

D'varim—Forty years of Wandering OR

It's a Long, Long Way from Tyler, Texas to Lexington, MA"

Our Torah portion today, *D'varim*, begins...These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel.... And then Moses goes on to review the history of their forty years of wandering around in the desert. There has been a lot of debate about *D'varim* and why Moses felt it was necessary to recount the forty years since the people had all lived that period, as well. Moses chooses to dwell on the difficult times between himself and the people. Some commentators say that Moses wants to make sure there was a record of these events and to stress to the people why none of them...including Moses, himself, will enter the Promised Land.

After accepting Terri's kind invitation to speak and looking at the Torah portion for this date, I started thinking about the connection to Sharon's and my real life journey.

In *D'varim*, Moses says...The Lord our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying, you have stayed long enough at this mountain. Start out and make your way.... And then he gives instructions for their future destinations. The commentators say that the Lord felt there was a danger that Israel would grow too comfortable and be reluctant to move on into the unknown.

Well, as you will see we never had a chance to get too comfortable and we learned not to be hesitant to move on when the opportunities arose.

Today, I'd like to review for you Sharon and my wandering around for what's been a good bit longer than forty years and our story begins...It's a long, long way from Tyler, Texas to Lexington, Massachusetts.

Our journey officially started on February 10, 1963 with our wedding at Ahavath Achim Synagogue in Tyler, Texas and our trip the next day to begin our new life as a couple in Wilmington, Delaware.

But wait, that's not quite the appropriate starting point. I really need to start by telling you a little about our hometown, Tyler, Texas, the Jewish community there and our families' histories.

Tyler became the commercial center of East Texas early on and there were Jewish families there as early as the antebellum period. Although there were earlier sporadic religious services and organizational activities in Tyler, the first formal Jewish activity was the purchase of land for a cemetery in 1884.

In 1898, two synagogues were established (naturally, there were two), Temple Beth El (reform) and Ahavath Achim Synagogue (first

orthodox and later conservative) by the way, there are not many continuously operating synagogues in Boston of that duration. There were also chapters formed of B'nai B'rith, Hadassah, ZOA, two sisterhoods, and two brotherhoods!!

Sharon's family history in Tyler goes back many generations and one of her ancestors was an early rabbi and *shochet* in Tyler.

Most importantly, Sharon's father and my father, who came to Tyler with his parents in 1914 grew up together. My father took the first picture of Sharon on day 1 and we have that picture plus a picture from my 4th birthday party where Sharon is gazing lovingly...at the cake!! We were both active in BBYO growing up and of course, Sharon was a sweetheart of AZA. There were active Hebrew schools and we shared many happy and sad occasions as a community.

The synagogues in Tyler played an important role in our lives growing up and, as you will hear, synagogues were a major factor in our lives all along our journey, which will now resume.

Just as the Torah recounts the various stops on the Israelites journey, I will now do the same for our wanderings.

As I said earlier, we went from Tyler to Wilmington, Delaware where I began my thirty-seven-year career with DuPont, Sharon completed

her degree in medical technology at the University of Delaware, and I received my M.B.A. there, as well. Then it was off to Chicago 1 (you will notice the numerical designations), Minneapolis (where our son David was born and where Sharon believes it snowed constantly for the two years that we were there.)

Back to Chicago 2 (where our daughter Judy was born on a dark and stormy night...but that's a different story for another time, then Wilmington 2, Parkersburg, West VA, Wilmington 3, and Lexington. But wait, there was also a Wilmington 4, when I commuted weekly for twelve years. But Lexington had really become our home and since my retirement from DuPont at the end of 2000, we've both been full-time residents of Lexington.

Let me tell you a little more about our wandering around the U.S. Throughout our journey, we, of course, had each other as the major stabilizing force in our lives, but right behind that were our families and friends in Tyler. There was another important factor...wherever we lived, we always belonged to a local synagogue and worked hard to contribute as active members of those Jewish communities.

The synagogues ranged from a fantastic modern orthodox congregation in Wilmington over all four stays and even today. I was honored to serve a term as president at Adas Kodesch Shel Emeth and we still have great friends and even family there as we

introduced Sharon's youngest sister to her future husband at that synagogue.

We belonged to an enormous conservative synagogue in Skokie, IL, where we experienced multiple High Holiday services for the first time. We weren't too excited about being assigned to the annex service in the high school auditorium with a student rabbi.

On the other hand, in Parkersburg, West VA we belonged to the small reform congregation where we were very happy to have a student rabbi show up. We also crossed over the Ohio River to Marietta, OH to help make a *minyan* at the even smaller orthodox *shul*.

After we were firmly settled in Lexington and active members of Temple Emunah, we bought a home in Quechee, VT and have also been members of the Upper Valley Jewish Community, an independent synagogue in Hanover, NH for over thirty years. We've watched the Jewish community in that part of Vermont and New Hampshire grow as Jewish families moved into the area and as Dartmouth became more welcoming to Jewish students. For the past several years, there has even been a *kosher* dining hall at Dartmouth and a *Chabad* in the area.

What all of those synagogues and congregation had in common for us was a community of caring people who helped us adapt to the local area and provided support for us in so many ways.

For all of you who belong to Emunah, I don't need to tell you why we have considered it our real spiritual and social home since we moved to Lexington in 1982.

During our time at Emunah, you have shared great joy (naming our granddaughter, Jamie in 2002) as well as helping in times of intense pain, the death of our son, David in 1985, and the death of our parents over the years.

We have so many wonderful friend and experiences here, we thoroughly enjoy services and the many, many educational and social activities at Emunah. Sharon is very active on both the Landscaping and Beautification Committees and we have been Sunday night *minyan* regulars for many years. We consider attendance at Shabbat morning services to be a regular part of our weekends.

Here's another tie in to *D'varim*: in the commentary it says...“Moses' remarks seem to show concern that when the Israelites are no longer camped around the tabernacle but are living each on their own property that they will drift away from G-d.” As we know, after the

destruction of both Temples and the establishment of the rabbinic system and local communities, Judaism has continued to thrive in villages and towns around the world. The synagogue has been a key element of that survival and even rebirth of Judaism.

In addition to synagogue life, we are both very involved in the broader Jewish community. We play an active role in AIPAC in Boston and nationally and visit Israel whenever we can, including participating in two wonderful Emunah trips. I have served on the boards of Gateways, Jewish Vocational Service, and Temple Emunah.

Beyond our involvement in Emunah, we are also very busy. I am co-director of a wonderful entrepreneurship program at MIT where we work with many exciting entrepreneurs and their ideas.

Sharon manages a family business based on energy assets and real estate. We try to see our daughter and grandchildren in Sharon whenever their busy schedules allow us to get together. We were blessed to be able to take Jamie (almost fifteen) and Jake (whose *bar mitzvah* is in October) along with Judy on a Temple Emunah trip to Israel for the kids' first visit several years ago. They loved it!!

We hope our wandering is over and we look forward to living in Lexington and continuing to be an active part of Temple Emunah and the broader Jewish community for many, many years to come.

I would also like to note, however, that all during our journey in life we have always also considered Tyler, Texas, our very special home. We are still members of Ahavath Achim and I currently serve on the board there, remotely. Our parents, grandparents, and many friends are buried there and remain part of our history. We visit Tyler several times a year to maintain our strong connection and always attend services when there.

To paraphrase the famous American philosopher, Jon Bon Jovi... "Who says you can't go home again."