Don't Forget the Journey

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As you all know, the 2024 Olympics are currently underway, and I have been closely following the gymnastics events.

Gymnastics has always been my favorite Summer Olympics sport, and I love watching the athletes throughout the competition. I also follow many of their careers during non-Olympic years, and this year's team has had quite the offseason.

Let's start with Simone Biles. At the last Olympics, she withdrew from the competition due to "the twisties." For those unfamiliar, the twisties are a mental disconnect between the body and mind, where a gymnast loses their sense of spatial awareness while in the air, which can lead to serious injury.

Some saw her as a hero for prioritizing her safety, while others labeled her a quitter. Upon returning home, she faced a significant challenge, taking two years off from gymnastics to focus on herself. She finally returned in 2023, ready to compete in Paris.

Next is Suni Lee. She won the all-around title in 2020; but after one year at Auburn University, she woke up one day unable to get out of bed.

This marked the beginning of two different kidney disease diagnoses, and she was told she would never do gymnastics again. Yet, after a lot of hard work, she is here, competing in Paris and defying the doctors' expectations.

Now, another gymnast you might not be as familiar with is Brody Malone. He suffered a devastating fall two years ago, underwent three major surgeries and had to relearn how to walk.

Despite these challenges, he persevered and is now representing the USA in men's gymnastics.

These are just three of the members of the USA gymnastics teams who have been on significant journeys to reach this milestone. Each individual member has their own unique story.

In our Torah portion this week, we are given a detailed account of the Israelites' journey through the wilderness from Egypt to Canaan.

Verse after verse, we read about how they set out from one location and camped at another, with details of each step of their journey.

Many people ask, why do we need all this detail? Why must we know every stop on their journey through the wilderness? Rashi quotes Rabbi Tanchuma, who explains this with a parable: It is like a king who took his ill son to a distant place to cure him. Upon their return, the father recounts each stage of their journey, saying, "Here we slept, here we caught a cold, here you had a headache," and so on.[1]

Rabbi Tanchuma reminds us of the importance of remembering the steps along our journey and acknowledging how far we've come.

Each of these gymnasts has experienced significant events that they should remember, as these moments have brought them to the Olympics.

The journey is just as important as, if not more important than, the destination. While their ultimate goal was to win medals—which they achieved both as a team and as individuals—their journey to the Olympics and their participation in the games are equally significant.

While we may not be Olympic athletes, we each have our own personal "Olympics." Whether it's career aspirations, educational milestones, health challenges, personal growth or something else, we all have experiences that shape us.

For me, rabbinical school was my Olympics—six years of schooling, learning, growing and more led me to where I am today.

Take a moment to think about something you have worked exceptionally hard to achieve. How can you embrace and remember the journey that brought you there, rather than just focusing on the destination?

Turn to the person next to you and share your answer to this question. If you're joining us on Zoom, Facebook or YouTube, post in the chat or comments. Share what your personal Olympics is—and the journey you've taken to get there.

Just like the Israelites, we must remember our journey and the steps that have led us to where we are today.

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[1] Rashi on *Numbers* 33:1