

MASEI (NUMBERS 33:1-36-13)

The Long and Winding Road

2011 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

"The Long and Winding Road"

This week's Torah Portion is, in a sense, the final portion of the Torah. Next week we will begin the Book of Deuteronomy, much of which is a review of the rest of the Torah. In fact, Deuteronomy is often referred to as *Mishneh Torah – Review of the Torah*.

Rabbi Avraham Saba wrote in his book *Tzror Hamor* that there is great significance in the information that G-d chose to write in the conclusion of His Torah.

These are the journeys of the children of Israel who had left Egypt...Moses recorded their stops along the way at G-d's command. These were the stops along the way... Numbers, 33:1, 2)

The Torah goes on to list the forty-two stops that the Israelites made over the forty years that they traveled through the desert. Many of the verses simply state that: *They left _____ and they camped in _____; they left _____ and they camped in _____.*

There are various suggestions made by the Commentaries as to why the Torah writes such apparently superfluous information. I even offered one of my own. (See "One Small Step for a Man...")

The Tzror Hamor points out the implication not only of the description of their travels, but also the point that Moses listed them " *...at G-d's command.*"

There are many things in the Torah that we don't understand. Sometimes they don't seem necessary. Sometimes they don't seem logical. G-d concluded His Book with an apparently unimportant itinerary. But what does He tell us about WHY He told us the itinerary? ***Moses recorded their stops along the way at G-d's command.*** The idea is to show us that every word in the Torah was written *****at G-d's command.***

Moses didn't make anything up. Every word, every letter, every jot and tittle is there for a reason. Sometimes it is there to teach us a law or a concept that we wouldn't otherwise know. The Tzror Hamor tells us that this is about G-d's name.

G-d has several names. Each of these names has special meaning and significance. One name literally translates as "Judge." Another means "Almighty." Another means "My Master." Another refers to the fact that G-d has patience with His children when they sin, and that he rewards those who follow His

commandments.

The Tzror Hamor writes that seven of G-d's names, each one pertaining to one of the days of the week, are alluded to in the very beginning of Genesis. (One of those names, which translates as "Tear apart the Satan" refers to Monday, the day of Creation when G-d created Gehinnom, often inaccurately translated as "Hell.") Collectively these seven names, each of which consists of six letters, form a 42-letter name of G-d.

Why does the Torah end with a SEEMINGLY unnecessary list of 42 stops that Israel made on their journey through the desert? They are, suggests the Tzror Hamor, a reference to the 42-letter name of G-d. Thus, the Torah begins Genesis with that name of G-d, and ends with that name of G-d. As a result, the Tzror Hamor rules that when this week's Torah Portion is read, all 42 stops should be read together, without interruption.

(This, by the way, is unlike the custom in most synagogues, where some of the stops are read when the first person is called to the Torah, and some are read when the second person is called. The Tzror Hamor rules that they should all be read together by the first person. [See Mogen Avraham 428:8 and Mishnah Berurah 428:21])

Why does the Tzror Hamor feel that it is so important that we not break up this symbolic reading of G-d's name? I'd like to suggest an explanation.

The Torah is a continuum. It is a complete package. We can't take some parts, as "our portion," and ignore other parts as someone else's. Some of it we understand, at least on a superficial level. Some of it we were never meant to be able to fathom. But it is all G-d's Torah. All of the stops we make on the journey through life should reflect the uninterrupted commitment to G-d.

There is one G-d. He has a lot of names, and a lot of "jobs." But there is one, single unified, yet multi-faceted G-d. The G-d who created the world is the G-d who runs the world. The G-d who said "*Let there be light*" is the G-d who provided a pillar of fire that lit up the night and led our ancestors through the desert. The G-d who released us from Egyptian slavery is the same G-d who gave us Mitzvahs that we don't always understand. The G-d who allowed our enemies to destroy our Temples and persecute our nation is the same G-d who will bring the ultimate salvation, send the Messiah, rebuild the Temple, and bring world peace.

Let us pray that our long and winding journey through the long and painful Exile will soon be over.

Have a great Shabbos.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplovitz

