

Masei @ DC Beit Midrash, 21 Tammuz, 5763/July 22, 2003
 Two Verses and a 42-Stage Commentary -- Virginia Spatz, vspatz@radix.net

****For notes on asterisked sources, see page three of this handout.****

33:1) These are the journeys of the Children of Israel, who went forth from the land of Egypt according to their legions, under the hand of Moses and Aaron. 2) Moses wrote their goings forth according to their journeys at the bidding of HaShem, and these were their journeys according to their goings forth.

וְאֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 וְאֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

1 Why "goings forth according to their journeys" and then "journeys according to their goings forth"? God sees going forth as journeying to a destination, but people see only the journey not the goal (from R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, 1808-1888, Germany, quoted in *Stone Chumash*).

2 "Goings forth" is repeated twice, according to Bachya ibn Pakuda, as an allusion to future redemption from exile to the Promised Land. (from *Stone Chumash*; Bachya, 11th Century Spain, author of *Duties of the Heart*)

3 Were the journeys (alone) at the bidding of God or was it the writing of the journeys? Ramban saw the writing as bidden by God to remind us of God's compassionate guiding hand. (R. Moshe ben Nachman [Ramban], 1194-1270, Spain, quoted in *Stone Chumash*)

4 It would of course be ideal if we could map out the route, but the location of most of the places mentioned has been lost over time. We are left with the rhythm of the place names rather than a viable historical record (Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*)

5 "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou went after me in a wilderness, in a land that was not sown." -- Jeremiah 2:2

6 Rambam (Maimonides) wrote that God wanted the record of all 42 stopping places so that no other nation could claim that the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years because they were lost. (Attributed to Rambam [1135-1204, Egypt] in Loeb, Kadden. *Teaching Torah*. Denver, CO: ARE Publishing, 1997.)

7 *Tzror HaMor* links the 42 place names with the mystical Forty-two Letter Name of God, suggesting that the Torah reading should not be interrupted during the reading of these places. (*Tzror HaMor* is homiletic commentary on the Torah by R. Avraham Saba [c.1440-c1508] of Portugal and, later, Morocco; both sources quoted in *Stone Chumash*)

8 "We are brave!
 Last of the enslaved!
 First to be free!
 With our strong hand,
 our hand alone,
 we tore from our neck
 the heavy yoke
 Raised our heads to the skies,
 narrowed them with our eyes.
 Renegades of the waste,
 we called barrenness mother.
 On the topmost crags,
 among levelling clouds,
 we drank from the fount
 of the eagle's freedom
 and who shall command us?
 In the desert imprisoned,
 to misery abandoned

by an avenging God,
 a mere whispered song
 of defiance and revolt
 stirred us to rise.
 To arms, comrades!
 Seize sword and lance,
 spear and javelin-- advance!
 Heaven's rage defy
 and in storm reply.
 Since God denies us,
 we will ascend alone,
 outface his wrath,
 the lightning's path.
 We will overcome
 these impregnable hills,
 meet the foe face to face.
 To arms!
 The storm calls: Dare!

Take lance, take spear.
 Let the mountains break up,
 the hills collapse,
 or our bodies lie heaped
 corpse upon corpse
 Onwards to the hills
 arise, ascend!"...

9 Somewhere here in the desert lie
 the six hundred thousand,
 an eerie light on their faces:
 atoned in death with their God.

(from "The Dead of the Desert," **
 Chaim Nahman Bialik. Trans.
 from 1902 Hebrew by Ruth Nevo.,
 IN Robert Alter, *Canon and Creativity*. New Haven, CT: Yale
 Univ. Press, 2000.)