

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.)

10 In the way of the world, when a man receives a guest, he will slaughter a calf for him the first day, and hens the second day...but on the 14th day he will give the guest something less delicious, and even less so on succeeding days... Do you suppose the Holy One also acted in this way? Hence Scripture says, "These 40 years the Lord your God has been with you (Deut. 2:7) -- the last day as much as the first. (*Sefer HaAggadah**: *Deut. Rabbah*)

11 R. Eliezer asked of R. Simeon saying "When the children of Israel went out of Egypt, did weavers' gear go out with them?"

12 R. Simeon replied, "No."

13 "Then how did they clothe themselves during those 40 years?"

14 R. Simeon replied, "with garments that the ministering angels gave them."

15 "But did not their garments wear out?"

16 "Have you not read that Moses said to Israel in the wilderness, 'Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee'?"

17 "But did not the little ones among the children of Israel grow up?"

18 "Go out and learn from the snail: all the while that he grows, his shell grows with him!"

19 "But did not the garments require washing?"

20 "The cloud of fire cleansed their garments and made them white."

21 "But were not the garments scorched?"

22 "Go out and learn from the amiant [like asbestos], which is cleansed only by fire."

23 "But did not the children of Israel get vermin?"

24 "Since worms and maggots had no power over dead bodies in Israel, how much less did they have over living bodies in Israel."

25 "But since they did not change their garments, did they not reek with sweat?"

26 "The well of living waters brought up varieties of plants and spices for the children of Israel, and they rolled in these, so the fragrant smell of them was carried from world's end to world's end.

27 When Israel saw how the Holy One led them, made their garments white, and refreshed them in the wilderness, they sang, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures."

(*Sefer HaAggadah** original sources include *Deut. Rabbah 7:11*, Solomon Buber's 1891 *Midrash Tehilim*, and *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*, an early homiletic midrash collection..)

28 A king had a son who was sick. He took him to a distant place to have him cured. On their way back, the father began listing the stages of the journey: Here we slept, here we were chilled, here you had a headache. Likewise the Holy One said to Moses: List for Me all the places where Israel caused Me anxiety. Hence "These are the stages." (*Sefer HaAggadah** Original source is *Tanhuma B* a late 19th Century compilation of early medieval homelitical commentary edited by Solomon Buber.)

29 Israel will end up crossing the river and taking possession of Canaan, leaving the plains of Moab behind. But this national rite of passage, this second initiation, is not a magical coming of age in which the founding nation suddenly turns into an invincible upright hero and acquires cultural individuation and dominance.

The most relevant image of crossing in this connection is that of Jacob at the Jabbok, after the struggle with the divine messenger. Jacob, as one recalls, limps...He limps because the mysterious opponent "touched the hollow of [his] thigh" (Gen 32:25). He limps because he is a mortal who has striven with God and one cannot emerge unscarred from such intense intimacy. He limps because mortals lack perfection and have their points of weakness (Achilles and Oedipus are two other well-known examples). He limps because scars are a language and this is a

mark of chosenness... He limps because of the cost of the dreams, the cost of growing up, of assuming the father's position. He can hear the cry of Esau, way back, over the lost blessing and feel his own tears piling up, the tears that will burst out in the forthcoming encounter with his brother. He limps while crossing, because even after prevailing in the struggle with the unfathomable "man" he is still not exempt from fear on approaching the border of the Promised Land. He limps because this homecoming is temporary: another exile awaits him and his offspring in the future.

(Ilana Pardes***, *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives of the Bible*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000..)

30 Why, in the recital of the journeys, was the revelation at Sinai left out? Because once the Torah was given it became timeless and cut loose from any one place: every moment is its moment and every place its place. (Mordecai HaCohen. *Al HaTorah*, mid-20th Century commentary, quoted in *Plaut, UAHC Chumash*)

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|---|---|
| <p>31 Slavery battle conquest hope
Miriam's dance
Moses' song
a priesthood established</p> | <p>32 mountaintops and stumbling blocks
visible voices and thundering sights</p> |
| <p>33 desert and well
manna and quail
grumbling, outright complaint</p> | <p>34 doubt rebellion retribution</p> |
| <p>35 holy terror and terrifying holiness</p> | <p>36 bones and graves and fire and ash</p> |
| <p>37 census taxes gifts</p> | <p>38 Law</p> |
| <p>39 Tabernacle</p> | <p>40 orderly campsites and ordered marches
division of labor</p> |
| <p>41 covenant
promise
an ass and an angel, blessing and threat</p> | <p>42 escape and exile
wings and limping
a howling waste holding the kindness of youth</p> |

("Epilogue: Their journeys according to their goings forth," written by Virginia Spatz for drash given two years ago at Fabrangen, DC's nearly 30-year-old open, independent, egalitarian havurah.)

*****Notes on a few sources used above*****

**Sefer HaAggadah./The Book of Legends* -- Legends from a variety of classical sources first published 1908-1911 in a format designed to read "as literature" by H.N. Bialik & Y.H. Ravnitsky as part of the Hebrew revival; now available in translation by Wm. Braude. NY: Schocken Books, 1992. The same Bialik (1873-1934) -- first name: Chaim, Chayim, or Hayim -- wrote intense Hebrew poetry, including the epic "The Dead of the Desert" quoted in part above, which often turned biblical stories or prayer themes on their heads. (I learned about Bialik's poetry from Tani Meir, who taught a great Jewish Study Center course on Russian-born authors of this era.) Together with the journalist Ravnitsky (1859-1944), he founded the Dvir Publishing House in Tel Aviv.

**Alters's *Canon and Creativity* includes Bialik's "The Dead of the Desert," as well as pieces from Joyce, Kafka, and the Hebrew Bible in a literary analysis of biblical text and its evolving meaning in and through literature.

***In addition to Pardes' *Biography of Ancient Israel*, a piece of biblical scholarship that reads like the moving narrative she's discussing (vs. a dry-as-dust-attack-on-another-bit-of-scholarship or, worse, the PhD-thesis-that-really-could-have-used-an-editor), those seeking another fascinating and different look at the Bible by a scholar with fresh insights, might want to check out her previous work: *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992. I first learned of her work via the footnotes in Ellen Frankel's *The Five Books of Miriam*, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1996.

- 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.
- 3) They journeyed from Rameses in the first month, on the 15th day of the first month -- on the day after the Pesach-offering -- the Children of Israel went forth with an upraised hand, before the eyes of all Egypt.
- 4) And the Egyptians were burying those among them whom HaShem had struck, every firstborn; whereby HaShem executed judgment on their gods.
- 5) The Children of Israel journeyed from Rameses and encamped in Succoth.
- 6) They journeyed from Succot and encamped in Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness.
- 7) They journeyed from Etham and turned toward Pi-hahiroth, which is before Baal-zephon, and they encamped before Midgol.
- 8) They journeyed from before Hahiroth and passed through the midst of the Sea toward the wilderness; they went on a three-day trip in the Wilderness of Etham, and they encamped in Marah.
- 9) They journeyed from Marah and arrived in Elim; in Elim were 12 springs of water and 70 date palms, and they encamped there. 10) They journeyed from Elim and encamped by the Sea of Reeds.
- 11) They journeyed from the Sea of Reeds and encamped in the wilderness of Sin. 12) They journeyed from the Wilderness of Sin and encamped in Dophkah. 13) They journeyed from Dophkah and encamped in Alush.
- 14) They journeyed from Alush and encamped in Rephidim, and there was no water there for the people to drink.
- 15) They journeyed from Rephidim and encamped in the Wilderness of Sinai.
- 16) They set out from the wilderness of Sinai and encamped at Kibroth-haHaavah. 17) They journeyed from Kibroth-HaHaavah and encamped in Hazeroth. 18) They journeyed from Hazeroth and encamped in Rithmah.
- 19) They journeyed from Rithmah and encamped in Rimmon-perez.
- 20) They journeyed from Rimmon-perez and encamped in Libnah.
- 21) They journeyed from Libnah and encamped in Rissah.
- 22) They journeyed from Rissah and encamped in Kehalathah.
- 23) They journeyed from Kehalathah and encamped in Mt. Shepher.
- 24) They journeyed from Mt. Shepher and encamped in Haradah.
- 25) They journeyed from Haradah and encamped in Makheloth.
- 26) They journeyed from Makheloth and encamped in Tahath.
- 27) They journeyed from Tahath and encamped in Terah.
- 28) They journeyed from Terah and encamped in Mithkah.
- 29) They journeyed from Mithkah and encamped in Hashmonah.
- 30) They journeyed from Hashmonah and encamped in Moseroth.
- 31) They journeyed from Moseroth and encamped in Benejaakan.
- 32) They journeyed from Benejaakan and encamped in Horhaggidgad.
- 33) They journeyed from Horhaggidgad and encamped in Jotbatha.
- 34) They journeyed from Jotbathan and encamped in Abronah..
- 35) They journeyed from Abronah and encamped in Ezion-geber.
- 36) They journeyed from Ezion Geber and encamped in the Wilderness of Zin, which is Kadesh.
- 37) They journeyed from Kadesh and encamped in Mount Hor, at the edge of the land of Edom.
- 38) Then Aaron the Kohen went up to Mount Hor at the word of HaShem and died there, in the fortieth year after the children of Israel went forth from the land of Egypt, in the fifth month on the first of the month. 39) Aaron was one hundred and twenty-three years old at his death on Mount Hor. 40) The Canaanite King Arad heard - he was dwelling in the South, in the land of Canaan - of the approach of the children of Israel.
- 41) They journeyed from Mt. Hor and encamped in Zalmonah.
- 42) They journeyed from Almonah and encamped in Punon.
- 43) They journeyed from Punon and encamped in Oboth.
- 44) They journeyed from Oboth and encamped in the ruins of the passes, at the border of Moab.
- 45) They journeyed from the ruins and encamped in Dibon-gad.
- 46) They journeyed from Dibon-gad and encamped in Almon-diblathaimah.
- 47) They journeyed from Alon-diblathaimah and encamped in the mountains of the passes before Nebo.
- 48) They journeyed from the mountains of the passes and encamped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho.
- 49) They encamped by the Jordan, from Beth-jeshimoth until the plains of Shittim, in the plains of Moab.
- 50) HaShem spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab, by the Jordan, at Jericho, saying:
- 51) Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them, When you cross the Jordan to the land of Canaan,

The Ultimate Answer

Some time ago a group of hyper-intelligent pan dimensional beings decided to finally answer the great question of Life, The Universe and Everything.

To this end they built an incredibly powerful computer, Deep Thought. After the great computer programme had run (a very quick seven and a half million years) the answer was announced.

The Ultimate answer to Life, the Universe and Everything is...

(You're not going to like it...)

Is...

42

Which suggests that what you really need to know is 'What was the Question'?

The Question

It has been shown that there is an answer to the great question of life, the universe and everything. It was computed by Deep Thought, but really didn't seem to provide, well... an answer.

The great computer kindly pointed out that what the problem really was that no-one knew the question. Accordingly, the computer designed its successor, the Earth, to find the question to the ultimate answer.

However, due to a slight Golgafrincham problem, and a small hoocha with some Vogons the program went a bit wrong. The whole problem remains just as mysterious as it always has been, but a little more frustrating.

Deep Thought

The great supercomputer Deep Thought is the most powerful computer ever built, with one exception.

It was designed by hyper-intelligent pan-dimensional beings, who wanted to know the answer to Life, the Universe, and Everthing.

Its creation annoyed a fair few philosophers, who felt that it was taking over their turf.

After seven and a half million years of serious cogitation, Deep Thought spoke the answer. However, it ws so inexplicable that Deep Thought then had to go on and design the most powerful computer ever built (with no exceptions) to work out what the question was.

The Earth [AKA "the most powerful computer ever built"]

Mostly Harmless

A small, blue-green world in one of the less fashionable sectors of the galaxy. It was demolished by the Vogons in order to make way for a hyperspace bypass.

Two humans survived; Arthur Dent, and Trillian. Two mice and some dolphins also escaped.

The Earth was often mistaken for a planet. It was, in fact, a powerful supercomputer running a program designed by hyper-intelligent pan-dimensional beings.

[You'll have to follow the hyperlinks yourself to find out about Arthur Dent, Golgafrincham, Vogons, etal.]

Everett Fox [secular academic] trans. published by Schocken. *The Five Books of Moses*¹

33:1) These are the marching-stages for the Children of Israel that they went on from the land of Egypt, by their forces, through the hand of Moshe and Aharon. 2) Moshe wrote down their departures, by their marching-stages by order of YHWH. Now these are their marching-stages, by their departures:

New Jewish Version [revised 1967 from '20s JPS translation]; trans. notes in UAHC [Reform] Chumash²

33:1) These were the marches of the Israelites who started out from the land of Egypt, troop by troop, in the charge of Moses and Aaron. 2) Moses recorded the starting points of their various marches as directed by the LORD. Their marches, by starting points, were as follows:

***The Good News Bible for Catholics*³**

33:1) The following account gives the names of the places where the Israelites set up camp after they left Egypt in their tribes under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. 2) At the command of the LORD, Moses wrote down the name of the place each time they set up camp.

New International Version Study Bible (Protestant)⁴

33:1) Here are the stages in the journey of the Israelites when they came out of Egypt by divisions under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. 2) At the LORD's command Moses recorded the stages in their journey. This is their journey by stages.**

**The numerous places (significantly 40 in number between Rameses and the plains of Moab) in Israel's desert experience are listed. Unfortunately, most of the sites were desert encampments, not cities with lasting archaeological records; so they are difficult to locate. Many of the places are not recorded elsewhere in Exodus and Numbers. Some of the places mentioned elsewhere are missing here. The data warrant the conclusions: 1. Moses recorded the list at the Lord's command (v.2). 2. The list should be taken seriously as an accurate recapitulation of the stages of the journey, despite difficulty in locating many of the sites. 3. The numerical factor of 40 sites between Rameses and the plains of Moab suggests some styling of the list, which helps to account for the sites not included. 4. As in the case of genealogies in the Pentateuch, some factors of ancient significance may not be clear to us today. Ultimately the record is a recital of the Lord's blessing on his people for the extended period of their desert experience. Although certainly not without geographical importance, the listing of the stages of Israel's experience in the desert is fundamentally a religious document, a litany of the Lord's deliverance of his people.

"The Stone Edition"/Artscroll [Orthodox]:

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.

1. "[Translators usually aim to convey meaning in] as clear and comfortable a manner as possible in one's own language. Yet the truth is that the Bible was not written in English in the twentieth or even the seventeenth century...Accordingly, I have sought here primarily to echo the style of the original, believing that the Bible is best approached, at least at the beginning, on its own terms. So I have presented the text in English dress but with a Hebraic voice."

2. "The important ancient translations often give us significant clues about the original from which they were translated. What is even more important is to recognize that every translator interprets the original text, for he renders it as he understands (or misunderstands) it."

3. "The translators have used what they call the principle of "common language, dynamic equivalence....[The translators write,] 'This means it aims in each passage for the closest, natural equivalent in modern English that expresses the same meaning as the original text...to stimulate in today's reader essentially the same reaction to the text that the original author wished to produce in his first and original readers.'"

4. "...the translators were united in their commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Bible as God's Word in written form. They believe it contains the divine answer to the deepest needs of humanity....The first concern of the translators has been the accuracy of the translation and its fidelity to the thought of the biblical writers."

5. "The new translation in this volume attempts to render the text as our Sages understood it. Where there are differing interpretations, we follow *Rashi*, the "Father of Commentators," because the study of *Chumash* has been synonymous with *Chumash-Rashi* for nine centuries....we attempt to follow the Hebrew as closely as possible and to avoid paraphrase, but, occasionally, English syntax or idiom forces us to deviate somewhat."