

Parsha Ponders

Mattos / Masei | July 15, 2020 | 24 Tammuz 5780

Growth through adversity¹

ויכתב משה את-מוצאיהם למסעיהם על-פי יקוק ואלה מסעיהם למוצאיהם

Moshe wrote the experiences² of their journeys that were directed by Hashem. These are the journeys of their experiences³

This week's *parsha* starts off with a glaring inconsistency. The Torah proceeds to describe the forty-two journeys the Jews made from their Exodus from Egypt to their final encampment before entering the land of Israel. To introduce this list, the Torah says that Moshe wrote the experiences of their journeys. It immediately follows by saying that this is the list of the journeys of their experiences. The first time it mentions their experiences first, yet the second time it mentions their journeys first. Why is there this apparent inconsistency?

One explanation⁴ can be understood with a parable. Imagine an extremely rich man. Money was entirely meaningless to him. He had a son, who he didn't wish to spoil. He wanted his son to be self-sufficient⁵. As such, his son went out to work in business. He traveled across seas, deserts, and dangerous rivers, in order to earn a profit. He ended up becoming very successful, and acquired a fortune of his own. When he would recount to his friends all of his trials and tribulations, and the amazing wealth that he had accumulated, they would make the following observation. They would conclude that in this businessman's eyes, his trials and tribulations are insignificant in the face of the success he accomplished. He doesn't really focus on the negative, because he is so happy with the outcome.

However, the son eventually returned home. He told his father about all of his journeys. His difficult travels and business deals. His mistakes and his successes. His hardships and his near-death experiences at sea. He would conclude his story with pride as he would share with his father that he indeed became a self-made man. He has a fortune of his own, and doesn't have to rely on his father's wealth. He would hope that his father would too be very pleased. However, the father is very distraught. Due to his intense love for his son, it was extremely difficult for him to hear his tales. The trials and tribulations his son went through were too much. How much pain and sorrow he must have experienced! The wealth gained isn't significant in the eyes of his father, who is too focused on the pain he caused his son to go through.

The two perspectives in the parable are conveyed in the verse we started with. The verse starts by saying that Moshe wrote down the experiences of the Jews' journeys, which were directed by Hashem. The verse mentions their experiences first, because for Hashem that's more daunting, as it were. In their forty years in the wilderness, they experienced many hardships. They had a lot of challenges, and sometimes they stumbled. It was very difficult for the Jews, and for Hashem their loving Father, it

¹ Based on Nachalas Yaakov to Numbers 33:2, by Rav Yaakov MiLisa (the author of Nesivos HaMishpat)

² HaKesav VeHakabbalah *ad. loc.*, who understands this is the intent of Chazal in Bamidbar Rabbah 23:3, Midrash Tanchuma Masei § 3, and Tanchuma Yashan Masei § 2 (brought by Rashi *ad. loc.*). This is similar to the translation that the Nachalas Yaakov assumes as well. Literally it means "their going outs" (see Targum Onkelos *loc. cit.*). This more literal translation understands that it simply refers to the places they left *from* (and then מסעיהם is where they traveled *to*) (Ibn Ezra, Seforno, and HaKesav VeHakabbalah *ad. loc.*)

³ Numbers *loc. cit.*

⁴ Cf. Ibn Ezra and Seforno *loc. cit.*; Ohr HaChaim *ad. loc.*

⁵ The Nachalas Yaakov quotes the Yerushalmi Orlah 1:3: מאן דאכיל דלאו דידיה בהית לאסתכלא באפיו

pained Him, so to speak⁶. Just like the father in the story, the growth they experienced in these journeys takes a backseat to the pain they endured. Therefore, the journeys themselves, whose purpose was to elevate them, is mentioned second.

However, what was the ultimate purpose? Why did they have to endure so much? It was all for their benefit. They grew tremendously in their spiritual level during these forty years. Every challenge made an impression, and they grew from adversity. Since the journeys accomplished their goal, the verse concludes by mentioning them first⁷. Their experiences and hardships were simply part of the package, but aren't the focus. Therefore, the verse concludes by mentioning their experiences second.

Good Shabbos

⁶ See Sanhedrin 46a, Chagigah 15b, and Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 6:8: בזמן שהאדם מצטער שכינה מה לשון אומרת קלני מראשי קלני מזרועי. See also Nefesh HaChaim 2:11

⁷ I would have expected the Nachalas Yaakov to explain that although the beginning of the verse is from Hashem's perspective, the conclusion of the verse is explaining things from Moshe and the people's perspective. For them, the focus was the growth they accomplished. The pain they endured is not at the forefront of their minds. This also would seemingly fit better with his parable. This is similar to an idea I heard from Rabbi Reznick and Rabbi Dovid Heber of Baltimore, to explain a different inconsistency. Numbers 31:2 says that the Jews should take the vengeance of the Children of Israel against the Midianites, and v. 3 says that the Jews should take the vengeance of Hashem against the Midianites. The explanation is the first verse is Hashem speaking, and the vengeance of His children take precedence for Him. Whereas the second first is Moshe speaking, and from the Jews' perspective the vengeance of Hashem takes precedence. This explanation is given by the Alshich to v. 1 and Meshech Chochmah to v. 3. A similar idea is also expressed by Tosafos Chadashim to Pesachim 1:1, quoting Rav Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev, to explain why the Torah always refers to the Festival of Pesach as the *Chag HaMatzos*, yet we refer to it as Pesach. *Matzah* signifies the haste to which the Jews ran to the wilderness, without any provisions. This is very dear to Hashem, so He refers to the holiday exclusively through the *matzos*. We on the other hand focus on the fact that Hashem spared us by skipping over the Jews' houses during the Tenth Plague. This act of skipping, or in Hebrew *pasach*, is commemorated by the Pesach offering. As such, we refer to the Festival that way. Regardless, the Nachalas Yaakov decided to take a different approach to explain this inconsistency, perhaps because here we're dealing with a single verse (unlike these other instances)