

Moshe wrote their goings forth according to their journeys at the bidding of Hashem, and these were their journeys according to their goings forth. (33:2)

The *pasuk* relates that Moshe *Rabbeinu* wrote *motza'eihem l'maseihem*, “their goings forth according to their journeys.” This idea is repeated at the end of the *pasuk* – only this time the order is reversed, with their journeys preceding their goings forth. **Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl**, explains that the change in the wording is significant and purposeful. The beginning of the *pasuk* presents Hashem’s view of their travels. The *pasuk* closes with the nation’s view of their forty-year sojourn. When Hashem had them break camp, it was always for the purpose of reaching a new goal, a fresh plateau, for which the new encampment was most suitable. Each *masa*, journey, reflected progress, moving forward, setting out on a new trip. Therefore, *motza'eihem*, their breaking-up/goings forth, were all for a goal, a purpose, reflecting G-d’s intention.

The people maintained a different perspective on their journey. Wherever they were, they expressed dissatisfaction. They were rarely happy, always finding something to complain about. They wanted to move on, seek new adventure, excitement. Staying in one place was boring. Thus, as soon as the signal was given to break camp, they were excited – not because of where they were going – but because of where they were leaving. They had no goals, no objectives; they just wanted to move on. Their purpose was not the destination, but rather, the journey.

Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, offers a pragmatic explanation for the variation of sequences found in this *pasuk*. He begins with a simple question. The Torah lists forty-two encampments which the Jewish nation set up in the wilderness. The places are designated by name. How are we to understand this? The *Navi Yirmiyahu* (2:6) attests to the barren, desolate nature of the wilderness, a land in which no human being had previously either lived or even tread. If so, how did these encampments become geographically distinct? Nothing was there.

Obviously, explains *Rav Kanievsky*, they were barren and desolate prior to the arrival of *Klal Yisrael*. Once they had settled there, the Well of Miriam supplied the water, and the people did the rest. Soon the desert began to bloom; the “place” developed a character, and it became a city. When the nation was summoned to the next encampment, they left a fruited plain which was now ready to become home to the next visitor.

The cities were all given names based upon their relationship *vis-à-vis* the Jewish People. They transformed desolation into habitation. Therefore, when the Torah addresses these “goings out” as they left for their forty-year sojourn, they had no destination. They had no clue where they were going; furthermore, wherever it was that they were going, it had no name. It was as if the “place” did not exist. It was only after they left that the area achieved distinction. The nation was originally going *l'maseihem*, for a journey; wherever Hashem took them, they were going. Forty years later, in retrospect, the places had names. The Torah could now record that we understand the rhyme

and reason, goal and objective, to each one of their encampments.

We may add that this idea applies, likewise, to the journey called life. We end up in different places. When we arrive at each, we really have no idea why we are in this place as opposed to another place. Why this *yeshivah*, when I originally wanted to go elsewhere? *Nu* – I will make the best of it. Why am I in this city, when my original plan was to make my fortune in another city? Often the places that we “stop” along the way to our ultimate “destination,” at the time, have no meaning to us. It is only later, in retrospect, that we see how everything fits into

G-d’s master Plan.

We may derive another lesson from here. We make the place. We have the ability to transform a barren, desolate wilderness into a lush region of distinction. We give it its name. Our actions, our initiative, our positive endeavors, create an area whose enduring legacy reflects our presence there. The region has new significance; its vitality and vigor persist even after we have moved on. As always, there is a flipside. As our positive endeavors concretize the positive identity of a locale, the negative consequences of our neutralizing efforts may have left a bad taste, infamously perpetuating an ignominious designation to this place. When we review the names of the forty-two encampments listed in the *parsha*, we observe that all was not well; a number of places are recorded in infamy. It is not always up to us, but we have played quite a leading role in establishing the identity of many places.