

DIVINE WISDOM

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The longest parsha of the Torah is the parsha of Naso, which we read publicly this Shabat. A great part of its length is due to the repetition of the offerings and gifts of the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel at the dedication of the Mishkan. Since each one of the twelve leaders brought the identical offering to the occasion and, furthermore, since the Torah itself at the conclusion of the parsha gives us a total summation of their offerings, the question naturally begs itself as to why the Torah should expend so many words and so much detail on this matter.

This question has troubled all of the commentators to the Torah and many divergent answers and opinions have been advanced to help explain the matter. All seem to be in agreement that the Torah wishes to emphasize the individual worth and contribution of each of these leaders of Israel and gave each one recognition by listing his offering individually.

While this explanation and insight is undoubtedly true, it seems not to be wholly satisfactory in light of the great length that the Torah goes to in its detail of every offering. Each of the leaders could have been mentioned by name without having to repeat the entire paragraph detailing his offering. And yet as the length of the parsha indicates, the Torah took no shortcuts regarding this matter. Even in kabbalistic thought and works, no clear explanation emerges regarding this anomaly of Torah writing.

It would be arrogant and foolish of me to advance any personal explanation of mine to address this difficulty. Though space has been left for every generation of Jews to add their insights into the Torah there are areas where even angels should fear to tread. Just as with parsha of the red heifer, the Torah purposely offers up to us a rule that defies our rational powers of logic and explanation, so too are there other areas of the Torah that defy our sense of proportion and human understanding.

I have always felt that this alone - the mystery of it all - is in itself a portion of what the Torah wishes to communicate to us with the repetition of the offerings of the leaders of Israel in this week's parsha. A Torah that makes perfect sense to the human mind can never be a Divine Torah. The mystery, even call it the illogic of certain sections of the Torah is itself the sign of its Divine origin.

The error of the "enlightened ones," the schools of biblical criticism and of many who deem

themselves to be scholars in these matters is that they approach the Torah as they would approach any human work of wisdom or prose. If one approaches the Torah from the vantage point of it being a Divine document, mysterious and wondrous, greater than what the human mind can encompass, then the Torah takes on a different dimension in one's thoughts and life.

Perhaps this parsha is one of the many places where Jews can only stand back and wonder in awe as to the Divine wisdom that the Torah blesses us with even when we are unable to discern that wisdom clearly.

Shabat shalom,

Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com