

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT BEHA'ALOTCHA IN ISRAEL • 14 SIVAN 5780 JUNE 6, 2020 • VOL. 27 NO. 26
IN CHUTZ LA'ARETZ PLEASE SAVE THIS FOR NEXT WEEK

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Keeping the Flame

"...When you kindle the lamps..." (8:2)

A few years ago LensWork magazine featured some of my photographic work for Ohr Somayach's Jewish Learning Library. In the course of working together with the editor, Brooks Jensen, I learned something that I think has application for a lot of people who walk through the doors of Ohr Somayach.

Until quite recently, to *make* a photograph, as distinct from *taking* a picture, required a great deal of technical skill and practice even with a 35mm camera, let alone the artisanal experience *in extremis* required by 5x4 view camera in which you need to perform a series of 16 separate operations in precisely correct order even to get something onto the negative. Brooks noted that many aspiring Ansell Adams would put in years of practice, schlepping around kilos of equipment, and arrive at a decent level of technical precision – only to give up when they were just about ready to produce something really original and exciting.

I think that, in many cases that resemble my own, being a *ba'al teshuva* is a bit like being an aspiring photographer. We spend so many years breaking our teeth over Hebrew, Aramaic, Gemara, the minutiae of Halacha, and navigating the sometimes narrow channels of what is and what isn't acceptable, only to give up when we we're just on the brink of a real spiritual breakthrough. I don't mean giving up and

dropping out. I mean just coasting and being satisfied by being a reasonably well-integrated member of a Torah society. Did we change our lives completely just to be "mediocre"? (Even if that mediocrity is light-years above the level of the materialistic world that we left!) It's often all too easy to "get tired" along the way.

At the end of the Mesillat Yesharim, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto describes how when we exert ourselves to the absolute maximum that we can, Hashem, so to speak, reaches down and raises us up to a level that is humanly impossible to achieve. True, Rabbi Luzzatto was describing the holiest and the most elevated souls in existence – but each one of us, at our own level, knows that we really didn't try our absolute best. But we can. While Hashem blesses us with life and breath and another tomorrow, we can push ourselves just a little harder.

"...When you kindle the lamps..." (8:2)

The literal translation of the Hebrew word for 'to kindle' here is 'to make ascend.' When the Kohen Hagadol, the High Priest lit the Menorah, it wasn't sufficient that he ignited the wicks – he had to hold the taper in position until each wick was burning to its maximum capability. Then it ascended.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Shabbat 86 - 92

Under the Mountain

Rav Avdimi bar Chama bar Chasah said, "This teaches that Hashem uprooted the mountain (Mount Sinai) from its place and held it over the Jewish People as if it were a barrel and said to them: 'If you accept the Torah – good. But if not, there will be your burial place.'"

This Sage's teaching that a seemingly extreme ultimatum was given to the Jewish People at the time of Matan Torah can be derived from the following verse: "Moshe brought the people from the camp toward Hashem, and they stood at the *bottom* of the mountain. (*Shemot 19:17*) The word translated here as "at the bottom" would be expected to be written in the Torah as "*b'raglei hahar*." Instead, the word "*b'tachtit*" indicates "underneath," meaning that Hashem situated them underneath the mountain, saying that they would be buried there if they refused to accept the Torah – but all would be good if they accepted it.

Tosefot and other commentaries pose an apparent contradiction in the existence of this scenario. Prior to this, the Jewish People had *already* stated their willingness and desire to accept the Torah, saying: "All that Hashem speaks, we will *do* and we will hear (i.e. listen and learn)." (*Shemot 24:7*) Clearly the nation had already expressed willingness to accept the Torah, so why did Hashem need to hold the mountain over them, seemingly an act done to force them to accept the Torah?

Numerous answers to this famous question have been tendered by our great Torah commentaries throughout the ages. Here is a selection of their approaches in answering this question:

One: *Before* the Jewish People stood at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, they indeed sincerely and willingly declared, "*Na'aseh v'nishma*." However, when the time arrived and they were actually standing at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, the verse describes the scene: "And the entire Mount Sinai smoked because Hashem had descended upon it in fire, and its smoke ascended like the smoke of the kiln, and the entire mountain quaked violently." (*Shemot 19:16*) They stood there in tremendous fear of the "great fire" (which is often a reference to Divine justice meted out to those who transgress the Torah's laws). They were also in a state of tremendous awe, being in such proximity to the Divine Presence. Would they change their minds and try to

back out of their initial promise to willingly accept the Torah? Hashem held the mountain over them, telling them what would happen to them if they would dare do so. As a result, the people – of course and *perforce* – proceeded to accept the Torah. (*Tosefot*)

Two: They willingly agreed to accept *Torah she'b'Ktav* – the Written Law. Hashem needed to force them to accept *Torah she'b'al Peh* – the Oral Law. (*Midrash Tanchuma*)

Three: They willingly accepted to observe the mitzvahs only when they were present in the Land of Israel. Hashem forced them to accept upon themselves to fulfill the mitzvahs even when they would be outside of the Land of Israel (where applicable, such as mitzvahs not dependent on the Land – *teruma*, *ma'aser*, *Shemittah*, etc.). (*Ramban*)

Four (and the final one for this current essay): Hashem forced the Jewish People to receive the Torah. Of course it was laudable that they had already shown their love for Hashem and His Torah by declaring that would willingly accept it. But Hashem wanted to "make a point" to emphasize an essential aspect of the significance of the Torah in its relationship to Mankind and the entire Creation. What is this point? The Creation and the existence of Mankind would have no meaning and be irrelevant without the Torah in the world. The world had to have the Torah. It is a "must." To show this existential necessity, Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish People "by force." One might then say that when the mountain was on top, it just appeared that way. In reality, the recipients of the Torah were the ones who were really atop the mountain. (*Maharal*)

(*For a better understanding of the chronology of the relevant events, especially the "threat" in 19:17 appearing in the Torah before the statement of willingness – "*na'aseh v'nishma*" in 24:7, see *Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai 24:7*.)

• *Shabbat 88a*

Questions

1. Toward which direction did the wicks of the Menorah burn, and why?
2. From what material and in what manner was the Menorah made?
3. Moshe was commanded to cleanse the *levi'im* by sprinkling on them "*mei chatat*." What is "*mei chatat*"?
4. Which three "*t'nufot*" (wavings) are in the parsha?
5. Why did G-d claim the first-born of the Jewish People as His possession?
6. Why are the words "Bnei Yisrael" repeated five times in verse 8:19?
7. When a *levi* reaches age 50, which functions may he still perform?
8. Why was the mitzvah of Pesach Sheini not commanded directly to Moshe?
9. What similarity is there between the Menorah and the trumpets?
10. What three purposes did trumpet signals serve?
11. How many tribes marched between the Gershon-Merari detachment and that of Kehat? How was the time differential used?
12. The tribe of Dan, who traveled last, was called "the gatherer of all the camps." What did they gather?
13. When the Jewish People entered the Land, who took temporary possession of Jericho?
14. Which aron is referred to in verse 10:33?
15. Which two topics are out of chronological order in the parsha?
16. Which tastes did the manna not offer, and why not?
17. Moshe was commanded to choose 70 elders to help him lead the Jewish People. What happened to the elders who led the Jewish People in Egypt?
18. Whom did Moshe choose as elders?
19. What was the prophecy of Eldad and Medad?
20. Why did Miriam merit to have the people wait for her?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 8:2 - They leaned toward the middle wick so people wouldn't say that the Menorah was lit for its light.
2. 8:4 - It was made from one solid piece of hammered gold.
3. 8:7 - Water containing ashes of the *para aduma*.
4. 8:11 - The wavings of Kehat, Gershon and Merari.
5. 8:17 - Because in Egypt He spared them during *makat bechorot*.
6. 8:19 - To show G-d's love for them.
7. 8:25 - Closing the courtyard gates of the Mishkan and Beit Hamikdash; singing during the avoda; loading the wagons to transport the Mishkan.
8. 9:7 - The people who asked about it were rewarded by being the catalyst for the teaching of this mitzvah.
9. 8:4, 10:2 - They were each made from a single, solid block.
10. 10:2-7 - Announcement of the gathering of Bnei Yisrael, the gathering of the *nesi'im*, and the beginning of a move of the encampment.
11. 10:17-21 - Three: Reuven, Shimon and Gad. In the meantime Gershon and Merari set up the Mishkan.
12. 10:25 - They gathered and returned things lost by the other tribes.
13. 10:32 - The children of Yitro.
14. 10:33 - The aron which held the broken pieces of the first tablets, that was taken to the battlefield.
15. 9:1, 10:35,36 - The Pesach sacrifice, and the traveling of the aron.
16. 11:5 - Cucumbers, melons, leeks, onion and garlic - these are harmful to nursing women.
17. 11:16 - They were consumed in the fire at Taverah (11:3).
18. 11:16 - People who were supervisors in Egypt and had pity on Bnei Yisrael at risk to themselves.
19. 11:28 - "Moshe will die and Yehoshua will lead the Jewish People into the Land."
20. 12:15 - Because she waited for Moshe when he was cast into the river.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

A Coriander Conundrum

The Torah twice describes the manna as resembling the *gad* seed (Ex. 16:31, Num. 11:7), but the meaning of the word *gad* is not readily understood. Targum Onkelos leaves the word untranslated in both cases, instead aramaicizing the Hebrew word *gad* into the Aramaic *gada*. Other commentators suggest identifying the Hebrew word *gad* with known plants such as “coriander.” In this essay we will discuss multiple words for “coriander” in Hebrew and other Jewish languages. Afterwards we will cite several alternate commentators who explain *gad* as something other than “coriander.”

While Targum Onkelos leaves the word *gad* untranslated, Targum Yonatan (to Ex. 16:31 and Num. 11:7) translates it as *kusbar* – “coriander.” Menachem Ibn Saruk similarly identifies *gad* as *kusbarat*, while Radak in *Sefer HaShorashim* explains that it refers to what the Rabbis call *kusbarta*. Rashi (in both places) also explains that the *gad* plant, whose seeds were said to resemble the manna, refers to *colliander*, an Old French word for “coriander” (with the *l*-sound and *r*-sound being interchangeable, as is often the case).

In his commentary to the Talmud, Rashi (to *Shabbat* 109a, *Yoma* 75a, *Avodah Zarah* 10b) explains the Aramaic words *kusbarta* and *gida* with a different Old French word for “coriander” – *aillendre* (possibly pronounced *aliandre*). What is the difference between *colliander* and *aillendre*?

After consulting with some experts, it seems that the following two possibilities may resolve this “contradiction” in Rashi: First of all, it seems that in Jewish dialects of Old French the opening consonant of the word *colliander* might have been dropped, thus rendering the word as *aillendre*. According to this understanding, Rashi may have used both pronunciations interchangeably. So, in one of his works he uses one word while in the other work he uses the other word. However, this explanation does not account for why Rashi’s commentary to the Chumash uses the word *colliander*, while his commentary to the Talmud uses *aillendre*.

Secondly, it has been pointed out that alternate manuscripts of Rashi’s commentary to the Chumash read *aillendre* instead of *colliander*, while alternate manuscripts of his commentary to the Talmud read *colliander* instead of *aillendre*. This suggests that the appearance of the term *aillendre* is unintentional, and actually reflects a copyist’s error stemming from permutation, as in some scripts the letters ALEPH and KUF appear very similar. (Special thanks to Dr. Ariel Shaveh of the Academy of the Hebrew Language and Rabbi Tzvi Mordechai Libber of Milwaukee for these suggestions.)

In American English, the term *cilantro* (which comes from the Spanish word for “coriander”) refers to the leaves and stalks of a coriander plant, while the seeds are called *coriander*. Etymologically-speaking, the American English word *culantro* is a synonym for *cilantro*, but in practice it refers to a different plant that is native to the Americas.

The word *kusbar* appears several times in the Mishna, including: *Sheviit* 9:1, *Kilyaim* 1:2 (cited in *Pesachim* 39a in a discussion of what vegetables may be used for *Maror* on Passover), and *Maasrot* 3:9, 4:5. Linguists recognize both the words *kusbara* and *coriander* as belonging to very ancient languages, tracing *kusbara* to the Sanskrit *kustumbari/kustumburu*, and *coriander* to *korijadana* in the proto-Greek language known as Linear B. That said, Rabbi Dovid Golomb (1861-1935) in *Targumna* parses the word *kusbara* as comprised of two Hebrew roots that mean “cut up,”

“chewed up,” or “masticated”: KAF-VAV-SAMECH (or, perhaps, KAF-SAMECH-SAMECH) and BET-REISH (see Yechezkel 23:47).

Interestingly, the Talmud (*Avodah Zarah* 10b) relates that when Antoninus sent Rebbe a coded message about his promiscuous daughter, Rebbe replied by sending him *kusbarta*, which was supposed to mean that he should put her to death, as *kus* means to “chew” or “slaughter” (see *Pesachim* 63a which teaches that *kus* in Syriac means to “slaughter”) and *barta*, which means “daughter.” Ultimately, when Antoninus pointed out that doing so would totally erase his progeny, Rebbe encouraged the Roman official to have mercy on his deviant daughter (see Rabbeinu Chananel, *Sefer HaAruch*, and Rashi there). Others explain that Antoninus actually misunderstood the meaning of Rebbe’s message, as the word *kusbarta* was really meant to stand for *kasah* (“cover up”) and *barta* (“daughter”), which means that Antoninus should cover up her misdeeds and not punish her (*Tosafot Rabbeinu Elchanan*, *Tosafot HaRosh*, and *Nimukei Yosef*).

Going back to the word *gad*, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) understands that the two-letter root GIMMEL-DALET means “attachment/connection.” He explains some other words derived from this root include *gad* (a “spiritual force” that is *attached* to a specific physical entity), *gid* (“sinew,” which *holds together* different parts of the body), *gedud* (“squad,” a unit of soldiers *joined together*), and *haggadah* (the act of presenting new information by *merging it into* a broader narrative). In that spirit he explains that *megeed* (Deut. 33:13-14), *megadim* (Song of Songs 4:13), and *migdanot* (Gen. 24:53) all refer to sweet-tasting foods, as one’s palate desires to “connect” to such delicacies. Based on this, Rabbi Pappenheim suggests that perhaps the *gad* seeds referenced when describing the manna also refer to a sort of sweet edible seed. (By the way, coriander seeds are sometimes described as sweet).

As an aside, coriander is known as *goid* in North African Punic, leading the German linguist Wilhelm Gesenius (1786-1842) to claim that *goid* is derived from the Hebrew *gadad* (“to cut”), in allusion to the wrinkled and furrowed appearance of the seeds.

The Talmud mentions a food called *gudgedaniyot*, which Rashi (to *Erwin* 28a and *Gittin* 70a) defines as *aillendre* in Old French (“coriander”). Jastrow vowelizes the word as *gadgadniyot*, and defines it as a type of “clover” or “cherry” (see also Rashi to *Berachot* 57b and *Sefer HaTishbi*). Either way, it seems that Rashi understood the Talmudic word *gudgedaniyot* as related to the Biblical *gad*.

As mentioned in the beginning of this essay, not everybody agrees that *gad* refers to “coriander.” Rabbi Yehudah Ibn Balaam (1000-1070) writes in the name of Rabbi Hai Gaon (939-1038) that “*gad* seed” refers to “mustard seeds.” This opinion is also cited by Ibn Ezra (in both his “long” and “short” commentaries to Ex. 16:31, and in his comments to Num. 11:7), who writes the “coriander” explanation as well, and concludes that he is unsure about which view is correct. Rabbi Yehuda Leib Krinsky (1840-1915) writes in *Yahel Ohr* that Ibn Ezra reasoned that the word *gad* is related to *gedi* (“kid” or “young goat”), which denotes the smallest type of caprine animal, and so it could make sense that when talking about seeds it would refer specifically to the “mustard” seed, which is used in the Talmud to denote the smallest type of seed.

Rashi (to Ex. 16:31), Rashbam and Radak all clarify that when the Torah describes the manna as resembling “white *gad* seed,” this should not be taken to mean that *gad* seeds are white. Rather, the Torah means that the manna was white and that its shape resembled a *gad* seed. In fact, these commentators explicitly note that the *gad* seeds are *not* white. This fits with those who interpret *gad* as “coriander,” whose seeds are yellowish-brown, and even with those who interpret it as “mustard,” whose seeds are dullish gray and brown. On the other hand, Gersonides (to Ex. 16:14 and 16:31) writes that the *gad* seed was indeed white. Since neither coriander seeds nor mustard seeds are white, Gersonides seems to identify *gad* with something else. (Although, truth be told, Ibn Balaam does claim that mustard seeds are white.)

Finally, Rabbi Golomb suggests reading the word *gad* backwards as *dag* (“fish”). He explains that “fish seed” in the context of the manna refers to caviar, an especially notable and prominent food.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BLESSING THREE: CELEBRATING FREEDOM THE JEWISH WAY

“Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, for not having made me a slave.”

The philosophy behind the “negativity” of the previous blessing serves as the key to help us understand the third blessing and the depth of the message it conveys.

No one wants to be a slave. The dictionary definition of slavery does not make for very pleasant reading: Slavery is any system in which principles of property law are applied to people, allowing individuals to own, buy and sell other individuals, as a *de jure* form of property. A slave is unable to withdraw unilaterally from such an arrangement and the slave works without remuneration.

It is clear why no one *wants* to be a slave. It would seem that the aversion to being enslaved is such a basic and straightforward concept that there is no need to recite a blessing over our being free. And yet the third blessing that we recite each morning is, “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, for not having made me a slave.” Not only that, but it is the second of the three blessings that are recited in the negative. As with the previous blessing, the meaning behind the blessing is clear: We are thanking G-d for having made us free. And yet, for the second time, the Sages use a language that is distinctive in its composition and which requires clarification.

Why did the Sages not simply compose the blessing as, “Blessed are You... for having made me free”? Worded like that, the blessing would clearly convey the message that we are here in this world in order to reach beyond ourselves. To stretch upwards towards our potential and to use our freedom to build up the world. In effect, to be attached to G-d. But, as before, our Sages chose to couch the blessing in negative terms. Why?

It transpires that there might be an intrinsic difference of opinion between the Torah and the secular society as to how to define “free.” Our Sages, in their thought-provoking moral and ethical treatise called *Ethics of the Fathers* (6:2), teach in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi that a truly free person is someone who studies G-d’s Torah [and lives his life accordingly]. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch writes, in his famously eloquent style, that the Torah is not a crushing and constricting yoke. Rather, the Torah is a source of freedom that allows man to be

loyal to himself and his G-dly soul. To be free to live according to the internal harmony of his personality. Rabbi Samuel ben Isaac de Uceda, in his classic commentary on *Ethics of the Fathers*, writes that unless man lives as G-d created him to, he is a slave to his own passions, to the standards of society or to the authoritarianism of dominant or fashionable cultures.

Accordingly, Jewish freedom is not to be defined as “an absence of servitude.” Jewish freedom does not mean that I can do whatever I want, whenever I want, to whomever I want. Jewish freedom means each person utilizing his life in order to make the world a better place by learning G-d’s Torah and keeping His commandments.

That is definitely an electrifying idea! But how does it fit into the Morning Blessings? A blessing is a definitive statement. And freedom does not just mean that I am not enslaved. Jewish freedom means that I am doing the Will of G-d. Just as with the previous blessing, if I boldly claim that I am free – “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, for having made me free” – *but I am not living up to what G-d wants from me* – then I am not using my freedom in the way G-d wants me to. I am not connecting to G-d to become both better and bigger spiritually than I was up until now. And that may be the cause of G-d’s carefully examining how I use my freedom. It will be a thorough “Divine checkup,” delineating exactly how I live my life. Am I using my precious freedom to draw closer to G-d? Or am I ignoring it and drifting further away from Him?

But, on the other hand, I am beholden to acknowledge the dazzling gift of freedom that G-d has granted me. Yes, it is true that I may not be utilizing it to its fullest, but I still recognize it for what it truly is – the most effective and vivid method of connecting to G-d. Therefore, the Sages introduced another blessing written in the negative, “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, for not having made me a slave.” A blessing that is undeniable in practical terms, but will not be the cause of Divine scrutiny in the way that the blessing – if said in the positive – might be. Instead, it is stated as a blessing which reveals my inner yearning to be close to G-d, even if I am not totally succeeding at it right now.

ASK!

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Who's the Doctor?

From Casey in NYC

Dear Rabbi,

In Exodus 15:26 it says "I am the Lord that heals you." Does going to a doctor contradict this? Thank you.

Dear Casey,

I have a story for you: A man swept away by a flood sees two guys approach in a rowboat. "Hop in!" they shout. "No, thanks," he says, "God will save me." Next, a tugboat passes by. "Climb aboard," calls the captain. Again he refuses. "God will save me," he says. Then the Coast Guard sends a helicopter but he refuses to board, giving the same reason. Finally, he drowns.

Up in Heaven, an angel asks why he refused help. "I wanted to rely on God alone," he replies. "Idiot!" says the angel.

"Who do you think sent you the rowboat, the tugboat and the helicopter?"

G-d acts through the guise of doctors and medicine, just as He acts through the guise of employers to provide us with a living. Would your friends refuse to take money from their bosses, saying they'll get it directly from G-d? I think not. Do they eat food, or do they wait for G-d to miraculously inject their bloodstream with nourishing vitamins, minerals, fats and carbohydrates?

The Torah (Bible) gives explicit permission to engage in healing. The verse (Exodus 21:19) says that if one person strikes another person, the attacker "shall pay for his unemployment and for his medical expenses".

Our task is to exert the effort and then to recognize that ultimately it is G-d who heals. While seeking proper medical attention, a sick person simultaneously engages in prayer, good deeds, and introspection. We don't accept prayer as "a last resort" – it's a "first resort," along with medicine and the doctor.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Aharon is taught the method for kindling the Menorah. Moshe sanctifies the *levi'im* to work in the Mishkan. They replace the firstborn, who were disqualified after sinning through the golden calf. The *levi'im* are commanded that after five years of training, they are to serve in the Mishkan from ages 30 to 50. Afterwards, they are to engage in less strenuous work.

One year after the Exodus from Egypt, Hashem commands Moshe concerning the *korban Pesach*. Those ineligible for this offering request a remedy, and the mitzvah of *Pesach Sheini* – allowing them a "second chance" to offer the *korban Pesach*, one month later – is detailed. Miraculous clouds that hover near the Mishkan signal when to travel and when to camp. Two silver trumpets summon the princes or the entire nation for announcements. The trumpets also signal travel plans, war or festivals. The order in which the tribes march is specified.

Moshe invites his father-in-law, Yitro, to join the Jewish People, but Yitro returns to Midian. At the instigation of the *eruv rav* – the mixed Egyptian multitude who joined the Jewish People in the Exodus – some people complain about the manna. Moshe protests that he is unable to govern the nation alone. Hashem tells him to select 70 elders, the first Sanhedrin, to assist him, and informs him that the people will be given meat until they will be sickened by it. Two candidates for the group of elders prophesy beyond their mandate, foretelling that Yehoshua instead of Moshe will bring the people to Canaan. Some protest, including Yehoshua, but Moshe is pleased that others have become prophets. Hashem sends an incessant supply of quail for those who complained that they lacked meat. A plague punishes those who complained.

Miriam tries to make a constructive remark to Aharon, which also implies that Moshe is only like other prophets. Hashem explains that Moshe's prophecy is superior to that of any other prophet and punishes Miriam with *tzara'at*, as if she had gossiped about her brother. (Because Miriam is so righteous, she is held to an incredibly high standard.) Moshe prays for Miriam to be healed, and the nation waits until she is cured before traveling.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

Complaints and Quail

Moshe is understandably exasperated with the people – the people whom he led out of Egypt and so devotedly sought to educate to an elevated mission of spirituality. To this end, G-d miraculously provided water and spiritual manna bread. But now they complain – cry and wail – over the garlic and onions they had consumed so freely in Egypt. To Moshe, this attested to the failure of his mission. He was to have won the people’s hearts to the supreme ideal of moral and spiritual perfection, and here the people were wailing about the lack of onions!

Lamenting his failure, Moshe says, “Have I conceived this nation or given birth to it, so that You should say to me: Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries the suckling infant?” If a father or mother fails in some regard as a parent, this is somewhat mitigated by the natural love and respect a child has for a parent. But Moshe was not their parent, and without the natural bonds of love and respect, he was not their natural educator.

Moreover, Moshe did not see a way out. Sure, he knew that G-d could perform miracles. But he also knew that the demands of the people here were trivial and inappropriate – they were “bad” in the eyes of G-d and in the eyes of Moshe. (Bamidbar 11:1, 10) This was hardly the kind of crisis that Hashem would resolve with a miracle. *And*, the people didn’t want “miraculous” food – they wanted real meat, not manna. Therefore, Moshe asks, “Where will I get meat for six hundred thousand people?” He correctly recognized that here they could not expect a miracle from G-d’s strong Hand, and asked for an explanation. G-d’s reply to him was that He has the power to carry out His word even within the framework of

natural possibilities: “My word will come towards you.” The event (His word) is beyond all human reckoning, yet it will come towards “you,” meaning that it will occur by natural causes. And, indeed, it was so. No one could have envisioned the fortuitous winds which would divert the migratory path to deposit mountains of quail in the camp of Israel!

In response to Moshe’s complaint, G-d instructs him to appoint seventy elders to assist in leading the nation, a group that constitutes the basis for the future Sanhedrin. But they do not appear to play any role in resolving the meat complaints. Why are they appointed in the middle of this story? In years to come, whenever circumstances do not seem to favor the realization of G-d’s word, and the battle of Israel’s future elders for the fulfillment of G-d’s Word does not seem – by human reckoning – to stand a chance, they will be able to look back for moral support upon those initial moments and the events that surrounded the very first elders of the Jewish People.

These events will always reassure Jewish leaders that as long as the message they represent and convey is the true Word of G-d, they can trust in His hidden Providence. Even without the splitting the sea or ordering the sun to stand still, His Word will come to the people within the natural order. The quail event would give our elders a firm foundation of confidence for all future activity.

- Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 11:10-11, 23

OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

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Love of the Land, written by RAV MENDEL WEINBACH, zt”l • General Editor: RABBI MOSHE NEWMAN •

Design: RABBI ELIEZER SHAPIRO z”l / DANIEL FREEDMAN

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