**Parsha Potpourri**

**Parshas Beha’aloscha – Vol. 12, Issue 32**

**Compiled by Ozer Alport**

**ויהי העם כמתאננים רע באזני ד' (11:1)**

 Although the Torah has until now recounted a handful of isolated sins committed by the Jewish people, in Parshas Behaaloscha they begin a pattern of repeated complaints – against Hashem, against Moshe, against the Manna, and against the laws of forbidden relationships. Commenting on the general phenomenon of complaining, Rav Chaim Kanievsky notes that quite often, the people who are protesting have no basis for their objections, but are merely seeking a pretense to express their dissatisfaction.

Dovid writes in Tehillim (106:16) ויקנאו למשה במחנה לאהרן קדוש ד' – The people were jealous of Moshe in the camp; of Aharon, the holy one of Hashem. Quoting his father, the Steipler, Rav Chaim homiletically explains that they argued that as their leader, Moshe belonged in the camp, among the people, and it was therefore improper for him to spend so much time away from them on Mount Sinai and in the Mishkan communicating with Hashem.

In contrast, Aharon excelled in promoting and facilitating peace, and as such, he spent most of his time in the camp amongst the populace. In response, they argued that as the holy one of Hashem, Aharon should not be spending his time on such mundane activities, but should instead devote himself to serving Hashem on Mount Sinai and in the Mishkan. The lesson this teaches us is that there are people who will always find something to criticize, and a truly wise person will be able to discern when to take their protests to heart and when to tune them out.

 To illustrate the point, Rav Chaim cites a mashal (parable) of a father and son who were traveling together with a donkey. Initially, the father was riding the donkey, while his son walked beside him. Along the way, they encountered a person who remarked that the father has no compassion for his son, as he comfortably sits on the donkey while forcing his son to walk. When the father heard this perspective, he decided to reverse the arrangement, placing his son on the donkey while he walked alongside them. A short while later, they encountered a second person, who commented that this new arrangement was inappropriate and demonstrated the son’s lack of respect for his father, whom he compelled to walk while he rode the donkey in comfort.

Upon hearing this accusation, the father decided to join his son, and they proceeded with both of them riding the donkey. The next person they met was shocked by their lack of mercy for the donkey, as evidenced by the unreasonable burden they were imposing on it, to which they responded by both dismounting from the donkey and walking alongside it. As they continued, they encountered a fourth person, who claimed that it made no sense for all three of them to walk, when one of them could easily ride on the other. Having exhausted all the other possibilities, this left the father and son with no choice but to lift up the donkey and carry it the rest of the way.

Rav Chaim comments that this nonsensical conclusion is indeed the appropriate outcome for a person who lives his life worried about every complaint he hears, no matter how illogical, and allows them to govern his decision-making process. Rather than obsessing about obtaining the approval of the donkey-toting society around us, we should instead seek to live lives and make choices with which we are comfortable, while remaining open to constructive criticism from those whom we trust to have our best interests at heart, secure in the knowledge that we are acting correctly and not worrying about the opinions of those who will always find something to complain about.

**זכרנו את הדגה אשר נאכל במצרים חנם (11:5)**

During their travels in the wilderness, a group of complainers began to protest the Manna that they were forced to eat day after day. They wailed that they missed the fish that they used to eat in Egypt, and now they had nothing to look forward to except Manna. Commenting on this lament, the Medrash Pliah cryptically remarks מכאן שמדליקין נרות בשבת – from here we may derive that it is obligatory to light candles for Shabbos, a mitzvah which has no apparent connection to their grievance.

 The Chida explains by noting that we must first understand what they were upset about. Rashi writes (11:5) that the Manna tasted like whatever the person eating it desired. If so, why were they mourning the fish they used to eat in Egypt when they were capable of making the Manna taste like fish with no effort whatsoever?

The Gemora in Yoma (74b) teaches that although a person could make the Manna taste like anything he desired, it nevertheless retained its original appearance. Even though the complainers were able to make the Manna taste like fish, they lacked the pleasure and satiety which comes from seeing the food that they wanted to taste. The Gemora adds that a blind person won’t enjoy or become as full from a meal as a person with normal vision who consumes the same food.

In light of this difficulty, the Medrash questioned how a person will be able to avoid the same dilemma on Shabbos since he will not be able to appreciate the Shabbos delicacies if he is forced to eat them in darkness. The Medrash concluded that from their protest, we may derive that a person is obligated to light candles so that he can see and enjoy his food on Shabbos.

**לא אוכל אנכי לבדי לשאת את כל העם הזה כי כבד ממני ואם ככה את עשה לי הרגני נא הרג אם מצאתי חן בעיניך ואל אראה ברעתי (11:14-15)**

 The Torah is replete with incidents in which the Jewish people sinned grievously, yet in each case, their reliable and perennial defender Moshe prayed and beseeched Hashem for mercy on their behalf, even going so far after the sin of the golden calf as to tell Hashem (Shemos 32:32) that if He would not forgive them for their transgression, He should erase Moshe from the Torah.

However, Rav Yosef Elefant of Yeshivas Mir in Yerushalayim notes that in Parshas Behaaloscha, when a group of rabble-rousers complained about the Manna and wanted to instead eat meat, Moshe’s approach was completely different. Unlike in previous episodes, he did not utter a single word of prayer on their behalf and did not express a single positive sentiment in an attempt to defend them. Instead, Moshe atypically responded by complaining to Hashem about the weighty burden of the nation, lamenting his inability to meet their needs and asking Hashem to kill him so that he would not need to witness such evil. What was so unique about this episode, which at first glance appears far less severe than many of the others, that provoked Moshe to throw up his hands in despair?

The Vilna Gaon explains that although it is true that some of their earlier transgressions, such as the sins of the golden calf and the spies, were graver than this sin, they did not represent a direct attack against Moshe and his style of leadership, and in this sense, the nature of this transgression was indeed unique and unprecedented. By rejecting the Manna and expressing their preference for meat instead, they were in essence saying that they no longer desired Moshe’s leadership and the miraculous way of life that accompanied it. Rather than living a supernatural life of Torah, spirituality, and Manna, they announced that they would instead prefer to live a natural lifestyle, as embodied by the meat they demanded.

As a result, this incident became a turning point in Jewish history. The people’s rejection of Moshe and the way of life he represented weakened him, and as a result, he acknowledged for the first time that he no longer had the strength and ability to defend them and pray for Divine mercy on their behalf. This transformation pained Moshe so greatly that he expressed his desire to die rather than witness the aftermath of this seminal event.

Rav Elefant adds that this episode is immediately followed by Hashem instructing Moshe to gather 70 elders to assist him. Although Moshe had been capable of singlehandedly leading the people until now, their spurning of his leadership left him enervated and required him to divide the weight of the nation among 70 helpers. The elders that Moshe assembled included Eldad and Meidad, who prophesied that he would die and Yehoshua would lead the people into Eretz Yisroel (Rashi 11:28). Once Moshe’s miraculous manner of leadership was challenged and he expressed his inability to carry them all alone, the entire lifestyle of the nation was inexorably altered. As a result, because Moshe could not operate in a world of natural governance, he could no longer be the leader to bring them into Eretz Yisroel.

**Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources which discuss them):**

1. Moshe asked (10:31) his father-in-law Yisro to remain with the Jews in the wilderness in order to serve as eyes for them. Why did they need Yisro’s advice or guidance when all of their travels were conducted based on Divine instruction (9:17-18)? (Rabbeinu Bechaye, Taam V’Daas, Peninim MiShulchan Gevoha)
2. How were Eldad and Meidad (Bamidbar 11:26) related to Moshe? (Targum Yonason ben Uziel, Daas Z’keinim, Peirush HaRosh)
3. The Rambam writes (Hilchos Tumas Tzara’as 16:10) that Miriam didn’t intend to disparage Moshe with her comments to Aharon. Rather, she erred in equating the level of Moshe’s prophecy to that of other prophets such as herself and Aharon. In his Peirush Mishnayos on Sanhedrin (Perek Cheilek), the Rambam lists 13 fundamental principles of Jewish belief and writes that a person who denies even one of these beliefs is considered a heretic. One of them is that the level of prophecy of Moshe is unparalleled among all other prophets. Does this G-d forbid mean that Miriam was a heretic? (Kovetz Ma’amorim, Chavatzeles HaSharon)

**Answers to Points to Ponder:**

1) **Rabbeinu Bechaye** answers that although the Jewish people traveled based on Hashem’s guidance, there were still many Jews who lacked proper faith and trust in Hashem. Because they felt more secure with a human being upon whom they could rely, Moshe suggested that Yisro remain to reassure them. Alternatively, he suggests that Moshe’s intention was that Yisro should serve as eyes not for the Jews, but for the non-Jews. In other words, he would be a witness to all of the miracles that Hashem performed for the Jews, which he could then relate to the non-Jews to inspire them to believe in Hashem. **Rav Eliyahu Meir Bloch** explains that unlike tzaddikim such as Moshe and Aharon who were born righteous, Yisro was unique in that he was self-made and self-taught. Many Jews had difficulty looking to Moshe as a role model, as his greatness seemed so far removed from them. Moshe therefore asked Yisro to stay and serve as an example of what every person can become if he only recognizes and uses his latent potential.

2) The **Targum Yonason ben Uziel** writes that when Pharaoh decreed that all male babies would be killed, Amram divorced his wife. During this time, she married Eltzaphan ben Parnach and gave birth to Eldad and Meidad prior to remarrying Amram and giving birth to Moshe. The **Daas Z’keinim** and **Rosh** write that when Hashem gave the Torah and prohibited relations between certain relatives, Amram again divorced Yocheved, who was his aunt and was now forbidden to him. Amram remarried, and together with his new wife gave birth to Eldad and Meidad. They add that they found a journal written by a Rav Amram, who quotes a Rav Hillel who lived in Eretz Yisroel. Rav Hillel testifies that he saw the tombstones of Eldad and Meidad, and on them were written אלדד ומידד אחי אהרן מן האב ולא מן האם – Eldad and Meidad, the brothers of Aharon through their father but not through their mother.

3) **Rav Elchonon Wasserman** answers that the very source for this fundamental principle of belief regarding the uniqueness of Moshe’s level of prophecy is this incident involving Miriam. After Miriam spoke negatively to Aharon about Moshe, Hashem rebuked them and explained (12:7-8) that Moshe’s prophecy is not on the same level of all other prophets. In other words, at the time that Miriam made her accusations against Moshe, this principle hadn’t yet been clearly stated and established in the world. Even though a person today who repeated Miriam’s argument would indeed be labeled a heretic, her position at that time wasn’t considered heretical because it didn’t contradict any known and established belief.

© 2017 by Ozer Alport. To subscribe, send comments, or sponsor an issue, email oalport@optonline.net