

PARSHAS BEHAALOSCHA

תשפ"ו

This week's parsha of Behaaloscha is very complex. We have a section in the middle which is bracketed by two inverted nuns – they separate it from the section before and the section after. Chazal say it forms a separate sefer in Chumash! What does that tell us?

What has happened to Klal Yisroel until this point? In Egypt, they had a year of education about how Hashem runs this world. Hashem used the ten makkos to teach these lessons. Then, on the night of Makkas Bechoros there was an unbelievable gilui Shechinoh. Then they travel for seven days through the desert with a cloud leading them during the day and a pillar of fire through the night. They come to Yam Suf and see another gilui Shechinoh and come out fabulously wealthy. Six weeks later they are raised to incredible levels of nevuoh with ma'amad Har Sinai, but come crashing down forty days later with the Eigel Hazahav.

And finally, Moshe brings down the second set of luchos and immediately, the construction of the Mishkon begins. Once the Mishkon is completed, there is a chanukas hamizbeach and hashroas haShechinoh. They start moving through the desert to complete the dream. Everything is going according to plan – they are going with Moshe Rabbeinu, with the Mishkon and the Shechinoh into Eretz Yisroel. They have trumpets and the cloud of Hashem and pillar of fire leading the way. But then things start spinning out of control.

What happened?

When you are living in overwhelming circumstances, you get used to it. You stop realizing how special and privileged your daily life is and you start taking it for granted. You stop being overwhelmed by traveling through the desert with nothing growing for hundreds of miles. There are dangerous creatures and scorching heat, but you are oblivious to it all because you are surrounded by a cloud that is protecting you and keeping you comfortable at all times. Your breakfast is being dropped right in front of your doorstep every single day. You make a brocho of השמים לחם מן השמים. There is a little stream of water passing by your front door to scoop up whatever you need. You live like this for long enough, and you get used to it. You don't appreciate what is really happening.

The plan was to set up life in Eretz Yisroel as a whole different nation – transformed. Had Moshe Rabbeinu led them there, Chazal tell us Moshiach would have come right then. But Klal Yisroel have a habit of blowing every opportunity they are given – because they stopped appreciating what they have.

At this point, Yisro decides to leave Klal Yisroel and go back to convert his family in Midian. Moshe pleads with Yisro to stay with them. He promised him the most fertile part of Eretz Yisroel, but Yisro insists on leaving. Then the complaining starts and gradually things start to unravel.

The Eirev Rav are always the ones who start the trouble. Why? Because Klal Yisroel went through a long – decades long – process of growth through slavery and persecution and terrible nisyonos, ending finally in spectacular redemption. But the Eirev Rav took a short-cut. They were Egyptians who saw the ten makkos and saw Klal Yisroel being redeemed at the end in all their glory, and wanted to jump on the bandwagon. They didn't want to go through all the nisyonos to reach Klal Yisroel's level. As long as things are inspiring and wonderful, they are willing to go along. But the minute things get difficult and they hit nisyonos, they complain and want to bail out.

The Mis'onenim wanted an excuse to leave Hashem. They found something to complain about. Hashem wanted to get Klal Yisroel to Eretz Yisroel and reach their destination as soon as possible. But some people have an attitude of looking at the negative in every situation. A fire comes down from shomayim and kills some of them.

There are two ways people could react to this dramatic response. They could accept it as a message and learn the appropriate lesson, or they can take this as just another miraculous thing that they are surrounded with in any event, and it becomes ordinary and unremarkable.

The next issue was a complaint about the mon. They were looking for taivoh intentionally. The mon not only tasted like the food you were thinking about, but it even had the qualities of the food you were thinking about. But even this wasn't enough – they wanted the real thing.

Hashem responds by instructing Moshe to gather seventy elders to become the new Sanhedrin. But there were seventy elders before! What happened to them? Rashi tells us they all died. Why?

The reason they died is crucial for understanding a basic value in life. We need to realize that Hashem does everything for us, and unfortunately, we take it for granted.

Hashem gave us the Torah at Har Sinai 3,500 years ago, and He asks us every year to take a day to contemplate what that event was and how it still impacts us today by recreating it. At the end of every Yom Tov, a person should evaluate and see if he worked with the themes of the Yom Tov to grow from it. Can he take something that will stay with him after the Yom Tov is over? Is he on a higher level now because of how he went through the Yom Tov?

There is a common question that people ask: why, in the Maariv after Yom Kippur, do we still make mention of aveiros? We just went through teshuvoh and kapporoh ending with Ne'iloh and had all our aveiros wiped off! It was just two minutes ago! Why am I still asking for selichoh in Maariv? I answer that the Maariv after Ne'iloh is a test – how much did Yom Kippur change you? How did it make a difference in your davening going forward?

The seventy elders died because of what they did at the end of Parshas Mishpotim. They had an incredible vision of nevuoh on the highest level, but they were still eating and drinking. They were not appreciating what they were experiencing. In truth, they deserved to be struck down on the spot, but Hashem holds off in order not to dampen the simchoh of kabbolas haTorah. But here in this parsha, when Klal Yisroel complain about the mon, they are killed.

Why here specifically?

The answer is simple. These were the leaders of Klal Yisroel and they were supposed to set an example for the people they were leading. Instead, they were oblivious to the incredible gift of nevuoh they were given and were preoccupied with regular, mundane living. This is why Klal Yisroel didn't appreciate the mon and the whole environment they were living in. They were following the examples of their leaders. So the leaders had to be replaced.

Klal Yisroel were demanding to have all these foods that were not good for them. They want everything they desired with no restrictions. There is a reason they aren't getting it, but they are not willing to submit to any limits. There is a deeply destructive approach to life

called hefker. Unfortunately, this attitude has infiltrated our frum tzibbur as well. We can't accept limitations. The moment limits are placed, we complain bitterly.

We are living in an unbelievable generation. We live in a very unique period of Jewish history. Limud haTorah is available to anyone who wants to learn, on a massive scale. One hundred years ago, there were only small groups of yechidei seguloh who went to yeshivos. The conditions of those yeshivos were the bare minimum in terms of food and accommodations. It is nothing resembling what the vast, sprawling yeshiva world is today – with high quality, abundant food and comfortable living conditions. The ease and comfort and luxury of our generation has to be appreciated. But people complain nonetheless.

Here in the Chumash we have a story where Hashem is setting Klal Yisroel up in the most ideal way imaginable – actually, we can't even imagine it. He is trying to move them along to reach their destination and fulfill the greatest dream as soon as possible. It is less than two years since they left slavery in Egypt and less than a year from Ma'amad Har Sinai. They are being fed manna and water from a special well in the middle of a vast barren desert, and they are complaining about steak and watermelon!

We need to see how this story is reflected in our own lives.

I think regularly about the October 7th massacre and the war in Gaza. I am constantly overwhelmed by people who don't see the hand of Hashem in how He protected the shomer Shabbos communities, while the rest were devastated. There were fourteen communities to be targeted in the south. Four were shomer Shabbos and ten not. Nothing happened to the shomer Shabbos communities. The yeshiva in Tifrach was targeted and nothing happened. People see it, but it goes right by them. It doesn't fit neatly into their understanding of the world, so they ignore it completely. It is called cognitive dissonance. We have to stop and see what Hashem is showing us – just as Hashem was showing Klal Yisroel in the desert. But the complaining starts with

the Eirev Rav, and spreads to the rest of Klal Yisroel.

Hashem told Moshe the roots of this attitude came from the reaction of the seventy elders to the vision they received at Har Sinai. It all hits rock-bottom in the next parsha with the meraglim and Klal Yisroel's rejection of Eretz Yisroel. As a result, they needed to spend another 38 years in the desert until the entire generation died out and a new generation replaced them. They didn't deserve Eretz Yisroel once they rejected it.

Our Jewish world that exists today was built virtually from scratch in the U.S., the U.K. and Israel by a handful of people who decided they are going to rebuild after the Holocaust. The Jewish world was devastated to a degree you cannot imagine – utter despair and hopelessness. But, some individuals didn't give up. Now, because of their tenacity, 81 years later, we have a sprawling empire of Torah. But those who grew up with it don't appreciate what they have.

One group of Klal Yisroel didn't die in the desert. They remained focused and didn't get misled by the meraglim and entered Eretz Yisroel. It was Shevet Levi. This is a pattern: In Egypt they kept focused and avoided slavery, at the sin of the golden calf they kept focus, and here with the meraglim they kept focused. Why? It was because they put Torah and avodas Hashem at the center of their lives and didn't feel the need to follow everyone else.

These are the parshiyos that are so relevant to us in our times – in the situation Klal Yisroel are in today. I meet a lot of different people and I see that people don't appreciate what we have been through for the past 81 years rebuilding Torah. It is not a small thing. The hand of Hashem is very clear for those who want to see it. Our generation is blessed with so much financial resources that any bochur who is serious can become a budding talmid chochom and sit and learn for a few years with no responsibilities of parnossoh to distract him. Nothing is stopping anyone here. Appreciate the gift and don't take it for granted.