

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

After her husband and sons passed away, Nu'umi left Moav, along with both of her Moavite daughters-in-law (Rus 1:6). After they had already left Moav (1:7) and were well on their way to "the Land of Yehudah" (ibid), Nu'umi tried to convince her daughters-in-law to go back to Moav, "each to her mother's house" (1:8-13). Urvah eventually listens to her mother-in-law, but Rus "clings to her" (1:14), and continues to travel with her back to Bais Lechem (1:19). This conversation happened a while after they had left the place that had been their home (1:6-7), necessitating a "return" to Moav by "traveling" back (1:8). Why did Nu'umi wait so long before trying to convince them not to return with her to Bais Lechem? Wouldn't there be some resentment at having them travel all that way and then have to travel all the way back? Shouldn't she have told them that they are better off staying in Moav while they were still in Moav, before they left?

Malbim suggests that all three agreed that they had to leave where they were because of all the troubles they had experienced there, but it was only Nu'umi who had decided that her final destination would be Bais Lechem. Later, after they had traveled a bit, when Rus and Urvah decided to stay with Nu'umi and move to Bais Lechem rather than moving elsewhere within Moav, Nu'umi tried to convince them to return home.

One of the manuscripts quoted in Tosfos HaShaleim asks why Nu'umi tried to convince them to return to non-Jewish homes, answering that she was embarrassed that her children had married non-Jews. It is unclear that Nu'umi had intended to return to Bais Lechem from the outset; she may have originally planned to move to a different part of the Land of Israel, where no one knew who she was. She had no money and no belongings (not even shoes, as they walked all the way from Moav to Bais Lechem barefoot, see Rus Rabbah 2:12), making it necessary for Rus to go out to the fields to pick up stalks of grain left inadvertently by workers (2:2) just so they could eat. It would be understandable if the formerly rich Nu'umi, who was from a noble family, preferred to live the life of a pauper in a place where no one recognized her. When she changed her mind and decided to move back home anyway, since people she knew would see that her sons had married Moavites, she tried to convince them to return home. It

is also possible that in her haste to leave Moav, it hadn't occurred to her that she would be embarrassed by who her sons had married. As she got closer to Bais Lechem, she realized the ramifications of returning with two Moavites, and tried to convince them to return to Moav.

The Vilna Gaon is among the numerous commentators who say Nu'umi didn't realize that Rus and Urvah were planning to stay with her all the way to Bais Lechem. She thought that they were just accompanying her for part of the way, and would eventually return to Moav. (Some suggest that this was in fact their original intent; they only decided to stay with her after they had traveled for a while.) When she realized that they were planning on leaving their native Moav forever, she tried to convince them not to. Others suggest that Nu'umi knew that they were planning to move with her back to Bais Lechem, but after having traveled for a while she sensed that Urvah was having second thoughts. Rather than embarrassing her by only addressing her (and not Rus), Nu'umi made her speech to both of them, thus allowing Urvah to return while Rus continued on.

Chazal (Rus Rabbah 2:12) tell us that along the way, they were discussing the laws of converting. There is much discussion regarding whether Rus and Urvah had converted before they married Nu'umi's sons, or if this discussion was part of Rus's conversion process. One of the issues that must be resolved if they had converted before their weddings, is how Nu'umi could send Urvah back if she was already Jewish. Rav Moshe Shternbuch, sh"lita, (Moadim U'zmanim) suggests that the Bais Din (Jewish court) in Moav (outside the Land of Israel) was only given the authority to make decisions through the Sanhedrin (Jewish Supreme court, in Israel), and they only gave the courts outside Israel the authority to convert sincere converts; if the convert turned out to not be sincere, the conversion wouldn't be valid. (Conversions done by courts that don't need special authority remain valid regardless.) Nu'umi's attempt to dissuade Rus and Urvah from staying with her was a way to test their sincerity. Rus passed the test, so her conversion was valid, while Urvah didn't, nullifying hers.

If trying to convince Rus and Urvah to go back home was a means of testing their initial sincerity, a delicate balance must be maintained. Pushing too hard might cause them to return even if they really were sincere at the time of the conversion, but not pushing hard enough could prevent them from leaving even if

they weren't. Having this conversation while still in Moav, before they left, might tempt them to stay even if the conversion was valid. Therefore, Nu'umi might have purposely waited until they were on the outskirts of Moav, when going back home wouldn't be too easy, but far enough away from Bais Lechem that continuing wasn't that easy either, in order to allow their decision to be based on their desire to be or Jew or not be a Jew rather than on how convenient or inconvenient it would be to stay in Moav or travel to Bais Lechem.

On the other hand, if they hadn't converted before they got married, this conversation was part of the conversion process. Part of the conversion process is trying to dissuade the potential convert from converting, and doing so numerous times. If Nu'umi knew before leaving Moav that Rus and Urpah were planning on moving to Bais Lechem permanently, she would have also known that they were planning on becoming Jews. It is therefore likely that even before they left, while still in Moav, Nu'umi tried to convince Rus and Urpah to stay in Moav rather than joining the Jewish people. Nevertheless, they both said they wanted to convert, so all three left for Bais Lechem. The next time Nu'umi tried to talk them out of converting, they had already traveled far enough to have to travel back to Moav if they changed their mind. Nu'umi tried again, and this time Urpah was persuaded to return home. The Megila only recorded the conversation that resulted in Urpah's change of plans (and Rus's emotional acceptance of Nu'umi's people and God); there was no need to tell us about the conversation that had occurred before they left Moav. Nu'umi hadn't really waited until they left Moav to have this conversation; we are only told about the conversation when it happened again later. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l ©2024 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“In the second month [Iyar] on the afternoon of the fourteenth day, he shall prepare it [the second Passover Sacrifice].” (Numbers 9:11) One of the many injunctions in this week's portion is that of Pesach Sheni - "second Passover" - a "second chance" for anyone who was ritually impure on Passover to bring the festival sacrifice four weeks later and eat it then. At this time, though there would be no festival and no prohibition of hametz (leaven), one could partake in this delayed Passover sacrificial meal with matza and bitter herbs. Although the analogy is not completely apt, this strange combination of Passover, hametz and matza sparked within me some significant childhood memories which may contain important lessons regarding our attitude toward different kinds of "religious" observances.

Throughout his life, my paternal grandfather, Shmuel, was a communist. In Czarist Belorussia, he

organized the workers in his father's factory to protest against their boss. In 1906, he escaped from Siberia to New York and opened a woodworking business, which he handed over to the workers as soon as it became profitable. He was a Yiddishist - an atheist who wrote a regular column for the Freiheit (the New York Yiddish communist newspaper) - and he truly believed that "religion was the opium of the masses."

When I was about three years old, he crafted for me a miniature "stool and table" set as a special gift; it remains in our family until this very day. He then asked me to try to place my fingers in the manner of the kohanim during the priestly benediction; when I did it successfully, he kissed me on the forehead and admonished me: "Remember, we are kohanim, Jewish aristocracy. Always be a proud Jew."

As he left the house, I remember asking my mother what "Jew" and "aristocracy" meant.

Another childhood memory is of a train ride we took together from Bedford-Stuyvesant, where I lived, to Kings Highway, where he lived. Two elderly hassidim boarded the train and sat directly opposite us; three neighborhood toughs began taunting the hassidim and pulling at their beards.

My grandfather interrupted his conversation with me and looked intently at the drama unfolding in front of us. As soon as the train came to a stop, he lunged forward, grabbed the three hoodlums, and literally threw them out of the compartment. Trembling with fear, as the doors closed with the toughs outside, I asked my grandfather, "Why did you protect those hassidim? You aren't even religious."

Nonchalantly, he responded, "They are part of our Jewish family. And you must always protect the underdog. That's what Judaism teaches."

And now the point of my reminiscences. In the Brooklyn of my childhood, there were two Passover Sedarim; the first we celebrated at the home of my religious maternal grandmother, and the second with my communist grandfather. On his dining room wall hung two pictures, one of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (who he thought was bringing communism to America) and the other of Joseph Stalin.

On the beautifully set table were all the accouterments - matza, maror (bitter herbs), haroset, the egg and the shank bone - but on the side were fresh rolls for family members who preferred pumpnickel to the "bread of affliction." We read from the Haggada and my grandfather read passages from Marx, Engels and Shalom Aleichem about communist idealism and our obligations to the poor. For an 11-year-old who adored his intellectual and idealistic grandfather, there seemed to be no contradiction between the different foods and the various and variegated readings.

When I came upon the fascinating law of Pesach Sheni, the "second chance" Passover sacrifice that features the roasted meat, the matza, maror and haroset

together with the hametz and without the usual festival prohibitions, this was the closest thing I could imagine to my grandfather's Seder. An evening that featured the "peoplehood" and familial aspects of a celebration which taught us to identify with the slave, the stranger, the downtrodden, but without fealty to G-d who placed restrictions upon our diet and our activities. My grandfather was "far away" from the traditional definitions of observance; he was even "defiled by death" - the spiritual death of communism that had captivated his intellectual world like an evil, seductive slave woman. (Rav A.Y. Kook, Iggarot R'eya 137).

Such a Seder has no staying power; to the best of my knowledge, none of my Riskin cousins have Jewish spouses or attend Passover Sedarim. By the end of his life, my grandfather himself understood this. In our last discussion before his fatal heart attack, while reclining on the bed of a Turkish bath, he told me of his great disillusionment with communism after reading of Stalin's anti-Semitic plots against Jewish doctors and Yiddish writers of the Soviet Union.

"I gave up too much too soon for a false god. I yearn for the Sabbaths of my parents' home. I now understand that all of communist idealism is expressed in the words of our Prophets and experienced in the Passover Seder. You are following the right path..."

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

It is a terrible personality trait to be a complainer. It is hard to live with complainers at home, in the workplace, and in the community. In this week's parsha we are made aware of the dismal consequences of complaining. Rashi points out that the complainers in the desert had no real basis for their complaints. They were just dissatisfied somehow and so they complained against Moshe and eventually against God.

Moshe in his final oration to the Jewish people in the book of Dvarim will himself complain that the people of Israel are unnecessarily quarrelsome and a bunch of complainers. There is a Jewish joke, more ironic than funny, about three Jewish matrons eating lunch at a restaurant in New York and the waiter approached them in the middle of their meal and asked them "Is anything alright?"

Rashi's interpretation of the lack of justification for complaints in the desert portrays for us a very serious character defect within the Jewish people. They are chronic complainers and a vast majority of the time their complaints are baseless. The many complaints in the desert follow the usual pattern – food, Moshe's leadership, the unfairness of life and the difficulty of living up to the role of being the chosen people.

All through First Temple times we find that the prophets of Israel were barraged with complaints about their mission and words. The prophets were the solution

to Israel's troubles. The people complained that they were the problem. Destruction and exile came in the wake of the unjustified complaints.

I am not a mental health professional by any stretch of imagination. Yet my instinct tells me that chronic complainers are not happy with themselves and project that dissatisfaction outwards on events and humans that are not the cause of their original dissatisfaction. There is something deep within us that requires self-justification and self-empowerment.

When that need is fulfilled, we are happy, and optimistic. When that ingredient in our soul and psyche is absent, we are complainers, carpers, sad and sometimes destructive people. We recite in our daily morning prayers the statement as to how fortunate we are to be the special people that God has chosen to lead the world in service to Him. We may all recite that prayer but how many of us are really convinced in our heart of hearts of its truth?

The rabbis of the Talmud harshly disdained the chronic complainer – "Is it not sufficient for you that you are alive?" Nothing is perfect in life but that is not a justification for complaints. We are bidden to deal with problems to the extent that we can and not to dwell on them and constantly complain about them. We have to seek an inner peace that will allow us an optimistic attitude and an avoidance of complaints. Our parents, schools and society should somehow concentrate on achieving this goal with our coming generations. © 2024 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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Complaining to Moses, the Israelites cry out that they remember the fish served to them in Egypt that they received "chinam" (without paying; Numbers 11:5). Could they really have received food with no strings attached? After all, these are the same Egyptians who refused to give the Jewish slaves straw for bricks. As the Midrash asks: "If they wouldn't give them straw for naught, would they have given them fish for naught?" (Sifrei 87).

Nachmanides believes that this is certainly possible because, at the riverside, the Jews who were slaves of the Egyptian fishermen would be given some fish, probably the small fish that had no value in the Egyptians' eyes.

Ibn Ezra reflects this line of reasoning but adds that the term chinam should not be taken literally – it should be understood to mean "inexpensive." They received fish at bargain basement prices.

Rashi offers another answer from the Midrash. "Chinam," says Rashi, means "free of mitzvot [commandments]" (Sifrei 87). In Egypt, without the

commandments, the Jews felt unencumbered, free. After the giving of the Torah at Sinai, with all of its prohibitive laws, the Jews felt restricted by the commandments. This seems to make sense. Freedom and limitation are antithetical. If, for example, I'm not allowed to eat a particular food, my options are severely narrowed, and I am no longer feeling "chinam" or free.

But the Jews in the desert misunderstood the commandments. The mitzvot, even the laws that seem most restrictive, can often teach self-discipline, and self-discipline is a passageway to freedom.

To become a great pianist, for example, one needs the self-discipline to practice endlessly, thereby becoming free to roam the keyboard with grace and ease. So too with dance, with sports, and yes, with learning. Vigorously pushing oneself to put in hours makes one free to navigate and understand even the most difficult text.

We commonly associate freedom with the ability to do whatever we want, whenever we want. But freedom is not only the right to say yes; it is the ability to say no. If I cannot push away a particular food, my physical urges may have unbridled freedom, but my mind is enslaved. What appears to be a clear green light can sometimes turn out to be the greatest of burdens.

The opposite is also true. What appears to be a burden can often lead to unlimited freedom.

A story illustrates this point. When God first created the world, the birds were formed without wings. They complained to God: "We're small and feel overpowered by the larger animals." God responded: "Have patience, you'll see." In time, God gave the birds wings. The complaining intensified. "It's worse than ever! Until now, we were all small, but still quick enough to elude the animals of prey. Now we have these appendages by our sides, and we feel weighed down." God gently took the birds and taught them how to fly high and then higher. They were able to reach above the clouds and escape all threats from their animal adversaries.

The mitzvot are like wings. When not understood fully, they can make us feel stifled and weighed down. Yet when studied and internalized, they give us new ways of looking at the world and at ourselves. They teach us self-discipline and meaning. With these gifts, we can fly high and far.

We become free – chinam. ©2024 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**A**nd the mixed nation in its midst craved desire, and the Children of Israel also sat and cried and said, "Who will feed us meat?" (Bamidbar

11:4) One of the darkest times in our nation's history came when it could have been the brightest. When the Jews left Egypt, they were catapulted to greatness by Hashem choosing to give them the Torah, and by their willingness to accept it unconditionally. But they were not alone.

Along with the Jews left many others who were inspired by the plagues and miracles to join the Jewish People. Moshe thought it was a good thing though Hashem did not. These people would influence the Jews to stumble.

In this case, they craved certain foods and lamented about what they had. They cried for meat, though in reality, the Jews had sheep and cattle. They complained about the mon, though it could be delicious and wondrous to eat. As the Baalei Mussar say, they did not desire meat, but rather they desired, "desire." They mustered up their despair and chose to complain, even when there was so much to be grateful for.

They wailed about the things they missed, reveling in their misery though it was of their own doing. This is a distinctly un-Jewish characteristic and we were influenced. We are called Yehudim, those who appreciate and acknowledge, because we see Hashem's hand in our lives constantly and recognize the miracles of goodness He does for us.

They misused their power of imagination. Hashem gives us the ability to be creative so we might use it for good. Perhaps we can think of unusual ways to help people, or we can come up with innovative Torah ideas. That's what imagination is for. Instead, these people used it to find problems in their lives. But it doesn't stop there.

They said, "We have nothing before our eyes but the mon." This could also be read, "we have nothing towards the mon but our eyes." Looking at this miracle food on a strictly superficial level, noting its bland appearance and unexciting taste was to do it a tremendous disservice. It was completely absorbed by the body as it was a perfect food. It provided all one's nutrition and could taste like the most exquisite dishes. But you needed to think about this in order to appreciate it.

We have the power to look at things in different ways, and whatever we're looking for is what we will find. The people who sought the negative found suffering and anger, while those who saw the greatness in the mon, and imagined all the good things Hashem was doing for them, were the ones who understood the power and the nature of the Torah they were given.

The Chofetz Chaim was once speaking to a group of students and they were discussing the mon, the miraculous food eaten by the Jews in the desert.

"We all know," said the sage, "that the mon miraculously tasted like whatever you wanted. If you thought about cake, it tasted like cake. If you thought about fruit, it tasted like fruit. But what would happen if

one ate the man and did not have any specific thought?"

The boys thought about it and agreed it was a good question. They looked to the Chofetz Chaim to enlighten them.

"It's simple," he explained. "Az men tracht nisht, hot es kain taam nisht – If you don't put in any thought, it has no flavor!" This lesson was about much more than food; it was a lesson about everything we do in life.
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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Jewish Geography

On the 20th of Iyar, 2449, the Children of Israel left Sinai (Bamidbar 10:12) after spending almost a year there. The subsequent places mentioned in our Parasha are the Paran Desert (ibid), Taveira (11:3), Kivros Hataavuh (11:34), Chatzeiros (11:35) and, once again, the Paran Desert (12:16). The Paran Desert being mentioned a second time doesn't mean they had left it. This desert is quite large (and these locations might be near each other), so the three places between the two mentions of the Paran Desert were all in that desert. As a matter of fact, most assume that the first stop in the Paran Desert was [what would eventually be called] Kivros Hataavuh (see Rashi on 10:12), so only four locations are actually being referred to. The Paran Desert might have been mentioned at the outset just to tell us that they left the Sinai Desert and entered the Paran Desert before getting into specifics. It's also fair to assume (as Yoel Elitzur does on page 442 of "Places in the Parasha") that Taveira and Kivros Hataavuh didn't have names prior to the incidents that led to these names. The generic "Paran Desert" was therefore used to describe where they went before the names were given (see Sefornu on 12:16).

The second "Paran Desert" refers to Kadesh, where the scouts were sent from (13:26; see Ramban on 12:16, although Sefornu there says they really camped opposite Kadesh, not in it). What about Taveira? Although mentioned before Kivros Hataavuh in our Parasha, it's not mentioned at all in the stops listed in פרשת מטעי (towards the end of Sefer Bamidbar) where it says they went from the Sinai Desert to Kivros Hataavuh (33:16) and then to Chatzeiros (33:17). Why isn't Taveira included there?

The most common approach to explain the absence of Taveira in the list of encampments is that Taveira and Kivros Hataavuh are the same place (see Ibn Ezra on 10:33, Rabbeinu Bachye on 11:5 and Chizkuni on 10:12 and 11:3). It was named Taveira after some were consumed by G-d's fire (11:1-3), but renamed Kivros Hataavuh after the "very great smiting" (11:33), when those who desired meat died and were buried there (11:34). Ramban (11:3) adds a twist, suggesting that only the edge of the camp, where the fire burned, was called Taveira, whereas the whole city (or area) was called Kivros Hataavuh. I'm not sure why they

would only name a small section Taveira if there had been no name for the area yet (Sifre suggests that the fire was a reminder not to complain, so they may have been focusing just on that reminder, not the location). Either way, since it wasn't a separate stop, Taveira wasn't listed among the encampments. (Based on this, only three separate locations are referred to in our Parasha.)

Although Ibn Ezra in Bamidbar says that Taveira and Kivros Hataavuh are one and the same, in Devarim (9:22) he suggests the possibility that not every stop was listed with the encampments in פרשת מטעי. (Ramban on Bamidbar 12:16 seems to accept this possibility.) If they stopped somewhere for only a day, it didn't make the list, so even if Taveira was a separate location, because they didn't stay long, it wasn't mentioned there. It should be noted, though, that there's no mention of any travel between Taveira and Kivros Hataavuh, implying that they were not two separate stops. But that doesn't mean they had to be the same place.

According to Sefornu (Bamidbar 10:33) and Malbim (11:3), they never camped at Taveira (which is why it isn't listed as one of the stops). Rather, this incident occurred on the way to [the place eventually named] Kivros Hataavuh, while they were traveling. Rashi (11:1) seems to be saying the same thing: "they said, 'woe is to us, how exhausted we've become from this three-day journey, for we haven't rested from the afflictions of traveling.'" Before dissecting Rashi's wording, allow me to explain why I put the comma after the words "three days," despite a popular printing/translation putting the comma before them.

When the Torah says they traveled a three-day journey from G-d's mountain (10:33), Rashi (based on Sifre) says they didn't really travel for three days. They did travel a distance that normally takes three days, but they did it in just one day. If the comma (in his commentary on 11:1) is before the words "three days," he would be saying that they were tired from traveling for three days – which they didn't do. Putting the comma after "three days" means that he isn't referring to how long it took them to travel, but how far they traveled – a distance that normally takes three days to traverse.

Rashi's description of the complaint is based on Sifre (84), although Sifre doesn't mention three days (only the distance they traveled – 36 mil). Sifre says they were complaining about how exhausted they were, and Rashi adds that it was a three-day journey. Although Midrash Aggadah does say their complaint was that G-d made them travel for three consecutive days, we don't know if this Midrash was written/compiled before or after Rashi wrote his commentary. Either way, Rashi himself (like Sifre) says they attributed their exhaustion to the distance they traveled, not how long the trip took. [Now back to our regularly scheduled dissection of Rashi's wording.]

You'll notice that Rashi didn't say "we didn't rest

until we traveled a three-day journey,” but “we haven’t rested,” indicating that they were still traveling. Had they already reached that first destination, they likely would have appreciated what G-d had intended – getting them to the Promised Land sooner – rather than complaining about how exhausting the trip was after they already had a chance to rest.

Nevertheless, because Rashi mentions the three-day journey, Taveira must have been located near the end of that trip, and therefore close to Kivros Hataavuh. But since they never stopped at Taveira (at least according to Sefornu, Malbim and Rashi), it wasn’t included in Moshe’s list of encampments. ©2024 Rabbi D. Kramer

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Sounding the Trumpets

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Bamidbar 10:9 presents the mitzva of sounding trumpets during wartime (“When you are at war in your land”), and during a time of trouble (“against an enemy who oppresses you”). Some require that both these conditions be present for the mitzva to be in effect. This leads the *Avnei Nezer* to ask whether we should blow the trumpets only for a voluntary war, or also for a *milchemet mitzva* (obligatory war). After all, since G-d has guaranteed us a successful outcome, one might posit that it is not considered a time of trouble. During the war against Jericho (which was a *milchemet mitzva*), they blew the *shofar* and not the trumpets (*Yehoshua* 6:2). This would seem to prove that blowing the trumpets is limited to a voluntary war.

While some limit the trumpet-blowing to a voluntary war, others offer a different limitation. The *Pri Megadim* points out that the verse uses the word “*be-artzechem*” (“in your Land”). He explains that this is the reason that in his time (18th century) the trumpet was not blown for trouble, as this was limited to trouble in the Land of Israel (or, by extension, trouble for the majority of the world’s Jews).

With this background, we can understand why Rav Shraga Feivel Frank (*HaMa’ayan*, 1970) exhorted people to blow trumpets near the *Kotel* in contemporary times of trouble. He argued that this would fulfill the mitzva.

In wartime, the trumpets are sounded as part of a special prayer service designed for this purpose. This prayer service is similar to that of *Mussaf* on Rosh Hashanah, with verses of *Malchuyot* (G-d’s kingship), *Zichronot* (asking G-d to remember), and *Shofarot* (about times when a *shofar* was sounded). Some maintain that the trumpets are blown in the battlefield itself, as we see from historical descriptions of the wars of the Maccabees.

Similarly, when our soldiers return from war or when they celebrate victory, they should celebrate and sound the trumpet. This is what King Yehoshaphat did

when he returned victorious from the wars against Ammon and Moab. As it states, “For G-d had given them cause for rejoicing over their enemies. They came to Jerusalem to the house of G-d, to the accompaniment of harps, lyres, and trumpets” (*II Divrei HaYamim* 20:27-28). As a result, “The terror of G-d seized all kingdoms of the land when they heard that G-d had fought the enemies of Israel. The kingdom of Yehoshaphat was untroubled, and his G-d granted him respite on all sides” (*ibid.* 29-30). ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Temptation and Hashem’s Anger

In a previous year we discussed the double inverted nuns which we said were placed between two negative situations in the parasha. Prior to the inverted nuns was the incident of leaving Har Sinai. The people were joyful, not because they were beginning the journey to their new home, but because they were free of the burden of Har Sinai. According to one interpretation, the sin that occurred after the inverted nuns was the gluttonous demand for meat instead of the manna which was a gift directly from Hashem each day. Our focus will be on this second negative event, the event immediately following the inverted nuns.

The Torah states, “And it was that the people were (k’mi’t’on’nim) (as if they were dead, like those who seek pretexts of evil, as if they were suffering, as if complaining) in the ears of Hashem, and Hashem heard and His wrath flared, and a fire of Hashem burned against them, and it consumed at the edge of the camp. The people cried out to Moshe; Moshe prayed to Hashem, and the fire sank. He named that place Taveirah, for the fire of Hashem had burned (va’arah) against them. The (asafusuf) (rabble, those who were added) among them cultivated a craving, and the B’nei Yisrael also turned, and they wept and said, ‘Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish that we would eat in Egypt free of charge; the cucumbers, and the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our life is parched, there is nothing; we have nothing before our eyes but the manna.’”

As you can see, there are several translations for two of the words in this section. While only some of the translations are given here, it is clear that there is a dispute as to the meaning of a number of crucial sections of our paragraph. Rashi understood the word, “ha’am” to refer to only the wicked people who were “k’mi’t’on’nim” looking for a pretext to arouse the people and cause them to return to Egypt. Part of Rashi’s understanding was based on the word, “ha’am, the people,” which he contrasts with “ami, my people,” the way that Hashem referred to the people when they were doing His Will. Ibn Ezra does not separate the term

“ha’am” from the entire nation, as he suggests that the problem arose for the entire nation when they traveled from Har Sinai and came to Kivrot haTa’eivah, a name associated with lust and temptation. The Ramban discards this explanation as it suggests that the Torah did not specify the sin for which Hashem punished them. The Ramban explains that the people’s sin was complaining about the journey itself. They were concerned with what they would eat, how they would get water, how soon they would arrive in Israel, and how difficult the journey would be. Instead of being grateful to Hashem for His guidance through the desert and His gift of the Land of Israel, they were questioning and impatient with Hashem. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch understood the sin to be that the people were “k’mi’ot’nim,” from the word “o’nein,” meaning that they saw themselves as if they were already dead, with no purpose left. They “mourned over themselves” as they felt that they had been “placed in a coffin.”

The Kli Yakar understood the sin of the people differently. He suggests that the sin was related to the complaint mentioned a few sentences later about not having fish. Fish are related to the mitzvah of “p’ru ur’vu, be fruitful and multiply.” The people’s complaint about the lack of fish had to do with the restrictions on marital relations and on procreation with any woman. The people believed that the primary command to mankind, “be fruitful and multiply,” should override any restrictions on procreation. The Kli Yakar explains that the words that we find later, “Vayishma Moshe et ha’am boche l’mishp’chotav, and Moshe heard the people weeping by their families,” was the weeping about the restrictions on procreation.

The other word which we saw has various translations is “asafsuf.” HaRav Hirsch understood that this was referring to the erev rav, the non-Jewish Egyptians who fled Egypt with the Jews but never really associated themselves with the people. They were those who were added on (asaf) to the Jewish people. “The doubling of the root letters indicates a repeated absorption, meaning that a multitude were absorbed.” Hirsch points out that this absorption was external, “and that those who were absorbed did not identify with the essence of the national union that absorbed them.” HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that Rabbi Shimon ben Menasye says that the “asafsuf” were the elders among the B’nei Yisrael. But this does not appear to be accurate because the normal understanding of the word is that they were the erev rav. The elders heard the people and their complaints, and understood that even though the manna could taste like everything including the meat that they desired, it did not give them the same strength that the meat itself could depart. The manna would not give them the strength to overcome their complaints caused by their travel. The elders, therefore, urged the people to cry out to Moshe from their tents. The problem was that Hashem did not agree to their

opinion for the solution to the complaining. Hashem also disagreed with their method to request meat through their tears, because this method would increase their lust for meat, which could lead to a desire for other things.

The Ohr HaChaim explains why Hashem became so angry with the people’s complaints that He sent out a fire to consume the edge of the camp. Hashem could understand that the people would be tempted and succumb to that temptation, as they would fall under the control of the Yeitzer Hara, the Evil Inclination, a force which reacts to our weaknesses and encourages them. What Hashem could not tolerate was the people placing themselves in a position to be tempted. Hashem understands human nature, so He clearly understands that Man can be tempted by outside forces. What Hashem finds difficult to accept is when Man places himself in a situation that he knows will cause him to be tempted to sin.

Our world today presents us with many temptations for sin. For many, this has caused them to place barriers to prevent this temptation. The emergence of Kosher phones which block the internet or limit the apps that can be accessed, the Parental Guides which block internet sites for many adults and not just their children, and, for many families, the no-TV home, all have become the answers that they have sought to overcome this temptation. One must recognize those things which tempt him to sin and avoid placing himself in a situation which will arouse that temptation. This is not only to avoid Hashem’s wrath, but also to keep ourselves pure and more susceptible to accepting Hashem’s Will and a better life. © 2024 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

Something special about Aharon HaCohein is telegraphed in the sentence “And Aharon did so,” after Moshe’s brother receives instructions about lighting the menorah in the Mishkan (Bamidbar 8:3). Rashi, paraphrasing Sifri, comments: “This tells us the praiseworthiness of Aharon, that he didn’t change [anything in the service].”

Well, of course he followed Divine orders carefully, puzzle many commentators. What is the significance of stating the obvious fact?

An interesting approach is offered by the Chasam Sofer. The Talmud, he points out, describes the daily schedule of service in the Mishkan and Beis HaMikdash and notes, inter alia, two things: that the menorah-lighting takes place simultaneously with the burning of the afternoon incense on the mizbei’ach haketores (Yoma 15a); and that the cohein bringing the ketores would become wealthy as a result of performing that service (Yoma 26a).

Thus, suggests the Chasam Sofer, Aharon’s “not changing” means that he never took a day off from the menorah-lighting, which he could have allowed

someone else to do, to take advantage of the wealth-producing ketores-offering. In other words, he shunned material gain that was available to him.

A simpler approach is taken by R' Simcha Bunim of Peshischa, who interprets Rashi's comment as "And Aharon didn't change himself."

"Power tends to corrupt," British historian Lord Acton famously wrote in 1887. That adage -- as true about fame and privilege as it is about power -- has been borne out by countless examples since and presently.

Aharon, however, despite the new exalted status he had received, born of the special mitzvah entrusted to him, remained... Aharon. ©2024 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

One of the greatest gifts you can give a person is inspiration. And though giving gifts on Chanukah is not really our thing, the holiday of Chanukah itself is the gift of inspiration. The chayn in Chanukah and the Menorah of Chanukah tell you that.

Parashas BeHa'alosecha begins: "God spoke to Moshe, saying: 'Speak to Aharon and tell him: 'When you light -- beha'alosecha -- the lamps, the seven lamps will illuminate towards the face of the Menorah.'" (Bamidbar 8:1-2) regarding which Rashi comments: "When you light: literally, when you cause to ascend...He (Aharon HaKohen) is required to light the candle until the flame rises by itself. Our rabbis further elucidated from here that there was a step in front of the Menorah on which the kohen stood to prepare [the candles]." (Rashi)

These two ideas are not only necessary to explain the word, beha'alosecha in the verse, they also clue us in to the actual source of inspiration itself. After all, though most people know what inspiration is, they don't really know what it is. This inspires us to figure it out. Chanukah, which the Ramban says is alluded to in this parsha, inspires us to try it out.

That was the easy part. Now for the more difficult one.

Everything exists because of God's infinite light called Ohr Ain Sof -- Light Without Limit. Everything is made from it, and everything lives because of it. Take Ohr Ain Sof away from anything and it immediately ceases to exist. Everything we see or feel is just another form of the light, because there is nothing else but God's spiritual, unlimited light.

Yet, the world that this spiritual and unlimited light created and runs is so physical, so limited. How does that work? We call it a miracle because, naturally-speaking, it is not natural at all. From where we stand it should not be possible at all, but it is anyhow, thanks to something God created called sefiros.

The sefiros don't really answer the question, but they do tell us the means by which God makes the miracle happen. They are spiritual creations, also made

from Ohr Ain Sof, but with a capacity to reduce the spiritual intensity of the Ohr Ain Sof so that the physical world can exist and function.

I'm going to skip the next, very technical (but informative) part, which is in my latest book, b"H, called "Inspired." The main idea is this. The sefiros are organized like a human body, which we are modeled after. Just as our limbs live and function because of the light of the soul within them, the sefiros also have a light inside of them that acts as their soul, a very specific light called "Da'as." The light of Da'as is the source of life, sense of being, and spiritual energy to accomplish.

In short, the light of Da'as that courses through the sefiros that govern our history (Chesed through Yesod) is the source of all inspiration, in the sefiros and in humans as well. Motivational speakers may be entertaining, but it is what they say more than how they say it that talks to us inside and inspires us to get up and do great things. Great ideas inspire great things.

The kohen climbs three stairs he didn't need to reach the Menorah to teach that only inspired people inspire others. Being a conduit for the light of God, the kohen had the incredible job of "lighting" our fires, by channeling that light, the light of Da'as -- that the Menorah represents -- to us. And he cannot stop what he is doing until he sees that we "burn" with the light of the Menorah on our own.

This is what happened through the kohanim in the time of the Chashmonaim. They were inspired to fight the Greeks regardless of the consequences, because inspired people do not need goals, to encourage them to fight their battles. They don't ask questions that might intimidate them from trying. They just put everything they have into what they are doing and let the results take of themselves.

This is only the beginning of this life-altering discussion. Hopefully it will inspire you to learn the rest of it on your own. ©2024 Rabbi Y. Zweig and shabbatshalomfax.org

