

PARSHAS BEHAALOSCHA

תשפ"ג

Behaaloscha is a very critical parsha in the Torah.

In the middle of this parsha we have a strange interruption in the journey to Eretz Yisroel after Klal Yisroel made the mishkon and received atonement for the sin of the golden calf. We run into brackets made out of inverted nuns. Chazal tell us that these inverted letters create two sections to Sefer Bamidbar – one section is before the nuns, and another after the nuns. Before the nuns, everything was on track for Klal Yisroel to arrive at Eretz Yisroel in the most ideal way. Then the storyline abruptly starts crashing with aveiroh after aveiroh, failure after failure. Klal Yisroel are looking for some kind of excuse to avoid this smooth journey. Why?

This way of life they were living in the desert was very demanding. Moshe Rabbeinu is their leader and there is hashroas haShechinoh – nothing could be better! But having this overwhelming presence of Hashem in their lives at all times was too much for them to take for an extended period of time.

Klal Yisroel were fighting this every step of the way. The process of yetzias Mitzrayim was a year full of lessons that Hashem was teaching Klal Yisroel about the true nature of reality. The only true power in the world is Hashem, and avodo zoro is all false. Klal Yisroel were quickly brought up to unbelievable levels. Then there is the gilui Shechinoh at kriyas Yam Suf, and finally the overwhelming confrontation with Hashem at Maamad Har Sinai. Hashem pleads with Klal Yisroel to hold on to this level! But 40 days later they crash with the golden calf.

80 days later, Klal Yisroel climb back up to receive the second luchos and to start building the mishkon. Hashem gives them manna and asks them to put a portion away to keep for generations to come – to show them that even when you are farming and working for a living, Hashem is really the One who provides parnassah. But you have to live your life on a certain level to appreciate these lessons and integrate them properly. Some people don't want to live life on this demanding level.

Lot hung around Avrohom Ovinu and only benefited from being associated with him. Lot became tremendously wealthy, but being around Avrohom required that Lot live up to a certain standard of spirituality. He didn't want that. He looked to S'dom which was the most fertile and prosperous part of the land at the time. He made a choice to leave Avrohom and the spiritual life he was living, to go to S'dom to expand his wealth – knowing full well that the people of S'dom were incredibly evil. So, although he doesn't want to sink all the way down to the level of S'dom, he didn't want to stay with Avrohom's standard either. In the end, S'dom was destroyed, and the malochim pleaded with Lot to return to Avrohom. Lot refuses. He can't push himself to live up to the demands of Avrohom's lifestyle, and his story ends in disgrace.

Here in the desert, Klal Yisroel are complaining.

The asafsuf – the eirev rav – created a taivoh that didn't exist beforehand. Who are the eirev rav? They had a very interesting psychology.

Avrohom Ovinu was told at the Bris Bein HaBesorim that his descendants needed to first go through a painful process of slavery, persecution and suffering in a foreign land, in order to emerge as the nation of Hashem – ready to receive the Torah and enter Eretz Yisroel. Going through the bitter golus of Egypt was a form of purification – a smelting furnace – to prepare them to take on the service of Hashem

and to live an elevated life of 613 mitzvos. Many Jews in Egypt – most Jews – didn't want to leave Egypt and accept this elevated life of service to Hashem. As a result, they died in the makkas choshech.

On the other hand, there were many people living in Egypt who never went through the avdus of Egypt, and saw how lofty and exalted Klal Yisroel were, and they wanted to jump on the bandwagon. They didn't go through that purifying process, and because of that, they are the ones now who are complaining the most about the demands that this lifestyle requires. They want to eat meat. They recalled the free life they had in Egypt – a life without restrictions.

Right now, we are going through the biggest yetzer horo ever experienced in our history. It is destroying this generation. People want to live a life of hefker – they don't want to feel boxed in and restricted.

The manna was an unbelievable food – it could taste like anything you wanted, and it even had the properties of that food! But five things are potentially problematic and they aren't good for you. So the manna couldn't taste like those foods. It was for our benefit. Everything Klal Yisroel needed was taken care of for them in the desert without effort – the manna was delivered on their door daily except for Shabbos and they had a double portion delivered on Friday.

Klal Yisroel are clamoring watermelon like spoiled campers in a camp lunchroom? Is that normal? But people do not appreciate what is being given to them. They need to have everything they could possibly want – even if it is bad for them. They can't live with restrictions. What is ironic is that people aren't any happier in the long run when they don't set up sensible restrictions for themselves. It has been proven over and over that a life of hefkeirus utterly destroys people's lives! And you can never get enough – no-one can really get everything they want even when you try.

Klal Yisroel were going up and up – on the way to Eretz Yisroel, with Moshe Rabbeinu leading them with hashroas haShechinoh! They would have entered Eretz Yisroel on the highest madreigah and built the beis hamikdash, and the final geuloh would have come right away! But we want watermelon instead. How many people make decisions like that?

I sat down with a young man about a major life decision he was about to make. It was the biggest one in his family's life so far. He started listing to me all the various petty cheshbonos that he and his wife had considered in making this decision. I sat back and laughed. I said to him that they are making one of the most important decisions in their lives and they aren't even considering the most important factors? People live their lives based on peripheral, secondary issues and passing fads. They do not prioritize the things that are most important in life.

Probably one of the most important decisions a young man makes in his life, is which yeshiva he will attend after high school. The yeshiva he attends at that delicate stage of his development likely determines the trajectory of growth in avodas Hashem he will be on for the rest of his life. Most yeshivos already have a proven track-record of which kind of trajectory in life their talmidim typically take. But when these boys think about which yeshiva to go to, they prioritize all kinds of silly, trivial factors that have very little to do with what kind of person they want to become.

This is the tragedy of Klal Yisroel here in the desert as well as the tragedy of most people today.

The Eirev Rav hadn't paid the price of avdus in Egypt to be prepared to switch their avdus from Pharaoh to Hashem. They wanted that elevated, inspirational life of Klal Yisroel without the ability to meet the demands that this lifestyle requires. They also wanted meat. But they have the mon which can already taste like meat! The Torah describes how amazing the mon that they are complaining about is.

Then Hashem replaced the Sanhedrin with 70 new members. The previous Zekeinim who were at Maamad Har Sinai all die here in Taveiroh. Why? What was their sin? In Parshas Mishpotim we read about the tremendous gilui Shechinoh at Har Sinai. These 70 Zekeinim were experiencing this unbelievable vision of Hashem, but they didn't appreciate it. They were munching on a hamburger at the same time, treating it like it was nothing special. This is the same failure of Klal Yisroel here in this week's parsha, who are failing to appreciate the mon. If these are leaders of Klal Yisroel who can't appreciate the level they are supposed to be on, they cannot correct Klal Yisroel on this same issue. So instead, Hashem appointed those who allowed themselves to be beaten by the Egyptian taskmasters in order to spare Klal Yisroel from suffering. They had the appropriate sensitivity to what is going on and they will lead Klal Yisroel from now on.

Klal Yisroel are given more meat than they could ever eat and they are gorging themselves on it. This is Klal Yisroel? They were killed by Hashem while the meat was still between their teeth.

This is the introduction to Parshas Shlach which is an incredible story in its own right. Klal Yisroel again fail to live up to the level that they were supposed to reach.

The brackets of the inverted nuns in this parsha make the contrast between Klal Yisroel on the highest level beforehand, and Klal Yisroel sinking lower and lower. It is the combined failure of not appreciating what they have and rejecting any limitations. But there is no such thing as a successful, constructive life without limitations.

Remember the societal collapse during corona, when they had the George Floyd riots and clamors to defund the police all over the United States. These protestors were basically calling for anarchy – no laws, no restrictions, no police – do whatever you want, take whatever you want. Life in these cities became impossible to live in any kind of productive manner. Civilization cannot survive under such chaos and hefkeirus. It will eventually resemble the remote jungles of Africa with savage tribesmen dancing around a fire.

Klal Yisroel made a bris with Hashem. A bris is an opportunity to be connected to Hashem, Who created the entire world and Who runs the entire world. He is uplifting you to become His special nation – on one condition. It comes with restrictions, obligations, and responsibilities. 248 positive mitzvos and 365 negative mitzvos. This is the price you pay for being elevated and superior amongst all of humanity. Otherwise, you sink all the way down. People live in a battle between what they want and how they should live. But even when you live without restrictions, you never get what you want. Your life falls apart.

At the end of the parsha we have three of the greatest Jews in history – Moshe, Aharon and Miriam. They equated Moshe with their own level

of nevuoh. Although they agreed he is a greater novi, they thought it was only on a quantitative level. But the truth was that Moshe Rabbeinu was on a different level of nevuoh completely – qualitatively. People don't appreciate the greatness that lies beyond their own experience. They feel everyone is basically the same as they are – more or less.

Hashem Himself testified that Moshe is in an entirely other realm of nevuoh – completely clear and direct communication. Hashem says why he is so great. Moshe is the most humble of all human beings. Rav Chaim of Volozhin in his commentary on the first Mishna in Pirkei Ovos notices that the kind of transition between the people involved in the chain of mesorah is not consistent – sometimes it is "kibbel" and sometimes it is "mossur". He explains that at the end of Moshe Rabbeinu's life, we are told that the essence of his existence was being an eved Hashem – total nullification to Hashem. No ego whatsoever. This meant Hashem's message was undiluted and unaltered by the human mind and the human ego.

For every other human being, they can have wonderful minds with wonderful thoughts, but there is still always an ego involved. The moment the Torah goes through a filter of a human ego, it is not 100% pure communication from Hashem. Moshe had no ego, and whatever came out of his mouth was pure, unfiltered Torah. This is why we can only have what we call 'Torah' through Moshe Rabbeinu's nevuoh and not from any other novi – no matter how great. Moshe was the only one capable of transmitting the pure d'var Hashem as it was given to him, and this is why it has the highest level of authority that no other novi can contradict.

The entire parshas Behaaloscha is a tragic parsha.

Hashem gives us opportunities to live our lives on a high level. People do not appreciate this opportunity and they start complaining about this or that petty detail without realizing how much they have – all these complaints are nothing compared to what Hashem has given you.

When I was growing up, the number of people learning Torah was miniscule. There were few yeshivos and few talmidim, compared to today. There were a few who were learning and they certainly appreciated the value of learning. That was the only reason they were learning. Hashem said He is going to give this generation an incredible opportunity, that virtually anyone who wants can sit and learn for years and years. Do people appreciate that there is so much financial security in our community that is unprecedented in Jewish history? The amount of limud haTorah that is going on in the world today? It didn't just happen. Hashem arranged for it to happen in order for us to take advantage of it to further avodas Hashem. But we don't want it. This is the tragedy that we ourselves create.

Only with the bi'as hagoel will we finally appreciate what we have been handed on a silver platter.

In this parsha, Klal Yisroel keep falling and falling, but Hashem doesn't give up. In next week's parsha we will see and try to understand why Hashem finally gave up on the dor hamidbor.