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Parshat HaShavua sheet

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Parshat Beha'alotcha

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IT'S THE REAL THING

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

In this week's portion, there is a brief conversation that may get lost in the myriad activity of some of its more fascinating stories and commands. Moshe beseeches his father-in-law, Yisro, to continue travelling with the Jewish nation. "We are travelling to the place of which Hashem has said, 'I shall give to you.' Go with us, and we shall treat you well" (Numbers 10:29).

Yisro replies by saying that he would like to return to his land and family. Moshe implores Yisro by telling him that he must accompany the Jews. After all, he knows the encampments and would be eyes for the Jewish people.

Whether Yisro was influenced by his son-in-law's arguments is debated by the commentaries. The Torah does not refer to the outcome. What interests me, however, is that Moshe never tells Yisro where the Jews are going. He just tells him that "we are travelling to the place of which Hashem has said, 'I shall give to you.'"

It is reminiscent of Hashem commanding Avraham to travel to Canaan with the petition "go from your land and your birthplace to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). But Moshe is not the Almighty, and the entire nation knew of the land where they would be going. After all, the land of Canaan was the focal point of the Exodus.

Why, then, does Moshe describe it to Yisro in a mysterious manner, not by defining its location, longitude or latitude, but rather identifying it as "the land that Hashem has promised to give us"? Would it not have been easier for Moshe to tell Yisro, "We are travelling to the Land of Canaan and we want you to accompany us"?

New York Times columnist Ralph de Toledano had a different view of the world than that of his editors. Despite protestations of the editorial board of the Times would always capitalize the words Heaven and Hell in any context. His editors called him to task citing that heaven is only capitalized when it is a alternative for the Deity as in "Heaven help us." Moreover they insisted hell never got a capital H. De Toledano, however, insisted that any reference of those two places be spelled with a capital first letter. "You see," the conservative columnist explained, "Heaven and Hell must always be capitalized. I want my readers to understand that Heaven and Hell are real places just like Brooklyn, and Queens and Scarsdale!"

When describing the Land of Israel, Moshe does not take a topographical approach. He delves deeper. Moshe Rabbeinu does not refer to the land of Israel merely as the land of Canaan. In telling his father-in-law where the Jews would be going, he does not offer the longitude and latitude. He does not even describe Eretz Yisrael as the land flowing with milk and honey. Moshe's only descriptive was, "the land that Hashem told us, this I shall give to you."

That statement describes Eretz Yisrael in stronger terms than agricultural potential, natural beauty, or strategic location. It tells us that Eretz Israel is the place that Hashem promised. Any other quality is temporal. Bounty withers, beauty erodes, and natural resources dry-up. But the promise of Hashem remains eternal. It makes us understand that like both extremes of the world-to come, the Land of Israel is real.

Definition of ‘Chareidi’

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

In Parshas Beha'aloscha, we are introduced to the laws of *Pesach Shen*i (the “Second Passover”). There were certain individuals who were unable to bring the Pesach offering in its proper time (on the 14th of Nissan) for very legitimate reasons. They were *Tameh Meis* (impure by virtue of contact with a dead body). They approached Moshe Rabbeinu with the famous words, “Why should we miss out (on the opportunity to bring the Korban Pesach)?” (Bamidbar 9:7)

At this point in time, the *Ribono shel Olam* told Moshe about the mitzvah of *Pesach Shen*i. This is a rare exception in Torah where people have a “make-up opportunity” to compensate for having missed fulfilling a given commandment in its proper time. The Sifrei notes here that this shows that these individuals were upright and righteous individuals (*tzadikim* and *kesheirim*) who trembled (*chareidim*) to do the mitzvos.

In America, Jews who are exceptionally “*frum*” are often labeled “ultra-Orthodox.” In *Eretz Yisrael*, the popular terminology for describing such “ultra-Orthodox” individuals is “*Chareidi*.” I always wondered where that expression came from. I have my doubts about the theory that it came from the Sifrei in Parshas Beha'aloscha.

Chareidi is actually a curious title. *Chareidi* really means a person who trembles. Why was this adjective chosen to describe someone who is ‘*frum*’? Perhaps there is a different twist to what the word *Chareidi* really means.

I would like to explain this by citing an incident I saw in one of the sefarim of Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein. A few days before Yom Kippur, a Jew came to Rav Zilberstein and told him that he would not be able to fast on Yom Kippur. Many times, for various medical reasons, a person must eat on Yom Kippur. If a person is well enough to abide by such a protocol, the specified halachic dispensation for eating on Yom Kippur is a process known as *pachos*, *pachos*, *m'k'shiur* (consuming less than the amount for which a person is culpable for breaking his fast — pausing a certain length of time — and then again eating less than the specified amount). In this way, the person is able to get the nutrients he needs without having been in strict violation of the mitzvah of fasting. This process can be a bit complex — how many ounces one consumes at a time, how long he waits between each eating, etc.

Rav Zilberstein sat down with the fellow and explained to him in detail how much to eat and how much to drink, and how to pause appropriately between the various food intakes, and what further leniencies are allowed if he is feeling exceptionally weak, etc. The fellow thanked Rav Zilberstein for the information and went home. However, he came back the next day and said, “I forgot what you told me, could you go over it with me again?” Rav Zilberstein went through the entire set of halachos again with him. Rav Zilberstein asked him if he now had it clear in his mind. The fellow confirmed he had it, and went home.

The third day, the entire process repeated itself. This happened four or five times. Finally, the person who had the query admitted to Rav Zilberstein, “I am nervous about this matter.” In other words, he was not an imbecile, but rather the tension caused by the thought of eating on Yom Kippur was so great, that it made him keep forgetting exactly how he was supposed to do it. He was so upset about not being able to fast, that he kept needing reassurance that what he needed to do was okay. Rav Zilberstein wanted to console him so he told him, “It is a wonderful thing that you are so nervous.”

In this connection, Rav Zilberstein referenced a Rashi at the end of the Torah. On the last day of Moshe's life, he told the Jewish people, “And Hashem did not grant you a heart to understand and eyes to see and ears to hear until this day” (Devarim 29:3). In other words, finally today — on the last day of my life — you have been given the capability to understand my message to you. Rashi comments: What happened “on that day?” Rashi explains that Moshe Rabbeinu gave a *Sefer Torah* that he wrote to the Tribe of Levi, and then representatives of all the other tribes came before him to complain. “Why should only the Sons of Levi receive a *Sefer Torah*? What about the rest of us? We too stood on Sinai and were given the Torah. We too deserve our own copies of this holy scroll!” They were afraid that maybe in a year or two, the descendants of the Tribe of Levi would say that it was only their tribe who received the Torah at Sinai.

Rashi says that Moshe rejoiced when he heard this complaint. Concerning this request, Moshe told them, “On this very day you have become a nation” (Devarim 27:9). “It is today that I realize that you appreciate and cling to the Omnipresent.” Their complaint demonstrated their passion for the Torah. For the previous 39 or 40 years, they kept the *mitzvos* that they were supposed to keep, but Moshe Rabbeinu never witnessed to what extent it went to their whole being. The opportunity to perform *mitzvos* was always there for them, so they never had the opportunity to demonstrate this passion: What do you mean, we do not get to have our own *Sefer Torah*!? This was a gut level reaction that Moshe now witnessed and appreciated for the first time.

Rav Zilberstein explained that when a person is so upset about eating on Yom Kippur that he cannot remember the instructions from one day to the next, it does not say anything about his mental capabilities. It says something about the importance he attaches to proper *mitzvah* performance, and how much the lack of the ability to perform them bothers him.

We see this regularly when people spend hours picking out an Esrog. People buy a beautiful Esrog, paying a fortune for it, and then taking it to a *posek* (i.e. – a person with halachic expertise in being able to rate the quality of the Four Species) to ask him — is this *mehudar* (“exceptionally beautiful”)? The posek looks at it for three seconds and proclaims it “*mehudar*.” The fellow comes back a day later and asks the same *posek*, “But, did you see this little ‘pimple’ over here...?” The posek looks at it again and says, “It’s fine. It’s *mehudar*.” The person comes back on the third day and says, “But, you missed this...”

What is going on with such people? The word to describe such people is *chareidim*. *Chareidim* are not “tremblers.” *Chareidim* are people who are passionate. They are passionate about their Yiddishkeit (Judaism). They are passionate about their performance of *mitzvos*. They feel deprived when they cannot do a *mitzvah*. “Why should we be left out?” The Sifrei says these people are *chareidim*. That is the real meaning of the term. A *chareidi* is a person to whom it makes a difference, who cares about his Divine Service.

Pain or Privilege?

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

Okay, I admit it. I'm not sure how I would have behaved if I were in the position of the Jews back in the wilderness. We always criticize their lack of faith in G-d and the rough time they gave Moses. Even as G-d was providing them with the most incredible miracles — bread from heaven and water from rocks — they were busy moaning and groaning throughout. But would I have acted differently? Who knows? You think it was easy to live in a desert, even with all the miracles in the Bible?

I suppose a lot depends on a person's attitude and perspective in life.

Recently, I heard a powerful insight in the name of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, one of the outstanding authorities in Jewish law of our time (he passed away in 1986). He was speaking of the generation of Jewish immigrants to the United States who spawned what became known as the “lost generation.” Why was it that the children of parents who were religious, or at least traditional, moved so far away from the Judaism of their parental homes? Rabbi Moshe argued that it could be summed up in one simple question of attitude. Did those parents convey to their children that Judaism was a burden or a boon, a pleasure or a pain?

Was the constant refrain these children heard at home, *Oy*, it's hard to be a Jew! or *Ahh*, it is good to be a Jew! Was being Jewish in those early days in America something to sigh about, or something to celebrate and sing about? Whether children grew up hearing that Judaism was a pain or a privilege would determine whether they embraced it happily or escaped from it at the first opportunity. According to Rabbi Moshe, on that hinged the success or failure of an entire generation.

Indeed, we know of many Jews who survived the Holocaust and because of their horrific experiences perceived being Jewish as a death sentence, G-d forbid. There were those who sought to run as far away as possible from Europe. Many found their way to Australia and became “closet Jews.” Some never even told their children that they were Jewish.

It was for this reason that the late Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, Rabbi Immanuel Jacobowitz argued that while Holocaust education was important, there was a danger in over-emphasizing the Holocaust in Jewish Day Schools. We want our children to see that Judaism is a blessing, not a curse. Our Jewishness should not be dark and depressing, but bright and joyous.

I remember having a discussion with a group of businessmen some years ago where we were trying to put together a slide show to promote one of our local institutions. We were looking for a particularly powerful scene. One prominent doctor suggested that, for him, the single most powerful scene in Jewish life was the Rabbi walking into the house of mourning carrying his bag of prayer books. To him, that may have been powerful, but for me — as a rabbi — I'd never heard anything as depressing. What am I, the Angel of Death?

The Jews in the wilderness had their own issues. We should try and learn from their mistakes and be more faithful and trusting in the leadership of the Moses of our own time. But beyond that, let us not whine and whimper about the challenges of Jewish life. Let us convey to our children that Judaism is a joy and a privilege. Then, please G-d, they will embrace it for generations to come.

“Speak to Aharon and say to him: When you kindle the lamps, toward the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light” (8:2)

Rashi gives two explanations for the word "בהעלתך", "when you go up." One explanation is that the kohen must light the lamp until the flame rises on its own. Another explanation is that it refers to the steps that the kohen would stand on when he lit the menorah. when you ascend the steps. R' Moshe Feinstein asks: Why is a step even necessary in the first place? After all, the menorah only was five to six feet high. It was possible to light the menorah without climbing a few steps. The reason for the steps was so that the kohen could have a good view of the lamps from above in order to get into every crevice of the menorah to clean it thoroughly. The menorah is a symbol of Torah study. The kohen, who lights the menorah and causes the flame of Torah to rise, represents the teacher of Torah. The teacher has to have a clear perception of what he is teaching. He must plumb the depths of the material in order to impart a proper understanding of the materials. The steps of the menorah illustrate this essential part of teaching the Torah. The menorah cannot be approached without a good vantage point of all its details. The ability of a talmid to be able to learn and understand on his own depends heavily on the level of preparation by the teacher. This is the connection between the two explanations of Rashi. The first explanation, that the kohen must light the flame until it rises on its own, symbolizes the responsibility of the teacher to educate the student until he can learn on his own. If the teacher fully prepares every aspect of the material that he is teaching, he will be able to fulfill his responsibility in the teacher-student relationship. The student must also look well into the Torah in order to understand it completely. Having a superficial understanding which appears to make sense is not enough. One must fully grasp the material to the best of his abilities.

“Moshe went out and told the people what Hashem had said, and he assembled seventy men of the elders of the people, and stood them around the Tent” (11:24)

Tzror HaMor writes that this story shows us how great Moshe Rabbeinu was. Typically, people do not want to share their leadership roles with others and are jealous when someone they view as an equal rises above them. Moshe understood that his job as leader of Klal Yisrael was not about himself. It was about helping the people serve Hashem. He requested that others be elevated to share his leadership role because he felt that this was the best thing for the nation. He did not think about himself at all and did not mind sharing his power with others for the greater good. It is important for community leaders to learn this lesson from Moshe Rabbeinu. In order to achieve great things on behalf of the community, people must be honest with themselves and put aside their personal agendas in order to allow others to contribute.

“Moshe said to him: Are you zealous for my sake? If only all Hashem’s people were prophets, that Hashem would bestow His spirit upon them”(11:29)

Rabbeinu Bachya writes that Moshe’s yearning for a time when all the people will be prophets is a reference to the times of Moshiach about which the prophet Yeshaya said: “The land will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem as water fills the sea. “Prophecy and knowledge of Hashem are the hallmarks of the messianic era that we eagerly await. This idea is also found in the words of the Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 9:2), who writes that the Jewish prophets and sages desired to witness the coming of Moshiach so that they would be free from oppression and able to spend their time immersed in the study of Torah and knowledge of Hashem. Moshe Rabbeinu yearned for the time of Moshiach. We need to look forward to it and desire its arrival as well.

“So Miriam was closed away outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not journey until Miriam was brought in” (12:15)

R' Moshe Feinstein points out that at the time when Miriam sinned, Hashem showed her honor. Hashem loved her so much that despite her sin, Hashem still wished to honor her. In Sefer Shmuel, a famine occurred because Shaul had not been eulogized properly and because he wrongly killed the Givonim. The Gemara comments that even when Shaul sinned, it did not detract from the honor that he deserved. Even during the time when punishment was meted out for his sin, the people were also punished for not according him the respect due. Similarly, Miriam was honored even while she was being punished. R' Michel Berenbaum quotes the Gemara that R' Chiya's wife gave him a lot of trouble and he still constantly bought her gifts. When he was questioned about this, he said that it is more than enough that she raised the children and saved him from sin. Her negative traits did not take away from the positive side of her character. We should not only focus on the negative sides of others but be appreciative of the good things that they do. Similarly, one should not only concentrate on the bad aspects of his life but recall the good parts as well.

By Rabbi Mayer Friedman

When Manna Wasn't Good Enough

By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg

The Children of Israel began to cry, and they said, "Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge, the cucumbers, the watermelons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic... But now, our bodies are dried out, for there is nothing at all; we have nothing but manna to look at!" ([Numbers 11:4-6](#))

Besides its abundance, accessibility, and the absence of a price tag, the manna was the perfect food. Nutritionally, it contained zero waste or excess. It was 100% absorbed by the body, and those who subsisted on a strict manna diet actually had no need to relieve themselves! Spiritually, the manna was "matterized" divine light, the same diet which the supernal angels consume. According to the Talmud, the manna's spiritual qualities had a profound effect on its eaters, and the Torah "could only be given to 'manna eaters'"! To top it all off, according to tradition, the manna miraculously assumed any taste which its eater fancied. Imagine how simple it was to prepare a meal for a family. "Mommy, what's for dinner tonight?" "Anything you wish, dear," would be the convenient reply...

Yet, incredibly, the Israelites found reason to grumble: 1) They wanted free *real* meat (...without depleting their own herds in order to satisfy their craving). 2) The "cost" of the manna was prohibitive. (FYI, the cost = observance of the mitzvot.) 3) The manna "refused" to assume the taste of several vegetables (...whose taste was harmful for nursing infants). Their lack of gratitude and the extent of their greed are unfathomable. Or are they?

It is human nature never to be satisfied with one's current possessions and achievements. The Mishna declares that "one who has 100 desires 200." Upon attaining 200, the person will crave 400—and this continues *ad infinitum* (or, perhaps, *ad nauseam*?...). G-d imbued us with this nature for good reason: its purpose is to constantly impel a person forward in his spiritual quest, not allowing him to be content with spiritual heights scaled yesterday. This nature is also the spark which continuously drives scientists to unearth new discoveries and inventors to originate new inventions—which greatly improve our quality of life—leaving us with added time and energy to devote to serving G-d.

This inborn nature must find an outlet in a person's life. If this quality is not used in pursuit of positive and productive objectives, then it deteriorates into an insatiable and pointless desire for more and more luxury and wealth. Man is blessed with a creative imagination; always capable of conjuring yet another "necessity" without which he absolutely cannot rest.

Resurrect a person who lived one century ago and drop him in any Western nation, and he will be absolutely convinced that the Messiah has arrived. It is unnecessary to belabor this point—suffice with a little thought about the differences between daily life today and the way our ancestors lived a few short generations ago. This revived person will rightfully thank G-d for His tremendous kindness, for affording His creatures the means of living lives of tremendous prosperity, ease, and comfort.

...It will probably take no more than three weeks for this person to stop marveling about the miracle of air conditioning—and start complaining about the high energy bills it produces...

Torah only speaks of historical events which have a lesson relevant to all generations. The story of the "Manna Mutiny" has a powerful moral:

Strive for more and better in the areas of character, good deeds, and our relationship with G-d and our fellows. But always be happy with the material bounty G-d has granted.

Israel: Our Destiny

By Rabbi Berel Wein

The troubles, disappointments and disasters that visit the Jewish people on their trek through the Sinai desert begin in this week's parsha. Moshe announces that "we are traveling now to our ultimate destination – the Land of Israel."

But deep down in their hearts the people are not really that anxious to go there. They have in their minds and hearts two options, either to remain in the desert and live a life of supernatural miracles and there become the *dor deah* – the generation of exclusive intellect and Torah knowledge, or to return somehow to Egypt with all that that radical move would entail, physically and spiritually.

The Torah will soon detail for us that neither of these two options are satisfactory either. They will complain about the manna that falls from heaven daily and the seeming lack of variety in their meals. They don't like the water supply which is never guaranteed to them.

They remember the good food that they supposedly had in Egypt but according to Midrash, only a small minority actually wishes to return to Egypt on a permanent basis. They will press forward with Moshe to reach the promised Land of Israel, but they will do so reluctantly and halfheartedly.

And, this will lead inexorably to further rebellion, tragedy and the death of an entire generation – notwithstanding its being a *dor deah* – in the desert of Sinai. This makes this week's parsha a very sad and depressing one, for we already know the end of the story. We can already see that this generation has doomed itself to desolation and destruction.

Coming to the Land of Israel and its Jewish state, whether as a tourist and most certainly when someone immigrates, requires commitment and enthusiasm. There are many who came to Israel over the past one hundred years by default, but the country has truly been served and built by those who came with a sense of mission, purpose, happiness and expectation.

Moshe's clarion call, "that we are traveling to the place" of our destiny, echoes throughout the Jewish ages. Not all such calls are heard and even fewer are followed. Nevertheless the call has resonated within the Jewish people for all of its history. It is that call that appears in today's parsha and again it is that call that Moshe proclaimed millennia ago that was and is the guiding motive for the existence of the State of Israel today.

Just as then in the desert, there are options for Jews today present in our world. The many "Egypt" of the world beckon with all of their seeming allure but also with great underlying faults and dangers. And there are those who wish to continue to live in a desert that demands nothing from them and contemplate themselves somehow as being a *dor deah*.

History has always arisen and smitten these options from the Jewish future. The long trek begun by Moshe and Israel in this week's parsha continues. We hope that we are witnessing, at last, its final successful conclusion.