

D'var Torah for Behalotecha
"Jewish Complaining"

Parshat Behalotecha has many threads running through it. It begins with a discussion of the placement and lighting of the menorah in the mishkan. The link to the menorah is one of the reasons that the accompanying haftorah is also read on Shabbat Hannukah. The parsha then continues to review the process for purification of the Levites and the duties they will undertake. It also describes the process of purification for an individual who comes upon a corpse during their travels, and the corresponding sacrifice, which coincides with the celebration of Pesach Sheini. The parsha discusses the procedures for the movement of the people from one encampment to the next in chapter 10. This chapter contains an important verse, verse 35: "Vayehi bin soah Aharon vayomer Moshe coomah Hashem viyafotzoo oyvecha viyanoosoo misanecha mipanecha" which we recite during the service for taking out the Torah.

To me the most concerning parts of the parsha are in chapters 11 and 12. Here we find the Israelites complaining bitterly, as they have so many times, this time raising the issue of the lack of meat (most likely fish) in their diet. It starts with the "riffraff", the non-Israelites who joined us in the exodus from Egypt, and quickly spreads within the Israelite community. Once again, they question whether they should have left Egypt. They are tired of eating manna every day, even though it can taste like anything they desire. Once again, they have forgotten all of the blessings which Hashem has bestowed upon them: redemption from Egypt, the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, the receipt of the Torah and so much more. Today, we make an effort on our part to remember all of this at the Passover Seder when we sing Dayenu, literally, any one of Hashem's gifts, by itself, would have been enough.

The complaining reaches another plateau when Aaron and Miriam speak out against Moses, seemingly because Hashem has chosen Moses as the leader, the only person with whom he communicates directly. The excuse given is that Moses married a "Cushite" woman, the daughter of Yitro. Rashi believes that this criticism especially by Miriam, may have been a response to Moses ignoring his wife because he has so much to do. Either way, Miriam and Aaron, as his siblings, should have confronted Moses directly instead of complaining to the people as a whole. The incident angers

Hashem who causes Miriam to develop leprosy, something from which she will be cured.

The main point in all of this is, just how much complaining will Hashem tolerate? We know that among Hashem's attributes are that He is slow to anger and ready to forgive. But just how much patience does He have? Perhaps, one day he will throw his hands up and he will say, Dayenu.