

Parsha Beha'aloscha

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1. Understanding the Value of the Menorah

The Torah juxtaposes the portion of the kindling of the Menorah portion of the princes (the twelve princes involved with the inauguration of the Mishkan). Rashi cites the Midrash, which asks why are these two portions, juxtaposed? The Midrash answers that after Aaron Ha'Kohane had seen the participation of the princes in the inauguration of the Mishkan he was "taken aback" because he, as the prince of the tribe of Levy was not included. Aaron believed that he might have been unworthy to represent his tribe in this capacity because of some level spiritual deficiency (e.g. his participation with the Chet Ha'Aigel (Sin of the Golden Calf)).

The Midrash continues and says that Hashem responded to Aaron's concern, "Your participation is greater than theirs. They (the rest of the tribes) participated in the inauguration of the Mishkan but your mitzvah will be the kindling of the Menorah." Ramban in his commentary asks why should Aaron have been "taken aback" because he was not involved in the inauguration? He should have understood that his involvement is greater vis-à-vis the Mishkan from the fact that the Kohane officiates on a daily basis and only the Kohane Gadol (Aaron was the High Priest) is qualified to officiate on Yom Kippur and enter into the Holy of Holies. Having this special status, why would Aaron feel deficient in any way because he did not participating in the inauguration of the Mishkan?

The Mishkan represents the spiritual infrastructure of the Jewish people. Each *nasi* (prince), representing his tribe, infused his own spirituality into the Mishkan through his own gift and offering. Thus, the Mishkan itself became a spiritual entity representing the entire Klal Yisroel. The fact that the prince of the Leviim, did not participate in the inauguration of the Mishkan troubled Aaron because it implied that he was not worthy to contribute to the spirituality of Klal Yisroel. Hashem however, informed Aaron that his participation, through the lighting of the Menorah, would have greater value than the participation of the princes. Just as the *neshama* (the soul) gives life to the physical body, so too did Aaron's lighting of the Menorah bring spiritual energy and vibrancy to the Mishkan.

The Gemara in Tractate in *Bava Basrah* tells us that the light of the Menorah represents the oral law, which is the elucidation of written law. Thus the Menorah provides the spiritual illumination necessary to comprehend and internalize the Torah, which is the essence and the source of life for all Klal Yisroel. The Kohane is the only person qualified to kindle the Menorah and thus bring down that level of energy, which gives us relevance to the Torah. Therefore, the Kohane's contribution to the Mishkan is of paramount importance. Just as the body, as complete as it may be, only has value when it is infused with the soul, so too is the Mishkan, regardless of its spiritual infrastructure, valuable only when it is infused with the energy which elucidates the Torah. This can only be brought about through the Kohane who lights the Menorah.

After Hashem told Aaron that his participation, through the lighting of the Menorah, has paramount value to the Mishkan and the Jewish people, the Torah tells us "Aaron did as Hashem Commanded Moshe." Rashi in his commentary cites the Midrash, which explains that he did exactly as he was told without any change. Therefore he is praiseworthy. The question to ask is – why was Aaron considered praiseworthy for fulfilling the Commandment of Hashem? Lighting the Menorah was a relatively simple mitzvah. The answer is- the meaning of "without change" does not mean that the Mitzvah was executed as prescribed but rather "without change" means that Aaron did not change as a result of performing this Mitzvah. One would think that because of the special effect that the Menorah brings about, Aaron's ego would have been affected by some degree- Thus causing the mitzvah to be spiritually deficient.

The Torah attests to the fact that Aaron maintained his level of humility despite understanding his accomplishment vis-à-vis the Mishkan and the Jewish people. Since humility is a prerequisite for one to be a repository of Torah knowledge and have the ability to process this information, by not being affected to any degree Aaron was able to activate the most advanced level of spiritual energy vis-à-vis the Torah. Therefore Aaron's accomplishment was truly praiseworthy.

2. What is the Basis for Being Content?

The Torah tells us that for the forty-year period that the Jewish people were in the desert, Hashem provided them with all of their needs. Every day the *Mann (Manna)* would fall from heaven to feed them. The Mann not only tasted like the food that was desired by each individual it also provided all the nourishment of that particular food. However there were a number of foods that the Mann would not assume their taste or affect such as garlic, onions, melons, and gourds. In addition to giving the Jews sustenance, Hashem also protected them with the Clouds of Glory from the elements of nature and their enemies. There was no disease, sickness, or fatigue in the desert. The Jews were beneficiaries of endless miracles, which accommodated every conceivable need. The only responsibility of the Jew at this time was to focus on his spirituality.

The Torah tells us that despite all this, the rabble began complaining because they felt deprived and denied of the food items that they had in Egypt- such as garlic, onions, melons, and gourds. The Jews followed suit and complained also. They fondly remembered the cuisine they ate in Egypt without regard of the fact that they were slaves living under the worst conditions. How do we understand the mindset of the Jewish people?

Perhaps one could say that it was because they did not see things clearly and therefore could not understand and appreciate the value of spirituality. However this cannot be considered. The Jewish people were in the desert for a bit more than a year. They had previously witnessed the Ten Plagues in Egypt (each being a revealed miracle) and the splitting of the Sea. Chazal tell us that Hashem's Presence was so vivid and obvious at the time of the splitting of the Sea that even the maidservant (who had the least level of relevance to spirituality) witnessed G-d's Presence to a greater degree than Yichezkel the Prophet.

Every Jew stood at Sinai and heard the Voice of Hashem. Despite all this, the Jews complained that the Mann did not taste like the garlic and onion that they fondly remembered in Egypt. How is it possible that the Jews acted so irrationally? This was the most spiritually advanced and insightful generation in the history of the Jewish people. The Midrash refers to this generation of Jews as, "the generation of understanding" indicating that they had a special level of clarity that was unequalled. If this is the case- how could the Jewish people been affected by the rabble and complain?

We find that there are people who have a great amount of material wealth yet they are unhappy because they do not possess what they want or need. Regardless of the bounty that was bestowed upon them, they feel unfulfilled. At best their experiences are distractions from their unhappiness. If one has what he needs and still remains unhappy then this is an indication that he has a problem. The Jews understood clearly that the objective and focus of life was spirituality. They understood Hashem's agenda with utmost clarity. The question is- was this way of life what they really wanted? Regardless of how much Hashem provided, they had not interest with Hashem's agenda and therefore were not satisfied. Thus giving them reason to complain. In this context, not having garlic or onions was reason enough to complain. The fact that Jews complained regardless of the fact that objectively no one should have complained indicates that they had a problem.

They understood that the purpose of life was to perfect their spirituality and their will and existence was secondary to G-d's. At Sinai the Jewish people negated themselves to such a degree that they were totally subjugated to the Will of Hashem. However, at this point in time they wanted to re-assert their will. The problem of the Jews was rooted in their ego. This is the nature of a human being. The Jewish people wanted to assert their independence and their individuality by complaining despite the fact that Hashem provided them with all of their needs. The

experience at Sinai was something of the past and therefore the feeling of self-negation was no longer their reality.

We find that people are most happy when they are who they are supposed to be. The Jewish people would not have complained had they been in line with the Will of Hashem and functioned within the spiritual agenda for which they were created. If a person wants to satisfy his ego there is no end to that pursuit and will never find happiness and satisfaction. However, if a person suppresses his ego and pursues the purpose for which he was created he will definitely attain contentment and happiness.

3. The Basis for Hashem's Love for the Jewish People

The Torah states, **“Then I assigned the Levites to be presented to Aaron and his sons from among the Children of Israel to perform the service for the Children of Israel in the Tent of the Meeting and to provide atonement for the Children of Israel, so that there will not be a plague among the Children of Israel when the Children of Israel approach the Sanctuary.”** Rashi cites the Midrash that notes that “Children of Israel” is mentioned five times in the verse to indicate the great love that Hashem has for the Jewish people because as Chazal explain the number five corresponds to the Five Books of the Torah. The Midrash could have simply stated that repeating “Children of Israel” five times is an indication of Hashem's love for the Jewish people however, Chazal add that *the number five corresponds to the Five Books of the Torah*. The question is- what is the correlation between the Five Books of the Torah and Hashem's love for the Jewish people?

Existence was created by G-d for His own Glory as the Prophet states, **“For My (Hashem's) Glory I have created it”**. How does one bring about Glory for Hashem? Is Glory what we believe it to be or what Hashem says it is? The Torah begins with the verse, ***Berashis bara Elokeem ais hashamayim v'ais ha'aretz (In the beginning of G-d's creating the heavens and the earth).*** Rashi cites the Midrash, which states that word “Berashis” alludes to the Torah which is called “reishis” (the most special) and for the Jewish people who are also identified as “reishis”. Meaning that Hashem created the world for the sake of the study of Torah and for the sake of the Jewish people. Thus the Glory of Hashem is brought about through the Jew's study and adherence to the Torah because the objective of existence and the Jew is the study of Torah.

Hashem's special love for the Jewish people is not based on the fact that we are descendants of Avraham our Patriarch but rather, Hashem expresses His love for us through the repetition of the word “Children of Israel” five times indicate that our special status is only because of our relevance to the Five Books of the Torah. The Jew is the only being that has the capacity to bring about the Glory of Hashem through the Torah and fulfill the purpose of existence. The Gemara tells us that if the Jews had not accepted the Torah at Sinai existence would have reverted back to pre-creation. The only reason why existence has value is to glorify Hashem, which can only come about through the study and adherence of Torah. (Consequently, if one has the capacity to glorify Hashem through Torah and does not do so, it is a serious claim against that individual.)

The second blessing of the Priestly Blessings is “Hashem should turn His face towards you and be gracious.”- The meaning of “turning His face” means that He should favor you. The Gemara in *Tractate Berachos* tells us that the angels asked Hashem, “How could You favor the Jews as it says in the blessings of the Kohanim, when You had said that one is not permitted to show favoritism?” Hashem responded to the angels by explaining, “The Torah only obligates the Jew after eating a bread meal and reaches a point of satiation to acknowledge Me and to thank Me. However the Jewish people accepted upon themselves to acknowledge Me with the after blessing even if they had only eaten an amount as small as an olive or an egg!” Therefore Hashem is saying, “It is not that I am favoring them, and that there is a bias towards the Jewish people, but rather I am favoring them because they are worthy of my favor because of their conduct.”

The question is- Hashem could have answered the angels by telling them that He favors the Jewish people only because they accepted the Torah at Sinai, which is the basis for existence and the

glorification of Hashem. This seems to be a more appropriate response to establish our worthiness because we are responsible for the entire existence. If this is so - Why did Hashem respond to the angel's claim by telling them that we are worthy of his favor because we acknowledge and thank Him even after eating the volume of an olive although we are not obligated to do so?

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk zt'l in his work Meshech Chachama explains that the reason why the blessing after eating is Torah obligation only when a person is sated is because a person has a tendency to reject and forget G-d when he is in a state of complacency and comfort. Therefore when one completes a satisfying meal the Torah obligates a Jew to immediately acknowledge the source of that satisfaction and complacency- It emanates from Hashem's blessing. However, the Jewish people themselves were concerned that in a state of semi-satisfaction one may reject and deny G-d. Therefore they accepted upon themselves that even if they eat as little as the volume of an olive it is sufficient cause for every Jew to trace that benefit to Hashem.

With this understanding of the value of the blessing after the meal (Birchas Ha Mazon), we can now understand why Hashem responded in the manner that He did. Because the Jew can only approach Torah if he believes and has a sense of G-d, it is only through immediately acknowledging our source of satiation that we are able to maintain that sense. Thus enabling us to approach Torah and give meaning to existence.

Hashem's special love for the Jewish people is based on the Jew's capacity and relevance to the Torah. Because it is only through the Torah that G-d can be glorified.