

Parshas Beha'aloscha

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1. The Uniqueness and Position of Every Jew Vis-à-vis the Whole

The Torah states, “Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Speak to Aaron and say to him: When you kindle the lamps, towards the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light.” The center column of the candelabra was the Menorah and the “branches of the Menorah” extended themselves on either side. The wicks that were contained in the cups of the Menorah leaned towards the center column. However, this configuration was not meant to maximize the amount of light being defused. If the intent were to bring about a greater level of illumination, the wicks would have been positioned in an upright position in the cups. Therefore, what is the symbolism of the wicks facing the center column of the Menorah?

Sforno explains, “It is when the six lights of the Menorah face the center column that it will be considered illuminated. All of seven lights in conjunction with one another will bring about a special spiritual light for the Jewish people... The lights on the right side of the Menorah represent the people who are engaged only in Torah study. The lights on the left side of the Menorah represent those who are responsible for all the material needs of those who are engaged in Torah study.” As the Gemara in Tractate Chulin states, “If the grapes did not have leaves, they would not be able to survive.” Rashi explains that the leaves protect the grapes from the natural elements to allow them to develop. Similarly, those who are engaged in material pursuits provide the physical needs for those who are engaged in Torah study. Sforno continues to explain that regardless of the area of involvement in which one is engaged (whether it is the material or spiritual), one’s focus must be to do the Will of Hashem.

At Sinai the Jewish people merited receiving the Torah because they said, “All that Hashem has spoken we will do – Naaseh” – in other words “together” we will fulfill His intent. Although each person is unique, having his own abilities and qualities, when the Jewish people responded to Hashem with one voice and said “Naaseh – we will do), they committed to complement one another as one entity. It is not possible for one to function in both the material and spiritual realm simultaneously.

Thus, if part of the Jewish people is engaged in Torah study and the other is responsible for providing for their material needs, then the Jewish people are acting in unison. The Gemara in Tractate Chulin states, “The Torah scholars must pray for the success and well-being of those who support them. Without their participation, the spiritual cannot succeed.” Each Jew succeeds in his own capacity because he is assisting the other in unison.

The Torah commands the Jew to observe 613 mitzvos. Many of these mitzvos are particular to Kohanim (Priests) or to living in the Land of Israel, or to being a man or woman. For example, the service in the Temple has relevance only to the Kohanim and not the non-Kohen. Additionally the Kohen is restricted from certain acts that the non-Kohen is obliged to do. For example, a Kohen is not permitted to contaminate himself with the dead, while a non-Kohen is obligated to attend to the burial needs of a fellow Jew. Since this is the case, how could a single Jew have relevance to all of 613 mitzvos, when there are certain mitzvos that obviously do not apply to him? If each Jew is

considered an individual and not connected to his fellow, how is it possible to bring about a fulfillment of the Torah in its entirety (Torah Shalaimah -unified and whole Torah)?

If the focal point of the Jew is G-d and fulfilling His Will, the contribution of each individual complements the other. For each Jew to insure that he is contributing his appropriate share to the whole, he must follow the dictum that is stated in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers), "Make for himself a Rav (Rabbi/Teacher)."

Just as the wicks on the right side and on the left side of the Menorah all faced the center signifying the unity and complementary function of each Jew working in unison to fulfill the Will of Hashem, so too we as a Jewish people should work together and do our share as Hashem's people to do His Will.

2. The Linkage Between the Holy Temple and the Torah Itself.

The Torah tells us that the Leviyim (Levites) were chosen by Hashem to replace the Bechorim (first born - Kohanim) as the officiants of G-d. In one of the verses regarding the Levy representing the Jewish people, the term "B'nai Yisroel (children of Yisroel)" is mentioned five times, which seems to be superfluous. What is the significance of this repetition? Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the term "B'nai Yisroel" is mentioned five times to correspond to the five books of the Torah (chamishah chumshei Torah). Why is the Torah equating the Jewish people to the Torah by repeating their name five times in the context of the Leviyim assuming the role as the officiants of G-d?

The Torah tells us that when Esav returned from the field tired and weary, he discovered that his grandfather Avraham had passed away. Yaakov, his brother, was preparing lentil soup, which is the food eaten by a mourner. Esav requested of Yaakov, "Give me some of that red stuff!" Yaakov understood from Esav's expression that he was totally immersed in physicality and therefore was not the appropriate person to be the Kohen. Thus, Yaakov asked Esav to sell his birthright in exchange for the food that he had requested. Esav readily agreed to sell the Bechorah (birthright), which was the Kehunah (Priesthood). Yaakov thus assumed the rights of the Bechor. Yaakov's interest was not to take away what rightfully belonged to Esav. Rather, since Esav was unbecoming the position of Kohen, Yaakov purchased the birthright from him. The purchase of the Kehunah was purely for the sake of the Honor of Hashem.

The Kehuna (Priesthood) qualifies the person who assumes that status to be close to Hashem and thus have a special relationship with Him. The Kohen Gadol (High Priest) was the only person qualified to enter into the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur and be in close proximity to the Shechinah (Divine Presence) because of who he was. Yaakov as the inherently spiritual person was qualified to assume the status of Kohen, which was the birthright of the Jewish people, and thus had relevance to G-d's Torah/ Chachmas Hashem (Wisdom of Hashem). The spiritual representatives of the Jewish people were the Kohanim and the Leviyim. Since they were able to have this level of representation, it is indicative of their own spiritual capacity. Thus, the Jewish people have relevance to Torah and Hashem. As it is stated in the Zohar, "Yisroel, the Torah, and Hashem are all one."

As was said, the Torah tells us that the Leviyim were to replace the Bechorim as the officiants of G-d and Hashem mentions "B'nai Yisroel - the children of Yaakov (the Jewish people)" five times. This is an indication that just as the Leviyim are spiritual people and the officiants of G-d, so too the Jewish people have relevance to the Torah because of their spiritual status (as the children of Yaakov). The innate spirituality of the Jew makes him have relevance to the Wisdom of Hashem and the Torah. To emphasize

this point, in the same verse which mentions the Levyim assuming responsibility for the Jewish people vis-à-vis Hashem, the Torah also mentions “B’nai Yisroel” five times to indicate that they have relevance to G-d’s Torah.

Now we are able to understand the tefillah (prayer) at the conclusion of the Amidah (silent prayer) which we recite three times a day: “May it be Your will, Hashem our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, that the Holy Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days. Grant us a share in Your Torah...” Why do we mention having a share in Hashem’s Torah in conjunction with the rebuilding of the Temple? As we had explained, the Jewish people are qualified to have a special relationship with Hashem – as it is indicated through the representation of the Kohen and the Levy. Consequently, the Jewish people have relevance to the Torah and the Land of Israel, which is the prime location for the fulfillment of the Torah. One is linked to the other. When we pray, we ask for the rebuilding of the Bais HaMikdash (Temple) because we have relevance to its sanctity, which is G-d Himself. Thus, the Jewish people are qualified to have a share in His Torah.

It is stated, “From Zion, the Torah emanates.” Zion is identified as the location of the Divine Presence. Thus, since the Jewish people have relevance to the Divine Presence they have relevance to the Holy Torah.

3. The Qualifying Factor For Spirituality

The Torah tells us that when Moshe’s sister Miriam, who was a prophetess, became aware that Moshe had separated himself from his wife after Sinai, she commented on this fact to her brother Aaron. Miriam said to Aaron, “Was it only to Moshe that Hashem spoke? Did He not speak to us as well?” Miriam did not appreciate Moshe’s level of prophecy and therefore could not understand why Moshe had separated himself from his wife. Miriam and Aaron were also prophets and they did not separate themselves from their spouses. The Torah tells us that upon making this comment to Aaron, Miriam became a leper because she had spoken critically of Moshe. Thus, she was reprimanded by G-d.

Hashem explained to Miriam and Aaron that there was no comparison between their level of prophecy and Moshe’s. Moshe retained the prophetic level of Sinai, which was “face to face (with G-d).” Also, Moshe’s communication with G-d did not occur in a sleep state; rather, he was awake and had full use of his faculties. Before Hashem responded to Miriam’s criticism, the Torah states, “Now the man Moshe was very very humble, more humble than any person on the face of the earth!” What relevance does Moshe’s exceptional level of humility have to do with discerning between his level of prophecy and that of Aaron and Miriam?

The Gemara in Tractate Sotah tells us that if a person possesses the characteristic of arrogance and is haughty, G-d says, “The world is not big enough to accommodate both of us.” Maharal of Prague explains this concept with by comparing a person to a leather/skin flask, which has a capacity to contain wine. The capacity of the skin which contains the liquid is determined by the thickness of the hide – the thinner the hide the greater the capacity. So too it is the case with man- the more one values himself, the less room there is for G-d. If a person focuses only on himself, then G-d’s value is only to accommodate the ego/need of that individual. Therefore, when a person is humble he has a greater capacity for spirituality because G-d’s value is not just to accommodate his interests. Rather G-d is recognized for His own sake.

Moshe is quantified through his own statement, “What am I? (I am nothing).” Moshe did not exist to accommodate himself to any degree. He lived selflessly, only for Hashem.

Because Moshe had this level of humility, G-d communicated with him at the most advanced level, which was “face to face.” The Torah introduces the discernment between Moshe’s level of prophecy and that of his siblings with the qualifying characteristic of exceptional humility to explain why Moshe merited that special level.

Rashi explains the word “anav” to mean, “shafeil v’savlon (humble and patient/tolerant).” One who is truly humble must possess both of these qualities. He must have humility and be able to tolerate whatever experience he may encounter. It is possible for one to be humble but at the same time intolerant. Conversely, it is possible for one to be patient but simultaneously motivated by ego.

The Talmud in Tractate Yomah tells us that “Those who are embarrassed and do not embarrass others – who listens to their disgrace and do not respond – they will radiate as intensely as the sun.” One, who remains silent and endures embarrassment and does not respond in kind, possesses the qualities of “shafeil v’savlon (humble and patient/tolerant).” He understands that his response is unimportant. However, if one finds it necessary to respond because the Torah dictates it, then reacting even in the most intense way is proper- just as Moshe had done when he saw the worship of the Golden Calf and destroyed the tablets.

Chazal tells us that the Jewish people complained because they had traveled continuously, without a respite, for three days in the desert. Rashi explains that their complaint was unfounded because G-d was hurrying them so they could enter into the Promised Land more quickly. However, because the Jewish people misunderstood G-d’s intention, they believed that their experience was detrimental.

Every Jew has the potential to be a “savlon (patient/tolerant).” At Sinai, the Jewish people unequivocally accepted the Torah with the declaration of, “Naaseh V’nishma – we will do and we will listen.” They accepted the Torah without knowing the extent of their obligation. This indicates that the Jew has an innate capacity to deal with something, which seems to be overwhelming. He is able to forego many amenities for the sake of the Torah.

The Torah refers to tribe of Yissachar (who was fully committed to Torah study) as, “the big boned donkey/beast of burden.” A beast of burden endures his load and does not cast it off its back. He perseveres under all circumstances. Our Patriarch Yaakov described Yissachar as the one who personifies the characteristic of endurance. This quality has relevance to every Jew. However, if one’s priority is to be preoccupied with his own interests, then anything that interferes with his agenda is burdensome.

When Moshe addressed the Jewish people he said to them, “What is Hashem asking of you? To fear Him, to keep his Statutes, etc...” – implying that G-d was not asking much from the Jewish people. In essence what Moshe was saying to the Jewish people was, “What G-d is asking is that you dedicate your entire life to Him.” The Gemara in Tractate Megillah asks, “How could Moshe present G-d’s Will as something which is not too difficult, when it is something which requires selfless sacrifice?” The Gemara answers, “For Moshe Rabbeinu, the fear of G-d was not considered something very difficult (it was a small thing).” As Rambam writes in Hilchos Deos (Laws Pertaining to Character)- if one conditions himself to become a savlon (tolerant) eventually what initially was considered difficult and challenging will become second nature and no longer be considered a complication in his life.

4. The Far Reaching Effects of One’s Decision

The Torah states, “The rabble (erev rav) that was among them (the Jewish people) cultivated a craving, and the Children of Israel also wept once more, and said, “Who will feed us meat?...” The erev rav was the rabble that Moshe had allowed to leave Egypt along with the Jewish people. They initiated the craving and complaining regarding the desire for meat. Consequently, it was their influence that caused the Jewish people to express their unhappiness.

Before Hashem responded to their complaints, He revealed to Moshe that tragedy would befall the Jewish people when they would partake of the meat that would be given to them. When Moshe was informed of this pending tragedy, he told Hashem that he could no longer endure having the sole responsibility for the Jewish people. Hashem told him to choose seventy qualified individuals to assist him in this capacity. Hashem then extended the spirit of Moshe onto these seventy individuals thus causing them to become prophets. Two of these individuals, Eldad and Medad, began to prophesize in the camp. Upon hearing these prophecies, Zipporah, the wife of Moshe exclaimed, “Woe to their wives!” By saying this, she revealed that because of his status as a prophet, Moshe had separated himself from her since Sinai. She believed that since Eldad and Medad had become prophets, that they too would separate themselves from their wives.

In response to the complaint of the Jewish people (that they were deprived of meat), Hashem sent the slav (quail). The Torah states, “The people rose up all that day and all the night and all the next day and gathered up the quail...The meat was still between their teeth, not yet chewed, when the wrath of Hashem flared against the people and Hashem struck a very mighty blow against the people.” Thousands of people who had partaken of the slav died.

When Miriam overheard Zipporah’s remark, she said to her brother Aaron, “Was it only to Moshe that Hashem spoke? Did He not speak to us as well?” Since Miriam did not appreciate Moshe’s level of prophecy, she could not understand why Moshe had separated himself from his wife. Miriam and Aaron were also prophets and they did not separate themselves from their spouses. Because she had spoken critically of Moshe, Miriam was afflicted with leprosy, thus causing her to be sent out of all the camps of Israel. The Jewish people were not able to travel for a seven-day period until she recovered.

It is important to note that the erev rav (rabble) introduced the Golden Calf into the camp of Israel at Sinai. When Moshe was in heaven receiving the Torah, G-d said to him, “Go down! Your people have become corrupted.” When Hashem said “your people,” He was referring to the erev rav who Moshe had taken out of Egypt solely on his own initiative. Since he did not confer with Hashem on this matter, they are referred to as “Your (Moshe’s) people.” Although Moshe had justified allowing the erev rav to leave Egypt along with the Jewish people, it was not considered a proper decision because it introduced a negative influence into the Jewish people.

Because of this singular decision made by Moshe, an entire chain of events with far reaching tragedies ensued. The Sin of the Golden Calf, which was introduced by the erev rav, taints the spirituality of the Jewish people until the end of time. Because of the incident of the Golden Calf, the bechorim (first born) were no longer qualified to be the Kohanim (priests). Thousands of people perished when they partook of the slav, which was initiated through the urgings and complaint of the erev rav for meat. Because of the overwhelming situation, which was brought to bear on Moshe Rabbeinu, he asked Hashem to relieve him from the sole responsibility of Jewish people. Thus, Hashem endowed seventy individuals with prophetic abilities to assist Moshe. As a result of this extension of Moshe’s prophecy, Eldad and Medad (two of the seventy individuals that

were chosen by Moshe) made prophecies causing Zipporah to reveal that Moshe had separated from her after Sinai. Upon hearing Zipporah's comment, Miriam spoke critically of Moshe, thus causing her to become a leper. All of these tragedies were the consequence of Moshe's decision to take the erev rav out of Egypt.

We can now appreciate the words of Shlomo HaMelech in Mishlei (Proverbs), "The person who breaches the fence should be bitten by a snake." Once a breach is made, it is just a matter of time before everything else topples. The erev rav breached the fence and ultimately the repercussions were tragic. Although Moshe's decision was not a good one, he was not held accountable for it. Hashem allowed Moshe to act on his decision. If the consequences of taking the erev rav out of Egypt were so grave, then why did Hashem not intervene by telling Moshe not to do so?

Dassan and Aviram were two individuals who informed on Moshe to Pharaoh when he (Moshe) had killed an Egyptian. They remained a source of conflict and strife for Moshe throughout their travels in the desert. Chazal tell us that four fifths of the Jewish people died during the plague of darkness; however, it was not until Hashem destroyed Korach and his community that Dassan and Aviram were eliminated. Why did they not die during the plague of darkness as all of the others who were unworthy?

We are able to learn from this that Hashem always provides a setting in which there is a representation of "Good" and "Evil," thus allowing free choice to exist. There always needs to be a counterbalance. Dassan and Aviram were the counterbalance for Moshe Rabbeinu. The erev rav was the negative representation, which was the counterbalance for the Jewish people. Hashem did not intervene by not allowing Moshe to take the erev rav out of Egypt in order to create a setting for choice. Seemingly, if Moshe did not make this decision, the evolution of the Jewish people would have taken another direction. Their choices would not have been as difficult.

When one makes a choice there can be far-reaching repercussions that not only affect the one who made the decision, but also can ultimately affect all existence. The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin tells us that when one makes a decision vis-à-vis his spirituality (doing "right" or "wrong") one must see the world in the balance. If one does something that is considered positive, he will sway the world to the right and thus the world will take on the status of a tzaddik "righteous" – guaranteeing its continuation. However if one chooses to do the wrong thing, the balance of the world will be swayed to the negative and it will be classified as rasha "evil" - thus causing the world to be destroyed (G-d forbid).

5. What is Honor?

The Torah tells us that Miriam became a leper because she had spoken critically (Loshon Hara) of her brother Moshe. Because of her leprous condition, she was sent out of all the camps of Israel for a period of seven days until she recovered. The Torah states, "So Miriam was quarantined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not journey until Miriam was brought in." Rashi cites Chazal who explain that, "and the people did not journey" means that this was an honor accorded to Miriam by Hashem because she had waited to find out the fate of Moshe when his mother put him into the Nile. This is a demonstration of "measure for measure." Since Miriam had waited, the entire camp of Israel (millions of people), the Heavenly Clouds of protection, as well as the Shechina (the Divine Presence) and the Holy Ark waited for Miriam to recover from her leprosy.

One would think that Miriam's transgression of Loshon Hara, which caused her to become a leper, would have best been kept hidden from the community. This seems to be

a disgrace rather than an honor. However, Chazal depict this as a great honor and a reward for the chesed (kindness) she had shown Moshe when he was a newborn child.

The Torah tells us that after Miriam had spoken critically of Moshe, Hashem reprimanded her by saying, “Mouth to mouth do I speak to him (Moshe), in a clear vision and not in riddles, at the image of Hashem does he gaze. Why did you not fear to speak against My servant Moshe?” It is important to note that Hashem did not say to Miriam, “How could you have spoken so critically about Moshe?” Rather, He said, “Why did you not fear to speak against My servant Moshe.” Meaning, if Miriam had understood and appreciated the dimension of her brother Moshe (as one who speaks “mouth to mouth” with Hashem), then she would have revered him to such a degree (fear) that she could not have spoken critically of him. It is obvious that Miriam did not have a sufficient level of reverence for Moshe. Thus, Hashem chose to make Miriam’s predicament public knowledge in order for the Jewish people to understand that the level of Moshe’s prophecy was one of a kind. He communicated with Hashem “mouth to mouth.” Despite her failing regarding Loshon Hara, it was considered an honor for Miriam to be chosen as the person through whom the Jewish people would appreciate Moshe’s dimension.

Another aspect, which is revealed by the Jewish people waiting for Miriam’s recovery, was to understand that although Miriam initially waited a few moments to witness Moshe’s fate, the Jewish people, the Shechina and the Holy Ark waited seven days. This is to magnify the value of Moshe even as a newborn child.

It was important for the Jewish people to understand and fully appreciate Moshe’s level of prophecy to guarantee the authenticity of Torah. The word of Moshe was synonymous with the Word of Hashem. Thus, it is through the example of Miriam that the Jewish people came to this vital realization. Therefore, her personal situation becoming public knowledge was considered a great honor. If Korach and his congregation had fully understood this reality, he would have never considered usurping Moshe’s authority.

Miriam is credited with a reinforcement of the immutability of Torah. Her personal embarrassment was irrelevant because it was for the sake of establishing Torah – that it is truly the Word of Hashem.

6. The Relationship between the Jewish People and the Kohen (Nasso)

The Torah juxtaposes the portion of the Sotah (suspected adulteress) to the portion that discusses the person who withheld the gifts/tithes that were due to the Kohen (priest). Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the juxtaposition teaches that if one denies the Kohen what is rightfully his, ultimately he will have to bring his wife to the Kohen when she becomes the suspected adulteress. This does not mean that the wife is punished for the wrong of the husband (namely withholding the gift that was due to the Kohen); but rather if the husband had met his obligation to the Kohen, he would have established a worthiness, which would in turn bring about Divine Protection. This protection would safeguard his wife from anything inappropriate (such as a circumstance of temptation that could lead to adultery). However if the husband did not give the Kohen what was rightfully his, then he does not merit this special protection. Thus, his wife may be subject to temptation, which could cause her to become an adulteress. Why is the monetary gift to the Kohen so special that it brings about a level of worthiness that protects and preserves the sanctity of the entire family?

One could simply say that since the Kohen is the officiant of Hashem and is responsible for bringing about atonement for the entire Jewish people, he should be given the gifts that

are due to him. It is because the Kohen was conscripted by G-d to act on behalf of the Jewish people that he must be compensated. The Kohen and the Levi were not given a share in the land and are thus completely reliant on the tithes of the Jewish people for their subsistence. However, this understanding does not fully address the question of why does fulfilling one's obligation to the Kohen bring about such outstanding merit?

Sforno tells us that the claim against the Jewish people at the time of the Golden Calf was not that they had actually participated in idolatry; but rather, when the erev rav (rabble who had left Egypt with the Jewish people) introduced idolatry into their midst they had remained silent. They were willing to tolerate the ultimate desecration of G-d's Name by not reacting to this detestable behavior.

When Moshe descended from heaven after receiving the Torah and he saw the worship of the Golden Calf, he broke the tablets at the foot of the mountain. He then declared, "Whoever is for Hashem, come with me!" The Leviyim responded to this call by killing the idolaters. While the idolaters were being purged from their midst, the Jewish people remained silent and did not interfere. Sforno explains that the silence of the Jewish people at this moment was a correction for their silence when the idolatry was initially being perpetrated – (measure for measure). Thus, the Jewish people deserved to be spared.

Despite Moshe's plea to Hashem not to destroy the entire Jewish people for the sin of the Golden Calf, G-d would have destroyed them had it not been for the actions of the Leviyim. If the Leviyim had not killed the idolaters there would not have been a setting in which the Jewish people could have remained silent (to atone for their sin). Thus, there would have not been a Jewish people. Therefore, the Jewish people must be beholden to the Levi/Kohen for their very existence.

If one withholds what is rightfully due the Kohen, it is the behavior of an ingrate and considered a lack of appreciation. This is because the Jew's existence is only due to the Kohen's initial selfless sacrifice at Sinai. When the Jew behaves in this unappreciative manner, he deserves to have the stability of his life undermined, which is putting his wife in a situation where she may succumb to temptation. However, when one gives the Kohen his due, it is an expression of haKaras haTov (appreciation), which makes him deserving of a special level of protection which guarantees the preservation of shalom bais (peace in the household).

The husband's proper behavior in many instances causes a worthiness, which provides special protection for the wife. For instance, the Gemara in Tractate Shvuos tells us that if one makes vows and does not adhere to them, the consequence of this violation could be tragic to the point where one could lose his wife and young children (G-d forbid). This does not mean to say that the wife's life is taken because of her husband's failing; but rather, the wife merits an exceptional level of rachamim (Mercy) because the husband abides by his vows. This is so because the wife is a necessary component of the husband's life. As we read at the beginning of creation, Hashem had said, "I will make a helpmate opposite him..."