

RED ALERT!

B'HA-ALO-T'CHA

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DIVREI TORAH

- In the beginning of this Chumash the Torah has devoted a great deal of space to the organization of Bnei Yisrael for their camping and travel. This required much time and effort in order to organize the Nation of Israel. At the outset it would seem that this is a lot of effort for a very short trip. They were not expected to travel for forty years when Moshe was organizing the people. To go from Egypt to Canaan, even taking into consideration the large multitude of people, would not have taken more than a month. Yet, with all the organization and time and effort, it all unraveled quickly. From this week's parsha and on, we see the complaints about the lack of food, the lack of water, sending spies, the rebellion of Korach – more and more complaints. It did not take a long time for these difficult episodes that we read this Shabbat and in upcoming sidrot. The preparation for travel did not have the right result; it should have been a short trip! Could Moshe have done something to prepare the people in a better way? Probably not. Although commentators will write about the leadership of Bnei Yisrael, it would

seem that the people were not ready and not prepared, emotionally or physically, for what was in store for them in the future.

- The sidra begins with another statement about the Menorah: that the job every day of the Kohen Gadol was to maintain the light of the Menorah. Rashi adds that there was a platform or stool that was placed right in front of the Menorah to assist the Kohen to stand and service the Menorah. The Menorah, as recorded earlier, was three cubits high. Our estimation is that a cubit is a foot and half, and therefore the Menorah stood four and a half feet tall. As such, a normal sized Kohen Gadol would have no problem maintaining the Menorah even without a stool. We can assume that Aharon was of normal height for an adult male. As such, why would he need a stool to perform the mitzva at hand when the Menorah was only four and a half feet tall? Aharon was not permitted to raise his hands higher than the Tzitz on his forehead.

- When they traveled in the desert they had divine leadership. At night the representation of the divine presence was a Pillar of Fire. We are all mesmerized by fire; we can watch it for long periods of time. It is inspiring and awesome. Going back to the vision of the Burning Bush, Hashem chose a fire for His image to

be represented on earth. During the day time the presence of the Almighty was represented by a cloud. As awe-inspiring as a fire was, the cloud is not. It looks like it has form and substance, but it does not have either. We know very well through airplane travel that you would not even know you are going through a cloud if it were not for some minor turbulence when the plane enters a cloud. The cloud really has no substance and its form is lacking. At times we look up to a cloud formation in the sky and guess as to what it looks like. Perhaps, though, that is the proper contrast to the fire that is needed to present a different image of the Almighty in our world. The cloud is without form and substance, just as Hashem has no form or substance. On a daily routine Hashem's presence exists and may not be awe-inspiring and momentous. Hence the choice of a cloud could actually be the exact and proper representation of the Almighty in its less spectacular form.

- Moshe made two Chatzotzrot, two silver trumpets. Whatever happened to the two silver trumpets that Moshe made in the desert? [They were hidden away.]
- In chapter 10 Moshe requests of his father-in-law that he remain with the Jewish people and accompany them in their travels to the Promised Land.

Moshe says to his father-in-law: "You will be as eyes for us." He further mentions that all the benefits that Hashem does, He will do for his father-in-law as well. Besides seeking family unity, what does Moshe really want from Yitro's presence as they traveled through the desert? It is not possible that Moshe requires Yitro's knowledge of the desert so that Yitro could be a scout in their travels. Bnei Yisrael are being treated with a divine GPS system. They do not need a Midianite scout to help them traverse the strange terrain of the Sinai desert. It is possible that we should look at this on a more Midrashic basis. The Midrash tells us that Yitro was part of the inner cabinet in Pharaoh's government in Egypt. He was one of Pharaoh's prime advisors. When we are introduced to Yitro, he is referred to as a Kohen Midian, a minister of Midian. The word Kohen here was not a religious leader, but rather one of the political leaders of the country. As such, maybe what Moshe was requesting was that his father-in-law join the people in a leadership role. After all, choosing and structuring the leadership was one of Moshe's primary efforts, even in the beginning of this Chumash of Bamidbar. With Yitro's experience, knowledge, and stature, he would be well-received by Bnei Yisrael. He had already advised Moshe as to the judicial system being employed at

this time. Yitro would add another pair of eyes in governing the people and assisting in the leadership. He is part of the royal family and his presence would be welcome.

- Beginning with chapter 11, the people complained to Moshe about several issues, including the complaint that there was a lack of food. They claimed that they remembered the fish that they ate in Egypt free of charge; including the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic (11:5). Commentators line up to offer their opinions as to what it meant free of charge. Was it possible that the Egyptians were giving them food for nothing? This was the opinion of the Ramban and the Ibn Ezra. Yet others were not content with that, considering that the Egyptians were the ones who would not even give them straw for nothing. Rashi comments that what these protestors meant was that the food in Egypt was free in the sense that it came without any obligation to perform mitzvot. In other words they did not have to worry about the kashrut of the fish or any of the items. Also, they did not have to worry about making brachot. In that sense it was free of restrictions. In the bigger picture, what we find is that the Jewish people had not truly divorced themselves from their Egyptian experience. They could not cut free from Egypt even after all that Hashem had done to defeat the

biggest military power in the world at that time. Literally Hashem brought Egypt to its knees and demonstrated that they were weak and inept in contrast to Hashem. With that message still in front of them the Jewish people had not absorbed everything that they experienced. Even at this time they had nostalgic views of life in Egypt and had not properly adjusted to the new life of Torah observance.

- At the end of the sidra is the story of Miriam speaking Lashon HaRa against her brother Moshe to her brother Aharon. Everything until now is part of the public domain. All the stories of the parsha are important because they involved the people and the leadership capacity of Moshe and the others. This final incident was a private affair. No-one needed to know what Miriam had said privately to her brother Aharon. Add to this that the subject at hand and the concern that Miriam had was for the benefit of the family, and in particular for Moshe's wife Tzipora. Even though her intentions were proper, what she did was not. When the Torah makes a very private incident public it must have good reason to do so. In this particular case it is obvious that it is to teach us a lesson that speaking ill of somebody else is detrimental even if it is not in public. Just privately between two people with no others listening is still sinful.

The issue here, in my mind, is the Torah publicizing this most private discussion so that now all of Bnei Yisrael, and all the Jewish people for eternity, know about Miriam's indiscretion. The sin of Lashon HaRa is given that form of attention by the Almighty, and it is something we should be more careful about in our lives.

Questions by RED

From the text

1. What comprised the consecration of the Levites? (8:6-14)
2. At what age were the Leviyim to end their service in the Mishkan? (8:23)
3. What was the punishment for Jewish person who neglected to bring a Pesach sacrifice on 14 Nissan? (9:13)
4. What was supposed to happen when both trumpets sounded a T'ki'a? (10:7)
5. How did Hashem help Moshe in leading the people? (11:15)

From Rashi

6. Why is the Mitzva of the Menorah positioned right after the dedication of the Altar? (8:1)
7. What is the Halacha of Chametz on Pesach Sheini? (9:3)

8. Who could use the trumpets that Moshe made? (10:2)

9. Why did Yitro prefer to return to his country? (10:30)

10. The people complained that there was no meat to eat. That's not true. The exiting Jews from Egypt brought enormous amounts of cattle. Explain. (11:4)

From the Rabbis

11. Why did the men who could not bring the Pesach sacrifice on time feel entitled to make it up on another calendar date? (Or HaChayim)

12. Yitro's descendants eventually settled in Eretz Yisrael. Where did they settle?

13. The people complained about their lack of food. Was food virtually free in Egypt? (Ibn Ezra)

Midrash

14. Why were the Leviyim chosen to be the holy legion of the holy service in the Beit HaMikdash?

Haftara - Zechariya

15. Why did Satan condemn Yehoshua the Kohen Gadol at the time of Yechezkeil the prophet?

Relationships

- a) Moshe - Kalev
- b) Yocheved - Yitzhar (2 answers)
- c) Peretz - Kehat
- d) Korach - Elazar
- e) Ada - Tzila

ANSWERS

1. Purify them with the Red Cow water solution; shave their entire body; they and their clothing go to the Mikva; and sacrifice animals.
2. Age 50.
3. Karet
4. The entire congregation of Israel would gather at the Mishkan.
5. Hashem told Moshe to gather a group of 70 men to help lead.
6. Because when Aharon saw that he and his tribe were not included in the dedication ceremony, he was depressed. Hashem now told him that his Mitzva of lighting the Menorah was greater and was every day.
7. On 14 Iyar, the people who missed Pesach would bring a Pesach sacrifice and eat it with Matza and Maror. No Chametz could be had at that meal, but could be had during that day.
8. Only Moshe.
9. For his family and his possessions.

10. True. It was a pretext to complain.

11. Because they were required to become impure. (They were the ones who were carrying the bones of Yosef.)

12. Near Yericho on land that was originally to be given to the tribe who would give up part of its land to build the Beit HaMikdash.

13. Fish was so plentiful in the Nile that it was virtually free.

14. Because they were the ones who had not worshiped idols in Egypt or with the Golden Calf.

15. Because Yehoshua's two sons had married non-Jewish wives, and he did not chastise them.

Relationships

- a) Brothers-in-Law
- b) Siblings-in-Law - Aunt & Nephew
- c) First Cousins
- d) First Cousins once removed
- e) Co-wives (of Lemech)