

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



B'HA-ALO-T'CHA

On the Road Again!

This week's Torah reading is extremely disappointing. For 10 chapters the Book of Bamidbar has been inexorably moving toward the grand entry of B'nei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael. Expectations are running high; glory is imminent! Then disaster strikes. The nation finds the road too difficult.

Only next week will we read about the entry into Eretz Yisrael being postponed for forty years, a full generation. But the hand writing is already on the wall as we read about the beginning of the march through the Sinai Desert.

We could just go along with the idea that the travel itself was too arduous for the community to sustain. In this scenario, spending 40 years in the desert, mostly in one location (Kadesh Barnea), getting accustomed to the rigors of the environment and becoming a self-governing nation is not only reasonable, but could be seen as almost inevitable.

Rav Ovadiya S'forno adopts this approach stating, almost matter of factly, that the grumbings and

complaints were: On account of the difficulties of the journey.

The B'chor Shor (Reb Yosef ben Yitzchak, 12th century France), on the other hand, presents another very rational approach to the complaints and protests of the desert. They were terrified over the prospect of war. They had spent centuries as protected slaves in the very safe heartland of Egypt. Now, they faced an imminent war to conquer the Promised Land.

B'chor Shor states: They were mourning like mourners over the inevitable casualties, for they were short-spirited and grieving because the Lord desired to bring them into the land and they would go to war, as they were fearful and lacking in faith.

Rashi, on the other hand, presents the most popular approach to understanding the failure of an immediate march to Eretz Yisrael. The vast majority of the people would have been ready to follow God's instructions and march valiantly into the war, confident in God's power and follow God's appointed leader, Moshe Rabbeinu. However, there were amongst them people of lesser faith who had joined with the direct descendants of the Patriarchs.

These trouble makers are quickly identified at the beginning of Bamidbar 11: This people took to

complaining bitterly. Rashi writes that when the term HA-AM is used it refers to 'wicked people', because when God refers to His beloved people it says AMI, My People.

In Chasidic circles, the bad situation we find in terms of the state of mind of the Jewish People is just as pronounced as in the more literal commentaries, but the Chasidic Masters express the problem in very different terms.

The Ma'or V'Shemesh (Reb Klonimus Kalman HaLevi Epstein, 1751-1823) sees the problem in light of the distance which is growing between the average Jew in the Camp and Moshe Rabbeinu. He states: A fundamental principle in the service of God is to distance oneself from sadness and melancholy, by every possible means. The beginning of depression is that cravings for food overpower a person. We see this clearly: one who is immersed in melancholy eats greedily and hastily.

In other words, the normal channels for spiritual growth and uplift are now unavailable to the mass of Jews in the Camp. Normally, the regular Jew can find spiritual uplift through contact with the TZADIK, more commonly called the Rebbe. But this avenue for them has been blocked because the TZADIK, in this case Moshe Rabbeinu, has become remote. He is no longer relevant to

the lives of the average Jew. Why? Because, he, Moshe Rabbeinu has purified himself to a level to which the average Jew in the Camp can no longer relate. As the Rebbe asks: So how can he inspire them to repent, when they see in him no trace of their own condition? They can no longer identify with Moshe Rabbeinu.

The solution will be provided later in this chapter. The answer will be: Gather for Me seventy Elders! (Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the tent of meeting, that they may stand there with you; verse 16).

As the Ma'or V'Shemesh explains: It is impossible for you to lower yourself from your level. Rather, gather 70 men who possess connection with the people and from whom they can learn what they need. And since these 70 men are themselves great tzadikim, they can remain attached to you. Thus, through them, the ordinary people will become connected to you as well, and thereby attain correction.

Clearly, the situation in the Desert has reached a crisis, and it will take a new generation who have an entirely new set of life experiences to enter the Land, conquer it, and establish the Jewish Homeland. But was that situation and circumstance so unique that we can learn little from this difficult story which can be applied to

our own lives?

Reb Moshe Lichtenstein claims that is not the case! He declares: But the lesson learned from that tragedy is extremely important - that in order for significant things to happen, you have to go through a long, deep process; there are no shortcuts. What was true in the days of the Wilderness is also true for us today.

Our 78 year old Medina shares certain realities with the Generation of the Wilderness. We needed to begin a nation, army and government overnight with a collection of people, seemingly, little prepared for the task. But we made it through the first tests, but many challenges continue to face us.

We must learn their lesson: There are no shortcuts! Hard, arduous work is required for every improvement our country requires. But we're here for the long run, and we must declare:

May it be God's will that just as the people of Israel eventually went through the process and entered the Land of Israel, so we too will have the privilege of progressing in the right and appropriate way, and will have the privilege of experiencing the coming of the Redeemer and the building of the Beit HaMikdash. 