

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

B'HA-ALO-T'CHA

The parasha tells the story of the Israelites' grumbling soon after leaving Mount Sinai:

The Israelites were grumbling in an evil manner... (11.1)

Scarcely, the p'sukim tell us, had the Israelites left Mount Sinai to the Promised Land and they were already turning into a grumbling deadweight. The Torah does not tell us why the people were complaining. It could simply be that they did not like change. They were already feeling settled where they were at the foot of Mount Sinai. Until they were now on the move, things had been following in a pattern that was becoming familiar: after the initial clash with the cheit ha-eigel, they were feeling fairly settled in their routines and in their ways of doing things.

And perhaps that helps to explain why G-d emphasized that He would be with them in times of change. When the Ark and the people would travel, Moshe would say: "G-d, rise! Scatter your enemies..." For change brings new challenges and new vulnerabilities to the people.

And when the Ark rested and the people would encamp in a new loca-

tion, they were no longer the same people. They were geographically displaced, and they had gone through new, very likely life-impacting changes. They were now somewhere unfamiliar, geographically and spiritually. So when that happened, Moshe would declare: "Return, G-d, to the many thousands of Israel" (10:35-36). Return to assist Am Yisrael in their new realities.

The Torah tells us that the behaviour of the grumbling Israelites was going from bad to worse. To such a degree that Moshe himself wanted to hand in his resignation. He just could not go on. He hadn't wanted the role from the very beginning, pointing out that he was not a man that could speak and inspire. Nevertheless, he stepped up to the calling and had been carrying Am Yisrael 'in his lap as a nurse carries an infant' (11:12). Yet it seems that even though he followed his father-in-law, Yitro's, advice and set up a hierarchy in the administration of justice, too much was coming back to him.

Yet our record shows that although G-d entrusted Moshe to lead the people to Eretz Yisrael, He didn't tell him how to do it. Indeed, as Moshe himself said, he was not a man of words. Like a military commander, he fought battles successfully, as he did with the Amalekites. But, again as a military commander, there is nothing to show that he was particularly close

to the people he was leading. On the contrary, he was an outsider. He had grown up amongst Egyptian royalty, and when things were getting particularly bad he was away from the people in service to Yitro, his father-in-law.

That is what G-d implied in his response to Moshe. That is the core of your problem. Your way of leading the people creates mere followers. As the infant carried in the nurse's lap, the infant has no choice, but to follow the nurse. But it is wrong to assume that the child will follow you if you merely provide for its needs; just ask any parent.

What you need to do is to create leaders. People that can support your work by inspiring others. As G-d responded to Moshe preferring to die than to continue service: "Gather for Me seventy... elders of whom you have experience as elders and officers of the people... and let them take their place there with you... I will draw upon the spirit that is on you and I will put it upon them. Thus they will share the burden of the people with you" (11:16,17). They will be able to lead through the spirit of Moshe, and thus inspire the people, rather than just instruct the people.

Inspiration is crucial. It takes inspiration to lead. A great teacher inspires his students and thus makes his ideas part of the student's enthusiastic

operating system from where he or she can further advance. That is leadership.

This, perhaps, is the message of this section of the Parasha. Good leadership does not create mere receivers of knowledge and followers. Good leadership creates leaders who are inspired by ideas and can develop them further, including in turn to create future leaders. 🌱📖