

# Parsha Ponders

Beha'alochecha | June 15, 2022 | 17 Sivan 5782

## *The proper attitude towards mitzvos<sup>1</sup>*

ויסעו מהר יקוק וגו' זכרנו את-הדגה אשר-נאכל במצרים חנם וגו' וישמע משה את-העם בכה למשפחתיו וגו' ויאמר משה אל-יקוק למה הרעת לעבדך וגו' האנכי הריתי את כל-העם הזה אם-אנכי ילדתיהו וגו'  
[The people] journeyed from the Mountain of Hashem... "We remember the fish which we ate in Egypt for free"... Moshe heard the nation crying amongst their families... Moshe said to Hashem: "Why have You done evil to Your servant? ... Did I bear this nation? Did I give birth to it?"<sup>2</sup>

*Parshas Beha'alochecha* is a depressing section of the Torah. It begins a series of sins that the Jews committed while they were in the desert. After the Torah describes three episodes of sins<sup>3</sup>, Moshe abruptly starts complaining to Hashem. It appears like he was throwing in the towel, expressing his inability to deal with the people. This is quite surprising, for we know that when the Jews sinned with the Golden Calf, Moshe gave it his all to defend them<sup>4</sup>. What's different about these sins which were too much for Moshe to handle?

Let's analyze the sins, one by one. First, we are told that the Jews journeyed from the Mountain of Hashem. After spending a long time receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, it was time for the Jews to move on. Our Sages tell us<sup>5</sup> that they ran away from Mount Sinai like schoolchildren. Then, the Jews complained about all the food they used to get for free in Egypt, and all they had now was the *mun*. What do they mean they got food for free? As slaves, they didn't even get their building materials for free! Rashi tells us<sup>6</sup> that they meant free from *mitzvos*, free from responsibility. The final sin describes the Jews crying amongst their families. Rashi tells us<sup>7</sup> that this is referring to their sadness that they were no longer allowed to marry certain relatives<sup>8</sup>.

If we look closely, we'll see that these three sins have something in common. The Jews ran away from Mount Sinai because they were afraid that they'd get more *mitzvos*. They had had enough, and weren't interested in more. Similarly with the food complaint. They yearned for life without *mitzvos*. They looked at this all like a burden. Finally, they were upset that they were further restricted regarding who they could marry. Moshe knew that people with this kind of negative, apathetic attitude would be close

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a *devar Torah* heard from [Rabbi Joel Cohen](#) of Yeshivas Darche Noam (Shapell's)

<sup>2</sup> [Numbers](#) 10:33, 11:5, 10-12

<sup>3</sup> See [Ramban](#) to [Numbers](#) 10:35, who, based on [Shabbos](#) 115b-116a, says that there were three episodes in a row of sins (and the famous inverted *nuns* were to separate between them). Although (again, based on the *gemarra*), he says that the third episode was the *אספסוף*, the complainers who were seeking pretexts against Hashem, and not those who complained amongst their families

<sup>4</sup> [Exodus](#) Chapter 32

<sup>5</sup> [Yalkut Shimoni Beha'alochecha](#) § 729, brought by [Tosafos ad. loc. s.v. מורענות](#) and [Ramban loc. cit.](#) See [Torah Sheleimah](#) to [Numbers](#) Chapter 10 § 110. See also [Yerushalmi Ta'anis](#) 4:5

<sup>6</sup> [Rashi](#) to [Numbers](#) 11:5, quoting [Sifrei Bamidbar](#) § 87

<sup>7</sup> [Rashi](#) to v. 10, quoting [Sifrei Bamidbar](#) § 90 and [Yoma](#) 75a

<sup>8</sup> A non-Jew already can't marry some of their relatives (see [Mishneh Torah Hilchos Melachim](#) 9:5). [Rashbi](#) (in the [Yerushalmi Ta'anis loc. cit.](#)) says when the Jews converted, six more relatives became prohibited: (1) paternal sister (2) maternal sister (3) paternal aunt (4) maternal aunt (5) a *niddah* (6) a brother's wife ([Korbon HaEidah ad. loc.](#)). Note the [Rambam](#) disagrees about maternal sister. It would seem the [Korbon HaEidah](#) is explaining the [Yerushalmi](#) according to the opinion of [Rashbi's](#) teacher [Rabbi Akiva](#) in [Sanhedrin](#) 57b-58, who permits a non-Jew to their sister; see [Nechmad LeMar'eh ad. loc.](#) The [Rambam](#) doesn't rule like [Rabbi Akiva](#); see [Kesef Mishnah ad. loc.](#) and [Be'ur HaGra](#) to [Yoreh Deah](#) 269:2 § 3)

to impossible to deal with. The Golden Calf was just giving in to baser desires, which is something that could be resolved. This however, he felt was beyond fixing.

If we look in the *parsha*, we'll find two counterexamples to this kind of attitude. The *parsha* begins with the idea that Aharon would light the Menorah in the Temple. Rashi explains<sup>9</sup> the juxtaposition of this *mitzvah* with the previous *parsha*. The end of last week's *parsha* described the inaugural gifts the leaders of the twelve tribes donated towards the dedication of the *Mishkan*. Aharon felt left out of this ceremony and was upset. Hashem assured him that this was a momentary occasion, but his *mitzvah* of lighting the Menorah would be for all time<sup>10</sup>. We see that Aharon cherished the opportunity to fulfill a *mitzvah*.

A second episode is with regards to *Pesach Sheni*. The Jewish people brought the Passover offering while in the desert. There were those who were spiritually impure due to contact with the dead. Since they couldn't purify themselves in time, they were exempt from the *mitzvah*. Nevertheless, they asked Moshe why they should be left out, or be any worse than the rest of the Jews. Moshe asked Hashem what could be done with them, and Hashem, so-to-speak, created for them the *mitzvah* of *Pesach Sheni*, a second chance to bring the Passover offering<sup>11</sup>. We see that their attitude wasn't joy at the exemption from a *mitzvah*, but an intense desire to become obligated.

A final idea regarding proper attitudes towards *mitzvos*, we are told that when Aharon lit the Menorah, he did as he was commanded. Rashi says that this is to teach us that he didn't deviate. Why would I have expected Aharon to deviate? Is this really something to praise him for? The Kotzker Rebbe explains<sup>12</sup> that the first time that someone performs a *mitzvah*, be it someone who became religious later in life, or a *bar mitzvah* boy, they do it with great joy and excitement. The problem is with the passage of time, that initial energy fades. Not so for Aharon. He did not deviate in that every day that he lit the Menorah, he did it with the same excitement and joy that he had the first time.

May we be able to put this into practice ourselves.

Good Shabbos

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<sup>9</sup> Rashi to Numbers 8:2, quoting Midrash Tanchuma Beha'alo secha § 5

<sup>10</sup> See Ramban ad. loc., that this is an allusion to the Menorah of Chanukah

<sup>11</sup> Numbers 9:6-12

<sup>12</sup> Rabbi Cohen and others quoted this from the Sefas Emes. I was unable to find it, but I did find that Siach Sarfei Kodesh V p. 21b quotes this from the Kotzker Rebbe in the name of the Yehudi HaKadosh, Rav Yaakov Yitzchak of Peshischa