



Parshas Behaalosecha 2022, a crisis of identity

This week's Parsha Perspective is in loving memory of Edward Ben Efraim, Shlomo Ben Edward, and Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Gedalia. May their souls be uplifted and their memories a blessing.

Our Parsha begins with Hashem telling Moshe that Aaron's job is to light the Menorah daily in the Mishkan. Hashem then gave Moshe the process of purification that the tribe of Levi had to go through before working in the Mishkan. They needed to shave all the hair from their body, be sprinkled with ashes, and bring two special sacrifices.

As the Jewish people traveled, they began to complain to Moshe Rabbeinu. They objected to the fact that they only eat Man, the Heavenly bread, rather than meat and fish. (11:4-5) *"if only we had meat, we still remember the fish we ate in Egypt."*

Moshe was furious and turned to G-d and said: ***"why did you do this to me? Did I create these people? Did I give birth to these people that now I must carry their burden alone?!"*** In response, G-d sent quail birds from the ocean to satisfy the Jewish people's need for meat. However, all those who instigated the complaints or were gluttonous were killed by G-d for their lack of belief.

However, a question comes to mind: the Jewish people complained to Moshe twice in the span of 6 Pasukim. First, they said the pace of travel was too fast. G-d responded with a plague of fire, killing all those complaining. But Moshe begged G-d for mercy, and the plague stopped.

Then some people bemoaned the lack of meat and fish, but Moshe's reaction was drastically different. He was furious, annoyed and even resentful towards G-d for making him lead such irritating people. But what sparked Moshe's anger and rage? What made Moshe change from praying for his nation to wishing he had never led them in the first place?!

The simple explanation is quite apparent, Moshe was upset at the speed with which the Jewish people found what to complain about. They literally had anything they needed or wanted in the desert, a desolate place where no life exists. Yet, they continue searching for meaningless issues and problems to kvetch about.

However, the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh (*Rav Chaim Ben Attar, a Moroccan commentator and Kabbalist*) gives a deeper and more profound explanation. He writes that Moshe was enraged with the second complaint because the Jewish people were not living up to what he was told.

Moshe was told at the burning bush when he first encountered G-d that he would lead Jewish people out of Egypt into the Promised Land. The Exodus from Egypt was because G-d heard the cries of pain and suffering. Hence, Moshe expected the people to be ready and willing to receive G-d's blessings and love. To accept His laws and commandments and immediately head to their eternal home.

But amid the second complaint, they said, "*We remember the fish we had in Egypt.*" The Jewish nation was lamenting that they had left Egypt, the source of immense pain, while just a three-day journey from Israel.

This paradox disturbed and saddened Moshe to his core. (11:11-14) **"Why did you do this to me? Did I create these people? Did I give birth to these people that now I must carry their burden alone?!"**

The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh explains that the second complaint made Moshe doubt his leadership, purpose, and mission. He turned to G-d and asked Him why he was put in such an adverse situation.

This identity crisis happened to another great Prophet, Shmuel HaNavi. When Shaul, the first Jewish king whom Shmuel anointed, sinned against G-d, Shmuel was equally confused and sad. How could Shaul Hamelch not follow G-d's command to the letter of the law?! But G-d answered Shmuel; he was told to search for Dovid, the next king, because Shaul was no longer fit for that position.

Similarly, G-d responded to Moshe that the burden of leadership was not just on his shoulders but also on the seventy elders. Meaning that Moshe's purpose and mission is to be the greatest leader, and part of leadership is delegation. Moshe must delegate and assign responsibilities to others so he can lead responsibly. G-d reminded Moshe what His intentions were, Moshe to be known as a faithful servant and the ultimate leader.

In our daily life, we will inevitably question ourselves, what is our purpose and mission? This experience can be extremely overwhelming and depressing. It can feel like anything is meaningless and meaningful at the exact same time.

The Torah's response to this crucial and vital question is to look at the essence of ourselves. What unique and singular light do we possess that the world desperately needs? What perspective, understanding, and vision do we have to enlighten the world and bring about the ultimate redemption.

“The more we are able to listen to our soul, the more its voice will affect our lives and the way we understand the world.”

-Rav Adin Steinsaltz of blessing memory

*Have a meaningful Shabbos,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*