

United We Stand

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Parshas Mattos/Masei

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The Parsha's Path

Elazar HaKohen said ... this is the chok that G-d commanded Moshe (31:21).

This week's Parsha features the command to *kasher* and *tovel* utensils previously owned by non-Jews in the context of dealing with the spoils from the Jewish people's war with Midian. Unlike other commandments related throughout the Torah, these laws are not communicated by Moshe, but by Elazar, Aharon's son, and successor. Why doesn't Moshe relate these laws?

Rashi cites the Talmud (Pesachim 66) that because of Moshe's anger at the war commanders for sparing the Midianite women who were the very ones responsible for causing Israel to stumble in the beginning of last week's Parsha, he forgot the laws discussed here (four years ago we dealt with the relationship between these laws and the subject of Moshe's anger). It is for this reason that Elazar had to be the one to relate them.

Rashi continues by demonstrating that whenever Moshe got angry, he forgot commandments related to the subject of his anger. The most prominent example of this is by the Waters of Strife, when Moshe got angry at the people for complaining over a lack of water ("Listen now, you rebels") and subsequently struck the rock instead of speaking to it as he was commanded.

How could Moshe, the humblest of all men, have gotten angry numerous times? Furthermore, if this anger was what caused Moshe to sin at the Waters of Strife, then his anger was the reason he could not enter the Land of Israel! It thus becomes even more important to understand how Moshe could have gotten angry.

This question pales in comparison, however, to the issues raised by a conversation Moshe has with G-d in Parshas Behaaloscha. After the Jewish people complain over a lack of meat and G-d angrily says that He will provide them enough meat to eat for thirty days, the verses continue (11:21-23):

Moshe said: "The people are six hundred thousand on foot that I am among, and You say "I will give them meat to eat for a month of days? Will sheep and cattle be slaughtered for them that would be sufficient for them? If all the fish of the sea were gathered for them, would that be sufficient for them?"

And G-d said to Moshe, "Has the Hand of G-d become short? Now you will see if my words will occur unto you or not."

On the surface, it would seem that Moshe is questioning G-d's ability to provide enough meat for all the people. The staggering quantities of meat G-d promises may seem unrealistic, but could Moshe possibly be lacking faith in G-d's abilities? Was it not Moshe that executed G-d's miracles in Egypt? Was not Moshe the one most intimately familiar with G-d?

The strength of this question led some Tannaim and commentators to offer alternative explanations of Moshe's question here, but they remain somewhat unsatisfying. Rabbi Akiva understood Moshe's question at face value, and acknowledges that this breach of faith would appear to be an even more egregious sin than Moshe's error at the Waters of Strife. Nevertheless, the Torah glosses over this incident and Moshe goes unpunished since this occurred within a private conversation with G-d. In contrast, the episode of the Waters of Strife was in front of the entire nation, so Moshe was not spared. This, of course, still fails to explain how Moshe could have acted this way.

Perhaps Moshe's doubt could be better understood considering an explanation offered by Ramban (11:19). Ramban suggests that Moshe was not doubting G-d's *ability* to bring the meat, but that G-d *would* bring the meat (by means of a miracle) under the circumstances. The reason for this was as follows: G-d was angry at the request for meat, and it can be assumed that G-d was delivering such a large quantity of meat as a means of punishment. Because it is unlike G-d to produce such a miracle only to bring punishment, Moshe could not conceive that G-d would do such a thing. Thus, Moshe reasoned that when G-d said the people would eat for thirty days, he assumed that G-d must have been referring to meat they already had available and that did not require a miracle, and in that case, there clearly was not enough meat! This is what caused Moshe to question G-d's promise.

To this G-d replied that while all things being equal Moshe was right that this would have been an improper setting to perform a miracle, what Moshe did not fully realize, was that G-d's calculations extend to the necessity of the times and the people. In this case, it could be that producing this meat was necessary for the Jewish people to understand the sheer ability of G-d's power.

It is easy to have faith that G-d can do anything. The challenge we face is to have faith that G-d *would* do anything. We live our lives with some working understanding of how G-d operates, and to surrender that understanding when G-d seems to do things we do not expect can often be extraordinarily difficult. Moshe, as much as he understood G-d's ways better than any man in history, still could not fully

Dedicated in honor of Savta Marion Reiss's birthday. May it be one of many more to come in health and happiness, עז מאה ועשרים ועוד.

grasp one thing: At times G-d abrogates His ways to meet the needs of the people.

This mistake also explains the sin of hitting the rock. Moshe had difficulty accepting that he should speak to the rock when prior experience and understanding of G-d's ways dictated he should hit the rock (See Shemot 19). However, there was a reason for the change in G-d's command. According to Rashi, it was so the Jewish people should learn that if even a rock obeys the word of G-d, so should they, and not require the recourse of "the stick." This was an earthly consideration based on the flawed mentality of the people.

This, perhaps, was the source of Moshe's anger. As much as he knew on these occasions that G-d *could* accommodate to the needs of the people, he did not believe G-d *would* accommodate. Though only occurring a few times throughout the forty-year sojourn in the desert and only once in the presence of the whole nation, for Moshe, who is held to higher standard, that was too much. Through his misunderstanding of the way G-d operates Moshe inevitably becomes angry, and what he may view as zeal for G-d's will ends up representing a lack of faith.

The connection between a lack of faith and anger is deeply rooted in our tradition. Chazal teach that "whoever gets angry, it's as if he worships idols." Anger reflects a lack of acceptance that G-d is behind and is dealing with whatever reality confronts us. While zealous anger, as seen from Pinchas, may have a place, that is only when we can be sure we are aligning our anger entirely with G-d's. Most of the time, however, our challenge is to accept that G-d is not necessarily angry, and that whatever is happening may be for reasons that are beyond us, and accept the situation with equanimity. This level of faith is far deeper, forcing us to surrender our egos and tendencies for victimization and accept responsibility to deal properly with whatever happens to us.

As we approach the Nine Days, it is particularly important to work on our *sinas chinam*, for which the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed and for which our *galus* drags on. One powerful way we can work on abolishing hatred is by strengthening our faith – not merely that G-d *could* do anything, but that G-d *would* do anything. When we feel hurt or slighted by others, we can try to accept the fact G-d has a plan. When others are acting in a way that appears wrong, we should realize that G-d may be more tolerant and understanding than we are. The same is true when confronted by communal and global chaos. We can trust that it is all part of a Divine scheme.

This does not excuse us from action; on the contrary, it prevents us from shirking responsibility by claiming helplessness and victimhood, and forces us to accept the responsibility for dealing with the situation to the best of our abilities. At the same time, we must be aware that whatever is beyond our control is not entrusted to us, and let that rest on G-d's shoulders. May we then merit to

see that not only *could* G-d bring the Redemption now, but He *will* bring it now, *bimheira viyameinu*.

Pirkei Avos Paths

Hillel used to say: be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving the creations, and drawing them close to the Torah. (1:12).

Tosafos Yom Tov explains that the idea of "loving the creations" is that one should love everyone for no other reason but that they are G-d's creations, not because they could be of use to you. People often think that to love others, they must share the same values. The truth is that the opposite is true; by loving others unconditionally because they are G-d's creations, they are naturally drawn after our values.

Rambam quotes Avos D'R' Nasan, who notes that when Aharon heard of someone who was sinful, he would greet them warmly and speak extensively with them in a friendly manner. The sinner would then say to himself that Aharon would not be treating him this way if he knew of his sinfulness, and would then strive to be worthy of Aharon's friendship, ultimately becoming one of his students. The best way to elevate others is by honoring and being friendly to all people while simultaneously being a role model of piety.

To *pursue* peace means that we do not simply want things to be peaceful and dislike disputes; it means that we actively seek to forgive, accommodate whenever possible, and overcome all tensions, even at the price of self-effacement and compromise. Peace and people are too precious to be passive about.

Goal of the week

Reflect on what you tend to get angry about and how you can strengthen your *emunah* in that area.

This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Sheleima for Shaindel Temma bas Rachel Zlotta, Masha Sarah bas Tziviah Leah, Reuven ben Golda, Ephraim Melech ben Tzilah, Gavriel Margoliot Ben Malka, and all those injured by the war and acts of terror, as well as for the safe return of all the hostages and soldiers. Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.

Have A Great Shabbos !!

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