

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

MAY 29, 2021

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Sora bas Avraham.
"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 32

18 SIVAN

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS BEHA'ALOSCHA

When a Symptom Becomes a Cause

And the people became as complainers, (speaking) evil in the ears of Hashem... (11, 1)

Rashi (ad loc) explains that the word "misoninim" means those who seek a pretext to complain; Bnei Yisroel were looking for a way to distance themselves from Hashem. Rashi goes on to explain that they were complaining about their arduous journey – "we have traveled three days without a respite!" Yet, previously (10, 33) Rashi explained that they completed a three day journey in a single day because Hashem wanted to bring them into Eretz Yisroel immediately. If so, why were they complaining?

Chazal (cited by Ramban on 10, 35) teach us that Bnei Yisroel left Mount Sinai like "a child running away from school." Chazal are referring to the feeling of relief following the removal of responsibility that a school child feels when he hears that final school bell on the last day of the school year. He doesn't simply leave, he literally "runs away" from school. In other words, Bnei Yisroel were running away from Hashem and the *mitzvos*. As Ramban (ibid.) explains; they ran away "lest we receive more commandments."

Most fights that people engage in – especially when it comes to family issues – have little or nothing to do with the actual reason for the fight. Nearly all interpersonal issues stem from control issues. Couples may fight over religious observance, their spouse's family, their children's education, or other seemingly

"righteous" arguments. But in reality they are merely looking for a pretext to express their displeasure with the other person. The argument is merely the vehicle to articulate feelings of resentment.

The quintessential example of this is Korach. He made many religious and seemingly righteous arguments against Moshe and Aharon. Korach was a first rate *talmid chacham* and was able to channel his resentment into *halachic* disagreements with Moshe and Aharon. In fact, he was able to convince many people to side with him. But, in reality, he was just jealous that he was overlooked for the position of *Kohen Gadol*. His arguments were merely a pretext to pick a fight; which is why the Mishna in *avos* calls it a *machlokes* that was not for the sake of heaven.

This further explains what Rashi means by "they were looking to distance themselves from Hashem." Their real issue had nothing to do with the journey; for we know that a three day journey only took one day. This of course was a great kindness from the Almighty, but as they were looking for a pretext to throw off the yoke of responsibility to Hashem, they used the three day journey as an excuse for a fight. The complaining wasn't because of a justifiable cause, it was only a symptom of the real issue – their resentment at being told what to do.



Did You Know...

This week's *parsha*, *Parshas Beha'aloscha*, contains the unusual upside down appearance of the letter 'nun' twice as brackets to two seemingly random *pesukim* (*Bamidbar* 10:35-36). It is difficult to understand what is so unique about these two *pesukim*; they seem to carry no special message other than conveying what Moshe would say every time the *aron* started moving – with the entire nation behind it – and what he said every time the *aron* came to a rest.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 115b-116a) has a *machlokes* regarding what this separated section means. One opinion is that this section is bracketed to indicate that it does not belong here. It should really have appeared in the *parsha* of *Bamidbar* or *Nasso* where the formations and the travels of the camp were discussed. The reason why it was placed here was to put separation between the "first account of punishment" and the "second account of punishment" (because the Torah didn't want to record in succession two sins of Bnei Yisroel that were deserving of severe punishment). Interestingly, Rashi adds that when Moshiach comes, and there aren't any more punishments from Hashem, this section will go back to its rightful place.

Dealing with Abuse

Did I conceive this entire nation, did I give birth to it that You say to me carry them in your bosom like a nurse carries an infant... (11, 12)

Moshe describes his responsibility of leadership as a parent who cares for an infant. Rashi (ad loc) points out that Hashem outlined the extent of this responsibility when he first appointed Moshe: “And He commanded them (Moshe and Aharon) regarding Bnei Yisroel” (*Shemos* 6, 13): “Lead them with the understanding that they will stone you and insult you.”

On the face of it, this seems kind of shocking. What kind of leader tolerates physical and psychological punishment? Perhaps even more perplexing – how does Moshe relate this responsibility to that of parenting an infant?

The Torah is teaching us an incredible lesson in both parenting and leadership. Every child “knows” that they were born because of their parents’ self-interest, and upon superficial examination they would seem to be right. A case can certainly be made that having children is for our own self-interest: Whether it’s to work in the family business or continue the family legacy or simply to escape mortality by having descendants who will be here long after we’re gone, it’s seemingly clear that having children is really in our own selfish interests.

In leadership it is even more glaringly clear, particularly when looking at today’s political landscape.

Obviously, as parents we hope that bringing children into this world isn’t primarily driven by our own selfish needs. We strive to be giving, altruistic, and love unconditionally. On the other hand, we must keep in mind that our children will always look for reasons why we do what we do. Essentially, if they can explain that much of what we do is in our self-interest then they can rationalize that they don’t owe us much as we aren’t doing anything for their sake. This is a common mindset for one who is on the receiving side of kindness. Being on the receiving end of a largesse is discomfiting; therefore the natural response is to search for a motive behind the gift. Rationalizing that not much is owed in terms of appreciation because the kindness was really self-serving in some manner for the benefactor is how most people deal with this discomfort.

Unfortunately, we all make the mistake of criticizing our children in areas where it becomes confusing as to if we are criticizing for the child’s own good or merely because we are concerned for our own reputation. This can be criticism of how a child does in school, how he dresses, what profession he chooses, or even the spouse he chooses to marry. Are we being critical because we are trying to improve the child or because we are

embarrassed by his actions, as if it is some failure on our part?

Obviously, as parents we want to believe that we are doing it for the right reasons. On the other hand, a child will naturally look at it as being due to our own ego and self-interest. This is why it is so important that we severely limit our criticism to issues that cannot be misconstrued as self-serving.

But even more importantly, the Torah is teaching us that being a good parent comes with the understanding that, as a parent, you’re going to take abuse. In fact, that is the clearest way to send the message to your children that your parenting is for their sake not your own: If you’re willing to put up with abuse, obviously the relationship is about what’s good for them and not necessarily what’s best for you.

This same lesson applies to leadership. Constituents are naturally going to look at everything their leaders do as being in their own self-serving interests. This is why Hashem commanded Moshe to take the position with the understanding that there will be physical and psychological abuse. Being tolerant of those abuses is the only way a leader can relay the message that he is acting in the interest of the constituency not his own self-interest.

According to another opinion in the Gemara, these two *pesukim* are in their proper place because this is the first account of how the Jews traveled, as earlier it was only the commandment. So the separation of these *pesukim* indicates that these two verses are in reality a separate book in and of themselves. According to this view, there are not Five Books of Moshe, but Seven Books of Moshe: (1) *Bereishis*, (2) *Shemos*, (3) *Vayikra*, (4) *Bamidbar* until these two *pesukim*, (5) These Two *Pesukim*, (6) the rest of *Bamidbar*, and (7) *Devarim*.

As a side note – even if we acknowledge that this division creates two new books, how can two isolated verses be considered a “book” by any stretch of the imagination? We find a fascinating Mishna (*Yadayim* 3:5), which discusses the ritual sanctity of the Torah; it teaches that any part of Torah which is erased but retains a minimum of 85 letters, (exactly the number in this separated section of this week’s *parsha*), has holiness, for a “book” remains. This is discussed more in depth in *Gemara Shabbos* 116a.

Rabbeinu Bachya adds that the reason why the Torah chose reversed “nuns” is because the numerical value of the letter *nun* is fifty, and *Bamidbar* 2:17, where these verses belong, is 50 sections before this section.

{It has been observed that even with counting both of these sections, they are in fact only 49 sections apart, but this may be attributed to an extra paragraph that the older *Sifrei Torahs* had (*Minchas Shai Bamidbar* 10:22).}



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