

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of our father,
Gedalia Ben Shalom Halevi. Sponsored by Bobby and Shelley Rosenberg.
"May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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13 SHEVAT

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS BESHALACH

Who's Responsible?

And it was when Pharaoh sent the people that God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, because it was near, and God said, "Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war, and they will return to Egypt" (13:17).

This week's *parsha* opens with Hashem deciding not to take Bnei Yisroel into Eretz Yisroel through the most direct route. As the Torah explains, Hashem is concerned that Bnei Yisroel will lose heart when faced with a war upon encountering the hostile Philistines and they will regret having left Egypt. Therefore, Hashem leads them in a circuitous route around the Philistine lands.

This is a fairly serious charge that Hashem is leveling at Bnei Yisroel, and it is difficult to comprehend. After all, here was a nation prepared to follow Hashem into an empty desert, a wasteland without food or water, filled with snakes, scorpions, and other hazards. Obviously, Bnei Yisroel felt that they could rely on Hashem to take care of them. They displayed enormous faith in Hashem, so why would He suspect them of running back to Egypt at the first prospect of war?

Perhaps even more difficult: The circuitous route didn't really address this issue. In fact, it may have hastened the very situation that Hashem sought to avoid! One week after leaving Egypt Bnei Yisroel were being pursued by the entire army of the world's superpower, one that

enslaved them for centuries. A war with Egypt was potentially far more deadly than any war with the Philistines!

Of course, Hashem was correct. Bnei Yisroel, faced with the prospect of the Egyptian army bearing down on them, cried out, *"Is it because there are not enough graves in Egypt that you took us out to die in the wilderness? [...] It is better for us to be slaves in Egypt than die in the wilderness"* (14:11-12).

The answer lies in the difference between the perils of being in the desert versus the perils of a war. Bnei Yisroel unquestionably believed that Hashem could take care of them. After all, they had seen what Hashem had done to Egypt over the previous year and recognized the miracles that Hashem had performed on their behalf. They had complete faith that Hashem could take care of them: He would provide food and water and protect them from the snakes, scorpions, and other hazards of the desert.

However, they were not ready to take responsibility for themselves. A war requires participation, and Hashem knew that Bnei Yisroel were not prepared to take up arms and fight. They wanted to be taken care of; they



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simply weren't ready to bear responsibility for themselves. Perhaps this was a result of centuries of slavery; they preferred a harsh life of slavery to the possibility that some may die in war. This is why when the Egyptian army was bearing down on them Moshe said, *"Hashem will battle for you and you shall remain silent"* (14:14). In other words, Hashem is telling them that He knows they aren't prepared for war; Hashem will obliterate the Egyptians and Bnei Yisroel won't have to lift a finger.

Unfortunately for Bnei Yisroel, wanting to be taken care of also meant that they weren't ready to go directly to Eretz Yisroel. Eretz Yisroel required Bnei Yisroel to take responsibility for themselves, and part of that obligation was a willingness to fight (and suffer losses) in order to take what was rightfully theirs. Hashem knew that Bnei Yisroel were not yet prepared to take responsibility and therefore were not yet ready for Eretz Yisroel. Thus, He took them in a circuitous route to avoid the Philistines.

Dependence and Independence

Then Hashem said to Moshe, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain portion on every day, that I may test them, whether they will follow in my Torah, or not” (16:4).

This week’s *parsha* introduces the “*monn*” or “*manna*” – the miraculous food that sustained Bnei Yisroel for the following forty years in the desert. Remarkably, Hashem tells Moshe that the rules pertaining to the *monn* would reveal if Bnei Yisroel were prepared to handle the laws of the Torah or not. In other words, if Bnei Yisroel were able to adhere to the rules surrounding the *monn*, it would indicate that they were ready to follow the laws of the Torah as well.

Rashi (ad loc) commented that the two laws that were being used to test the Jewish people to see if they would follow the Torah were: 1) Whether they would leave *monn* overnight, which had been prohibited, and 2) whether they would go out to collect *monn* on Shabbos, which would violate Shabbos. What is it about these two deeds that makes them so revelatory that they are to be used as a litmus test for whether or not Bnei Yisroel will be able to follow the Torah?

While it is common knowledge that Hashem sustained Bnei Yisroel for forty years with the *monn*, it is less well known that Hashem commanded Moshe to keep some *monn* in a jar as a permanent exhibit by the *Aron* in the *Kodesh HaKedashim* (“Holy of Holies”). Rashi (16:32) mentions that the prophet Yirmiyahu, some eight centuries later, rebukes Bnei Yisroel for not spending time studying Torah. Their response to him is that if they would spend time studying, how would they make a living? Yirmiyahu pulls out the jar of *monn* and tells them that Hashem can provide for them just as he provided for their ancestors in the desert.

Yirmiyahu’s argument requires some explanation as the simple response to him should be, “As soon as I see *monn* in the morning I will stop going to work and commit to studying Torah!”

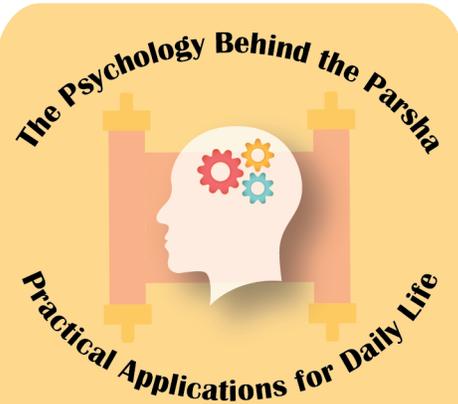
While the *monn* had many miraculous attributes, one of the most telling aspects as to the nature of the *monn* was in the collection of it. Hashem informs Bnei Yisroel that every person is to collect one *omer* of *monn* daily (roughly 3-4 quarts in volume). The Torah goes on to say that no matter how much or how little *monn* a person collected, when he or she returned home there was **exactly** one *omer* per person. In other words, no matter how hard one worked in the collection it made no difference – everyone got exactly what they were supposed to get.

This is the message that Yirmiyahu was trying to convey. Everyone has a set amount that Hashem feels they are entitled to receive, and it makes no difference at the end of the day if they try to get more than they are supposed to receive. Hashem makes sure that everyone gets what they are supposed to. The caveat being that one still has to make the effort to collect it. Some have an easier time collecting and some have a harder time, but in the end Hashem ensures that everyone gets what He wants them to have. Perhaps this is why it is called *monn* – derived from the word “*maneh* – portion.”

This is directly related to the two laws governing the *monn*, and it becomes clear why their adherence demonstrates whether or not Bnei Yisroel will follow the Torah. The first law is that one must not leave the *monn* overnight. An individual who chooses to save *monn* for the following day is one who is proclaiming, “I am in charge of my own destiny; I am in control.” This person refuses to recognize that there is a creator that runs the world and provides for sustenance. The second law of the *monn* is that it shall not be collected on Shabbos. This too is a direct repudiation of Hashem’s act of creation of

the world, for Shabbos is the time we commune with Hashem and reflect upon all that He has done for us and the world.

A person who refuses to keep these basic laws of the *monn* cannot possibly accept the Torah or be expected to keep the Torah. An integral aspect of the Torah is that it is the covenant between Hashem and mankind and the handbook for man’s participation in the running of the world. Only in safeguarding the laws of the *monn* can one exhibit an acceptance of Hashem as creator and king of the world.



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