

MISSING THE WEDDING

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Moshe said..."Why have you dealt evilly with Your servant? Why have I not found favor in Your eyes, that you place the burden of the entire nation upon me? Did I conceive this entire people, or did I give birth to them, that You say to me, 'Carry them...as a nurse carries an infant?'"

Be'er Mayim Chaim: Examining these verses superficially, we hear a Moshe who complains to Hashem that he has been mistreated, and who is overly critical of the *Bnei Yisrael*. Simply put, it is impossible for us to accept this about Moshe Rabbenu! His words are out of character, as well as inconsistent with the Torah's expectations of even ordinary people!

How could Moshe bemoan his fate? Moshe, who understood the totality of Torah, both Written and Oral, was surely aware of its instruction^[2] that we bless Hashem for all events in our lives, whether the ones that please us or the ones that don't. Moreover, it tells us^[3] to accept all those events joyously! This leaves no room for Moshe complaining about his treatment. Was he not prepared to serve Hashem with every ounce of strength he had?

Can it be that a disgruntled Moshe would point an accusatory finger at the *Bnei Yisroel*? At each and every juncture that the people sinned and failed, Moshe had rushed to defend them. He made the ultimate sacrifice in turning down Hashem's offer to literally become the father of a new Jewish people after He would abandon the old. (While he did not withhold words of reprimand and stern rebuke from the people when they needed it, he did so only out of love. He aimed his words at their hearts – not at G-d's ears. When other prophets expressed their disappointment about the spiritual state of the people in language that were too strong, they were faulted for it. Chazal tell us that Hashem simply has no use for those who speak evilly of the Jewish People.

Moshe's intent was the polar opposite of what it might seem. He neither balked at the misery of his lot, nor criticized the people. Rather, he offered a crucial and effective defense of the people against some anticipated criticism by Hashem.

A thought experiment will help us understand Moshe's argument. Parents must endure all kinds of hardships in raising young children. They care for them in trying circumstances, feeding them, cleaning them, clothing them, often at great personal inconvenience. They agonize over the development of their children, worrying that they fall short of the goal of becoming mature, capable, loyal Torah Jews. The burden is eased by looking ahead to the goal line. Parents look to the day when they are able to watch their child venture forth to start their own families, equipped with the

tools for success.

Imagine, now, that a horrible turn of events befalls a Jewish couple on the day of their child's wedding. Both parents lie near death, and realize that they will not live to see the *chupah* of their son or daughter. They are conscious of the fact that they are dying. Added to contemplating their own deaths, the parents are overcome with sadness for failing to behold with their eyes the moment that they had toiled for all through the difficult years of child-rearing. They will not stand with their child under the marriage canopy. Each one thinks of his or her investment in the child, and is crushed by the terrible irony within the tragedy.

Imagine further that one of the parents died during the child's infancy, leaving the survivor to play the role of two parents, not just one. If that parent should be stricken on the child's wedding day and die before the event, the tragedy is multiplied.

Decades earlier, Moshe began to suspect that he would not lead the people into the Land. They had not yet sinned; they were still enslaved in Egypt at the time. Yet Moshe picked up on something that Hashem said – and on something He did not say. In the long conversation at the burning bush, Hashem first forecast the future. "I will descend to save [the nation] ...and to bring it up to the Land."^[4] Later, however, the description changes. "I will send you to take out my people from Egypt."^[5] Hashem does not add that Moshe will also take them into the Land. Moshe learns that he is to be Hashem's human emissary, but sees the mission shrink to merely leading the Exodus. G-d is ominously silent about the concluding chapter of the drama, in which the *Bnei Yisrael* would enter the Land. Moshe senses that somehow, he would not live to see it.

This, then, was Moshe's argument to Hashem. "Despite whatever complaints You may have regarding this people, You do not have grounds for concern. I am the one who must deal with disappointment. You can and do look at the future. You see ahead to their entry into the Land, their building of the *Beis ha-Mikdosh*, and the beauty of their service to You with the years of *avodah* there. All their failings at the moment ought to be bearable to You, just like the tribulations of child-raising are borne by parents.

"But I do not contemplate the same. I will not enter the Land. All that I have had to endure will not be offset by the *nachas* of watching the people achieve maturity by entering Canaan. Why have You dealt evilly with me? In other words, why have You placed all the evil upon me, while You have not had to bear any of it, since Your disappointment in them is tempered by Your knowledge of the future? Why did I not find favor in Your eyes that I should bear their burden completely? In other words, had I found favor, I would bear all of the burden, including the wars that lie ahead in the conquest of the Land. But I would gladly bear all of it if I could expect to witness the joy of the realization of the dream – the building of the *Beis ha-Mikdosh*.

"Did I conceive this child and give birth to him? I have had to lead this people like a single parent raises a child alone! Emerging from slavery in Egypt, the people were like children. I had to clean up

after their mistakes, and defend them constantly. All was bearable for me, since I could think about how they would mature.

"Moreover, even as I tended to them, I never really had the status of a parent. Rather, I ministered to them as a wet-nurse does to an infant, even though it is not her natural child. This, too, I would gladly accept, if You would allow me to enter the Land that You promised to the Forefathers."

This is Moshe at his best, not his worst. He argues that unlike himself, a Divine Father ought not be perturbed by the sins of the nation in the wilderness. All *aveiros* can be offset by the *nachas* that He knows they will bring Him in the future.

[1] Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Bamidbar 11:11

[2] Berachos 54A

[3] Berachos 60B

[4] Shemos 3:8

[5] Shemos 4:13
