

# MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

*by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky*

This week's portion discusses the entry into the land of Israel and the responsibilities that are intrinsically tied with its inheritance. There are countless blessings mentioned that follow a Torah lifestyle and unfortunately myriad curses when those values are abandoned.

But after the litany of blessing and curses, Moshe tells the nation, "you have seen everything that Hashem did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his servants and to all the land. Your eyes beheld the great signs and wonders, but Hashem did not give you a heart to comprehend, eyes to see, or ears to hear until this day" (Deuteronomy 29:2-3). Moshe was obviously referring to the day that the Jews received a Torah comprehension of events. But it defies logic. After all, what does one need to understand about wonders? Water turning to blood, supernatural invasions of wild animals, locusts, and fire-filled hail need no rocket scientist to fathom G-d's power. Surely the splitting of the sea is as amazing an event that will marvel one's eyes and stir the senses of any people.

What then does Moshe mean when he tells the nation that Hashem "did not give you a heart to comprehend, eyes to see, or ears to hear until this day" ?

Rav Noach Weinberg, dean of Aish HaTorah Institutions, tells the story of the young man who came to him in search of spiritual meaning.

The young man entered the portals of Yeshiva Aish HaTorah for a few days and then decided to leave the yeshiva in his quest for spiritual meaning across the Land of Israel. The student stopped at synagogues in Meah Shearim, visited the holy sites in Tiberias and Tzefat, and after two weeks of spiritual-hunting returned to Jerusalem and headed straight back to the Yeshiva.

"Rabbi Weinberg," he exclaimed. "I spent two weeks in travelling the length and breadth of Israel in search of spirituality, and I want you to know that I found absolutely nothing!"

Rabbi Weinberg just nodded. "You say you traveled the entire country and did not find any spirituality?"

"Yes sir," came the resounding reply. "None whatsoever!"

"Let me ask you," continued the Rabbi, "how did you find the Bafoofsticks?"

"Bafoofsticks?" countered the student. "What's a Bafoofstick?"

"That's not the point," responded the rabbi, "I just want to know how you feel about them."

"About what?"

"The Bafoofsticks"

The young man looked at the rabbi as if he had lost his mind. He tried to be as respectful as he could under the circumstances. "Rabbi!" he exclaimed in frustration, "I'd love to tell you how the Bafoofsticks were. I'd even spend the whole day discussing Bafoofsticks with you, but frankly I have no idea what in the world is a Bafoofstick!" Rabbi Weinberg smiled. He had accomplished his objective. "Tell me," he said softly. "And you know what spirituality is?"

Moshe explains to the nation that it is possible to be mired in miracles and still not comprehend the greatness that surrounds you. One can experience miraculous revelations but unless he focuses his heart and mind he will continue to lead his life uninspired as before.

In fact, even blessings need to be realized. In offering blessing the Torah tells us, "the blessings will be upon you and they will reach you" (Deuteronomy 28:2). If blessings are upon us of course they reach you! Why the redundancy? Once again the Torah teaches us that it is possible to be surrounded by blessing and not realize it. There are people who are surrounded by health, wealth, and great fortune, but their lives are permeated in misery. They have the blessing, but it has not reached them.

We need more than physical or even spiritual blessing. We need more than experiencing miraculous events. It is not enough to see miracles or receive the best of fortune. We must bring them into our lives and into our souls. Then we will be truly blessed. Good Shabbos © 1999 Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

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Good Shabbos

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