

MOSHE HAD DIFFICULTY REMEMBERING

by Shlomo Katz

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Today's Learning:

Yoma 4:4-5

Orach Chaim 303:24-26

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Ketubot 86

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Gittin 35

Two events from this week's parashah occurred on the twentieth of Sivan, the date of this Erev Shabbat. One is the end of the month-long miracle of the slav / the birds that miraculously rained down on the Jewish camp to be eaten. The other is that Miriam was quarantined for speaking lashon hara against Moshe.

According to many authorities, we are required by the Torah (Devarim 24:8-9) to remember daily the punishment which Miriam suffered for her sin. However, writes the Chafetz Chaim, even among those who observe this practice, there does not seem to be less lashon hara spoken. Why?

He answers: There are several reasons for this, each of which may be understood by a parable. If one ignores his doctor's instructions on how to take a certain medication, the medication may not

help him. Similarly, remembering Miriam's fate is not a magical cure; it comes with instructions: do not engage in idle talk, avoid situations where lashon hara is common, etc. Many people do not heed these instructions. Also, if a person ignores his illness until disease has spread to his whole body, medicine may be useless, or will at least take longer to have any effect. This is unfortunately the case with lashon hara, a prohibition so neglected that no easy cure is possible. Instead, one must recognize the extent to which he has become entrapped by this sin, and only then will true and complete correction be possible. (Kuntres Zechor L'Miriam, ch.1)

"This is the workmanship of the menorah, lhammered-out ofl a block ('mikshah') of gold . . ." (8:4)

The word "mikshah" / "a block" is related to the word "kashah" / "difficult." Midrash Bemidbar Rabbah (46:10) explains as follows:

R' Levi bar Rabbi said: The pure menorah came down from heaven, for Hashem told Moshe (Shmot 25:31), "You shall make a menorah of pure gold."

Moshe responded, "How shall I make it?"

Hashem answered (in the same verse), "Mikshah shall the menorah be made." However, Moshe found this difficult, and when he descended from Har Sinai, he forgot how to make it.

This was repeated several times until finally Hashem showed Moshe a picture of what the menorah was to look like. Again, however, Moshe forgot, and again, Hashem showed Moshe the image of the menorah.

Finally, Hashem said to Moshe, "Go to Betzalel; he will make it." So Moshe instructed Betzalel, and immediately, Betzalel made the menorah.

Moshe was shocked, and he said, "Hashem showed me the menorah several times, yet I was unable to make it, and you, who did not see, made it on your own! Were you perhaps in the shadow of ('B'tzel') G-d ('El') [a play on the name Betzalel, meaning, were you so close to G-d that you could eavesdrop when He spoke to me]?"

This is what the midrash relates about the making of the menorah. What, however, was the purpose of Moshe's difficulty?

R' David Luria z"l (see page 4) explains: Man must prepare himself so that the light from Above can rest on him. Nevertheless, all a person can do is prepare; he cannot ensure that the light will, in fact, rest upon him. (Rather, we are taught that the yetzer hara would defeat man if Hashem did not come to his aid.)

Moshe, who prepared himself by studying the menorah over and over, could not make the menorah. Betzalel, who was given wisdom as a gift from G-d, was able to make the menorah. (Chidushei

Ha'Radal)

"According to the word of Hashem Bnei Yisrael would journey and according to the word of Hashem they would encamp . . . When the cloud lingered upon the Tabernacle many days, Bnei Yisrael would maintain the charge of Hashem and would not journey. Sometimes the cloud would be upon the Tabernacle for a number of days . . . and sometimes the cloud would remain from evening until morning . . . or for a day and a night . . . or for two days, or a month, or a year . . ." (9:18-22)

Why? Yitzchak Elchanan Waldshein z"l hy"d (Assistant Mashgiach in Baranovitch) explains:

Hashem's intention was to teach Bnei Yisrael three traits -- patience, restraint, and alacrity. They learned patience from staying in undesirable places longer than they wished. They learned restraint by staying in pleasant places a shorter time than they would have liked (and thus being restrained from enjoying whatever fruits that particular oasis offered). Finally, they learned alacrity by having to pack and unpack in a short time. (Quoted in Haggadah Shel Pesach Baranovitch p. 222)

"Make for yourself two silver trumpets . . . and they shall be yours for the summoning of the assembly." (10:1)

The gemara (Menachot 28b) teaches that all of the vessels that Moshe made could be used by later generations as well. However, the trumpets were for Moshe to summon the nation and could not be used by subsequent leaders.

Why?

R' Eliyahu Schlesinger shlita (rabbi of the Gilo neighborhood of Yerushalayim) suggests that there is a simple lesson here. The way that the leader of one generation calls his flock and relates to his congregants will not necessarily work for the leader of the next generation. (Eileh Ha'davarim)

From the same work:

"When the ark would journey, Moshe said, 'Arise, Hashem, and let Your foes be scattered; let those who hate You flee before You.' And when it rested, he would say, 'Reside, tranquilly, Hashem, among the myriads of thousands of Israel!'" (10:35-36)

In the Sefer Torah, these verses are set off by special symbols to highlight that they form a separate "book" on their own. What is so important about these verses that the midrash would refer to them as a separate book?

R' Schlesinger explains: These two verses contain the fundamentals of our existence in exile. At

times, the "ark journeys," and the Jewish people are tossed about from one exile to another. At such times, our primary concern is our physical safety, and we pray that Hashem's foes will be scattered and those who hate Him will flee before Him.

On the other hand, when the ark rests, i.e., when the Jewish people are living peacefully in their own land or in a benevolent kingdom, the primary threat is spiritual. It is primarily in those nations which have treated us well that the threat of assimilation has been greatest. Therefore we pray, "Reside, tranquilly, Hashem, among the myriads of thousands of Israel."

R' Schlesinger adds: We read a few verses earlier that Moshe asked his father-in-law Yitro to accompany Bnei Yisrael to Eretz Yisrael, and he told him (10:31), "You will be as eyes for us." Moshe knew that Bnei Yisrael would be in grave spiritual danger once they had settled peacefully on their land, and he therefore wanted Yitro among them so that Bnei Yisrael could look upon him -- they could set their "eyes" upon him -- as an example. What had Yitro done that could serve as an example? He had been living tranquilly in Midian -- indeed, he had been the high priest of Midian -- but he gave it all up and went "against the flow" once he realized that the prevailing beliefs were wrong.

R' David Luria z"l

"And the sun rises and the sun sets" (Kohelet 1:5) - so it was said of R' David Luria ("Radal"), who was born in 5598 (1797), the year that the Vilna Gaon died. Although he was a businessman who never held a rabbinic position, Radal was recognized as a leading Torah scholar in his day. In 1854, he was elected rabbi of Warsaw in place of R' Chaim Davidson, but he did not accept the appointment. Despite not holding any official position, Radal did participate in rabbinic conferences relating to issues affecting Russian Jewry and he represented the Jewish community before the Czar's government.

Although he had no formal secular education, Radal was fluent in several languages. In 1838, he was arrested on false charges of spying and was imprisoned for 105 days. It is told that during Radal's interrogation by Russian officers, the latter began speaking amongst themselves in French in order that their prisoner would not understand. Suddenly, Radal began inching toward a corner of the room. "Why don't you stand still?" the commanding officer bellowed, and Radal's explanation that he understood French and did not want to eavesdrop earned him the respect of the officers and facilitated his release.

Radal was a prolific writer. His works include Talmud commentaries, kabbalistic works, halachic responsa, glosses to several works of Jewish history, and commentaries on midrashim, including Midrash Rabbah, Midrash Shmuel, Pesikta, and Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer. (The last of these is the leading commentary on that midrash, and it not only explains the text but cross-references related sources in the Talmud and other midrashim.) The first work that Radal published was Kadmut Sefer Ha'Zohar,

whose purpose was to establish the antiquity of the Zohar. (The Zohar is classically attributed to the Tanna/Sage of the Mishnah Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. However, because it was never published before the 13th century, some have questioned that attribution.)

Radal died at the age of 58 on 5 Kislev 5616 (1855). (Sources: Rabbotenu She'ba'golah p. 29; Gedolei Ha'dorot p. 618)

Sponsored by Robert and Hannah Klein on the 90th birthday of mother Dorothy J. Klein

The Vogel family on the yahrzeit of Rabbi Joseph Braver a"h (R' Yosef Leib ben Harav Yehuda)

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