

FOLLOWING ORDERS

by Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig

"For you have taken us out to this wilderness to kill this congregation by famine." (Shemos/Exodus 16:3) As a result of their hunger, the Jewish people complained to Moshe for food. G-d responded to their complaint by telling Moshe that He would send food from the heavens to sustain them. On a daily basis a portion of manna would be provided for every man, woman and child. To avoid the need of collecting a portion on the Sabbath, a double portion was to be collected on Friday, as none would fall on the Sabbath itself. Moshe taught the Children of Israel most of the details of this revelation, but did not proactively inform them of the alternative procedures for Friday and the Sabbath. Rather, the masses collected one measure of manna only to discover that it had miraculously become a double measure; when they approached him, he completed the discourse. Rashi (ibid v. 22) quotes the Medrash that Moshe was held accountable for this lapse, as he was not excluded from G-d's reprimand, "How long will you refuse to follow my commandments and teachings?" (ibid v. 28), which was primarily directed at those who went out to collect on the Sabbath even after Moshe's completion of the command.

Moshe was the greatest prophet in the history of mankind. "Never again has there arisen a prophet like Moshe whom G-d knew face to face." (Devarim/Deuteronomy 34:10) How do we reconcile his apparent laxity in fulfilling G-d's will?

Maharal (Rabbi Yehuda Loewe; 1526-1609; one of the seminal figures in Jewish thought in the last five centuries; Chief Rabbi in Moravia, Posen and Prague) explains the second verse of the aforementioned reprimand, "See that G-d has given you the Sabbath, thus He has given you on Friday a two day portion of bread." (Shemos/Exodus 16:29) Seeing is emphasized because one cannot compare the knowledge attained from outside sources to something witnessed. G-d stressed that they had actually seen the miraculous double portion of Friday when they were enjoined to observe all the details of the Sabbath. Now the Jewish nation possessed, through their own observations, a heightened awareness of the lessons of G-d's providence as demonstrated by the manna.

This may have been Moshe's motivation to not preemptively explain the laws of the manna for the Sabbath. Moshe appreciated that the greater impact of the lessons learned, regarding both the divine care inherent in the manna and the paramount importance of Sabbath observance, followed an experiential first encounter with these concepts, personally witnessed by every Jew. His explanation would be after the fact but still before the commencement of the Sabbath. But as close

as this plan was to Moshe's divine charge, it did not match. Despite his good intentions and their inherent value, Moshe was punished for his lack of zealousness in informing the people, immediately and conscientiously. The ends did not justify the means.

Subjective rationalizations present serious dangers when they contradict the written law. As we will read in coming weeks, we committed to G-d at Sinai that "we will do and we will listen" (ibid 24:7). Listening is our license, our encouragement to question and develop a greater understanding of G-d's will. But our ultimate responsibility is action, total compliance with His will, even when complete appreciation is missing.

Have a good Shabbos!

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