

# THE PURSUIT FOR MORE

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

Without warning disaster strikes the people of Israel on their journey to the Land of Israel. Moshe boldly proclaimed that "we are traveling now on the way to the land of our destination." The tribes have been numbered and counted, assigned flags and positions of march and they are accompanied on their journey by the Tabernacle of God placed in their midst. Everything is seemingly poised for their successful entry into the Land of Israel.

But one of the traits of human nature is the penchant for dismissing the good that we enjoy and the blessings that we have. Instead we long for and complain loudly about what we believe we don't have. The search for perfection in human life is equivalent to drinking saltwater in an attempt to slake one's thirst.

So we read in the parsha how the father-in-law of Moshe abandons the Jewish people in the desert to return home to Midian where, according to Rashi, he is convinced that he will be able to convert a pagan society into believing in one God. His absence is harmful to the Jewish people encamped in the desert and as is apparent from the later narratives in the Bible, his conversion attempts were in the main unsuccessful.

Though blessed with daily food - manna from heaven - the Jewish people complain about their diet - they express their ingratitude and demand meat and other foods. They were tired of having to eat directly from God's hand, so to speak. All of their grouching and complaining only serves to bring plague, depression and disaster on them.

The prophet Jeremiah, in essence, states that human complaints are not really justified in the eyes of Heaven, so to speak. The Talmud puts it pithily: "Is it not sufficient for you that you are alive and functioning?" But we often take life for granted and are underappreciative of this most basic and generous of all gifts.

It is within the nature of humans to pursue wealth at the expense of health, power and notoriety at the expense of family and harmony, and temporal pleasures at the expense of eternal values and reward. The story of the desert illustrates for us how a section of the Jewish people valued a meat meal over entry into the Land of Israel. There will always be a refrain repeated in the desert, that it is better for us to return to Egypt than to meet the challenges that will be placed before us in establishing a Jewish national state in the Land of Israel.

This type of attitude is unfortunately not lacking in the current Jewish world. And no matter how

wealthy and successful the Jewish state is now and will be in the future, there will always be a longing for more, better and different. And this longing breeds the insidious feeling of dissatisfaction with what blessings one already possesses. The parsha comes to teach us this basic lesson of human nature, of how we must be aware of it in order to overcome and truly reach our proper goals in life.

Shabbat shalom

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Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)