AHARON'S GREATNESS: FORTY YEARS OF CONSISTENCY

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Beha'aloscha

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 508, The City Of Yericho. Good Shabbos!

Mazel tov to Annie and David Garmaise on their anniversary, from their children and grandchildren.

Aharon's Greatness: Forty Years of Consistency

There is a very famous comment of Rashi on the pasuk [verse] in this week's Parsha "And Aharon did so." [Bamidbar 8:3] Rashi states: "This teaches that he did not deviate" (melamed shelo shinah). These few words of Rashi have been the springboard for countless homiletic expositions by commentaries and expounders of Chumash throughout the ages.

The obvious question is: What novelty is there in telling us that Aharon did exactly as he was commanded by G-d, in terms of the practice of lighting the Menorah? Of course Aharon did what G-d told him to do!

Rav Elya Meir Bloch explains that the novelty of Aharon not changing is simply that he did the same thing daily for almost forty years.

Let us think to ourselves - what mitzvah have we done day in day out for the last forty years? There are not many items that fall into this category. True, some of us can say that we have put on Tefillin every day (except Shabbos and Yom Tov) for the last forty years. But there are not many things that a person can say he has done consistently for such a long period of time. How many people can say "I have never missed a minyan in the last 40 years?" or even "I have never missed the zman [proper time for] Krias Shma once in the last 40 years?" It is not so simple.

The praise of Aharon is that he did the same thing for 40 years without fail. That is greatness!

Upside Down Nuns Separate Between Two Sections of Punishment

There is another very famous passage in Parshas BeHa'aloscha: the two verses which begin with the words "And it was when the Ark traveled, Moshe stated..." and "And when it came to rest he would say..." [Bamidbar 10:35-36]. The Talmud records the tradition that these two pasukim are set off by a pair of inverted letter Nuns. Rashi quotes the Gemara [Shabbos 116] that the purpose of these upside down Nuns is to separate between one section of punishment and another.

Which are the sections of punishment (pur-oniyos)? According to some Rishonim, the first section of punishment is the fact that "They traveled from the Mountain of Hashem a three day journey." [Bamidbar 10:33] The Talmud describes their departure from Mt. Sinai "as a child running away from the school house." The Ramban adds that they were afraid that if they stayed at Har Sinai any longer, the Almighty would pile upon them additional mitzvos.

The second section of punishment is that of the 'misoninim' [complainers]. Rashi explains that their complaint centered around the fact that they had to travel so far during the three days of travel.

The Ramban notes that the reason for the separation of the sections of punishment by the pasukim regarding the travel of the Ark was so that there would not be three consecutive sections of punishment that would establish a 'Chazakah' [a precedent setting chain of events] for punishment.

What is the 'third' section that the Ramban is referring to? It is the murmuring of the Ayrev Rav [mixed multitude] that prompted the Children of Israel to desire and complain about the lack of meat.

But according to this Ramban, we would have expected the pause of the upside down Nuns to come between the second and third incidents. If that were the case, the pause would effectively stop the 'Chazakah' from taking effect. In fact, however, the separation comes between the first two incidents, when there was not yet an imminent chazakah.

What does the Ramban mean?

I saw a very interesting insight from Rabbi Zev Leff. The Almighty is particularly annoyed by inconsistency, i.e. hypocrisy. Hashem can deal less harshly with a person who may be bad, but who is at least consistent in his evil ways. But a person who demonstrates hypocrisy and inconsistency really riles the Almighty.

This is reminiscent of the Medrash regarding Yosef's first question to his brothers after revealing himself to them: "Is my father still alive?" [Bereishis 45:3] The Medrash comments: "Woe to us from the Day of Judgment. Woe to us from the day of humiliation. The Tribes had no answer to Yosef's chastisement."

What was the chastisement? It was their hypocrisy. Their whole interchange with Yosef had been that they could not bring down Binyamin, because if they separated him from his father, their poor old father would die. Yosef challenges them, "If you are so worried about your poor father, why weren't you worried about him twenty some years ago, when you separated him from his favorite

son?"

Return to the sections of punishment here in our Parsha, what was the people's second complaint? "We are traveling too fast." The significance of that complaint cannot be appreciated without considering the next section. They were not concerned about traveling so fast when they fled Mt. Sinai - like a child running away from the schoolhouse. When they were worried about receiving more mitzvos, they knew how to travel very quickly for a great distance. No one said a peep about "too fast" in that situation. Suddenly, a few days later, they are worried that they are going "too fast." This is inconsistent. It is hypocritical. When they were acting for THEMSELVES, it is not "too fast," but when it is for G-D, it is "too fast."

That is why the pause is between the first and second punishments. The glaring inconsistency in their deeds is manifest in the sharp contrast between these two sections. In order to dull the contrast, so to speak, we needed a pause between these two sections.

We must always bear in mind the hypocrisy of glaring inconsistencies in our deeds. We are inconsistent when we complain that we don't have enough money for this tzedaka or for that religious need and then we go spend great sums on other things that are perhaps not so important.

The Almighty can understand that a person may not have money. The Torah excuses one facing circumstances beyond his control [Ownes Rachmana patrei]. However, when we have money for 'this' but not for 'that,' the Almighty does not deal well with that, so to speak.

The same applies when a person says that he has no time to learn or to do chessed, but he has time for other crazy endeavors. Not having time is a reasonable excuse, but when one really does have time for much less important matters, we are not dealing with lack of time but with hypocrisy.

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