

A DEPRESSION THAT IMPRESSES

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Beha'aloscha

A Depression That Impresses

The beginning of Parshas Beha'aloscha, which deals with the kindling of the Menorah, immediately follows the lengthy section at the end of Parshas Nasso, which deals with the gifts of the Nesseyim [Tribal Princes] to the Mishkan. Rashi explains this juxtaposition: Aharon was chalsha da'ato [depressed] that neither he nor his tribe (Shayvet Levi) participated in the inauguration ceremony of the Tabernacle. Therefore, the Almighty told him, "By your life, your lot is greater than their lot - for you (and your descendants) will kindle and prepare the lamps of the Menorah."

We have spoken numerous times in the past about this Rashi and analyzed how exactly the lighting of the Menorah served as a "consolation prize" for not having participated in the inauguration. Rather than repeating our prior discussions, I will make another observation about Rashi's comment.

Rashi says that Aharon was "weakened" or depressed by the fact that he and his tribe did not participate with the Nesseyim. Aharon was depressed because he could not participate in a mitzvah. This is an admirable quality. It is a measure of a person as to what upsets him and gets him dispirited. Some people get depressed over the stock-market. Some people get depressed when their sports team loses. What gets Aharon depressed? When does he feel deprived? "I could not participate in a mitzvah." That depressed him.

We find another example of this in our parsha as well: "We are impure as a result of human corpse impurity - why should we be left out, unable to sacrifice the offering to Hashem in the midst of the Children of Israel?" [Bamidbar 9:7]. The setting is the offering of the first Paschal sacrifice in the Wilderness, one year after the exodus. A group of people were unable to participate because they were Tameh Mes. They protested before Moshe - Lamah Nigarah (why should we be deprived)?

Again, it is praise-worthy to feel deprived because you could not do a mitzvah, because you could not offer the Korban Pessach. Usually what do we think of when someone says, for example, "I had a deprived childhood"? Typically, it means he did not get a bike; he could not go to camp, etc. Usually "I am deprived" refers to materialistic deprivation - I cannot go on vacation, I cannot afford this, I cannot afford that.

People who are depressed because they could not do a mitzvah or who feel deprived because they could not bring a Korban Pessach are very special people. Such emotions say a lot about who they are.

This is in stark contrast to another group of people in this parsha: "And the rabble that were in their midst cultivated a craving, and the Children of Israel, also turned, and they wept, and said, 'Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish that we would eat in Egypt free of charge; the cucumbers, and the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic...' [Bamidbar 11:4-5]. What were they crying about? They felt deprived because they did not have meat!

These are two opposite ends of the spectrum. Aharon is depressed because he cannot bring a Korban. The carriers of Yosef's coffin felt deprived because they could not bring a Korban Pessach. And then there is the other end of the spectrum: "Who will feed us meat?" That which makes one depressed is a measure of the man.

Where's The Beef?

It is interesting to note G-d's response when Moshe presented the case of the people clamoring for meat. Moshe expressed his frustration over the situation: "...Where shall I get meat to give to this entire people when they weep to me saying 'Give us meat that we may eat'?..." [Bamidbar 11:12]. G-d's very first response to Moshe's plea had nothing to do with meat. G-d stated: "Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel..." [Bamidbar 11:16]. The response to the people who were complaining for meat was the establishment of a Sanhedrin. Moshe's spirit would rest on the 70 elders and they would form the first Jewish High Court.

That is all fine and well but "Where's the beef?" What happened to the people's complaint about lack of meat? What's the answer to that question?

The answer is that what was required to resolve this situation was not meat, it was an education. It was necessary to change people's priorities in life. How is that going to be accomplished? "Gather for me 70 elders..." Gather together a group of people who will become holy like you; prophets like you, and who will be able to teach the people.

If the problem would have merely been solved by giving them meat, they would have asked for something else tomorrow and a third thing the day after tomorrow. They would never be satisfied. The way to rectify people who cry over the lack of meat is not with meat but with a Torah education.

Do The Trumpets Send A Mixed Message?

This week's parsha contains the mitzvah of the silver trumpets. The trumpets were to be blown in

war time: "When you go to wage war in your land against an enemy who oppresses you, you shall sound short blasts of the trumpets..." [Bamidbar 10:9]. The trumpets are also blown on happy occasions: "On a day of your gladness, and on your festivals, and on your new moons, you shall sound the trumpets over your olah-offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace-offerings; and they shall be for a remembrance for you before your G-d..." [Bamidbar 10:10].

This appears to be a contradiction. What is the nature of the trumpets? Are they like a fire alarm? If so, we understand that the "fire alarm" is pulled when there is a danger. But we do not pull the "fire alarm" when we have a Yom Tov! Sirens announce danger - be careful! How can the same trumpet be blown for tragic occasions, for dangerous occasions, AND for joyous occasions?

The answer is to be found in the Mishneh Torah. The Rambam writes: "There is a positive Biblical command to cry out and to blow the trumpets for any tragedy that comes upon the community... And this matter is part of the ways of repentance, for when trouble comes and everyone cries out and they blow the blasts then everyone will recognize that because of their evil ways this calamity has befallen them..." [Hilchos Tanis 1:1-2]

The trumpets' blast proclaims that this trouble comes from the Almighty. "Do not think that this is a land grab, an oil grab, a money grab. Do not think this is global politics. If the enemy attacks, you should know that the Almighty is behind it. G-d is saying he wants you to be attacked." Blow the trumpets as a reminder of the nature of the calamity.

This is precisely why, when a person has a simcha, a festival, a joyous occasion, we are called upon to blow these same trumpets. We should remember that this too comes from the Almighty. Both our troubles and our celebrations come from Hashem.

When bad times occur, our tendency is often to ask "Why is G-d doing this to me?" However, when the good times occur, we think "We are lucky, smart, and successful." The Torah commands us to blow the trumpets when good things happen as well, to remind us that this too is the Hand of G-d in our lives.

Perhaps, suggests the Shemen HaTov, if we remember -- when the good times happen -- that this is from G-d, then there won't be a need to blow "when the enemy attacks," because the enemy will not attack. If we remember when the good times happen that "from the L-rd this event transpired" [Tehillim 118:23], then there will be no need for the Almighty to have to "set us straight" with some kind of crises situation.

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