

PARSHAS SHLACH: GROWING - OVER TIME

by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz

"Yom la'shana tis'ue es avonosaychem arbaim shanah - a day for a year shall you bear [the consequences of] your sins; for forty years." (Bamidbar 14:34)

Hashem informed Moshe and Aharon of the dire consequences that face the B'nei Yisroel for their lack of faith in Hashem's ability to lead them into Eretz Yisroel. When they heard the unflattering report of the meraglim (spies), they collectively grieved on the ninth day of Av. As a result of their 'needless mourning' on Tishah B'Av, this date would forever be designated for tragic and tear-filled events.

For the next forty years; one year for every day that the spies spent in Eretz Yisroel, all male Jews who reached the age of sixty years would die on Tishah B'Av. Additionally, until the coming of Moshiach, the ninth of Av would be designated for observing the tragic events in our history, among them the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash.

YOM LA'SHANAH

The Kli Yakar asks two interesting questions on the term 'Yom La'shanah' (a day for a year).

To begin with, should it not say 'Shana La'yom' instead of 'Yom Lashanah'? After all, the punishment was one year [of additional time spent in the desert] for each day [that the meraglim spent in Eretz Yisroel]. Therefore the appropriate phrase should be that they were punished with one year for each day, not visa versa?

Additionally, does it not seem overly harsh to punish the Jews in such a harsh and disproportionate ratio - one full year for each day?

A DILUTION OF THE DECREE

The Kli Yakar explains that the focus of the Yom La'shana terminology was the moderate implementation of the decree that the Jews would all perish in the desert. Firstly, the deaths would not occur all at once, but would rather be spread over forty years. Additionally, Jews would not die each day in the midbar, but rather the deaths would all occur on one day only - Tisha B'Av.

Viewed through this prism, the term 'Yom La'shanah' now becomes representative of Hashem's mercy - limiting the deaths to one day per year, and then spreading them over forty years.

A CONTINUATION OF THE THEME OF THE PREVIOUS WEEK

I would like to suggest that the 'Yom La'shanah' gezeirah (decree) that all adult Jews would die in the desert might possibly be congruent with the theme we addressed in these lines last week, when we discussed the term 'misonenim' (complainers) in last week's parsha.

A QUICK REVIEW

Last week, we proposed that the term "Vayehi ha'om kemisonenim" (Bamidbar 11:1) was used to denote the fact that the nation was similar to mourners - on the opposite side of the spectrum. Just as a mourner is in a state of shock by the sudden death of a loved one, so too, the Jews in the desert were stunned by their meteoric rise from penniless slaves to a prosperous group of noble men and women who were given the sacred mission of becoming Hashem's Chosen People. (An onen is one who is in shock over the death of a relative. He or she has not had the time to properly process this information and deal with the event that has just occurred. That is one of the reasons that halacha relieves the onen from the performance of any mitzvos during this short period of emotional overload.)

We suggested that the Torah began the tragic chapter of the complaints of the Jews to Moshe with an introductory and explanatory note. It mentions that the B'nei Yisroel were overwhelmed by their dizzying spiritual and material blessings and may not have been able to adjust properly to their new reality - not unlike some lottery winners whose lives disintegrate despite their great fortune. This was due to the fact that it was too much too fast.

We noted that the B'nei Yisroel were severely punished for their complaints and for their lack of gratitude to Moshe. But, as a loving Father, Hashem may have pointed out a possible defense for His children by explaining that they were 'misonenim' - like people who were adjusting rapidly to a new reality.

A POSSIBLE UNDERSTANDING OF 'YOM LA'SHANAH'

I would like to suggest that the decree that the adult males of the B'nei Yisroel not enter Eretz Yisroel and die in the midbar might have been a reflection of this reality. The first generation of Jews who were so recently freed from poverty and enslavement could not acclimate so quickly to their newfound spiritual and material wealth. It was up to their children to slowly adjust to their new roles as a mamleches kohanim v'goi kadosh - as revealed to them at Har Sinai.

Looking at things in this light, the passing of the first generation in the midbar was an incidental consequence of not being allowed to enter Eretz Yisroel. Their passing was of (seemingly) natural causes, not because of excessive heat, starvation or thirst. They died peacefully surrounded by the ananei hakavod (the Heavenly clouds), and in the presence of their families.

FORTY YEARS - TIME TO UNDERSTAND

Chazal (our sages) teach us that it often takes forty years for a talmid to fully understand the teachings of his rebbi (see Avos 5:21, Avodah Zara 5b). This does not reflect on a lack of intellect on

the part of the talmid. It means that when we are focused on 'the here and now' we cannot always see the wisdom and the far-reaching vision of our rebbeim. Additionally some teachings take nearly a lifetime to fully understand - and absorb. (The great tzaddik Reb Yisroel Salanter z'tl often said that one needs to study mussar (ethics) for seventy years in order to properly prepare for one moment - those times when our patience and middos tovos are most tested).

GROWING - OVER TIME

Once the Jews had sinned by complaining to Moshe and by mourning the unflattering reports of the meraglim, Hashem responded by giving the Jewish people forty years to fully understand the towering heights that they would need to reach as a result of accepting the Torah.

Hashem slowly implemented this decree over forty years - Yom La'shanah - giving the next generation of His children the time to be able to proudly and confidently enter Eretz Yisroel - and fulfill His sacred mission.

Best wishes for a Gutten Shabbos

Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz and **Torah.org**.

Rabbi Horowitz is the founder and dean of Yeshiva Darchei Noam in Monsey, NY, as well as the founder and Program Director of Agudath Israel's Project Y.E.S. (Youth Enrichment Services), which helps at-risk teens and their parents. He is a popular lecturer on teaching and parenting topics in communities around the world, and is the author of several best-selling parenting tape and CD sets. For more information on Rabbi Horowitz's parenting tapes, visit <http://www.rabbiorowitz.com/> or call 845-352-7100 X 133.