

Beha'alosecha - Rabbi Lerner - May 19, 2013

The Spiritual Collapse after Leaving Har Sinai

11:1: *The people took to seeking complaints (KaMisonenim); it was evil in the ears of Hashem, and Hashem heard and He was angry; and a fire of Hashem burned against them, and it consumed at the edge of the camp (Biktzei Hamachaneh).* **Rabbeinu Bachya:** Kemisonenim means "like complaining"; they were whispering and murmuring complaints under their breath - other people could not hear them, but Hashem did and He was very angry at them. **Rashi:** they were looking for an excuse, a pretense to stray from Hashem and the religious life of Torah.

Rashi: What is *Biktzei Hamachaneh*? It means the ones who were designated for lowliness, the fringe, the lowest level of Jewish people, the outcasts - this could be the Erav Rav - that the complaints emanated from this group of people, composed mostly of Egyptians who left Egypt with the Jews for economic and not ideological reasons. Another interpretation from the **Sifri** quotes Rav Shimon Ben Menasya who says that it means the officers and Gedolim, those in the higher strata of society - they were the designated people, the greatest amongst them. So we see two opposite, extreme positions from Rashi.

11:4-6: *The rabble (Asafsuf) that was amongst them cultivated a craving, and Bnei Yisrael also wept once more and said "Who will feed us meat?" We remember the fish we used to eat free in Egypt, and the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now our life is diminished, there is nothing; we have nothing to look forward to but Manna.*

11:10: *Moshe heard the people crying in their family groups, each one at the entrance of his tent; and Hashem became angry, and in the eyes of Moshe it was bad.* **Rashi:** the families gathered and openly cried and complained in public. Another interpretation by Chazal from the Gemorrah in Yuma: They were crying with matters having to do with family life - they were crying about the restrictive laws of Gilui Arayos; they were angry about the change from an open society with no sexual limitations to a very restrictive one.

What was this all about the remembrances of good times in Egypt, of free meat, fish and vegetables? **Ramban:** while Bnei Yisrael did not have meat to eat every day in the desert, they did certainly have meat at times - they brought with them a great deal of cattle, and certainly the wealthier people had meat very frequently; they left with large herds, and we know from the story of the tribes of Reuven and Gad that they approached Israel with great numbers of flocks. So they certainly did have meat - what were they really complaining about? They also did have free fish in Egypt - the Egyptian fisherman would take Jewish slaves with them fishing, to have them do most of the work, and they would catch large amount of fish; they then allowed the Jews to take whatever they wanted of this great bounty. Egypt was also like the garden of Hashem with large amounts of vegetables and crops, and the Jewish slaves who were doing the growing and harvesting were able to eat what they wished as well. So these were not legitimate complaints.

Chizkuni: the Nile always overflowed its banks to water Egypt, and with the rising waters, fish came along; when the waters receded, the fish were left in puddles; it was a huge find for anyone who was around in Egypt.

Da'as Zekainim: when they complained and demanded meat, it was an improper way of asking because they had Manna which could taste like whatever you wanted - it granted their wishes. Furthermore, they had real animals when they left Egypt - it says they left with flocks and cattle. They did not use them up in the desert. It was not real meat they craved - they had

plenty of animals - the Gemorrah says it was all about Arayos. They wanted a more permissive society - they were crying about the laws of family life. This angered Hashem and Moshe. Moshe at this point said to Hashem that before this crisis he had helpers to assist him in carrying the burden of leadership - he had the same 70 elders from Har Sinai, the ones who ascended the mountain part way with Nadav and Avihu, as detailed in Mishpatim. So why does Moshe now claim he cannot carry the burden alone, as we see in 11:14: *I cannot carry this entire nation alone, it is too heavy for me*. Where were the 70 elders? They were the Misonenim who were struck down in 11:1 - these are the ones that Rav Shimon Ben Menasya was referring to - these high level people complained and were struck down - they were the 'designated ones,' and they were punished. As a proof of this, the Torah uses the word *Asafsuf* - the ones who were gathered - they were the chosen, the elite - the ones gathered - from the verb asaf. They were the ones struck down. They deserved this punishment of being burned - *Vativar Bom*. They were deserving of this because at the end of the Revelation they saw God and they ate and drank; Hashem did not punish them at that time even though they were indulging themselves after attaining such high spiritual heights; they were already shown to be wanting - they saw an insider's view of Hashem and they were still concerned about their physical needs and desires; they could not overcome their physical desires, their Yetzar Hara. Here, too, they were the ones who had a craving for physical things, and their punishment is administered now. This is why Moshe is now alone in the leadership position.

Meshech Chachmah: they were lusting for meat, even though they had their own flocks. It wasn't that there wasn't enough. What was missing for them was the freedom to eat meat in a simple way, free of religious obligations. During the 40 years in the desert, anyone who wanted to eat meat had to bring the animal to the Mishkan in the middle of the camp - they were forbidden to slaughter their own animals. They had to bring it as a korban, with part of it going onto the mizbeach, and part to the kohen. It was a big project with endless amount of halachos - they had to be Tahor, they had to bring it to the Mishkan, they had to sprinkle the blood, etc.. When it says in 11:4 that they remembered the meat they ate for free, **Rashi** says that the Egyptians didn't give the Jewish slaves anything - if they wouldn't give them straw to make bricks, they certainly wouldn't give them free fish, meat and vegetables; the word free here means free of the mitzvos. In Egypt there were no restrictions; now they had a mountain of mitzvos to climb in order to eat a burger. There was no longer any freedom in their lives.

Meshech Chachmah: goes on to say that eating meat was a big headache; they used to have "free fish" because there was no shechita involved, no halachos of blood, no need to bring the fish to the Mishkan - fish truly was free and that is why they longed for it. **Rav Kuperman**: one of the things the chachamim allude to here is that with fish one could not make any restrictions - there is no real fish blood, they don't get slaughtered like land animals, etc.

Why were Bnei Yisrael sick of the Manna? It was given in the zechus of Moshe (the water in the desert was because of Miriam's zechus, the clouds because of Aharon). Why is Moshe connected to the Manna? In Tehilim it says that the angels also eat Manna. It is ethereal food, spiritual food, with no physical substance. It can satisfy a human, but it does not create any sense of love or lust; only things that are animal-like create animal-like cravings. That is what meat does. That is why it says in Pesachim that an Am Ha'Aretz should not eat meat because if you don't have the restraining influence of Torah for balance, you only have the Yetzer Hara of eating meat, with animal cravings. Moshe was the only human being who ever lived who completely suppressed all of his Ta'ayvos. He was able to be completely celibate because of suppression of his physical desires. That is why he is linked to the Manna, because that is what

Manna is all about too - it satisfies you but does not create a Ta'aveh. This is what the Misonenim complained about - they wanted lusts and cravings - that is why they were angry that they couldn't get meat. The Manna was not helping with this. Moshe could not relate to it because he had no connection to meat; he had transcended his physical body. That is why he needed 70 new leaders who would be the ones to help pray to bring the meat, which was fulfilled through quail.

When we look at the immediately preceding section in the chumash, we have the two pasukim of Vayehi Binsoa and Uvenucho Yomar, which talks about the shechina resting amongst the thousands of Jews. According to the **Kli Yakar** these two pasukim were a sefer by themselves - it emphasized the importance of Peru Urevu. We learn from those pasukim that 22,000 Jews are needed to bring down the shechina, and therefore, there is an implied command to have a lot of Jewish children to enable the shechina to descend and reside amongst us. And to fulfill this, the people complained they had no Ta'aveh to be intimate because of the food they were eating; they 'desired desire' - they wanted to have Ta'aveh again.