

## Parshat Chukat 5777

Towards the end of the parsha the Bnei Yisrael are reaching the end of the desert and wish to pass through the land of Edom to get to Eretz Yisrael. However, Edom does not allow the Bnei Yisrael to pass through and Bnei Yisrael had to pass round their land. The Passuk describes that, 'וַתִּקְצַר נַפְשׁ הָעָם בַּדֶּרֶךְ', the people became disheartened on the way and they complained, saying

לָמָּה הֵעֲלִיתֵנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם לָמוֹת בַּמִּדְבָּר כִּי אִין לֶחֶם וְאִין מַיִם וְנִפְשָׁנוּ קָצָה בְּלֶחֶם הַקָּלִקֶּל

‘, Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in this desert, for there is no bread and no water, and we are disgusted with this rotten bread.’, namely the Mann.

Straight after the Bnei Yisrael complain to Moshe, Hashem punishes them striking the people with venomous snakes which bite and kill many people. Immediately the Bnei Yisrael realise they have sinned against Hashem and they start to do teshuva and beg Moshe to daven for them. Hashem tells Moshe to take a snake and place it on a pole so that anyone who has been bitten will look at the snake and they will live. The Mishnah in Rosh Hashana (3:8) teaches us that this is because the person would look first at the pole and the snake and then their eyes would continue upwards towards the Heavens, reminding them to commit themselves to Hashem and as a result they were saved.

When describing the copper snake, the pesukim 8 & 9 use the word ‘Vehaya’:

‘כַּל הַנְּשׁוּף וְרָאָה אֹתוֹ וְחָי עֲשֵׂה לָךְ שֵׁרָף וְשִׂים אֹתוֹ עַל גֹּס וְהָיָה - ‘make for yourself a snake and put it on a pole and it will be that those who are bitten will see it and live’ and

- אִם נָשַׁף הַנָּחָשׁ אֶת אִישׁ וְהִבִּיט אֶל נָחָשׁ הַנְּחֹשֶׁת וְחָי וְהָיָה - and it was if the snake had bitten a person, he looked at the copper snake and lived.

In the sefer Siyach Pinu written by Rabbi Yehuda Sharabi, he points out that the Gemara tells us that each time the Torah uses the word וְהָיָה it is where there is a component of simcha. But what happiness is there here when Hashem in punishing Bnei Yisrael? This situation surely can't be viewed with one of simcha! Rav Sharabi answers that according to early meforshim, the simcha was that when they looked at the snake and consequently to Shamayim, it didn't only help cure them from the snake bites it also cured them from any other illness or disease they may have been

suffering from. Therefore, this is where simcha was experienced during this situation.

Harav Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht ztl in his sefer Asufot Mearochot asks a different question. Why was there such a quick and harsh reaction to the people's complaint? What was so terrible about the Bnei Yisrael's dissatisfaction with the Mann?

Rav Goldvicht explains that the essence of the Mann is that it required the Bnei Yisrael to constantly turn to Hashem in order to receive their daily food. The Gemara in Yoma (76a) asks why the Mann was given daily rather than annually? Rav Shimon Bar Yochai answers by comparing the situation to a king who supplied his son with a year's supply of provisions. The son came to visit his father only once a year. The king therefore instituted day by day support, and thereafter enjoyed his son's presence every single day. Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to daven to Him every day so he sent the Mann daily as a vehicle to enable the Bnei Yisrael to return to Him each day. Rav Shimon Bar Yochai states that 'A father with four or five children to feed was concerned every day that perhaps the mann would not fall from heaven, and that they would all die from hunger. As a result, they would all direct their thoughts to their Father in Heaven.' This life may seem hard, only ever having sufficient food for that day, but its purpose was to keep the Bnei Yisrael close to Hashem.

This way of living is diametrically opposed to the snake in Bereishit -the nachash. The nachash is punished by having to eat the dust of the ground. The Kotsker Rebbe asks, why is this a punishment for the snake? Everywhere he turns he has food! The answer is that in giving the snake his food forever it meant he did not need a direct connection with Hashem anymore. In complaining about the Mann, the Jews were acting as if they wanted to be like the snake, wanting to have an ample supply of food without the need to turn to Hashem. As a result, Hashem punished them with snakes, as a direct rebuke for their actions. Hashem wants a constant relationship with us which was why the Mann was delivered daily.

Rav Hoffman understands that this demonstrates why the word וְהָיָה shows there is simcha and joy here. In placing the snake on the pole and causing people to look to Shamayim, they did teshuva, realising the importance of being close with Hashem. They therefore renewed their connection with Him and this indeed was a joyous feeling for them.

Based on a Shiur by Rabbi Yamin Goldsmith