

Enjoy Dinner- “Or Else!”

PARSHA INSIGHTS - CHUKAS (5757)

NOT TO COMPLAIN

“And they traveled from Hor Hahor by way of the *Yam Suf* [Reed Sea] to go around the land of Edom, and the people became discouraged because of the trip. The people spoke out against Hashem and Moshe, ‘Why did you take us out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread and no water, and we are disgusted with this insubstantial food’” (*Perek Chof Alef, Psukim Dalid and Hey* [chapter 21, verses 4-5]). *Rashi* points out that after Aharon’s death and Amalek’s subsequent attack, *Bnai Yisroel* [the Children of Israel] traveled backwards seven stages. This mournful situation prompted them to complain bitterly.

We must keep in mind that this was the second generation, the children of those who had already died during the years following the sin of the *meraglim* [spies]. As the *meforshim* [commentators] show us, *Parshas* [Torah portion of] *Chukas* is a major turning point in the Torah. *Perek Chof* marks the beginning of the narrative involving the grown children, the Jews actually eligible to enter *Eretz Yisroel* [the Land of Israel]. They were extremely sensitive and on guard that perhaps some event would cause THEM to lose their opportunity to enter the land like their parents. Thus, when things did not go smoothly, murmurings were heard from their mouths. The third *Rashi* on *Dalid* [4] expresses this idea.

What was their principal complaint? They were not satisfied with the menu! They referred to the *mon* [manna] as “*lechem hak’lokel*” [insubstantial, weightless food]. In fact, *Rashi* remarks that they were criticizing the supernatural properties of the *mon*, that it was totally absorbed in the body, producing no waste products. The word “*k’lokel*” is like “*kilkul*” [damage or destruction]. They claimed that eventually, the *mon* would swell and maybe even burst inside their stomachs. Can a human being continuously ingest food without eliminating any waste?

How could anyone complain about the *MON*? One approach is that many of these people had been “born into” the *mon* - they had lived at least most of their lives in the *midbar* [wilderness], and they were quite accustomed to this heavenly nourishment. It is well known that when one is used to something, he tends to take it for granted, no matter how precious and rare it may be. My *rosh yeshiva* [head of a religious school], Rabbi Berel Wein, often repeated this lesson to us. He emphasized that years ago, people only dreamed of *davening* [praying] at the *Kosel* [Western Wall], but now it is a given that we have access to this sacred site. Consequently, people sometimes complain about various inconveniences involved in traveling to *Eretz Yisroel*, temporarily forgetting the miraculous nature of what we presently have there. This is just an example, but it sheds some light on human tendencies and attitudes. The elaborate descriptions of the *mon* in the *parshiyos* [Torah portions] of *Beshalach* and *Beha’aloscha*, plus the Oral Torah in such places as *Yoma* 75, are enough to impress us regarding its superior worth and most pleasing taste(s).

What consequences resulted from this complaining? How closely was Hashem listening to their derogatory words? Please bear in mind that G-d rewards and punishes *midah kneged midah* [measure for measure], as proven by *Chazal* [our Sages] over and over. What was the appropriate punitive action for these ungrateful protesters?

The information we need is found in *Parshas Ki Saitzai, Perek Chof Gimmel, Pasuk Yud Dalid* [23:14]. “You must have a digging tool with the rest of your utensils...” To preserve the sanctity and cleanliness of their habitation, *Bnai Yisroel* were commanded to exit the area known as the *machaneh* [camp], in order to eliminate waste. Afterward, they were to cover it over with earth; only then would they be allowed to return to the camp.

The question is obvious: The *mon* was totally absorbed in the body, producing no unwanted matter. It was a spiritual sustenance, fitting for our existence in the *midbar*. If so, what need was there to exit the camp and take care of one’s needs? The *Gemara Yoma* 75B expresses this shock. The solution? The heavenly *mon* only generated waste products AFTER the Jews sinned with it. What transgression is being referred to by the *Gemara*? *Rashi* on the spot explains that it is the complaint found in our *parsha* - “We are disgusted with this insubstantial food” - *lechem hak’lokel*. As the above mentioned *Rashi* on *Chukas* interprets, they were predicting that the *mon* would be “*mekalkel*” - it would damage their bodies because none of it ever left them. *Bnai Yisroel* received an

appropriate penalty, meant to point out the wrongdoing. They said it was impossible for a person to live without using the bathroom, so Hashem went ahead and agreed with them! He showed them that He DOES listen to what we say, and we'd better be careful with our words. They can sometimes be used against us.

In summary, because *Bnai Yisroel* complained and doubted the value of the *mon*, predicting doom for themselves in the form of swelled bodies, Hashem caused the *mon* to behave inside them like a natural food. Consequently, they DID have a use for the digging tool mentioned in *Parshas Ki Saitzai*. This only happened to the second generation, whose complaint warranted such a punitive measure, directly corresponding to their words of discontent.

One point of clarification needs to be made. There is often confusion regarding the *mon* - where it is discussed in detail in the Torah. In brief, it started falling in *Parshas Beshalach*, and it is discussed at great length there. In *Beha'aloscha*, there were complaints and cravings for meat; this resulted in another review of the preciousness of the *mon*. Both of these incidents involved the first generation, those who had left Egypt. The episode in our *parsha*, *Chukas*, was with the second generation, as explained above. In the *Torah Temima* on *Ki Saitzai*, *Perek Chof Gimmel*, *Pasuk Yud Dalid*, letter *Samech Gimmel* [63], there is a misprint that must be noted. It says there that the complaint of "*lechem hak'lokel*" is in *Parshas Beha'aloscha*. As we showed clearly before from *Yoma 75* and *Rashi* there, these words DID constitute the complaint which caused them to need digging tools, but it is found in *Parshas Chukas*, NOT *Beha'aloscha*. It is so important to be aware of this, because the *Bnai Yisroel* in *Beha'aloscha* were still the first generation, while in *Chukas* they were the second.

The message we receive from this is quite obvious. If we have food to eat, let us never complain about it. Instead, we should always make sure to compliment the chef, as many of our *gedolim* [great Torah scholars] have done. This should happen at home or wherever someone has worked to prepare food for us. There are people in the world who do not have "what to eat", and there have been times of oppression and persecution, *lo aleinu* [not to us], when Jews have been deprived of the very necessities. Hashem IS listening to all our words. Let us only express our praises and *tefillos* [prayers], never words of complaint. The food is really delicious!

By Rabbi Moshe Heigh

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