

And the people took to seeking complaints; it was evil in the eyes of Hashem. The rabble among cultivated a craving... and they said, 'Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge, and the cucumbers, melons... But now our life is parched, there is nothing; we have nothing to anticipate but the manna.'" (11:1,4,5,6)

The chapter dealing with the "*misonenim*," complainers, demands interpretation. Let us address the following questions: First, they complained that they lacked meat. This is not true! The *Torah* (*Shemos 12*) clearly states that they took sheep and cattle with them when they left Egypt. Second, when they complained that they had received fish in Egypt for free, *Rashi* comments that "free" actually means that there were no "strings attached." They did not have to observe *mitzvos* in order to get food. They did, however, have to undergo backbreaking and degrading labor in order to receive whatever limited food they were given. It seems difficult to accept that the generation that was privy to the greatest revelation of all time, the giving of the *Torah*, would complain about having to perform *mitzvos* in exchange for food.

Third, in regard to their complaint concerning the "wonderful" cucumbers and melons that they were able to get in Egypt, *Rashi* explains that the manna did not provide a taste of these vegetables. They were able to experience the taste of everything else, but they were concerned about the cucumbers and melons! How petty can one be? Indeed, it is common knowledge that the food served in prison is not a culinary delight. In Egypt they were slaves subject to the most inhumane torture; are we to believe that they really yearned for the "food" they were served under such conditions?

When they complained about the manna, they said, "*Our life is parched.*" Should not their stomachs have been parched rather than their lives? Last, why did Moshe respond with such hostility towards them? They only desired some meat. Is that such a terrible thing to request?

In response to these questions, **Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita**, posits that human nature reveals the same hypocrisy today that was manifest by these complainers. They were probably not lacking any meat, and the absence of cucumbers and melons made little difference to them. Indeed, there was not a ring of truth to any of their purported claims. It is as *Rashi* comments on *pasuk 11*, "*They sought to find fault and accuse.*" They searched for ways to justify their non-observance of *mitzvos*.

This attitude is, regrettably, prevalent in today's society when those who have alienated themselves from *Torah* heap scorn and abuse against the *Torah*. They slander and denigrate anything religious. Their contempt for those who did not desert our beautiful heritage is quite apparent.

Blatant hypocrisy spews from their mouths. The same individuals who would not consider refraining from commerce on *Shabbos* or *Yom Tov* have no qualms about closing down entire businesses for self-proclaimed holidays. They open their hearts to the homeless on secular holidays, but they do not respond when an observant Jew comes to their door or an appeal is made to provide *matzoh* and wine for *Pesach*. They exemplify democracy in religion by doing whatever they want, proclaiming that no one need answer to a higher authority.

This is similar to what transpired concerning the complainers in our *parsha*. Although they had meat, they looked for something to complain about. This is indicated when they said, "Our life is parched." Their stomachs were fine; it was their subjugation of their lives to religion that had become a problem. They would rather be in Egypt, suffering inhumane persecution than be in the desert devoting their lives to Hashem. The more we delve into the character of the complainers of that era, the more we come to realize how many individuals continue to follow in their path today.