

And the rabble in their midst longed desire, and the Bnei Yisrael wept as well, and said, “Who will feed us meat?” (11:4)

Shortly after *Klal Yisrael* commenced their journey from *Har Sinai*, where they received the Torah, to *Eretz Yisrael*, the people began to complain. One who is not knowledgeable might err and view *Klal Yisrael's* foibles and shortcomings in the wrong light. Their failings have a negative connotation only in relationship with their incredibly high spiritual level. Having witnessed the greatest Revelation of all time, the slightest complaint becomes greatly magnified. Following the Giving of the Torah, *Klal Yisrael* earned the title of *Dor Deah*, the Generation of Knowledge, so acute was their conception of the Divine. Thus, a sin caused by such a base desire as the lust for meat becomes something indecorous for them, totally unbecoming a people of such an elevated spiritual stature.

Indeed, the **Sfas Emes** views the sin of the *asafsuf*, with their lust for meat, to be in the category of an *aveirah lishmah*, a sin committed intentionally, but with a positive spiritual goal in mind. It is still an *aveirah*, but to a lesser degree, and one which may be misconstrued by some as a *mitzvah*. *Hisaavu taavah* is literally translated as “desired (a) desire.” The people mistakenly thought that they could only remain connected to Hashem if He would restore their inner yearning for physicality – something they lost when they stood at *Har Sinai* and received the Torah. This must be explained, since what place is there for a physical desire in the service of Hashem? One would think that attaching oneself to Hashem demands increased spirituality – not greater physical craving.

Chazal teach us (*Pirkei Avos* 2:4), *Asei retzono kiRitzonecha, k'dei she'Yaaseh retzonecha kiRitzono*, “Do His will like your own will in order that He should do your will like His own.” A person who is observant, who attaches himself to *mitzvos*, connects himself to *kedushah*, holiness. The more one becomes sanctified, the more he begins to feel that fulfilling Hashem's will is his true identity. His connection to *kedushah* serves as a safeguard from sin, protecting him by preventing his base nature from undermining the level which he has achieved. As this process continues, man becomes more and more dedicated to the Almighty.

We should not ignore the evil desires within man, for they can be harnessed to bring him closer to G-d. When one analyzes the drive which motivates his advancement in the physical world – both good/practical and bad – one may derive what could be his spiritual potential. This may be accessed through a *kal v'chomer*, a priori logic. In other words, if in a lenient situation a certain stringency is true, how much more so is this true in a stringent case. Or, if “I” have so much energy, resourcefulness, acumen, drive and ingenuity for achieving my transient physical/mundane goals, how much more so is expected of me (because I am capable of it) in devoting myself to the service of Hashem.

Therefore, when one directs his physical drives toward the spiritual, by taking all of his *kochos ha'nefesh*, abilities and talents-- which he would otherwise expend on physical pleasures and values-- and focuses them all towards his spiritual ascendancy, he reaches a level in which all of his desires are targeted toward Hashem. The *Sfas Emes* now explains the above *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* in a novel manner. “Perform His will as your own (with the same enthusiasm, excitement and elan that you would expend for your own desires) in order that He make your desires like His. (Then, Hashem will actually mold your desires to be spiritual, like His.)

Let us now review some history. Prior to eating of the *Eitz HaDaas*, Tree of Knowledge, Adam *HaRishon* was *yashar*, straight, upright. He was created to yearn instinctively to live according to Hashem's dictates. He immediately gravitated towards good, since he had no *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, to cloud his judgment. This all came to an abrupt end once he ate of the *Eitz HaDaas*, which now created within him a mixture of good and evil, transforming his *avodas Hashem*, service of the Almighty, into a process of sorting through the good and evil. First, he had to recognize and eschew the evil – then, he was able to execute his actions in a manner appropriate for living a Torah life.

When Hashem gave us the Torah, we regained Adam *HaRishon's yashrus*, uprightness. No longer were the people hampered by the evil inclination pushing them towards the world's physical pleasures. They just were not interested. This spiritual utopia lasted but a short while, until the sin of the Golden Calf, after which the people's innate drive to do good disappeared. Yet, they still had no craving for the physical. The people were in limbo: no drive toward the spiritual; and no drive toward the physical. They felt that they must return to the pre-*Mattan Torah* state, during which they would have normal desires to overcome. In order to achieve this, they had to begin discerning between good and bad, pure and impure.

With this background in mind, the *Sfas Emes* explains the people's grievances concerning the *manna*. The people complained, *V'nafsheinu ye'veishah*, “And now our souls are dry. We have nothing to eat but the Manna” (ibid 11:6)

Nu – so what is so bad with *manna*? The *manna* was a spiritual food which sustained spiritually. How could a flesh and blood human be nourished by Heavenly food? We eat “real” food which nourishes our bodies, thus allowing our spirit to be sustained via its connection with the body. *Manna*, however, worked in the opposite manner, by sustaining the soul and allowing the body, which is connected to the soul, to receive nourishment. The process was turned around. Man receiving his proper nourishment depends upon his spiritual level.

What is man's primary state? If it is spiritual – then he will thrive on spiritual food, such as *manna*, which will, in turn, sustain his body. If he is primarily corporeal, *manna* is not for him. He requires “beef,” real food, to sustain his physical dimension. The Jews complained to Moshe *Rabbeinu* that their souls were dry. *Nafsheinu/nefesh* denotes the lowest level of man's soul (*nefesh, ruach, neshamah*). The *manna* descended to the earth in the *z'chus*, merit, of Moshe, who existed on the

spiritual plane of *ruach*. Thus, it was for someone of his spiritual level – not that of the people. They complained that the *nefesh* received no sustenance from a food designed for someone on the level of “*ruach*.”

With this understanding in mind, the request of the *asafsuf* for meat takes on greater practicality. They were neither simply hungry, nor were they obsessed with a lust for food. The *asafsuf* were conveying a compelling message: We are no longer on the level of eating *manna*. We desire “desire,” to once again feel physical pleasures, so that we could use them as a vehicle for attaining a higher level of worship. Apparently, every coin has two sides. What on the surface appears to be gross base desire is actually a plea for an opportunity to achieve spiritual ascendancy.