

## **The people were like those who seek pretexts of evil in the ears of Hashem. (11:1)**

Our *parsha* begins with the *Menorah*, relates the laws of *Pesach Sheini* and then, in what appears to be a sad turn of events, records a series of puzzling complaints originally initiated by the *eirev rav*, mixed multitude, with an added participatory voice from the people. It is not as if the complaints had any positive substance – or any substance at all. For the most part, they complained for the purpose of complaining, something atypical of a happy people who had recently been liberated from crushing servitude. They craved meat – and cried. They claimed they missed the free fish they had eaten as slaves – and the wonderful squash and watermelon, onions and garlic. Does this sound reasonable? *Rashi* observes that the *manna*, which was their daily staple, did not taste like these foods because they are injurious to nursing mothers. Perhaps this is what they were missing. Imagine being able to taste any food in the world, but, because they could not sense the taste of those few foods in the *manna*, they complained and cried. This was a nation that had the temerity to complain about meat, fish and garlic! Furthermore, why cry? Do mature people become emotional over food?

In “Wisdom for Living,” an adaptation of lectures from *Horav Noach Weinberg, zl*, the *Rosh Yeshivah* offers a powerful insight into the complaints leveled by the people. First and foremost, I have to underscore the fact that this was the *Dor De’ah*, generation of knowledge, men of great spiritual stature. Thus, their behavior, while it may have been questionable, is something we must work on understanding. These were not simple people. Their complaints were not ordinary complaints.

Ultimately, there is only one tragedy about which great people cry: being distant from Hashem. The generation which received the Torah from Hashem had only one thing on the agenda: being close to Hashem. A vacuum in their relationship with the Almighty was an unacceptable tragedy. When they noted that certain foods were being held back from them, they immediately realized that their *kesher*, bond, with Hashem had somehow waned. Something was amiss. When they were in Egypt, in the depths of their slavery, Hashem still provided them with free fish from the Nile River. If He did not supply them with fish in the wilderness, it meant that something was amiss. This meant that Hashem had found a deficiency in their behavior. He was moving away from them. It was not about fish or garlic; it was about Hashem and the Jewish People. For a tragedy of such proportion, one has reason to cry – bitterly.

If so, what did they do wrong? They had a reason to cry – and they did! Why punish them? *Rashi* teaches that the people complained that all they had to eat was *manna*. The *manna* was Divinely sent; it was excellent in so many ways; it tasted like almost anything a person could have possibly craved. The fact that certain foods were not included in its repertoire of “tastes” was by design. The people erred in not living with the belief that, “Everything Hashem does – everything – is for our good.” True, there were deficiencies, but these deficiencies were not a sign of G-d’s

abandonment. On the contrary, they were a sign of Hashem's deep, unabiding love for them. So, instead of viewing the scenario as a positive reinforcement of Hashem's love, they interpreted it negatively. For this, they cried.

Their erroneous conclusion was in and of itself an indication of a deep character failing on their part. They were lacking in the *middah*, character trait, of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude. They had received so much from Hashem: They were embraced by the *Shechinah* and surrounded by Clouds of Glory; they received water compliments of a rock, and a daily ration of *manna*. Veritably, they might have had a reason to think that Hashem was moving away from them, but, had they been sufficiently grateful for the multitude of Hashem's gifts, they would never have complained. They would have believed that whatever deficiencies they noticed in the *manna* was for their good. Had they trusted Hashem, they would have believed, they never would have questioned.

Let us face it: a bitter person is a difficult person to satisfy. He smiles only as long as he is being fed, entertained, and made happy. The moment something does not go as he expects, he flies off the handle with a stream of complaints. Anyone who has ever run a program for a group is acutely aware that some people always say, "Thank you," while others acknowledge your presence only when something does not meet their satisfaction quotient.

When the Jewish People came to Marah, they complained that the water was bitter. The *Baal Shem Tov*, zl, explains that *marim heim*, "they were bitter." It was not the water that was bitter. It was they who were embittered.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* concludes his thesis with an observation. Every one of us experiences some form of lack in life. No one has a perfect life. It is how we respond to our individual collective challenges which reflects our sense of gratitude to Hashem. Those who fail to truly appreciate the good that Hashem lovingly bestows upon us are likely to respond with complaints and negativity – to the point that they conjecture that Hashem has abandoned them. One who is grateful for everything will remain steadfast in his unstinting love of the Almighty. He will realize that it is all part of His Divine plan: His attempt to strengthen us; to guide our growth; to teach us how to cope with adversity and challenge.

Waking up in the morning is a perfect time to begin our day by appreciating Hashem's gifts. First and foremost, we wake up. There are those who, sadly, do not. Our daily *Modeh Ani*, thanking Hashem for this unparalleled gift, should be recited with feeling, imagining that we are in G-d's Presence and talking to Him, thanking Him for granting us another day of life. When we begin our day with such gratitude, we will continue to express our positive feelings of gratitude throughout the day.

Veritably, complaining is never a good thing – but, when the complaint is founded in error and nurtured in malice, it is tragic, because it bespeaks a person whose ills go deeper than an inability to cope with imperfection.

