

## These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael... between Paran and Tofel and Lavan, and Chatzeiros and Di Zahav. (1:1)

*Rashi* quotes *Chazal*, who explain that the names of these cities are actually allusions to specific sins committed by the Jewish People during their sojourn in the Wilderness. When Moshe *Rabbeinu* mentioned Lavan, he was referring to the *manna*. Lavan means white. When *Klal Yisrael* complained about the insubstantial food, ie. *manna*, they referred to it in a denigrating manner by mentioning its color. Why is the white color of the *manna* important? Apparently, on some level, their sin was associated with the *manna's* white color. What about the color of the *manna* made their words sinful?

The *Zera Shimshon* quotes a *pasuk* in *Beha'alo-secha* (*Bamidbar* 11:6), "Our bodies are dried out, for there is nothing at all; we have nothing but *manna* to look at." First, why did they seek a way to slander the unquestionably most extraordinary food that ever existed? Why did they need to complain?

Obviously, the problem was quite different. *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 129a) teach that someone who visits the doctor for a session of bloodletting should eat meat and drink red wine that day. Meat brings back the *nefesh*, which was lost when the blood (which is the human being's life source) was removed from the body and wine replaces the red color of the blood that was removed. The Jews complained that the traveling had taken a toll on their bodies. At times, it was necessary to have a good, thick piece of meat in order to restore their energy after the rigors of the road. Unfortunately, they had neither meat nor wine. *Manna* is an extraordinary food, which replaces the body's energy (as does meat), but it does not do the job achieved by the wine, which gave them their color. The *manna* was white. *Klal Yisrael* complained that they were missing "redness." They needed red, ie. wine and meat. *Manna* is white. Wherever they were, they saw white! What would rejuvenate their bodies after the difficulties encountered from their travels?

Having said this, the *Zera Shimshon* now explains the meaning of Moshe's rebuke. Moshe underscored their lack of gratitude. "You complained about the *manna's* whiteness" (when you sought a food that was red). *Chazal* teach that a smile [during which a person's lips are parted and the whites of his teeth are noticeable] is more important than the portion of food one gives to a poor man. In other words, it is not what you give, but how you give it. Showing someone the whiteness of one's teeth, ie, a smile, is a sign of love and friendship. The poor man needs that reinforcement more than the food he receives.

Moshe told the nation, "There is a specific reason that Hashem colored the *manna* white. It was Hashem's way of 'smiling' at you every morning when He sent the *manna* to your door. However, you chose to complain specifically about the color of the *manna* (without giving a thought to the idea that perhaps a positive reason was behind this choice of color). Yet, it was this whiteness that

you chose to denounce. You wept over the lack of 'red' color in your diet, essentially repaying goodness with evil. Hashem made a point not merely to send you food, but to accompany it with His message of love. You, in turn, turned to cast aspersion on His benevolence, on the very kindness that He showed you!"

I write this because it is so common for us to look a gift horse in the mouth and find fault in it. How often are we the beneficiaries of someone's heartfelt care, only to undermine his good and find fault in his motives? Why is this? First and foremost on the list has to be envy. People who suffer from this disease go through life painfully obsessed by the advantages enjoyed by others. Jealousy impedes contentment and satisfaction. When we compare what we do not have to what others do have, it reduces our ability to appreciate that which we actually do have.

Second, is they feel they deserve the benefits which they have received. The privileges and advantages are theirs because they have earned them. No one seems to remember when and how, but they certainly do. This is an immature form of entitlement, whereby we convince ourselves that *es kumt es mir*, "I deserve it!"

Third, is a form of entitlement which comes as the result of expectation. Ingratitude is the result of unreasonable expectations. I expect everyone to drop what they are doing in order to accommodate my sudden needs. It would be nice – but it is certainly not required. I expect others to give and give, yet I find every excuse in the world for me not to be on the giving end. We determine that Mr. "X" is wealthy; thus, he can afford to carry the entire project on his shoulders. Why should we participate? These expectations lead to ingratitude.

At the end of the day, I think ingratitude is the result of one's inability to accept the fact that it is not all about "him." At the root of all ingratitude is the love of one's own greatness. This attitude robs one of *hakoras hatov*, appreciation and gratitude to Hashem. He finds it difficult to accept that he is really a paralytic living from *neshimah l'neshimah*, breath to breath, by the grace of Hashem. We love our own glory and prize our own self-sufficiency; gratitude forces us to look reality straight in the eye and realize that it is all a façade. Our success has been manipulated by Hashem, Who has employed the services of a number of agents. They are all part of the scenario which we think we control. The first step toward paying gratitude is the realization that one is far from perfect and that what he has achieved has been Divinely ordained. He then realizes that every step of the way he should have taken a moment to say thank you – not just for the bread (manna), but for the way it was served (white).