

But they could not drink the waters of Marah because they were bitter ... He cried out to Hashem, and He showed him a tree, he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. (15:23,25)

Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl, related the following homiletic rendering of these *pesukim*. (Apparently, he had heard the exposition from a *Chassidic Jew*.) On the surface, the *pesukim* relate that, when *Klal Yisrael* came to a place which was (later) called Marah, bitter, they found the drinking water to be bitter. As a result, they were unable to drink, and they questioned the choice of rest area. *Moshe Rabbeinu* prayed to Hashem, Who instructed him to throw a certain tree into the water, and it became sweet. Water is a metaphor for Torah. *Be'er chafaruah sarim*, "Well that the princes dug" (*Bamidbar* 21:18), which is the *Shiras HaBe'er*, the song of praise rendered by *Klal Yisrael*, paying gratitude to Hashem for the well that followed the nation throughout the forty-year sojourn in the wilderness. It followed, regardless of elevation or difficulty of the terrain. *Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh* explains that water is a simile for Torah. The succession of places/encampments that were temporary homes to the people go higher and higher as they get closer to *Eretz Yisrael*. Likewise, he who devotes himself to Torah study will continue to ascend spiritually to a position of greater elevation.

Throughout *Chazal*, the Torah is likened to water. Thus, the nation finding bitter water can be understood from a Torah study perspective as the Torah student who wants to learn, wants to *shteig* in Torah, but finds it difficult because of the many hurdles he must overcome. For one, it is a question of economic responsibility, another finds that he is unable to adjust to the *chaburah*, group of people with whom he is learning; while yet another is dealing with various issues at home or in his community that wreak havoc on his ability to concentrate to the maximum, thus impeding his satisfaction and growth. The situation is "bitter." The waters of Torah have a somewhat bitter taste as learning properly becomes a greater challenge. What is he to do?

Vayoreihu Hashem eitz, the word *eitz* is translated as tree. It may also be viewed as being derived from the word *eitzah*, advice. Therefore, the response to the man's "Torah bitterness" is *vayashleich el ha'mayim*, he should throw himself into the Torah, thus demonstrating his desire and devotion to learn. When one ignores the impediments and says, "I am not allowing this to disturb my learning," he will eventually see the bitterness dissipating, to the point that *vayimtiku ha'mayim*, the water/Torah became sweet. Understandably, he must make the first move; Hashem will not do it for him. He will, however, help him up the ladder once it is evident that he is prepared to climb.

Pischu li Shaarei Tzedek avo vam odeh Kah. Zeh ha'sha'ar l'Hashem tzadikim yavo'u vah; "Open for me the gates of righteousness, I will enter through them and thank Hashem. This is the gate of Hashem, the righteous shall enter through it" (*Tehillim* 118:19,20). *Horav Dov Landau, Shlita*,

offers a similar explanation to the above *pesukim* included in *Hallel*. The psalm is discussing one who is *shoeif*, aspires, yearns, expresses a deep desire to be shown through the gates of righteousness, one who has a burning desire to achieve spiritual ascendency, but does not rely on desire, aspiration and yearning; rather, he is *avo vam*, makes a move to enter through them. He will be helped to enter through the gates. *She'ifah* without action on our part will not get one very far. We must make the move. Hashem will then welcome us.