

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Shraga Kallus

Your Responsibility

In Parshas Behaloscha, Moshe Rabbeinu is faced with a lot. Knowing this, he asks Hashem, “Why have you caused harm to befall this nation? Why have I not found favor in Your eyes?” (Bamidbar 11:11). It is an interesting comment, especially considering who Moshe Rabbeinu was. Moreover, Moshe Rabbeinu continues, “Did I give birth to this nation that it is my responsibility? From where do I have meat? I cannot carry the nation alone. And if this how it will be, kill me now, and let me not see me evil” (Bamidbar 11:12-15).

This set of Pesukim is striking. What does Moshe Rabbeinu mean that he cannot handle it anymore?

In thinking this through, it appears that Moshe Rabbeinu was saying to Hashem that he could not handle it. “What, Hashem, do you want from me?” Otherwise, Moshe said, he would rather die. In the next Pasuk, in fact, Moshe receives a staff of seventy elders. All of a sudden, Moshe is granted all this help, and prophecy is being granted to these elders, and meat is falling from Heaven.

The Torah seems to be implying that such an outcry to Hashem for the betterment of the Jewish people is reasonable. Telling Hashem that it is too much, and praying for Him to provide support toward an improved situation for the sake of the Jewish nation is what Moshe did. These Pesukim should give us chizuk, encouragement. What do

we want? Klal Yisroel to be happy and for them to be serving Hashem. Moshe worried about the entire Jewish people, and it was overwhelming. This was Moshe’s tefillah, and something I believe we too can request of Hashem.

As an equivalent, it is akin to someone who spends hours a day learning and struggles to grasp the material well. Turning to Hashem, ask, “Hashem, it’s too much. I spend so much time and effort learning. Please, I want to understand Your Torah.” Such a form of tefillah shows a longing, an earnestness, a desperation. Likewise, “Hashem, I can’t handle it with shemiras einayim (guarding my eyes). Please make it easier for me.” That is my sense of how Moshe Rabbeinu’s tefillah could be understood and applied to us today.

When you are faced with something and it is overwhelming, turn to Hashem and tell Him just that.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz zt”l sees in this comment of Moshe Rabbeinu a tremendously important life message. What did Moshe Rabbeinu mean when he rhetorically asked, “Did I give birth to the Jewish people?” And if he did give birth to them, would that have made a difference? If he had, then it would have been Moshe Rabbeinu’s problem?

The answer is yes. This is a powerful message for anyone who is responsible for others, whether it be parents, teachers or whoever else. If you have given birth to these children, and students are considered like children

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in the words of our Sages, then you can deal with it. A lot of people today cannot deal with things that come up for those under their care. But that's not what the Torah is teaching here. It's showing the opposite. If you are responsible for someone else, you can and you must care for them. And how does this work? If it is overwhelming, how can it be that I can do it? Where will I get the strength from?

Ask for it from Hashem. That's what Moshe Rabbeinu did. You will get the strength to deal with it.

Anyone who is educating someone else in any form because he wants to be in that position assumes the responsibility as if they have given birth to those children or adults. It is their responsibility until the very end. And how will this turn out? They will gain the *siyata dishmaya* (Divine assistance) that they need.

This is true in all areas of life. Today you see people getting married and lacking responsibility. When a woman gets married, she should feel that her husband takes care of her and she has nothing to worry about. The husband needs to daven to Hashem, but she should place her confidence and trust that her husband will be responsible and get things done. The husband has *bitachon* that Hashem will provide him and his family with everything they need. The wife, however, should feel secure that her husband will take care of her and that she shouldn't worry.

There was a woman who was very sick who constantly felt that her husband would make her better. Her husband wasn't a doctor or Kabbalist, but he gave her so much confi-

dence that he is taking care of her that she knew she is in good hands.

Our entire education is that Hashem is the One in whom we place our *bitachon*. And that is entirely true. There is also a place, however, that we are to follow in the ways of Hashem, and just like He is compassionate, so should we. And just like Hashem is responsible for those under His care, so are we to be.

If Moshe Rabbeinu would have been the one to give birth to the Jewish nation, and if in our own lives we assume that responsibility towards others, then through us Hashem will grant us the *siyata dishmaya* to take care of those people who are relying on us. Who is our responsibility? Our spouse, children, students, learning and on and on.

This is the antithesis of today's entitlement generation. If we believe that "everything is coming to me" then we cannot look outside of ourselves to be there for others. But if we live the mantra of responsibility, then we will have *siyata dishmaya*.

These building blocks start well before we have any responsibility over others. When we are in our younger, single years, we are training ourselves to be prepared for our future life experiences. When you take responsibility at that point when it is just you, you have taken the first step toward being ready for that future.

There are those whose global vision of responsibility is large and wide. Rav Gershon Edelstein zt"l was one such person. What was he doing during the last moments of his life? He was writing *mareh mekomos*, sources, for the shiur he planned on

giving. Why didn't he just tell them to learn through a *sefer* and work through the topic themselves? They were certainly capable students, and Rav Gershon certainly had a so-called excuse not give a shiur that day. After all, he was about to pass away. He was also 100 years old. But he felt the magnitude of his responsibility, if not to the entire generation, to his own students at the least. He wrote out the *maareh mekomos* early in the morning, writing line by line until his handwriting began to grow slanted. That was who he was. He knew that he was responsible. Why didn't he just say *Shema Yisroel* and be at peace by himself? Because he knew his responsibility, and he knew he needed to deliver his shiur to these students who were relying on him. And now that shiur will live forever, and through that, he will live on forever too. That *siyata dishmaya* is what will ensure the continuity of *Klal Yisroel* from one generation to the next. That will make strong children, happy marriages and diligent students.

That is what Moshe Rabbeinu is teaching us through these words. You get to a place where the only One who can help you is Hashem and you let Hashem know that. It's not expressed as a complaint or with hopelessness, but knowing that this is who you are and knowing that Hashem is the only One to turn to.

Rabbi Shlomo Farhi

Why Complain?

In the Torah, on the occasions the Jewish people complained, the Torah informs us what they complained about.

At one time, it was meat, water another time. But in our Parsha, the Torah states, "And the people were like complainers..." (Bamidbar 11:1)

and doesn't continue with any description as to what the complaint was about. It's strange. Why doesn't the Pasuk tell us what they were complaining about? Why does the Torah leave it unclear? The answer is that it was inconsequential what they were complaining about.

It can be with a child or an adult; oftentimes, adults are just big children. We can easily come up with reasons why we don't like something or someone. We made a decision and that's that. What is said subsequently or if an alternative perspective is provided is not accounted for.

I remember once giving several back-to-back speeches in London, and for one of them, as I was heading to the podium, I noticed a man asleep right in the very front and snoring. I proceeded to deliver my speech, sprinkled with various insights, stories and jokes. But none of it, at all, awoke the man. Only at the very, very end, after I had finished with everything and the crowd let out a applaud did the man awake.

The man who had invited me to speak had been sitting behind the man who slept through my speech. Lightheartedly, he leaned over to the man in front and asked, "So what did you think about the rabbi's speech?" The man turned back and said, "Eh, he didn't do it for me." I remember growing into a wide smile and laughing. The man had no idea who I was. I didn't even have the opportunity to put him to sleep during my speech because he was never awake!

When the Torah says that the Jews were "like complainers" and doesn't fill us in as to what they were complaining about, that is the very point. It makes no difference. Some people just want to complain in life, and whether they have something real and justified to complain about or not makes no difference. They'll still complain. They will do what they can to find something wrong.

I once had someone come up to me and ask if I could suggest a shidduch for his daughter. Although I generally

don't involve myself with shidduchim, having been asked, I gave it some thought and mentioned to the father something I had in mind. "Actually," I said, "from your description of what your daughter is looking for, it sounds like you're describing someone from our beit k'neset. What do you think about this guy?" The father shook his head. "Not for my daughter... Not for her." "Okay," I replied, thinking further about it. "What about this other guy?" It was a friend of the first boy, and he also fit the description of what the father was explaining. But again, the father wasn't interested. "Not for my daughter," he said again. "He's a great guy," I made clear. But the father was adamant. "Not for my daughter," he repeated. I then gave it some more thought, and mentioned a few more names. But none of them appealed to the father at all.

Eventually I realized. Who was for his daughter? No one. "Can I ask you something?" I said. "You said that your daughter has been waiting for a shidduch for a while?" "Yeah," replied the father. "Does anyone get suggested to your daughter not through you?" He had his answer ready. "No, everything has to come through me." It then clicked for me. "Your daughter's problem," I said, "is not that she cannot find a shidduch; she can't find a shadchan (matchmaker). Your daughter is not the problem, and these young men are not the problem; you're the problem. You're deciding before anyone comes into the picture that they are not suitable. Nothing ever gets started."

The Jewish people were like complainers. But what were they complaining about? That is irrelevant. They decided that they were in a complaining mood. How practical is this

to us today? Very. We all can identify with times when we complain about our life's situation.

I'll never forget the time it happened. I went to a hotel in Israel, and there was a fellow there yelling and screaming. I thought the worst had happened. It was horrible. It sounded like a verbal nuclear bomb, and hearing it, I stayed away.

In the meantime, I myself started looking for the mashgiach to run a few food-related questions by. I was directed toward the front desk, and lo and behold, who appears right there after me? The nuclear guy. Now he was screaming near the front desk at someone. It seemed like he was going everywhere and angry at everyone. Now wondering what actually happened to this man, I inched myself closer. Were all of his belongings stolen? Or worse, G-d forbid, did something happen to one of his children?

Who was he yelling at now? The chef. And what was he yelling about? The oatmeal was not hot enough. It was hot, but not hot enough. Evidently, the way you know it's hot enough is if you stick your finger in it. Realizing this, I went ahead with a little test of my own. I headed into the breakfast area and began counting how many different types of breakfast items were there. How many cheeses, bourekas, pancakes, cereals, eggs, granola, muffins, breads... on and on. The total? 145 items. And this man was losing his mind because one of them was not hot enough.

I had the opportunity to see the moment when the chef brought his oatmeal and it was hot enough. (I'm not sure what he used to heat it up; perhaps the fires of Gehinnom). The

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man sat down, stuck his finger in it, and pulled his finger out. Now it was hot enough.

He took a bite, and then pushed aside the dish. He didn't like the way it tasted now.

This story is laughable. The production it took to prepare the oatmeal hot enough was well beyond, and now what is the problem? He doesn't like how it tastes. Now why, before he turned the world upside down, couldn't he decide if he likes the way it tastes? Also, what about the other 144 breakfast items? What does this man see? The one item that is not to his liking.

And the nation were like complainers. Every person is given a choice in the morning when they wake up. And that is: what is today going to be like? Is today going to be a good day, a miserable day or an amazing day? We think that it will depend on what it's going to be. But, in fact, what it's going to be depends on what you're going to be. You look out the window in the morning and it seems like it's going to rain. You think, "Oh, it's done." At that point, you've already made up your time how you wish for your day to be.

When we wake up in the morning and say "Modeh Ani," we thank Hashem not for any other fact than He returned to us our Neshama and gave us another day of life. That enough is reason for us to bless Hashem. There are those who have trained themselves to find all the positive things in life. When they approach things this way, life is entirely different.

The Torah makes mention that when the Jews came to Marah and found no water, Hashem showed Moshe a tree, from which Moshe threw it into the waters and they turned sweet (Shemos 15:25). Why

was this location called Marah? The Torah states: "Because they were bitter" (ibid. v. 23). Who are the "they" in this Pasuk? According to some commentaries (Baal Shem Tov), it refers to the Jewish people. They were bitter, and what they saw was therefore bitter too. We see the world they way we are.

The tree that Hashem showed Moshe, what type of tree was it? We'd expect it to be sweet, something along the lines of sugar cane. But what in fact was it? It was a bitter tree itself. What then happened? Moshe threw the bitter tree into the bitter waters and the waters became sweet. But that is so strange. How can something bitter turn something sweet?

The story is told of the Baal Shem Tov and man who came to complain that he, his wife and his children had no room in their house. The Baal Shem Tov said, "I have an idea. Bring a chicken into your home. It is a segulah, auspicious practice, to have more room in your home." The man followed the advice.

The man soon returned to the Baal Shem Tov. "Rebbe, now we are more squished." Listening intently to the man, the Baal Shem Tov went on. "Okay... the next thing you need to do if you are squished is to bring all the goats into your home." "But Rebbe, there isn't enough room already as it is!" "Bring in the goats!" insisted the Baal Shem Tov. He did just that.

Now, there were chickens and goats running around, creating even more mayhem. "I get what you're going through," said the Baal Shem Tov. "I think the cows need to be brought in. That will do the trick." Bringing in the cows, now the family was squished wall to wall with livestock. The family could barely move, the

stench was terrible and the noise was unbearable. Returning to the Baal Shem Tov, the man expressed they he couldn't take it anymore. "Take everything out!" he told the man.

The man removed the cows, goats and chicken. Suddenly, the wife turned to her husband. "Wow, we have so much room!"

This story is the story of Marah.

Imagine someone is not making as much money as they want. Then, G-d forbid, their child gets sick. Wouldn't that person yearn for the previous days? Imagine the man was told, "Your child will get better, but unfortunately, you'll be making the same amount of money as you were before." The man would take that offer in a minute. Hashem showed the Jewish people that He will bring them to bitter waters and then He will show them a tree, and the tree will also be bitter. And what then happened? All of a sudden, the water became sweet. How did this happen? Because now, instead of having two bitter things, the Jews looked back at the water and were able to see the water as sweet. "At least when I only had the bitter waters, I didn't have the bitter tree."

But it's not just when you have more problems, you yearn for less problems. But rather, when you thought you couldn't manage, that it was too much and that you didn't have it in you... you now realize otherwise. When you now have two children, you realize that one child was a breeze. You are suddenly able to see your old situation with new eyes. If today will be a good day in your eyes, then everything that happens today will be seen through that lens. That is the question. Do we want to be the nation of complainers or the nation of blessers?

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