

Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash  
(office@etzion.org.il)

**The Manna and the Paschal Sacrifice**

**By Rav Yonatan Grossman**

Parashat Beshalach can be thought of as "The Parasha of the Journey." Having left Egypt at the end of last week's parasha (Bo), they arrive at Sinai in the middle of next week's parasha (Yitro). They remain in Sinai until the Book of Bemidbar (chapter 10). Thus, our parasha tracks the fledgling nation from their initial departure from Egypt until their arrival at Sinai.

**A) THE STRUCTURE OF THE PARASHA**

The Torah presents this journey through a precise literary structure:

1) **AN EXTERNAL ENEMY:** The first section of the parasha recounts the final stage of the nation's escape from their Egyptian oppressors. The splitting of the sea and the drowning of the Egyptians therein constitute, on one level, a gradual continuation of the plagues described in the previous parshiyot. We may even suggest that the drowning should be viewed as the eleventh and decisive plague to befall the Egyptians. Interestingly, though, this final plague occurs specifically outside the boundaries of Egypt, just as the nation had begun its journey towards Canaan.

2) **COMPLAINT OVER WATER:** Upon arriving in Mara, the people complain about thirst, as the bitter waters of Mara could not be ingested. Moshe manages to purify the water, and, we are told, "There He made for them a fixed rule, and there He PUT THEM TO THE TEST."

3) **COMPLAINT OVER BREAD AND MEAT:** The nation then encamps in the desert - in "Midbar Sin" - and complains over the lack of luxuries that they enjoyed in Egypt. In the aftermath of their grumbling, they are commanded to observe Shabbat, given the manna and the quail and, perhaps most significantly, the Glory of God is revealed to the nation for the first time - "They turned toward the wilderness, and there, in a cloud, appeared the Presence of God" (16:10). The text also cites a further, side-benefit of the manna: "In order that I may thus TEST THEM, to see whether they will follow My instructions or not" (16:4). [Interestingly, the concept of "nisayon" appears in the context of the manna in the Book of Devarim, as well.]

2a) **COMPLAINT OVER WATER:** Upon their encampment in Refidim, Benei Yisrael once again express their frustration over the lack of water. In this instance, Moshe hits the rock, which in turn produces an abundance of drinking water. This section concludes with the verse, "The place was named Massa u-Meriva ... because THEY TESTED God" (17:7).

1a) **AN EXTERNAL ENEMY:** The parasha concludes with the unprovoked attack launched by Amalek, as Benei Yisrael embark on their journey to Mt. Sinai. Led by Yehoshua, Benei Yisrael overpower their enemy.

Thus, the nation's journey to Sinai appears in the Chumash in a chiasmic structure. The journey begins and ends with the threat posed by a foreign enemy (Egypt/Amalek), and sandwiched in between are two incidents of discontent over the water supply (Mara/Refidim). In the middle of these events lies the centerpiece of the journey, afforded the longest treatment by the text - the request for meat in Midbar Sin. As indicated, this specific incident features several unique elements, which set it apart from the other complaints voiced by the people in this parasha. Most notably, this complaint is followed by a public revelation of the Shekhina.(1)

**B. PARALLELS BETWEEN THE MANNA AND THE PASCHAL SACRIFICE**

As we have seen, the major emphasis of the parasha seems focused on the complaints for meat at Midbar Sin. The centrality afforded to this incident begs for an explanation.

By way of introducing our approach, we will first examine the literary parallels between the giving of the manna and the section dealing with the "korban Pesach" (Paschal sacrifice), which we read last week in Parashat Bo:

1. "The whole Israelite COMMUNITY came to the Wilderness of Sin... on the fifteenth day of the second month" (16:1). Two superfluous expressions in the verse immediately catch our attention:

A) The term "the Israelite COMMUNITY" ("ADAT Benei Yisrael") appears in neither of the other two incidents of complaints; it is employed only here. This term calls our attention to the only point heretofore in the Chumash where it appears - in the context of the korban Pesach: "Speak to the whole COMMUNITY of Israel" (12:3). [Significantly, this expression repeats itself consistently throughout the section of the manna: "Say to the whole Israelite community... And as Aharon spoke to the whole Israelite community..." further underscoring the importance of the term in this context.]

B) Regarding this encampment alone (in Midbar Sin) the Torah informs us of the precise date. The Torah records the dates of no other stop along the way from Egypt to Sinai. It is impossible not to take note of the significance of this day, the fifteenth of the second month - exactly one month from the night on which the people offered the paschal sacrifice and were subsequently driven from Egypt.

2. Regarding the quail, God says, "Speak to them and say: By twilight [bein ha-arbayim] you shall eat meat" (16:12). The time of day - twilight - reminds the reader of when the korban pesach was to be sacrificed: "All the assembled congregation of the Israelites shall slaughter it at twilight" (12:6).

3. "This is what God has commanded: Gather as much of it [the manna] as each of you requires to eat, as omer to a person for as many of you as there are; each of you shall fetch for those in his tent" (16:16). God warns the people not to collect more manna than was required for the members of their household. A similar guideline applied to the korban pesach, as the size of the sheep selected for each home was to correspond to the needs of the respective family. The size-restriction of the korban pesach resembles its counterpart regarding the manna linguistically, as well: "Each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household. But if the household is too small for a lamb, let him share one with a neighbor who dwells nearby, in proportion to the number of persons: you shall contribute for the lamb ACCORDING TO WHAT EACH HOUSEHOLD WILL EAT" (12:4). The same phrase, "ish lefi okhlo," appears in both contexts.

4. "Moshe said to them: Let no one leave any of it over until morning" (16:19). This prohibition regarding the manna bears a striking similarity to the law against leaving over meat from the paschal sacrifice: "You shall not leave any of it over until morning" (12:10). That which was left over of the manna would melt; the leftovers of the pesach would be burnt.

5. When presenting the laws of the manna, a special regulation applied on Shabbat: "Let no one leave his place on the seventh day" (16:29). Similarly, regarding Pesach night, the people were ordered, "None of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning" (12:22).

6. Additionally, a prominent figure reappears during the incident of the manna. After having "disappeared" throughout the journey from Egypt (including the splitting of the sea and Mara), Aharon resumes his former stature when Benei Yisrael arrive in Midbar Sin. The last point at which Aharon had assumed a leadership role was during the instructions regarding the korban Pesach.

### C. DOES DIVINE PROVIDENCE APPLY IN THE DESERT?

The key to understanding the significance of this parallel - between the complaint for meat in Midbar Sin and the korban pesach - lies in the actual complaint itself:

"The whole Israelite community grumbled against Moshe and Aharon in the desert. And the Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the Hand of God in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, when we ate our fill of bread! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to death.'" (16:2-3)

The people's "nostalgic" depiction of Egypt focuses on two elements. First, they describe Egypt as a place where people

die "by the Hand of God." Second, Egypt provided them with an alleged abundance of food ("flesh pots", "fill of bread"). This latter component fits appropriately into context - the people are now expressing their disapproval of the food supply in the desert. But why do they characterize Egypt as a place where people perish "by the Hand of God"? As part of their objection to desert life, shouldn't they present Egypt as specifically the land which facilitates life? Furthermore, these two apparently critical characteristics of Egypt seem to form the basis of the continuation of the verse:

1) "For you have brought us out into this wilderness:" As opposed to Egypt, where their existence was governed by the Almighty Himself, "you," Moshe and Aharon, took us out from Egypt.

2) "To starve this whole congregation to death:" In the desert, the people encountered the threat of starvation, in contradistinction to the bounty of Egypt.

Another textual subtlety demands our attention and may prove relevant to the understanding of the incident in Midbar Sin. While presenting the people's complaint in Midbar Sin, the Torah adds one word, which does not appear in the other two incidents of complaints:

\* In Mara, the Torah states: "The people grumbled against Moshe, saying, 'What shall we drink?'" (15:24).

\* In Refidim: "The people quarreled with Moshe, and they said, 'Give us water to drink'" (17:2).

\* Here, in Midbar Sin: "The whole Israelite community grumbled against Moshe and Aharon IN THE DESERT. And the Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died...'"

For some reason, specifically in this instance the Torah reminds us that the people were situated in the desert, despite its earlier description of their location: "Setting out from Elim, the whole Israelite community came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai" (16:1). Not only does this added expression - "in the desert" - not provide any additional information, but it is less specific and detailed than the earlier account of their encampment. Wherein lies the significance of their complaint having taken place specifically in the desert?

Evidently, the setting of this incident - the desert - constitutes an essential ingredient of the people's complaint. Just as the text records the actual content of each complaint, here the Torah emphasizes that this complaint was expressed in the desert, as this detail forms a critical component of the nation's discontent.

In effect, the people assess their existence in the desert in reference to their experience in Egypt. They contrast these two environments not only in terms of the availability of food, but also, and perhaps primarily, from a spiritual or theological perspective. As opposed to the "Hand of God" which they witnessed in Egypt, they now find themselves under the care of

Moshe and Aharon, who have taken them into "this desert." Does the "Hand of God" extend into the wilderness, or does the Almighty reign only in populated areas such as Egypt? The people associate their food shortage with their religious perspective, viewing Moshe and Aharon as the ones who took them from Egypt, and thus responsible for their hunger. God has no control over the wilderness; that is why there is no food. Thus, "If only we had died BY THE HAND OF GOD IN THE LAND OF EGYPT" - not by the hands of Moshe and Aharon.

In this sense, the nation's complaint must be understood in light of the religious beliefs which pervaded the ancient world. The notion of a deity who reigned supreme in a given setting (or against certain nations), but was powerless in other settings (or against other nations), was quite common. Benei Yisrael may very well have been misled by this theological misconception, that one who leaves the city for the desert forgoes the protection of the merciful god, only to be subject to the demons and spirits which indiscriminately control the uninhabited wilderness. It would seem that this grave error forms the basis of this specific complaint.

#### D) A TWO-TIERED SOLUTION TO A TWO-TIERED CRISIS

The solution to this shortage, then, could not be solved merely by the provision of food. Whereas in Mara God offered the straightforward solution of sweetening the bitter waters, in Midbar Sin the solution could not be so simple. Here, the people expressed a fundamental misconception; they had to be taught that the Almighty's control extends beyond the boundaries of Egypt, that He wields unlimited control throughout the universe, even in the desert.

Thus, the verses relate to both elements of God's response to the people's complaint: the gastronomical element, of feeding the hungry nation, and the spiritual component, of resolving the theological crisis that had overcome the nation. Here I would like to stress one particular aspect of the two-tiered solution, an aspect with which we began our shiur.

Undoubtedly, the problem of hunger was solved by the supernatural arrival of quail in the Jewish camp. In response to the people's longing for the "pots of meat" which they enjoyed in Egypt, God provides them with an abundance of poultry in the desert. Additionally, it would seem that the spiritual dilemma - the doubts regarding God's Providence in the wilderness - was resolved by the public revelation of the Shekhina. This most unique occurrence would never have been expected in the context of a mere petition for meat. (We encounter this type of public revelation at Mt. Sinai and on the eighth and final day of the consecration of the Tabernacle. In both those instances, the revelation was preceded by an intense period of preparation, and the incidents themselves demanded, by their very nature, the overt and public manifestation of God's Glory.)

Clearly, this revelation serves as a direct response to the people's ambivalence towards the reality of the "Hand of God" in the desert. The verse underscores the fact that the Shekhina appeared specifically in the desert: "They turned toward THE DESERT, and there, in a cloud, appeared the Presence of God."

Thus, the people learned that God does, in fact, reign in the barren wilderness as well.

However, this basic tenet cannot be sufficiently absorbed into the national mindset through a single incident alone. The educational process demands the constant reinforcement of basic values, until they become second-nature and part of one's routine. The manna comes to facilitate this innate awareness. This heavenly bread descended miraculously each morning, with a double portion appearing on Friday in anticipation of the absence of manna on Shabbat. Each morning, the people experienced first-hand the Almighty's providence in the desert. The people were warned strictly not to take more than was required for each day. Indeed, each day they had no choice but to trust that God would provide their needs, that He would sustain them for forty long years of wandering through the empty wilderness. Gradually, the realization of God's providence in the desert would become self-understood, no longer the subject of any question or confusion.

The aforementioned correspondence between the manna and the korban pesach serves to transmit this critical message. As we saw in our shiur last week, upon offering the korban pesach the people transformed their homes into God's altars, so to speak, or, in other words, the homes together with their inhabitants were dedicated to the service of God. The Shekhina thus descended upon their homes, just as it descends upon the altar in the Tabernacle or the Beit Ha-mikdash. As the manna fell from the sky, the people were shown that God's descent to sanctify His nation extends beyond the borders of Egypt and into the wilderness. The heavenly bread reminds the nation of the paschal sacrifice, of the Shekhina's appearance and its obvious intervention in Egypt. This reminder occurs consistently, each morning, as the head of each household collected just enough provisions for one day. Each morning, the manna reinforced the notion that God supervises the entire world, and specifically over His nation, providing for them in all places and under all circumstances.

#### ENDNOTES:

(1) In many ways, the trip from Egypt to Sinai resembles the second journey depicted in the Chumash, that of Benei Yisrael from Sinai to Arvat Moav. An interesting parallel exists between the complaints and wars described in Parashat Beshalach and those found in the Book of Bemidbar, from Parashat Beha'alotekha through Parashat Chukat. An elaboration of this correspondence appeared in my VBM shiur last year on Moshe's sin of hitting the rock.

(Translated by Rav David Silverberg)

Visit our website: <http://etzion.org.il/en>