

# MESHECH CHOCHMAH

## Parshas Beha'alozecha

### “Who will feed us meat?”

וְהָאֶסְפֶּסֶף אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבּוֹ הִתְאוּוּ תַאֲוָה וַיֵּשְׁבוּ וַיִּכְבּוּ גַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִי יֵאָכְלֵנוּ בָּשָׂר

*The rabble that was among them desired a desire, and the Bnei Yisrael also wept more, saying, “Who will feed us meat?” (11:4)*

What is the meaning behind this desire for meat? Interestingly, the pasuk does not say that they “desired meat,” but rather that they “desired a desire... saying ‘Who will feed us meat?’” What is behind this elongated phraseology?

Additionally, in the course of Hashem’s response to the people’s demand, He tells Moshe to assemble seventy elders, whereupon Hashem will bestow His spirit on Moshe and it will then spread to the elders.<sup>1</sup> How is this related to the people’s desire for meat?

#### **MANNA, MEAT AND THE DESIRE FOR DESIRE**

The Meshech Chochmah explains. The manna was entirely spiritual in nature, to the extent that the Gemara<sup>2</sup> states that it is the food which is consumed by the ministering angels. This being the case, the manna did not contain within an element which would promote physical desire within those who ate, as is the case with physical food. Even plants are described by Chazal as experiencing desire,<sup>3</sup> and this quality exists to an even greater degree within living beings, such as animals and birds, and this is imparted into those who consume them.<sup>4</sup> As such, as long as the people were eating only manna, they felt deprived of the faculty of physical desire. Therefore, since they “desired a desire,” i.e., they desired to desire, they demanded to be given meat that would impart this desire to them.<sup>5</sup>

1 Pasuk 16.

2 Yoma 75b, based on Tehillim 78:25.

3 See Bereishis Rabbah 41:1.

4 It is with this in mind the Gemara states (Pesachim 49b) that an am ha’aretz (*a person ignorant of Torah*) is forbidden to eat meat. Without the tempering effect of Torah wisdom, the desire he attains through eating meat is liable to lead to a negative outcome.

5 In this regard, the Meshech Chochmah explains the comment of Chazal that when pasuk 10 states that the people were “crying in their families (בְּכֵהָ לְמִשְׁפַּחֲתָיו),” it means they were crying

## THE MANNA AND MOSHE RABBEINU

The spiritual nature of the manna is intimately bound up with the nature of Moshe Rabbeinu. The Gemara informs us that the manna fell in the merit of Moshe. As such, there was a parallel between the manna and Moshe who served as the conduit for its descent into the world. Moshe Rabbeinu himself had attained a highly spiritual nature, and indeed is referred to by the Torah as “אִישׁ הָאֱלֹקִים,”<sup>6</sup> a quintessentially Godly person who no longer desired physical things. In keeping with this, following the giving of the Torah and with Hashem’s endorsement, he separated from his wife and devoted himself entirely to receiving prophecy from Hashem.<sup>7</sup>

This is the meaning behind Moshe’s exclamation upon hearing that the people were demanding meat: “מֵאֵין לִי בָשָׂר לָתֵת לְכָל הָעָם הַזֶּה” – From where will I get meat to give to this entire people?<sup>8</sup> Moshe was, in effect, saying: “My nature does not enable me to serve as a conduit for physical food such as meat!”

In response to this objection, Hashem instructed Moshe to gather around him seventy elders, who would experience Divine spirit as it “spilled over” from Hashem’s communication with Moshe. As a result of this attachment to Moshe, these elders would serve as a form of additional link in this Divine influx from Hashem to the people. Since these seventy elders, elevated of status though they were, were nonetheless possessed of all physical faculties, including that of physical desire, they were able to allow for the provision of physical food for the people in the form of meat.

## HORIZONS BEYOND THE AVODAH

In an alternative explanation of how the appointment of the seventy elders constituted a response to the people demand for meat, the Meshech Chochmah suggests that it related to events described in recent parshiyos. As a result of the people’s involvement in the *chet ha’egel*, the firstborn among them had been replaced by the Kohanim and the Leviim for purposes of the avodah in the Mishkan. In light of this, the people felt disenfranchised from spiritual endeavors and distant from the possibility of any meaningful spiritual attainment. As such they reasoned, why should we subsist on manna which is meant to develop and promote a spiritual states when we are barred from all spiritual matters of significance?

To this, Hashem responded by instructing Moshe to gather seventy elders from among the people, who would be able to partake of Moshe’s communication with Hashem, in addition to forming the first great Sanhedrin. The message for the people was this: The avodah may indeed have been transferred to the Kohanim and Leviim, but performing the avodah in the Mishkan is not the only meaningful spiritual endeavor. Anyone from any tribe who elevates himself can aspire to become gathered around Moshe and become a receptacle for the Divine Presence itself! As such, the spiritually nurturing quality of the

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about matters that pertain to family life, i.e. all the extended family members that they were now forbidden by the Torah to marry. Rav Copperman in his commentary explains that in contrast to the way this comment is usually understood, i.e. that they were bemoaning the fact that they could no longer marry whoever they wanted, the Meshech Chochmah explains that they were complaining about the fact that they felt distant from the desire for such matters.

6 Devarim 33:1.

7 See Shabbos 87a.

8 Pasuk 13.

manna should be appreciated and valued by all!

### **WHO GATHERED THE QUAILS? – TAKING NOTE OF TAAMEI HAMIKRA**

In response to the people's demand for meat, Hashem brought an abundance of quails into the camp. Pasuk 32 states: "וַיָּקָם הָעָם כָּל הַיּוֹם הַהוּא וְכָל הַלַּיְלָה וְכָל יוֹם הַמָּחָרֶת וַיֹּאסְפוּ אֶת הַטְּלִי" The simple translation of the opening phrase is: "The people rose up all that day and all the night." Interestingly, the Targum Yonasan ben Uziel limits the scope of this phrase, saying: "And those among the people who lacked faith rose up etc." Indeed, says Meshech Chochmah, it is reasonable to assume that the righteous among the people realized that they had erred in asking for meat and it would be a source of blessing nor have a beneficial outcome, and hence refrained from partaking of it.<sup>9</sup> Having said that, the pasuk itself does not seem to qualify its description of "the people" rising up to collect the quails.

However, if we look closely at the taamei hamikra (cantillation notes) on these words, we will notice something quite unusual which may constitute support for the Targum's comment. The taam on the word הַיּוֹם is called a *telisha ketana*, and requires a minor pause. This is rather difficult, since the word which follows – הַהוּא – is directly connected to it, forming together one phrase: הַיּוֹם הַהוּא – on that day. As such, there should be no pausing between the two words!

What are we to make of this situation?

In establishing a pause between the words "הַיּוֹם" and "הַהוּא", the pasuk is effectively breaking the exclusive connection between these two words. This means that the word "הַהוּא" is no longer limited to qualifying the word "הַיּוֹם"; rather, its qualifying effect extends to another term within the pasuk, namely, the word "הָעָם". It is as if the pasuk says "וַיָּקָם הָעָם הַהוּא וְגו'" – *That people rose up etc.*, referring to those among the people who had originally been the cause of the complaints, and who persisted in collecting the meat that they had requested regardless of the fact that it was not bestowed with Divine favor.

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9 Moreover, the following pasuk recounts how those who partook of the quails were afflicted with a deadly plague. This clearly did not happen to the majority of the Jewish people of that generation.