

Be'ha'alotcha 5778

BS"D Parashat Be'ha'alotcha 5778

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Everything in this world has a substitute

Eight times in his commentary on Chumash, Rashi asks, "lama nisma'cha" ("why did the Torah choose this particular sequence of verses?"). Meaning: since the episodes of the Torah do not always appear in their chronically historical sequence, nor is there always a logical human explanation for mitzva B to follow mitzva A, it is important to investigate the sequence of the Torah text.

Even though this question of lama nismacha could be posed almost everywhere in the Torah, Rashi does so in only eight places. The conclusion is that the lessons to be learned from the sequence of these eight places are of a special nature. One of these places is the link between the final episode of our parasha, Be'ha'alotcha, where Miriam questions Moshe's decision to leave the family unit and next week's parasha, Sh'lach which opens with the sin of the Meraglim (the scouts) who spoke disparagingly of Eretz Yisrael.

Rashi explains the sequence on the background of the shared sin of lashon hara in both episodes – Miriam speaks inappropriately against her brother, as do the Meraglim against Eretz Yisrael.

Rashi is certainly correct in pointing out what is common between Miriam and the spies, but what remains difficult is

the unusual harshness with which Hashem treated these sinners: Miriam was smitten with tzara'at, and the Meraglim died a horrendous death.

I suggest:

Parashat Be'ha'alotcha is replete with many diverse themes:

1. The menorah, hewn out of a solid block of gold
2. Consecration of the Le'vi'im
3. Pesach Sheni on the 14th of Iyar
4. The clouds over the Israelite camp
5. The silver bugles (chatzotzrot)
6. The manna
7. Choosing 70 members for the Sanhedrin (Moshe was the 71st)

At first glance, it is difficult to find a reason for these diverse subjects to appear in the same Parasha. However, they indeed share a common denominator – each one is either a substitute for something, or can be substituted by something else:

1. The golden menorah, which was fashioned from one solid block of gold, may be substituted by any other metal, which may be welded or pieced together in any fashion and need not be made from a solid block of that metal.
2. The Le'vi'im are substitutes for the first born (bechorot), who forfeited their privilege to perform the sacrificial duties.
3. Pesach Sheni on the 14th of Iyar is a second opportunity for anyone who was halachically unable to bring a korban Pesach on the 14th of Nissan.
4. The clouds, which protected and guided the camp, changed from a cloud during the daylight hours to a cloud of fire during the hours of darkness.
5. The original silver chatzotzrot were set aside until future times and replaced with a second set.

6. The manna would change in taste according to the preference of the eater.
7. A total of 72 names were selected (6 from every tribe), from whom only 70 were to be chosen by a random lottery, making each one a potential substitute for another.

The parasha concludes with the Miriam episode, followed by next week's parasha of the scouts – both receiving severe heavenly punishments.

The Torah is teaching us that everything in the world – the menorah, the firstborn, etc. – has a substitute (the cemetery is filled with people the world cannot exist without). Everything, that is, except for two things which are above any possibility of substitution – the Torah and Eretz Yisrael. Moshe is the personification of Torah in this world. To speak disparagingly of Moshe, as Miriam did, is to defile the Torah. Miriam knew that her brother was the wisest and holiest of men, but in her eyes, Moshe was still a man prone to mistakes as everyone else. But she was mistaken. Moshe was outwardly a "man," but inwardly he was now different than anyone else in the world. Miriam was not cautious in her criticism, and for this she was harshly punished.

To speak disparagingly of Eretz Yisrael in any way is a Chilul Hashem – and for this the Meraglim were so harshly punished, because they made the same mistake as Miriam. They saw Eretz Yisrael as one views any other place on earth – water, hills, vegetation – a beautiful land, but no different than most places on earth. They saw the exterior of the land; but they did not comprehend that just as Moshe was "different" from any person who ever lived, so too is Eretz Yisrael different than any place on this planet – and for this they were punished.

Just as Christianity, Islam and Buddhism can never replace the Torah and Judaism, so too no place on this planet or in the created universe can replace the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael.

The towns of Satmar, Belz, Lubavitch and Lakewood can never attain the kedusha of the most remote piece of desert in Eretz Yisrael.

All the yeshivot and synagogues in the USA put together do not contain the kedusha of a football field in Eretz Yisrael.

If I live a thousand years, I will never understand how a religious Jew can willingly choose to remain outside the Holy Land when the gates to Eretz Yisrael are open wide and our mother Rachel calls out to her children to return home (Yirmiyahu chapter 31).

But perhaps the answer lies in the following story:

A man was climbing a high mountain, when night fell and the pouring rain created zero visibility. He slipped and began falling to certain death. Suddenly he put out his hand and grabbed a branch jutting out of the mountain side and found himself suspended between heaven and earth.

He began to pray. A thunderous voice emerged from nowhere. "Do you believe in Me?" the voice asked. The poor fellow cried out, "With all my heart and soul, I believe in You."

"Do you believe I can save you?" HaShem asked. "I believe with every sinew in my body that You can save me."

"In that case," thundered the voice, "LET GO!"

The following morning, they found the man hanging on to the branch and dead of hypothermia, when between him and solid ground was a distance of 10 centimeters.

The lesson to be gleaned from this story: some people can't LET GO, even when HaShem comes to save their physical and spiritual lives.

Shabbat Shalom,

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