

Matot 5779

BS"D Parashat Matot 5779

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We were as dreamers

Sefer Bamidbar contains the history of our wanderings in the desert up to the time the Jewish Nation finds itself on the banks of the Jordan River preparing to enter the Promised Land.

As we approach the end of Sefer Bamidbar, I would like to recall three sequential parshiot, Shlach, Korach and Chukat. Shlach brings us the unfortunate episode of the miraglim, Korach relates the organized rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership and Chukat begins with the tahara (purification) process of one who comes into contact with a corpse.

What makes these three parshiot unique is their time frame. Shlach occurs in the second year of our sojourn in the desert, as most likely does the middle parasha, Korach. Parashat Chukat finds us 38 years later when Aharon and Miriam have already passed away. Hence, the three parshiot cover 38 years of our wandering in the desert.

How odd! Just look at recent history as evidence of the tumultuous and restless nature of the Jewish people. The tiny State of Israel has not receded from the headlines of the world since its inception. The Jewish people have affected the world in all aspects of life more than any other nation, as

the great Hebrew author Shai Agnon said in his acceptance speech when he received the Nobel prize for literature, "The Jewish nation comprises about one quarter of a percent of the world's population. According to this, how many people of the eleven award winners tonight should be Jewish? Obviously eight!"

It would, therefore, be logical to conclude that the Jewish nation under the leadership of Moshe and Aharon experienced numerous events in the 40 years in the desert. Where is a description of these gripping events that this mysterious mass of people experienced as they were sustained miraculously in the arid desert with food and water? Where is a description of the spiritual-national phenomena as this mass of people were freed from slavery to give to the world the human "road map" of morality? The 40 years and their adventures are swallowed up in only the three parshiot of Shlach, Korach and Chukat.

The answer lies in the fact that events and changes take place in the life of individuals and nations – events that fill thick volumes of history. Then an event comes along so huge and revolutionary that it obscures all previous events and renders them anachronous.

The Torah's objective is to teach us that, now when the Jewish Nation is getting closer to the hallowed land of Eretz Yisrael, what consequence is there in describing the desert experience?

We find another precedent for this. During the Second Temple period, many miracles occurred in Eretz Yisrael (as they do today) – so many that the rabbis declared a ban on fasting on the dates of these miracles, and they drew up a list of days called "megilat ta'anit" (days when one is not permitted to fast). However, when the Temple was destroyed, the megilat ta'anit was nullified. These days were no longer of any consequence, because they were eclipsed by the new catastrophic events.

We of this generation are witnesses to the truth of this phenomenon.

For thousands of years, Jews were loyal and productive citizens of the major countries of the world. The Jews' contribution to the economic and moral success of countries such as France, England, Russia, Morocco and Persia was important at the time. However, the moment the Jewish people returned to Eretz Yisrael 71 years ago, all previous history became a matter for dustbins of history. This is what King David meant when he wrote in Tehillim, "ha'yee'nu ke'chol'min" (we were as dreamers). When the redemption comes, all previous experiences will become as a dream.

Having experienced leaving the galut to return home to Eretz Yisrael, I can say, "ha'yee'nu ke'cholmin".

The Zohar says that on the first night when people come to Eretz Yisrael to stay, they are given an additional "neshama" (soul), as if they are born anew. Just as a newborn infant cannot remember from where he came, so too the life in Eretz Yisrael is so pervasive as to render a person's former experiences in the galut as a dream.

Thousands of our brothers and sisters have arrived here through the efforts of Nefesh Be'Nefesh, to join with the 100,000 or so Americans who came here in the last 71 years. The big question is why so few from a community that numbers several million?

In my view, the Jews of America are blameless. The blame is clearly on the shoulders of the leaders who contribute to extending the galut by not coming themselves and thereby projecting a message that nothing really happened in 1948.

I propose that the contract of a rabbi be limited to five years, after which time he must come on aliya with the financial help (in the form of severance pay) from the community. While the rabbis who encourage the building of new

shuls or yeshivot might appear to strengthen Yiddishkeit, they are just another nail in the coffin called – galut.

There is still some time to think, to plan, to decide and to implement. A new dawn has arrived for the Jewish Nation. To reject it is to become an anachronism of history. To take part in it is to be a star player in the fabulous history of Am Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom,

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