

פרשת בהעלותך is among the most perplexing and difficult Parshiot, containing many, seemingly disjointed stories. We are perplexed by the lack of continuity and unity of the narrative. The Parsha starts with the Menorah, a story that belongs in פרשת נשא, and continues with the sanctification of the Levites and the story of the second Pesach celebrated by the Jews in the desert and the laws of Pesach Shayni. It continues with the cloud guiding the people on their journey and the commandment to fashion trumpets and the associated signal system. The travel order of the tribes around the tabernacle is reviewed. Moses humbly extends an invitation to Yisro to remain with the Jewish People. We have the verses ויהי בנסוע and ובנוחה יאמר surrounded by inverted 'Nuun's, indicating that this section is out of context and doesn't belong here. The Torah tells the story of the קברות התאווה, people who committed no sin, didn't raise their voices and didn't threaten anyone. They were simply overcome by desire and complained. We could interpret the phrase קברות התאווה in modern terms as the graves man digs for himself, or the graves that desire digs for man. The Parsha concludes with the story of Miriam speaking badly of her brother Moses and her punishment.

Where is the transition between all these, seemingly half-told stories? Are there multiple stories in the Parsha or a single, unified story? Why was ויהי בנסוע and ובנוחה יאמר, with the surrounding inverted 'Nuun's, inserted here? These two verses would fit well at the conclusion of the Book of Exodus. Why did Moses seemingly panic and speak in such a negative way about the people in the story of קברות התאווה? The optimistic Moses, who was willing to grab on to, כביכול, the coat of Gd and defend the people, now became their prosecutor and said that he prefers death to continuing in his current role. How could he speak against his people? Why did Miriam, who protected Moses on the shore of the Nile when even their parents had lost all hope, condemn Moses' behavior?

There is a single, unified, tragic story told in this Parsha. Chazal refer to the calamities detailed in פרשת בהעלותך as among the most terrible and difficult. When Gd charged Moses with the mission to take the Jews from Egypt, He gave Moses a sign that the Exodus will not be complete without worshiping Gd on this mountain. According to the Chinuch, Gd meant 2 things with the word תעבדון (worship): 1) the giving of the Torah which teaches man how to worship Gd, and 2) the tabernacle, constructed immediately after Moses descended the mountain with the

second Tablets. (The importance of the tabernacle can be seen in that the command to build the altar was given immediately after the Ten Commandments.)

The episode of the golden calf delayed the fulfillment of תעבדון, the construction of the tabernacle, by approximately eighty days. The work began the day after Yom Kippur and was completed on Rosh Chodesh Nissan. There was no longer any need to remain in Sinai. פרשת נשא details the dedication of the Tabernacle by the tribal elders and the consecration of the Levites who were responsible for the Tabernacle. With the receipt of the Torah and the completion of the Tabernacle dedication on the 13th of Nissan, they accomplished על ההר הזה and completed the required Sinaitic pre-requisites to march into the Promised Land. The four languages of redemption were realized. They were extricated, saved, redeemed and taken unto Gd as His treasured nation. All that remained was the fifth aspect, והבאתי, entering the Land of Israel.

However while they expected to begin their journey, the cloud that directed their journey remained stationary. They were commanded to perform the Pesach sacrifice of the second year and postponed their journey. The narrative transition between the conclusion of the dedication of the Tabernacle and their journey, interrupted by the second Pesach, is seamless. (Note, my father, Rabbi Moshe Rapps Shlita explained to me that the exceptional punctuation of the word Pausach (Komatz instead of a Segol) in mid-sentence hints at the uniqueness of the second Pesach, the only one celebrated during the 40 year sojourn in the desert.)

The story continued with the cloud guiding their journey. They were organized according to tribes and groups. They were commanded to fashion trumpets and were given an associated communication code. One feels a mood of expectancy and tension when reading the story. Finally, the promise to Abraham is about to be fulfilled. Moses was excited and anticipated great things. This was to be the final journey. His conversation with Yisro portrayed peace of mind and a feeling of inevitability. Moses said ‘We, including myself, are traveling to the promised land’. Moses extended this invitation not only to Yisro, but to all converts, in all generations, and to the entire non-Jewish world to join them on their march. There was only one condition, whoever accompanies us must convert according to Jewish law and subject himself to the same divine discipline that we have accepted. The Torah and Eretz Yisrael were given to us but we were told to share it

with the world. כל שוכני ארץ ויושבי תבל, all people were invited to join. Had that march been realized, Moses would have been the Messiah and we never would have been exiled. Unfortunately the march ended abruptly and the time horizon to realizing its completion became much longer, extending to the present day.

At this point, Moses had no doubt that he would enter the Promised Land. The march and conquest would be complete in a matter of days. There was no need for spies or other military tactics. The Ark and the people traveled 3 days distance in a single day because Gd desired to bring them into the Land of Israel quickly. We now see that the section of ויהי בנסוע is in its proper place. Moses spoke of the 31 Canaanite kings and nations as the enemies of Gd and the Jewish People who were about to be confronted, dispersed and conquered, וינוסו משנאיך מפניך. Had the march come to fruition, there would have been no need for the inverted 'Nuun's.

Suddenly, something unexpected happened. The great march came to an abrupt halt. The multitudes among them experienced a desire for meat and wept. This lust aroused the wrath of Gd and the resentment of Moses. For the first time, Moses does not act as defense attorney. This incident was different than the sin of the golden calf. The Golden Calf incident could be understood as a newly freed people experienced a primitive fright when they thought their leader, Moses, died, resulting in a terror induced panic causing them to act out through the medium of the golden calf as an idol. There were mitigating circumstances in that case and Moses rose to defend them and argued courageously on their behalf.

קברות התאווה represented a pagan influence. Paganism combines an idolatrous as well as a hedonistic life style. Paganism can survive without the former, but not the latter. Where Judaism demands that the individual limit himself and withdraw from his lust and desire, paganism demands unlimited lust, to fill an insatiable desire. The demonic dream of total conquest attracts the pagan. When man reaches for the unreachable and enigmatic, he emulates the pagan way of life abhorred by Gd, like idolatry itself. Gd commanded the people to gather the Slav. The Torah describes in great detail the lack of control the people showed in gathering the Slav. They emulated the pagan. Contrast that with the Judaic approach to the Manna, where they collected only what they needed.

People who cannot limit hedonistic desires are not worthy to enter the land, a land that rejects pagan inhabitants. The great march came to an abrupt and tragic end. ויהי בנסוע was dislocated, represented by inverted 'Nuun's. Though there was no edict to wander the desert for 40 years yet, Moses realized his hope to enter the land would never be realized. (The Rav related a similar experience of his own. Throughout his wife's ע"ה illness, he had hope and faith that she would recover. On the Yom Kippur before she passed away, he held a Sefer Torah at Kol Nidrei and subsequently handed the scroll to a student to return it to the Aron Kodesh. The scroll slipped inside the Aron (it did not fall). At that point he realized that his hope for her recovery would not be realized.)

With the end of the march, Moses, the optimist, despaired and proclaimed he prefers death to not entering the land. This is highlighted by the story of Eldad and Maydad who prophesied that Moses' wish to see the land will never come true. Moses will pass on and Joshua will bring the people to the land. Instead of the march bringing them closer to the land, it pushed them further from their goal and inverted the 'Nuun's and Jewish history.

Gd chose Moses to be the spiritual leader and teacher of the people to make them into a holy nation. He was not selected as a political leader. With the episode of קברות התאווה, Moses realized that in addition to his teacher role, he would now also have to be a nursing mother. The nursing mother is perhaps the best teacher of the child. Where the teacher's role is limited, the nursing mother's is expansive. The disciple does not become a part of the teacher. However, the nursing child becomes a part of the mother. She has one calling, to protect the baby. The mother does not belong to herself anymore, at least while the infant is incapable of caring for itself. Moses discovered that a Jewish leader must be more than a teacher. The teacher has a life of his own, but he, Moses, is now connected to all the people. He must feel their pain and joy. While Moses reconciled with his role as teacher and leader, he doubted his ability to be a nursing mother. He said "Did I conceive and bear all these people that I should carry them like a nursing mother carries an infant"?

With the episode of קברות התאווה, Moses knew that he no longer had personal space or rights. He separated from his wife and children, brother and sister. He knew he could no longer share personal joy with them. The children of Moses are never mentioned in any census recorded in the Torah. Had Moses retained his own

children, he would have been obligated to teach them before teaching others. As parent and teacher of all Klal Yisrael he could show no preference to his biological children. At מתן תורה at Sinai, Gd told Moses to instruct the people to return to their tents and their normal family lives. However, Moses you must remain with me. Miriam asked, does prophecy require rejecting spouse, children and siblings? We are also prophets, and live exemplary lives with our spouses and children. Why should Moses be different? Gd told Miriam you don't understand the uniqueness of Moses. My servant is parent and teacher of all the people and his separation from his family is warranted and required by Gd.

The unified story of the Parsha is one of great potential cut short, and the evolution of the Jewish leader who must teach and remain resolute while accepting responsibility and showing patience, even for those that stray from Torah Judaism.

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