

## Parshas Beshalach – Mark Cohen

יג שבט תש"פ – 8<sup>th</sup> February 2020 – שבת פ' בשלח – שבת שירה

If we follow the chronology of Sefer Shemot, we see that Parshat Bo corresponds to the events of the first day of Pesach. Parshat Beshalach begins with keriyat yam suf which Chazal tell us occurred on the last day of Pesach (Rashi to Megillah 31a and Shemot 14:5). The following Parasha, Parshat Yitro, tells the story of Matan Torah which happened on Shavuot. Therefore, the second part of Parshat Beshalach (after the events of keriyat yam suf) must refer to the time between Pesach and Shavuot which we call Sefirat HaOmer.

Therefore, if we examine the events which occurred in the second part of this sedrah, we should be able to come to a deeper understanding of Sefirat HaOmer. Let's begin by listing the events-

- (1) Shmot 15:22-26: Bnei Yisrael can't find any water to drink. They then go to Morah but the water was bitter. HaShem told Moshe to throw some wood from a certain tree into the water- this makes the water sweet. HaShem teaches Bnei Yisrael that (15:26), "If you obey G-d your L-rd and do what is upright in His eyes, carefully heeding all His commandments and keeping all his decrees, then I will not inflict you with any of the sickness that I brought on Egypt. I am G-d who heals you."
- (2) Shmot 15:27-16:27: Bnei Yisrael complain about the lack of meat and bread in the wilderness and are given quail and mann.
- (3) Shmot 16:28-36: The mitzvah of Shabbat is repeated.
- (4) Shmot 17:1-7: Bnei Yisrael complain that there is a lack of water. Moshe Rabbenu strikes the rock and water comes out.
- (5) Shmot 17:8-16: The war with Amalek.

Let's start by examining events one, two and four. These three events all concern Bnei Yisrael complaining about lack of food or water and HaShem satisfies their needs but rebukes them for complaining instead of requesting. One of the ways in which Bnei Yisrael's needs were satisfied is through receiving the mann and this links with event three, the repetition of the mitzva of Shabbat, as the mann did not fall on Shabbat.

(Rabbi Sacks, in his introduction to the Koren Pesach Machzor notes something very interesting. The measurement of mann, which each man took each day for himself, was an "omer". We began this d'var Torah by noting that these events correspond to Sefirat HaOmer and we now have a further proof for our thesis.)

What do events one to four teach us? I think that they are clearly teaching that Bnei Yisrael need to have emunah in HaKadosh Baruch Hu and appreciate what He gives them. Relying on mann for forty years in the wilderness would have taught Bnei Yisrael that HaShem gives them what they need- they should enjoy and take what is theirs- no more and no less. Similarly, keeping Shabbat would have taught Bnei Yisrael that HaShem gives the Jewish People all that they need during the six working days of the week.

We are now left with event five- the war with Amalek- and have to work out how this fits into our understanding of these events. I found an explanation as to how this event fits in a chapter of the work Torah MiEtzion: New Readings in Tenach- Shemot edited by Rabbi Ezra Bick and Rabbi Yaakov Beasley. The chapter is entitled, "The Wanderings of Bnei Yisrael in the Desert" and was authored by Rabbi Yaakov Medan. In this chapter, Rabbi Medan notes that Rashi on Devarim 25:17 states that the description of the war with Amalek is repeated in Sefer Devarim after the halachah of not being honest when measuring items. Rashi states that the reason for this juxtaposition is that being dishonest with measurements causes enemies (like Amalek) to attack. Therefore, the war with Amalek was caused by unfair allocation of resources and fits in beautifully with our theme.

Lets now go back to Sefirat HaOmer. Sefirat HaOmer is the time when a nation in slavery were charged with changing and becoming a nation ready to accept the Torah at Har Sinai. What changes needed to occur for this to happen? I'd like to suggest, based on the above, that Bnei Yisrael needed to strengthen further the concept of gratitude to HaShem and personal property. HaShem gives each one of us what we need in this world- we need to internalise this while not being jealous of those who have more, or worse still, taking what is not ours. Maybe each year, when we count the Omer, we should consider whether we have internalised this message ourselves in order to be worthy of accepting the Torah on Shavuot.