

**PARSHAS BEHAALOSECHA – R' ELI PICK**

The people cried (11:4), "Who will give us meat to eat?" They recalled with relish the "fish ... the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic," which had been given to them 'for nothing' in Egypt. They were craving for meat, and Hashem became angry.

We might speculate their boredom, having to eat the same manna food for 40 years. However, many had owned cattle and sheep, and they had already been receiving quails for their evening menu (Shemos 16:8). Besides, they could cook, grind or bake the manna how they wished, and it would taste – and carry the nourishment - of almost anything they wanted. Yet, they reminisced about the free food of the "good old days" in Egypt, - oddly forgetting about the harsh slavery, and their baby boys being murdered! That was certainly irrational, but why was Hashem so angry?

Moshe reacts to the complaint, describing the people as "evil" (11:10). He implores Hashem to relieve him of being in charge of such rebels. He prays: "I cannot carry this entire nation, for it is too heavy for me. And if this is how You deal with me, then kill me now..." (11:14-15). But surely, the Torah permits kosher meat, and does not require one to be a vegetarian.

Moshe wants to resign. He is even willing to die. In contrast, look at the behaviour of Moshe at the golden calf. In that case, although Moshe asked to be 'erased from the book', he prayed for the people: "Why, Hashem, are You angry against Your people, whom You brought forth from the land of Egypt, with great power and a mighty hand? ... Turn away from Your fierce wrath..." (Shmos 32:11-12)

How could this be? When they had danced around the golden calf, Moshe prayed for their survival. Yet when they asked for meat, he would not pray for them. Moshe had been seeking forgiveness for idolatry, but was intolerant when they asked for meat. Surely, the people's betrayal with the golden calf was much worse, than the desire to eat some more kosher meat?

It was their rebellious sentiment, to return to Egypt, which displayed their true intentions (Rashi, Sifri). They did not only refer to the foods which they 'ate' in Egypt. They said – נאכל - "which we *will* eat", in the future tense, hinting at their intention to return there (Rav Zalman Sorotzkin).

As the French expression goes, "C'est le ton que fait la musique". (It's not what you say, but how you say it.) The outburst was really to avoid duty; to return to slavery without commitment. This is not so explicit in the verse, but Hashem knew what was in their minds. The quest for meat was really a mask, disguising a rejection of Hashem's kindness, and a lack of gratitude for all the miracles He was performing for them.

The golden calf was a grave sin, but it indicated a search for spirituality, so Moshe felt he could pray for them (Rav Twerski). In contrast, the quest for meat was a denial of Hashem's benevolence, and a wilful rejection of Him in favour of Egyptian servitude. That was too much for Moshe to bear. He offered his resignation.

