

HURDLE TO GREATNESS!

PARSHAS BEHA'ALOSCHA

A student of the Chozeh of Lublin once davened to Hashem, asking that he earn his weekly livelihood early in the week. Then he would have the peace of mind to learn Torah the rest of the week. The Chozeh told him that, of course Hashem could provide his livelihood earlier in the week. However, that may not be what Hashem wanted. Hashem wanted this student to be able to learn Torah and do mitzvos under less than desirable conditions. His Torah learning and his mitzvos, when done under the trying conditions, were more holy and more pleasing to Hashem. "Maybe Hashem has more satisfaction in how you overcome your burdens and create light in the midst of darkness." (The Pirkei Avos Treasury by Rabbi Moshe Lieber)

After leaving Egypt, the Jewish People traversed the desert. Hashem guided them with a Pillar of Cloud during the day and a Pillar of Fire at night. Whenever the Cloud rose from the Mishkan, it indicated that it was time to leave. Then the Jews packed their belongings and left. The **Bekhor Shor** says that Hashem did not inconvenience the people by making them break camp at night. However, sometimes the Cloud signaled to the Jews to leave after one day, sometimes after a month, and sometimes after a year. The **Sforno** says that it was impossible to predict with any degree of probability how long they would stay in one location. Sometimes the Jewish People arrived at a location, unpacked, and then had to leave hours later. The **Ramban** says that sometimes they arrived at an unpleasant place to camp. They wanted to leave right away but the Pillar of Cloud did not move for a long time. Other times, they came to a beautiful site. They wanted to remain there for a long time. They would unpack and settle in. However, the very next morning, the Pillar of Cloud rose, indicating that

*"It sometimes happened that the Cloud was [there] [but] from evening until morning, and then the Cloud rose in the morning, and they traveled; or [the Cloud was there] for a day and a night and the Cloud was lifted, and they traveled."
(Bamidbar 9:21)*

they had to leave. They had to repack all their belongings and continue traveling. The **Ramban** says that this was very bothersome.

What was Hashem's purpose in doing this? Why was the trip through the desert so difficult, as the Jewish People never knew how long they would be remaining in one place?

Rav Eliyahu Dessler zt"l in Michtav m'Eliyahu explains that Hashem may have done this to teach the Jewish People a very important lesson. **Learning Torah and doing mitzvos should not depend on external conditions.**

One is apt to say, "**If Only**". "If I only had a little more free time, then I would learn Torah. If only I didn't have to go to my job early in the morning, then I would be able to daven with a minyan or then I would be able to daven slower, with more concentration. Or if only I didn't have to work so hard to earn a living, worry so much about my children, be busy with homework, be busy with

shidduchim, or be busy with medical troubles, then I would do so much more.”

Life is never perfect. It is full of disturbances and challenges.

That is what Hashem was teaching us with the unpredictable travels in the desert. Life in the desert was not easy at times. However, Jewish life does not depend on conditions improving. A Jew must learn Torah and do mitzvos under all conditions, even difficult ones. One can't wait until he gets comfortable before learning Torah or doing other mitzvos. (based on Rabbi Yissocher Frand, Rabbi Frand on the Parasha)

It says in **Pirkei Avos** (2:5), “Don't say ‘When I am free then I will learn’, for perhaps you will not become free.” **One should never postpone learning Torah to a more opportune moment, for that moment may never come.**

“I don't know how, but someone had managed to smuggle in a pair of tefillin by bribing a kapo with dozens of bread and margarine rations. I only know that every morning many of us rose before the call-up to perform this mitzvah.... Jews who did not know each other, who perhaps did not even speak the same language, met each morning at dawn, exposed themselves to nameless dangers for the sake of doing this mitzvah.” (Professor Eli Wiesel, in a 1982 article)

A Jew must learn Torah and do mitzvos under all conditions, even difficult ones. Mitzvos done in trying circumstances give Hashem even more pleasure than those done when all is calm. We have the opportunity, to achieve greatness and holiness when we do mitzvos despite our challenges.

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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