

Parshas Behaaloscha is a very pivotal parsha in the Torah.

We just finished Klal Yisroel's building the mishkon, setting up the machaneh, and getting ready to move to Eretz Yisroel. Hashem organized the shevotim in a specific formation of a military camp set up for hashroas haShechinoh. Hashem's army is on the move. Shevet Levi is given their jobs in setting up the mishkon and dismantling it, and the chatzotzros were made to call the machaneh to start traveling in proper formation.

Klal Yisroel received the Torah and immediately had the problem of the eigel hazohov. They did teshuvoh and received the second luchos. They built the mishkon and observed Pesach, and are now ready to move.

Yisro came to convert. He was a man of uncompromising truth – a sincere and deep desire to search and sacrifice for the truth. He couldn't remain silent when he heard about Pharaoh's gezeirah. He couldn't tolerate the falsehood and cruelty and picked up and left his high-level position. He went to worship every avodo zoro until he heard about the Torah and followed it – even if that meant being rejected by his society. He merited to have Moshe Rabbeinu as his son-in-law. He came to Moshe in the midbor with Moshe's wife and children to convert and join Klal Yisroel after hearing all the amazing things Klal Yisroel went through and how Hashem delivers exact justice to the finest detail. Yisro is referred to as Chovav because the Torah was so dear and precious to him.

At that point in time, Klal Yisroel were on a level where they could travel just three days and arrive in Eretz Canaan and conquer the whole region. Yet Yisro is afraid – he hesitated in coming with Klal Yisroel to Eretz Yisroel and Moshe tries to persuade him. Yisro initially refused. Why? Even though he is able to give up everything to find the truth and spread the truth, but he cannot separate himself from the family and society that he is a part of. He doesn't feel comfortable joining Klal Yisroel. He doesn't feel he belongs here socially, and is therefore pulled to go back to the old, more familiar surroundings. This is an incredible insight into the deep social needs of human beings to identify with family and one's place of origin.

Intellectually, Yisro had an insatiable desire to search for the truth – a bakoshas hoemes. He was brave enough to publically criticize Pharaoh's decree and be banished as a result. Avrohom Ovinu also had this mesiras nefesh for truth, but then Avrohom was commanded by Hashem to turn his back on his family and his place of origin despite the difficulty – and he succeeded. Yisro did not succeed. Moshe tried to overcome his hesitation offering him a choice land in Eretz Yisroel. Moshe picked up on the fact that Yisro had to feel that he belonged and without a portion in Eretz Yisroel he would have felt like an outsider. Geirim have no inheritance in Eretz Yisroel and Yisro was afraid that he and his descendants would be social outcasts.

Moshe argued that if Yisro would go back to his family now, people will get the impression that Yisro only came to convert in the first place because he thought he would get a portion of Eretz Yisroel by joining Klal Yisroel. They will imagine that once he was told he won't get a portion, he just left it. People will think Yisro wasn't sincere in converting. So Moshe offered him a portion in Eretz Yisroel before he left, to prevent people from drawing this false conclusion.

Yisro still refused to stay. Moshe tried another approach. He said: Isn't being a part of Hashem's chosen nation enough of a reason to stay?

Isn't the closeness and the hashgochoh Hashem has with Klal Yisroel enough to outweigh the cost of social isolation? The idea of being part of Klal Yisroel and being close to Hashem – isn't that worth every sacrifice? Moshe Rabbeinu promised Yisro a portion that is the most fertile part of Eretz Yisroel – the plains of Yericho. When one views Yericho from the hills overlooking it one is startled by the starkly green plains and oases. He offered it to Yisro and he seemed to agree to stay with Klal Yisroel.

Moshe Rabbeinu tells Yisro – you have the chance to join Klal Yisroel and be a part of something so meaningful and important. But he needs a portion in Eretz Yisroel as well. Apparently all of Yisro's intellectual searching and intellectual conviction weren't enough. He had not gone through the experience of Egypt and lacked a certain commitment that this experience brought.

The ananei hakovod were carving out a path in the midbor to travel quickly through and we suddenly come across two inverted letter nuns which are bracketing a small parsha. There is a jarring break in the narrative. Klal Yisroel slowed down from their rapid pace and started to encounter various troubles and complaints. But they keep traveling from place to place. Their journey only comes to a grinding halt next week in Parshas Shlach.

We have the misonenim who are complaining about the mon. Why are they complaining? The mon was a wonderous food! But there were five foods which the mon didn't taste like. Why? Because these foods were bad for pregnant and nursing women. Incredible! – The mon not only tasted like any food, but also had the qualities of any food.

Klal Yisroel were hankering for watermelon gourds, onions and garlic. This always reminds me of an event in my youth. I was once a waiter in a summer camp, and the campers one day were chanting in unison in the dining room: "We want watermelon! We want watermelon!" For some reason, the camp kitchen wasn't adequately stocked with enough watermelon, and the campers let it be known that they were not happy with the situation.

We see a deep lesson here. They complained about not being able to taste foods that weren't even good for them to eat. They could have virtually everything they wanted. They lacked for nothing except for these five foods. But the biggest challenge we have is living within limitations – not being able to be completely hefker to do and to have absolutely everything we desire.

The gemara asks, where is Homon alluded to in the Torah? The gemoroh answers that it is hinted in a posuk in Bereishis, "hamin hoeitz"—the eitz hadaas. What is the connection between the eitz hadaas and Homon? Homon was extremely wealthy and powerful. He had many sons and great honor – people had to bow to him wherever he went! Was he lacking anything? The only thing he lacked was that a single Jew in the entire Persian empire – Mordechai – refused to bow to him. For that, everything he had was worth nothing!

In Gan Eden, Odom and Chava were able to eat from every tree and every fruit in the garden. They lacked nothing. All their physical needs were taken care of for them! But they couldn't bear to live with not being able to eat the fruit of one tree – the eitz hadaas. There is something I can't have? I need to have it!

The biggest yetzer horo people have is the need to live without any limitations. That is the problem with today's world – hefker. We have

seen in recent weeks how people have been clamoring to be free of law enforcement and get rid of all the police. They don't want anyone stopping them from doing whatever they want.

It wasn't all of Klal Yisroel who began complaining about the mon. It began with the Eirev Rav. But we see that Klal Yisroel then started complaining about the mon and then about arayos. What does this have to do with food or the mon? The moment people start thinking in terms of hefker, it quickly spreads to all other areas. They want everything everywhere.

Klal Yisroel had started forming a military camp with military discipline marching through the midbor. They would arrive in Eretz Yisroel in a matter of days! Moshe Rabbeinu is still with them now, and if they succeed, the beis hamikdosh will be built and everything will be perfect! They are almost there!

But the yetzer horo for hefker steps in and ruins everything.

The Eirev Rav are an interesting group of people. Klal Yisroel were in Golus Mitzrayim for a total of 210 years. 82 of those years were under a terrible slavery. All of those troubles and subjugation matured them and prepared them to become the Am Hashem. It was a purifying furnace that purified and uplifted Klal Yisroel. But these other people – well-meaning people who saw that something special was happening and wanted to be a part of it – did not go through any process. They simply jumped on the bandwagon without any preparation. They wanted to receive all the benefits of being a part of Klal Yisroel without paying the price. They didn't mature. They weren't ready to live with the discipline and restrictions of a Torah lifestyle. They were the first ones to clamor for a life without restrictions. And it was infectious.

But living with restrictions – especially regarding arayos – is necessary for hashroas haShechinoh. When you have hashroas haShechinoh you get all the brochos in the world. You have peace, security, tranquility, bounty and prosperity – everything you could want in life. But it requires restrictions and living with discipline. If you reject all restrictions and you go with hefker, it destroys you and it destroys the world around you. Those living in the United States of America today are living through what it means to live with total hefkeirus – a bunch of wild people running around like maniacs – the depravity, the

senseless violence and destruction. Total lack of restraint.

The moment you open up the drive for heker, it doesn't stop at watermelon. It goes further and further into arayos.

Another tragedy happened in this parsha – the Sanhedrin dies. Why were they killed? It goes back to Maamad Har Sinai when there was an amazing gilui Shechinoh and the Sanhedrin experienced a tremendous hisorerus. But it didn't affect them deeply enough. They went on eating and drinking as if they are still on the same level as before. But you can't live through a matan Torah and not allow it to change you. They should have died on the spot, but Hashem didn't want to mar the simchah of kabbolas haTorah. So He waited.

Why did Hashem choose to kill them now at this moment specifically? Because had Klal Yisroel seen their leaders understand that getting an uplifting inspiration – a hisorerus – means you have to respond by living your life on a higher level, they would have been inspired to follow their example. With the right leadership, Klal Yisroel would not have been hankering for taivoh once they had been living on the higher spiritual level and they were eating mon. But they were failed by their leadership who didn't set the right example. These leaders had to die and make way for new leaders to come up.

People can destroy themselves. They are their own worst enemy. Klal Yisroel had a golden opportunity! They could have entered Eretz Yisroel with Moshe Rabbeinu in just a few short days. He would have built the Beis Hamikdosh and everything would have been perfect forever. But it demands living up to a certain standard with discipline and maintaining a higher level. When you achieve that higher level, the Shechinoh will stay with you and you will get all the brochos you can ask for. But if you can't live with limitations, and you want everything to be hefker, the Shechinoh departs and the descent begins. Klal Yisroel now go down and down in the coming parshiyos until the entire dor hamidbor needs to completely die off. These inverted letter nuns for brackets signals the dramatic change in the fortunes of Klal Yisroel from here on.

We should learn the lessons of this parsha and try to live on the right level and not have that fall.