



הרב הראשי עיה"ק אלעד מרדכי מלכא שליט"א  
נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד  
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,  
ישיבה קטנה ארחות יהודה, ביהמ"ד גבוה לרבנים ודיינים "לקח טוב" קופת "מפעל החסד" אלעד  
Chief Rabbi of Elad, Israel MORDECHAI MALKA, Founder & President of Institutions "Or Hamelech"



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## Parashat Baha'alotecha

It is a Sin to Rush Out of *Tefilla* or a Torah *Shiur*

Our *parasha* states (10:33), "And they journeyed from the Mountain of Hashem three days, and the Ark traveled before them a distance of three days to sojourn for them a peaceful journey: (35) When the Ark journeyed, Moshe said, 'Rise Hashem and scatter Your enemies and Your enemies should flee from before You.' And when the Ark rested, Moshe would say, "Reside Hashem, amongst the myriad thousands of Jews." Later in the *parasha* it states (11:1), "And the nation who complained was evil in the ears of Hashem, and Hashem heard and grew furious. And the fire of Hashem burned them and consumed the edge of the camp."

### Questions

- 1) Our Sages ask (*Shabbat* 115b) why this portion of the Torah has inverted *nunns* before and after it.
- 2) We must furthermore ask why *pasuk* 35 begins with the word *va'yehi*, which is an expression of misfortune.
- 3) Why is the separation between one sin and the other symbolized specifically by the letter *nun* and not any other letter?
- 4) Why do the *nunns* have to be inverted? Why can't they just be straight and still separate between the sins?
- 5) The first sin is not explicitly mentioned in the Torah. What did the Jews do wrong?

### People who Rush Through Life

When we contemplate the matter, we will realize that there are many individuals who, *Baruch Hashem*, pray with a *minyan* and even attend *shiurei Torah*. Yet there are those who are constantly rushing through life and never have any time. When they come to pray, they not only come late, but even try to leave right after they conclude *Shemoneh Esrei*. Immediately, after *kaddish* they have already wrapped up their *tallit* and *tefillin*, and they rush out to work. The same thing applies to *shiurei Torah* or to the rabbi's *derasha*. They have no patience, and they quickly try to leave and don't wait until the end. In truth, when a person examines himself, he will realize that many times, he will rush out of the *beit hakeset* or the *beit hamidrash* and meet up with a friend who will stop to talk with him. They will end up speaking for a long time and all of a sudden he does not feel the pressure to rush anymore. Sometimes this person even raises his voice, instructing the *chazzan* to pray faster or to finish his *derasha*, and afterwards he has all the time in the world. Our holy Torah teaches us that this is a sin, as we will soon discuss.

### The Significance of the Two *Nunns*

Now we can explain our *parasha*. In *Masechet Shabbat* (115b) our Sages state that the *pasuk*, "And the Ark traveled" has *nunns* before and afterwards to teach us that this *pasuk* is not in its proper place.



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Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel says that in the future, this *pasuk* will be inserted into its proper place. But why was it intentionally written in the wrong place? To separate between the first sin and the second sin. What was the second sin? "And the nation complained." The first sin was (*Bamidbar* 10) "And they travelled from the Mountain of Hashem," on which Rebbe Chama the son of Rebbe Chanina explained indicates that the Jews went away from Hashem. Then where is this *pasuk's* proper place? Rav Ashi said that it belongs in the *parasha* that deals with the flags that marked each Tribes encampment. We see, then, that the Torah wrote this *pasuk* with an inverted *nunn* at the beginning and end to separate between one sin and the other.

### Fleeing From Har Sinai

We must understand what sin was committed by journeying from the Mountain of Hashem – for the *pasuk* states that they were commanded to do so! [See *Bamidbar* 9:18]. The *Baalei Tosafot* (*Shabbat* 116a) explain that when they journeyed for three days, it was like a young child who runs way from school. This was because the Jews learned much Torah on Har Sinai, and now they fled out of fear of learning more. Therefore, Hashem said that the two sins should be separated. So too, is it stated in the *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Parashat Bahaalotcha remez* 729). The *Ramban*, quoting the Midrash, explains similarly, writing that the Jews journeyed away from Har Sinai happily, like a child who flees from school, fearing that they would be given even more Torah and mitzvot. The *Kli Yakar* writes this as well, adding that this was the worst of the three sins. For Har Sinai was the place where they received the Torah, which is their very life, source of wisdom, and guide in this world. Therefore, how could they have left happily?

### Where is it Alluded to that they Fled?

Rav Yosef Tolidano *zt"l* once told me that his father, Rav Baruch Tolidano *zt"l*, asked how our Sages knew that the Jews left Har Sinai like a small child leaves school. From the *pasuk* we see nothing more than that they journeyed, and they only journeyed when Hashem commanded them to! He answered that when the Jews left the Red Sea after collecting the Egyptian spoils, the *pasuk* states (*Shemot* 15:22), "And Moshe led the Jews from the Red Sea..." Our Sages explain that Moshe Rabbeinu had to lead them forcefully. It was not enough to simply tell them to travel, for they very much desired the Egyptian spoils. However, when they left Har Sinai, they did so with ease. This was the claim against the Generation of the Desert, that following *Matan Torah* they quickly left their source of life, and they did not value it as much as they valued gold and silver. But Shlomo Hamelech teaches us (*Mishlei* 2:4-5), "If you desire it like gold and like treasures you seek it, then you will understand fear of G-d, and you will find the knowledge of G-d." The moment an individual does not value the Torah, he is liable to stumble to other sins as well. This is as we see with the Generation of the Desert, that this initial act lead to their complaining, etc.

### Nunn Alludes to a Fish

The *Kli Yakar* adds that this is why the incidents were separated by the letter *nunn*, and why they are inverted. For in Aramaic *nunn* means fish. The source of the fish's life is the water, and if it decides to leave the water and go onto the shore, it will die. This is similar to the parable that Rebbe Akiva told



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Popus, in *Berachot* (61b): There was a fox that saw fish scared from the fisherman. He therefore told them to come out of the water, and he would protect them. They answered him that if they were scared of fishermen in the place from which they drew their life, how much more so were they frightened to go onto the land, where they were unable to live. So too, with the Jewish people. Their source of life is the Torah; how, then, could they travel away from Har Sinai happily? In that sense, they were similar to a fish that is upside down; instead of its head facing towards the water, it faces the dry land. So too, did Jewish people turn their faces from Sinai. This is why the incident is separated by an upside down *nunn*, which hints to a fish facing in the opposite direction that it should be facing.

### Hinting to the Fifty Gates of Understanding

We can add that the letter *nunn*, whose numerical value is 50, alludes to the 50 gates of understanding, which one can only merit by following the path of the Torah. By fleeing from Har Sinai and turning their faces from there, they achieved the exact opposite of these gates of wisdom, turning what is primary into something secondary, and what is secondary into something primary. This is the worst sin of all. This is why the expression *vayehi* is used, which is an expression that connotes misfortune. For this act constituted a very great misfortune indeed, that following *Matan Torah*, they quickly descended from their lofty level, fleeing from Har Sinai, their source of life.

### True Story

Many years ago, I went to a grocery to buy some things for the house. As usual, there were long lines by the checkout counters, and I was the tenth in line, or even after that. Suddenly, an individual cuts to the front of the line, and turns to a child, whose turn it was to pay. He requested the child to allow him to go first, because he was an activist and was in a big rush. I told the man that this was not only the child's decision, but everyone else on the line as well. He therefore said, "I therefore beg your forgiveness," and he cut the line. After I finished paying, which took quite a long time, I exited the store, only to see this fellow standing outside and talking with his friend! I turned to him and said, "You cut the line because you were in a rush; why are you not rushing now?" He obviously did not have an answer.

### Words of Mussar

We have learned just how great the power of the *Yetzer Hara* is to lure an individual out of the *Beit Haknesset* or *Beit Midrash* before we are meant to leave. Similar to Har Sinai, these places of Divine service are our source of life, and one who leaves early is like a child who runs away from school. A person must be honest with himself – does he have a valid reason for leaving *tefillah* or the *shiur* early? Does he suddenly forget about his rush when he meets a friend and then begins a long, drawn-out conversation? Rather, a person should imagine what he would do if he had a rare opportunity to amass a large amount of gold. Would he be so quick to leave the gold if he wasn't forced to do so? He knows the value of each moment and wishes to make the most of each one and amass his fortune. Similarly, should a person feel when he prays or attends a *shiur*. He is truly amassing a fortune each and every day. It should be difficult for him to part from these places, and this is what it means to accept the yoke of *mitzvot* upon oneself. In the direction man wishes to go he is lead, and if he treats prayer in such a



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fashion, his prayers will be gladly accepted before Hashem. The same thing applies to Torah learning. By doing so, he will be blessed with all the Torah's blessings in this world and the next world. Amen ve'amen.

Shabbat Shalom

Rav Mordechai Malka