

LEAD TORAH The Sedra with a Split Personality

As several commentaries point out - and as other TT columnists have mentioned, B'haalot'cha definitely shows us opposite sides of B'nei Yisrael in the Midbar.

The beginning of the sedra tells us of Aharon's daily, but special task of lighting the Menora. We see all the people participating in the first annual Korban Pesach. We are told of a few individuals who stood up to 'request' not being denied this great Mitzva. We are told about the silver trumpets that are to be used on joyous occasions and festivals. And we see the proud marching formation with the Mishkan in the center. We get the strong impression that all is right and that the next goal is Eretz Yisrael... and soon.

And then things begin to fall apart. (Yes, I know this sentence is in the Sedra Summary, too.)

Complaints about this 'n that, G-d's anger, so to speak, at the people. Moshe's frustration with the people, and even G-d's anger directed at Moshe.

We find Moshe's brother and sister speaking negatively about Moshe Rabbeinu and G-d's immediate reaction and punishment of Miriam.

When the people complain about their food, they are not provided pleasantly by G-d, but rather, in His anger, He brings the harmful quail (in contrast to the tasty quail that preceded the miraculous MAHN).

Yet to come, in next week's sedra will be Cheit HaMeraglim which will prolong the sojourn in the Wilderness.

That's pretty much a thumbnail sketch of B'haalot'cha (even though in the Chumash game of our youth, this sedra gave us 500 points for the page with the upside NUNs).

So what does this mean to us today?

We have just finished reliving the Exodus from Egypt, the exciting march to Har Sinai and the awesome experience of Matan Torah. This challenges us with not following the full Torah's script, but doing our best to take the good and leave the negative as part of the once-upon-a-time background of the Jewish People - not to be emulated.

Jewish History is filled with ups and downs. We need to work on all fronts to increase the ups and minimize or eliminate the downs.

The well-known concept of MAASEI AVOT SIMAN L'BANIM provides us with models of behavior patterns to internalize in our own time - and warns us to avoid the pitfalls that our predecessors suffered.

It seems reasonable to say that HKB"H purposely included many negative episodes in the Torah, so that we will be able to see examples of the consequences of our own shortcomings in the hope that we will "get our act together" as individuals and as part of the community, עד ביאת הגואל.