

The Right Attitude

Freedom at last! Isn't that the way we all have felt when hearing that last bell before summer break? This is the very description Chazal use in explaining the pasuk VAYIS'U MEIHAR HASHEM (Bamidbar 10:33). Klal Yisrael felt that they were finally unfettered when leaving Har Sinai to travel onwards. Indeed, this is the first of the three tragic events that are recorded in close succession in our parsha. The next incident is that of the "Mitoninim" who were consumed by a fire, and finally those who complained that they wanted to eat meat and died amid their overconsumption. At first glance, it is not clear what exactly the first sin of the people was. They only left the mountain when the Cloud moved forward, how do we see from this pasuk that they left like children running away from school? Further, unlike the other two sins, there is no mention of any punishment. Did they even get punished?

The Saba from Slabodka notes that their fault lay not in the actual leaving of the mountain rather, in their attitude as they left. Hashem saw in the depths of their being that they had no feeling of remorse as they were leaving such a holy mountain and moving away from such an exalted

spiritual experience. Contrast this, notes, Rav Zaidel Epstein in Sefer He'arot, with the description of the Jews leaving the Red Sea. There, the Chumash notes, "Vayasa Moshe et Yisrael Miyam Suf." Moshe Rabeinu had to figuratively pull the people away from gathering the spoils of the Sea; their departure from Har Sinai should have been similar, pulling us away from the spiritual spoils of the mountain.

Rav Schwab notes another allusion to the people's mindset in the words of the pasuk. After the Torah was given, this is the only reference to the mountain as Har Hashem, and not Har Sinai. Once the Sh'china departed from the mountain it no longer carried the same holiness, hence, it lost the title Har Hashem. By referring to the mountain here in this way it is as if the people were expressing their desire for Hashem to dwell on the mountain and, so to speak, leave them alone - like the child who runs away from school, ensuring that his teacher is not following behind. The Torah doesn't explicitly state the punishment for this sin; the sin itself is the worst punishment. After having reached such high levels of closeness to the Almighty, to have plummeted to this level and not even realize it - this is the most tragic. The absence of connection and feeling is the punishment itself; no further explanation is necessary.

As we move away from the season of the Omer and Shavuot, we ought to be extra conscious of our mindset. Are we feeling relief, or do we have a strong desire to hold on to all that we gained and grew during this time?