

Dearest Desire

What do meat and prophets have in common? This is a question to ponder as we learn *Parashat Beha'alotecha*. *Am Yisrael* remembers the watermelon and fish they ate in Egypt at no cost, they demand meat; Hashem answers their cries with *slav* and the appointment of 70 elders to receive prophecy. How are these two responses connected?

Rav Sher explains in *Leket Sichot Mussar* that the people's request indicated their desire for an increased closeness and spiritual connection to Hashem. Indeed, when they ask for meat the Torah tells us, (*Bamidbar 11:4*) "*hitavu ta'avah*-they craved a desire". They wanted to experience intense feelings of desire so that they could conquer their urges and receive due *sechar*. Although the *mann* was all-sustaining, the people felt it inhibited their ability to fight their base desires and become elevated through that struggle. However, when confronted with the *slav*, they fell. They were unable to overcome the *ta'ava* and could not elevate the experience. Moreover, we are taught not to bring tests upon ourselves lest we are unable to withstand them. Knowing one's spiritual level is particularly pertinent on the heels of

Chag Hashavuot. Particularly after a *chag* one can feel very spiritually uplifted and can mistakenly assume levels beyond what is realistic. While Judaism encourages spiritual striving, at the same time it is essential to set practical, reasonable goals.

Rav Pincus in *Tiferet Shimshon* understands this story with a completely different approach. *Am Yisrael* understood that living under the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu was akin to living in the "palace of the King". They knew that even thinking inappropriate thoughts may result in severe punishment. Such earnest service was difficult to sustain; they wanted to be "normal" without the added level of intensity. *Mann* was food for angels, they wanted to be human! Meat on the other hand, is symbolic of physicality and worldly pleasures. Furthermore, this explains their desire for prophets. Moshe Rabbeinu had a direct connection with Hashem; other prophets were further removed, which made the people feel safer.

As we come off the 'high' of *Shavuot*, we can be conscious of the privilege to live in Eretz Yisrael, close to the Source of *kedushah*. It is an appropriate time to consider how we each can make Torah an integral, practical part of our daily lives. Through this, we will deepen our desire for an intimate relationship with Hashem. ■