

International Rabbinic Fellowship

Weekly Dvar Torah

Parshat Beha'alotecha

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This week's Dvar Torah is provided by Rabbi Aryeh Leifert, WalkingIsrael.com

In Season Two of *The Simpsons*, Bart Simpson is in a real jam. If he does not pass his next test, he will not advance to Grade 5. Desperate, he turns to the only One on whom he feels he can rely – God. “Well, old timer,” he begins, “I guess this is the end of the road.” He has exhausted all other avenues of assistance, and God is his last resort. While in general, Bart does not turn to God for help, in this case, he feels he has no other choice. This is reflected in his sister Lisa's muttered comment, when she observes Bart in his room, praying: “Prayer – the last refuge of the scoundrel.”

I suspect that for many of us, Bart's actions are not unlike what we do in our own lives. When things are going well, we tend to ignore God. Subconsciously or otherwise, we fall into the trap about which the Torah warns us in Deuteronomy 8, that when we are financially successful, we should not forget the One Who made our success possible. “And you will say in your heart, ‘It was *my* power, and the strength of *my* hand, which has achieved all of this for me.’” If, God forbid, things are not going well, it is only *then* that many of us turn to God, asking for His assistance.

It is precisely against having this kind of attitude towards God about which *Parashat BeHa'alotecha* warns us. In cautioning the Israelites not to allow any non-member of the tribe of Levi to perform any service in the sanctuary, the Torah says the reason is, “...so that no plague afflict the Children of Israel, when they approach the sanctuary.” The simple meaning of this verse is straightforward: Only descendants of the tribe of Levi may do the service; non-Levitical Israelites who attempt to will die.

But there is a deeper meaning, according to *Imrei No'am* (Rabbi Meir Horovitz, Dzikow, Poland, early 20th c.). It is not only that the Torah does not want any plague to break out among the Israelites due to their unlawfully approaching God, but also that their approaching God should not be precipitated by a plague to begin with! In other words, it should not be a tragedy or other trying time which encourages the person to approach God. *Imrei No'am* understands the verse thusly: “...so that no plague *cause* the Children of Israel to approach the sanctuary.” Let them also approach God during good times, as well, in order to offer appreciation for all the good which He has

bestowed on them.

If we knew someone who only contacted us when he was in trouble, and needed our help, we would understandably be annoyed with him. “Oh, so when you need me, you call me. But when things are OK, you ignore me?” we could say. Let us not develop (or continue) that relationship with God. When we close that important business deal, or when we land that critical client, or when we simply have an overall good day, let us take a moment to say, “Thank God.”

Let us not wait for things to go bad, to get to the point where we feel, as Bart did, that there is nowhere else to turn. Let us approach God when things are going well, and offer thanks for His granting us the ability to succeed in life. May we all be given many more opportunities to approach God not out of trouble and despair, but out of gladness and contentment.

Shabbat Shalom!

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