

**Potomac Torah Study Center**

Vol. 13 #34, June 5-6, 2026; 21 Sivan 5786; Behaalotecha 5786

**NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

---

**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.**

---

**May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We mourn those of our people who have perished since attacks have resumed. May the IDF and the U.S. soon force Iran to seek peace, and may a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.**

---

How do I find something new to say after writing an introduction on this, my Bar Mitzvah parsha, every year for the past six years? I am also attaching (by email) a longer essay on the parsha that I wrote four years ago. I consider Behaalotecha to be one of the most complex and crucial parashot in the Torah. Through 10:34, all of Sefer Bemidbar shows the excitement of B'Nai Yisrael as they go through the final preparations to leave the base of Har Sinai, where they had been camping for a year – from late in Nisan of the year of the Exodus until 20 Iyar of the following year. During this period, the Torah recounts the Revelation at Har Sinai, Egel Zahav, Moshe's successful appeal to God to change His covenant with B'Nai Yisrael from strict justice to Divine Mercy, the Mishkan, all of Sefer Vayikra, and the first third of Sefer Bemidbar. Moshe is so excited that he urges his father-in-law (Yitro) to join the people for the final short journey to Eretz Yisrael. Yitro declines the invitation. God's cloud rises from on top of the Ark in the Mishkan, and the people start their march, following the order that Hashem had indicated for the two million people to travel following Hashem's cloud.

What could possibly go wrong? Some people in the camp start murmuring and looking for a reason to complain. (The Torah blames the mixed multitude of non-Jews who left Egypt with the Jews for starting the evil.) Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at alephbeta.org deduce that the people are afraid to rely completely on God to direct their lives. God provides them with manna, bread or food from heaven, ready to eat, perfect in every way. The people, however, look for a way to add their own input. They pound, kneed, and bake the manna – unwilling to accept Hashem's gift of a perfect food from heaven, available six days every week, ready to eat as delivered. The people remember fondly the fish, melons, and vegetables that they received "for free" in Egypt – as if their labor did not constitute high payment. Rather than food from heaven, the people remember and desire food from under the ground. They also conveniently fail to remember the horrible slave conditions.)

Even worse, God promises the people the most special land anywhere, Eretz Yisrael. The people grossly insult God by asking instead to return to Egypt – a land now destroyed – rather than the special gift that Hashem has saved for His special nation.

The parsha closes with Miriam speaking lashon horah about Moshe's relationship with his wife. God is furious with Miriam and Aharon for engaging in Lashon horah. He strikes Miriam with tzaraat. Aharon asks Moshe to pray for Miriam to be cured. The people must wait a week while Miriam waits outside the camp for the tzaraat to go away so a Kohen may pronounce her cured. (Rabbi Mordechai superbly discusses the seriousness of Miriam's lashon horah.)

During this week, 22-29 Sivan of the year after the Exodus, while waiting for Miriam, the people commit two more grave sins. The meraglim depart to investigate the land that Hashem has set aside for B'Nai Yisrael (next parsha). When they

return, the evil report of the majority leads to the decree that the generation of the Exodus will die off over forty years and not enter the land. During the same week, Korach brings 250 leaders to protest Moshe's political leadership and convinces Dathan and Abiram, two members of Reuven (first born of Yaakov's sons), to protest Aharon's religious leadership. (The first born lose the religious leadership to Levi by participating in Egel Zahav, the Golden Calf, the sin in which members of every tribe except Levi participate.)

Rabbi Yitzchok Magriso, an 18<sup>th</sup> Century author from Constantinople, studied the dates and locations of the people at the time carefully and discovered that Miriam's tzaraat (chapter 12), the departure of the Meraglim (chapter 13), and Korach's rebellion (chapter 16) all take place during a single week, between 22 and 29 Sivan in the second year after the Exodus. (The evidence is in the Torah. See *Torah Anthology* 13: 333-34.) After the series of sins the final week of Sivan 2449, God gives up on the generation of the Exodus. Other than Caleb and Yehoshua, the two meraglim who fight unsuccessfully for the minority report (that it is time to take over the land that Hashem had promised), the rest of the generation of the Exodus must die in the desert, and only the next generation will enter the land.

God considers Israel, a land smaller than the state of New Jersey, to be perhaps His greatest gift for the Jewish people. This message should be clear from reading the many references to the land throughout the Torah. Hashem is willing to give the people time to learn that Hashem is forever – always has been, is, and will always be a God who loves B'Nai Yisrael and will always love each of us. God considers the land of Israel perhaps His greatest gift for our people, and He becomes angry every time our people fail to accept this gift. Jews who understand the importance of Eretz Yisrael to our religion and people should understand why the sin of the meraglim is the final reason why the generation of the Exodus do not deserve to enter the land. Hopefully this statement will become clearer next week when we read Shelach Lecha.

I always cherished the link that my beloved Rebbe, Leonard Cahan, z"l, and I shared the same Bar Mitzvah Haftorah. I would always read the Haftorah from Shabbat Hanukkah for Behaalotecha and read the Haftorah from Behaalotecha on Shabbat Hanukkah. Yes, we read this Haftorah (which Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander discusses brilliantly below) for both Behaalotecha and for Shabbat Hanukkah (first Shabbat when Hanukkah has two days on Shabbat). Rabbi Cahan and also shared a deep love for Eretz Yisrael, a love that Hannah and I hope to show to our grandchildren in a few months.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

---

**Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

---

**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeez Esther; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Rena Michal bat Sara, Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel.** Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

---

## **Haftarat Parshat Beha'alotekha: The Frozen Vision**

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander \*  
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

*Ian and Bernice Charif of Sydney, Australia dedicate Ohr Torah Stone's Devrei Torah for this Shabbat in memory of Bryna (Bertha) Charif, z"l, whose yartzheit is this Shabbat, 21 Sivan.*

*Rabbi Brander also dedicates his Dvar Haftarah this week to the heroic soldiers, security forces and first responders of the IDF, defenders of the Jewish people and the land of Israel, and the United States Armed Forces, defenders of liberty and justice for all. May Hashem protect them and bring them all home speedily and safely.*

Parshat Beha'alotekha contains one of the Torah's most unusual textual interruptions: two inverted letters – upside-down nuns – that bracket a brief, self-contained passage describing the Ark's journey: *"When the Ark set out, Moshe would say: 'Arise, Lord; let Your enemies be scattered, and Your enemies flee before You.' And when it rested, he said, 'Return, Lord, to the ten thousand thousands of Yisra el'"* (Numbers 10:35,36). The Talmud (Shabbat 116a) regards these two verses as an independent book in their own right, which means the inverted nuns divide the book of Bamidbar into three distinct literary units.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik understood these verses as capturing the Jewish people in motion – a divinely charged march toward the Land of Israel. At this point in the narrative, however, that march came to a halt. The verses are bracketed, enclosed, as if frozen in time. They represent a trajectory toward destiny that was interrupted, precisely because the Jewish people lost focus on the values and vision that should have animated their journey. What follows in the Torah – beginning with chapter 11 of Numbers – is a chronicle of that loss of direction: a spiraling series of failures that culminated in the catastrophic rejection of the Land itself, which we read about in next week's parsha.

Parshat Beha'alotekha opens with God's command to Aharon regarding the lighting of the mishkan's candelabrum. Similarly, the haftarah – Zechariah's prophetic vision – features a glorious golden menorah flanked by olive trees. The visual parallel is unmistakable, but Zechariah's vision pushes us beyond the visual parallel to the deeper question of spiritual orientation.

At the center of Zechariah's vision stands Yehoshua the High Priest, clothed in filthy garments. An angel commands that the soiled robes be removed and replaced with new, splendid clothing. This is not only a reflection of Yehoshua's personal spiritual state. The High Priest is the spiritual representative of the entire nation; his clothing embodies the people's collective orientation before God. Dirty clothing signals not failure alone, but misalignment – a loss of clarity about what truly matters. And the remedy the haftarah prescribes is captured in one of the most resonant verses in the prophetic canon: *"Not with valor and not with strength, but with My spirit, says the Lord of Hosts"* (Zechariah 4:6).

This is where the haftarah's deepest resonance with the parasha comes into view. The failures recorded after the inverted nuns are not primarily military or political; they are spiritual failures of leadership and orientation. The episodes that follow – from the debacle of the people's craving for quail – a hunger for materialism, to the breakdown of leadership around Moshe as illustrated in the stories of Eldad and Medad and the troubling words spoken by Miriam and Aharon against Moshe – reveal a people and a leadership struggling to align material desire with spiritual calling. When those entrusted with guiding the nation toward its destiny are wearing soiled garments – when their priorities are misaligned and their faculties misdirected – the march is frozen. The Ark stands still.

Such a trajectory cannot reverse itself on its own. Zechariah's prophecy insists that renewal is possible, but only through the spirit of God, not through the force of human ambition or the momentum of circumstance. This is a demanding standard. It calls on leaders to continuously examine their garments, to ask honestly whether their vision is clean or compromised, whether they are pointing their communities toward God or toward something lesser. And it calls on communities to hold their leaders – and themselves – to that standard.

For us, reading this parasha as it falls this Shabbat, the challenge is immediate. The march of the Jewish people toward its destiny in the Land of Israel – a march that pulses through the declaration recited when the Ark is opened, *"Arise, Lord"* – is not simply a past event. It is an ongoing project. Every generation must ask whether it is moving the Ark forward or is stuck in place. Every generation must look honestly at the spiritual clothing it wears. The inverted nuns still jump off the page to

us – not as a symbol of defeat, but as a call. When we choose to lead with spirit rather than force, when we return to the higher vision encoded in those two bracketed verses, we do our part to shatter their enclosure, allowing the spiritual light of our collective menorah to burst forth. And the march, at last, resumes.

Shabbat Shalom

\* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact [ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org](mailto:ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org) or 212-935-8672. **Donations to 49 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

<https://ots.org.il/behaalotekha-rabbi-brander-5786/>

---

## **Parshat Behaalotcha: “The Eternal Nation Is Not Afraid of a Long Journey”**

By Rabbanit Chamutal Shoval \* (June 10, 2025)

Complaining is fun, isn't it? There's something contagious about it — especially in a group. One person voices a criticism, finds a difficulty, and immediately others chime in. A kind of false intimacy is created, a sense of connection built not on what is, but on what's missing — on shared misfortune. It's so easy to be pulled into a downward spiral of negativity, complaints, and despair.

The Book of Bamidbar opens with a grand census, a majestic description of the Israelite camp marching in formation with the Mishkan at its center, the offerings of the tribal leaders, the priestly blessing. There's a palpable excitement in the air — entry into the Land of Israel feels imminent, everything is in place. And then... the downfall begins.

Bamidbar is the book of Israel's failings and the challenges of being in the wilderness. The people look around and see only endless sand, and the complaints begin. Suddenly, Egypt becomes romanticized. There's a wave of nostalgia for Egyptian cuisine: fish, onions, garlic — all the good Egypt had to offer. The harsh historical context is erased. Slavery seems to vanish from memory, while the imagined aroma of Egyptian stews floats longingly above the people's grievances. The people turn to Moshe and ask for meat, for fish, for melons.

The Torah sages debate whether their life in Egypt was really as good as they recall: were they truly feasting on Nile fish three times a day? Or is this simply the distortion of memory? The Ramban writes plainly that they lacked for nothing in the desert. They had the manna to satisfy them and could make from it various delicacies of refined taste. But they yearned for what they didn't have — they indulged in false longing for a past that never was. He writes:

*“There was no lack in the desert, for they had the manna to satisfy their hunger, and could prepare from it various refined dishes, as the text recounts. But they developed in themselves an excessive craving, as if desiring to eat coals, dirt, or spoiled food.”*

In other words, even when their needs were fully met, they yearned for something else — for something absent. It was a craving rooted not in reality but in fantasy.

Moshe urges them to believe in the direction they are headed, in the future that awaits them. He asks them to keep their eyes lifted forward, toward the Land of Israel — even amid the sand, the heat, and the void that surrounded them. But on the fringes of the camp, not everyone is capable of this. The Torah refers to these dissidents as “asafsuf,” the mixed multitude — the Egyptians who had joined the Israelites in the Exodus. The latter had attached themselves to the Israelites, and were now leading the rebellion of cravings, the march of discontent. They may have been moving forward, but every so often they glance backward. And like many who leave a familiar place, from a distance it suddenly seems better than it was. Time blurs the hardships, and these Egyptians, who had joined the Hebrews, begin to wonder if they have made the right choice.

The People of Israel ate manna in the desert — that miraculous food that descended from the heavens and provided all their sustenance. It was a symbol of Divine connection, reminding them each morning, as they collected the exact portion for each household, of their bond with the Creator. But the complainers wanted no part of that relationship. They longed for food that came from down below, from the earth itself: onions, garlic, cucumbers, melons, even Egyptian fish. The verse adds an intriguing word: chinam — “We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for free.” But of course, nothing was free for a nation of oppressed slaves.

What’s really happening here is fear — fear of the responsibility God is placing upon them. Fear of entering into a Covenant; fear of having a destiny and purpose. The terrible suffering they had endured in Egypt is forgotten, and the upward gaze — toward the Promised Land — dims. Their eyes are lowered. In a long-distance race, it’s hard to keep the finish line in mind. The cucumbers are just an excuse. A slave doesn’t have to choose, doesn’t need to believe, and certainly isn’t expected to journey toward a distant, promised land. A slave may work hard; however, when it comes to responsibility — one is definitely free of that. Yes, the physical labor in Egypt was brutal, but it required no spiritual commitment whatsoever.

As the Land of Israel draws near, the mixed multitude realizes that the easiest way to sow doubt is to remind the people how simple life once seemed: backbreaking labor, perhaps—but free melons. The manna symbolizes the next phase — one that requires lifting one’s gaze upwards. The wilderness is hard, frightening, and exposed. But it is a meaningful passage toward the goal. To become not just a nation of ex-slaves but a free and proud Jewish people, you can’t keep eating melons. You need food that demands faith — food that connects you to God and obliges you to be in a relationship with Him.

There is something terrifying about taking responsibility, about walking toward a vision you believe in, about leaving behind a place that harmed you — even when the destination is still out of sight. Moshe asks them to look up and face the future with courage. Tough decisions come at a cost; they are never free.

\* Alumna and director of the Susi Bradfield Women’s Institute of Halakhic Leadership (WIHL).

[Ed. note: from OTS: Among this year’s overseas students at Midreshet Lindenbaum’s Maria and Joel Finkle Overseas Program, 16 young women - 27% of the cohort - have chosen to remain in Israel next year to serve the country, whether in the IDF or some other form of National Service.]

<https://ots.org.il/rabbanit-chamutal-shoval-on-behaalotcha/>

---

## **Drasha: Behaloscha: It’s the Real Thing** by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1999

In this week’s portion, there is a brief conversation that may get lost in the myriad activity of some of its more fascinating stories and commands. Moshe beseeches his father-in-law, Yisro, to continue travelling with the Jewish nation. “We are travelling to the place of which Hashem has said, ‘I shall give to you.’ Go with us, and we shall treat you well” (Numbers 10:29).

Yisro replies by saying that he would like to return to his land and family. Moshe implores Yisro by telling him that he must accompany the Jews. After all, he knows the encampments and would be eyes for the Jewish people.

Whether Yisro was influenced by his son-in-law’s arguments is debated by the commentaries. The Torah does not refer to the outcome. What interests me, however, is that Moshe never tells Yisro where the Jews are going. He just tells him that “we are travelling to the place of which Hashem has said, ‘I shall give to you.’”

It is reminiscent of Hashem commanding Avraham to travel to Canaan with the petition “go from your land and your birthplace to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). But Moshe is not the Almighty, and the entire nation knew of the

land where they would be going. After all, the land of Canaan was the focal point of the Exodus.

Why, then, does Moshe describe it to Yisro in a mysterious manner, not by defining its location, longitude or latitude, but rather identifying it as “the land that Hashem has promised to give us”? Would it not have been easier for Moshe to tell Yisro, “We are travelling to the Land of Canaan and we want you to accompany us”?

**New York Times columnist Ralph de Toledano had a different view of the world than that of his editors. Despite protestations of the editorial board of the Times would always capitalize the words Heaven and Hell in any context.**

**His editors called him to task citing that heaven is only capitalized when it is a alternative for the Deity as in “Heaven help us.” Moreover they insisted hell never got a capital H. De Toledano, however, insisted that any reference of those two places be spelled with a capital first letter.**

**“You see,” the conservative columnist explained, “Heaven and Hell must always be capitalized. I want my readers to understand that Heaven and Hell are real places just like Scarsdale!”**

When describing the Land of Israel, Moshe does not take a topographical approach. He delves deeper. Moshe Rabbeinu does not refer to the land of Israel merely as the land of Canaan. In telling his father-in-law where the Jews would be going, he does not offer the longitude and latitude. He does not even describe Eretz Yisrael as the land flowing with milk and honey. Moshe’s only descriptive was, “the land that “Hashem told us, this I shall give to you.”

That statement describes Eretz Yisrael in stronger terms than agricultural potential, natural beauty, or strategic location.

It tells us that Eretz Israel is the place that Hashem promised. Any other quality is temporal. Bounty withers, beauty erodes, and natural resources dry-up. But the promise of Hashem remains eternal. It makes us understand that like both extremes of the world-to come, the Land of Israel is real.

Good Shabbos!

From my archives

---

## **Behaalotecha: A Split Parsha, A Split Vision**

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2009

B’ha’alotkha is rich with many stories of the challenges, adventures, and misadventures of Bnei Yisrael’s travelling from Har Sinai and moving towards the Land of Israel. What is visually the most striking is the parsha of “va’yehi binsoa ha’aron,” “and it was when the Ark travelled,” which occurs in the middle of the parsha, and is set off by inverted Hebrew-nuns. As is stated in Shabbat 116a, in the name of Rebbe, this division indicates that the parsha of “Vayehi” is a sefer in its own right, and it divides the Torah into 7 books (Breishit, Shemot, Vayikra, Bamidbar pre-vayehi, Vayehi, Bamidbar post-vayehi, and Dvarim). What is the significance of dividing the Bamidbar into these two halves?

I believe that this parsha signals a key transition point. From the middle of Shemot onwards, Bnei Yisrael have been at the foot of Har Sinai, receiving the Torah, building the mishkan, receiving the commands regarding the sacrifices, and setting up the camp. They are now, finally, prepared to move forward. The key question that is introduced at the beginning of Bamidbar, is how will they move forward from Har Sinai. Will they be able to leave Har Sinai and to keep the mishkan in the center, and to continue to orient themselves towards God’s presence?

Of course, they immediately fail this challenge, and as soon as they move forward, right at “Vayehi,” they begin to complain for meat. They have lost their center, their focus. It is instructive to compare this complaint, and these murmurings for food, to the complaint and murmurings for food that occurred prior to the giving of the Torah in Shemot 16:2. There, the people were not punished by God, and God granted them the manna. Here, the people were stricken by God, and many were

killed. Now, on the one hand, the difference is simple. Earlier, they had no food at all, and they asked for bread – the bare necessities – and were given it. Here, they have the manna, and what they ask for is an indulgence and a luxury. This is borne out in the Torah's emphasis of *hatavu ta'avah*, they lusted a lust, and in the description of the eating of the quail. But I believe that another difference is also at play, and that has to do with the question of unity. In Shemot, it is the nation asking for the sake of the nation – “And the entire congregation of Israel complained, ‘For you have taken us into this Wilderness to kill this entire congregation in famine.’” Whereas here there is complete self-absorption and self-centeredness – the rabble begin it, it is not coming from the nation as a whole, it is about desire – not necessity- which focuses on the individual's cravings, and there is no mention of the nation's interests or concern for its well-being.

What has happened is the difference of moving towards Har Sinai or away from it. When the people were moving towards Har Sinai they were brought together – externally, by the fear of Pharaoh's pursuing armies and by the shared need of survival (the necessity of bread), and internally, by the shared vision to follow God, to follow Moshe, to become free, and to arrive at Har Sinai. And at Har Sinai this unity was fully realized – “And the people encamped” – “as one person, with one heart.” Now, however, begins the move away from Har Sinai. Now that they are not moving towards the vision, but have achieved it, and have received the mitzvot, and must move forward with the vision. Now, Pharaoh's armies are no longer pursuing them, and their most basic needs are taken care of. It is now that they are at the greatest risk. What will hold them together? There is no external pressure, and without the goal of arriving at Har Sinai, it is unclear that they, left to their own devices, will be able to sustain the vision that will unify them.

This vulnerability when they move is true in a practical sense as well. For when the camp breaks, and spreads out to travel, they are the most vulnerable and can be picked off by the enemy. Amalek attacked the stragglers, and it was the role of the tribe of Dan was to gather all those who were left behind. The trumpets are needed to gather the people before the move, and to coordinate the move – to be the external structure that holds them together as they move forward.

It is because of this vulnerability, that we find the unexpected mention of ‘enemies’ in the “Vayehi” parsha. “Arise, God, and let Your enemies scatter from before You.” For when they are moving forward, they are most vulnerable, and they must pray that their enemies scatter. And when they settle, and re-erect the mishkan in the center of the camp, they are more secure, more able to establish our center, more able to sustain their unity. *Shuva Hashem ri'vevot alfei yisrael*, “Return, God, to the myriads and thousands of Israel,” bring all the myriads of Israel together with You in the center.

With a settled, focused, concerted effort we can re-establish our shared vision, our center, and our unity. But when we are moving and things are in flux, then we risk losing our center and losing our vision. With a shared vision, no hardship is too great. Without a vision, then every tiny problem becomes a hardship. We focus on our own cravings, and we even seek out new ones. We spread out, we fight, we bicker, and we suffer.

Bamidbar is, in fact, broken into two halves. Before they moved from Har Sinai and after they left Har Sinai. Would they be able to leave Har Sinai and keep the mishkan in their center? Would they continue to sustain a shared vision or would they be a *tinok haboreyach mibeit hasefer*, an child running out of school, casting the vision and the mission behind as quickly as possible?

We know how Bnei Yisrael fared and how they failed, until they reached the end of their wanderings, and arrived, in the book of Dvarim, the next sefer, to a place where they could once again have a shared vision, the entry into the land of Canaan.

How, we must ask ourselves, do we fare in this regard? At times when our home life and communal life is stable, let us work to erect a mishkan in our midst, to articulate a shared vision, and work to build it together. And when we are in times of transition, and the most vulnerable, let us work to sustain our vision and our unity of purpose, so that no hardship is too great, so we can free ourselves from nonsense, meaningless cravings, and pernicious and destructive squabbles, so that when we settle again, our unity will be established, our vision sustained, and God will be in our midst.

From my archives

---

## Nishmat haTorah: Parashat Beha'alotcha

## Chatzotzrot: The Sound of Incompleteness

By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz \*

In the spirit of this series, Nishmat HaTorah, whose guiding aspiration is to explore the weekly parsha through the lens of Torat HaChassidut, I want to share one of the foundational Chassidic teachings on this week's parsha. It is enigmatic and, as we will see, theologically daring. Still, in a series devoted to Chassidut on the parsha, I would be remiss not to include it. It is part of the basic Chassidic vocabulary of the parsha.

In this week's parsha, Hashem commands Moshe to make two silver trumpets. These trumpets gather the people, summon the leaders, organize the movement of the camp, accompany moments of celebration, and are sounded in times of danger:

*"When you go to war in your land against an enemy who attacks you, you shall sound the trumpets, and you shall be remembered before Hashem your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies."*

Ramban, in his critique of Maimonides' *Sefer HaMitzvot* (Positive Commandment 5), derives his unique understanding of prayer from this verse. Maimonides counts daily prayer as a biblical mitzvah. Ramban disagrees. For Ramban, there is no biblical obligation to pray every day. The biblical mitzvah applies only in a time of distress, when a person or community faces danger and turns to God. The requirement to sound the trumpets in a time of distress is, for Ramban, the Torah's concrete form of crying out to God in crisis.

That is significant. Ramban could have grounded prayer in a verse about petition, praise, or service of the heart. Instead, he grounds it in the trumpet blast sounded in a moment of danger. Of course prayer uses words. But here the words carry something more primal and visceral: not polished supplication, but alarm, distress, the raw cry of a person with nowhere to hide, standing desperate before God.

That is one kind of dependence: the dependence of crisis. For the Maggid of Mezritch, these trumpets point to a different kind of dependence.

The Hebrew word for trumpets is תורוצות, chatzotzrot. R. Dov Ber of Mezritch, known as the Maggid of Mezritch, the premier disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, reads the word Chassidically, not in its plain sense but by letting its sound suggest another meaning: "make for yourself two *chatzi tzurot*, two half-forms." On this reading, "make for yourself" also means: *look at yourself as a being of half-forms*.

The Ohev Yisrael preserves the teaching in a strikingly brief form:

*"I heard in the name of the holy Rav, R. Dov Ber, of blessed memory, that he said these words: 'Make for yourself two chatzotzrot' is an acronym for 'two half-forms.' But I did not hear the explanation of the matter."*

The Ohev Yisrael records the teaching but leaves it open. Two half-forms: half of what? Made whole through whom? By God? By another person? By Torah? By community? Later Chassidic teachers took the teaching in several directions. Some read it as a teaching about the relationship between the human being and God; others as a teaching about human interdependence, the need for another person, a teacher, a friend, or a community. In all of these readings, the human being is not whole alone.

But while some of the Maggid's disciples received the teaching in incomplete form, we also have the idea in the Maggid's own words. In Maggid Devarav LeYaakov (no. 24), the Maggid writes:

*"'Make for yourself two silver chatzotzrot' means: two half-forms... For the human being is only dalet-mem, dam, blood... and when he attaches himself to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, who is the Aleph of the world, he becomes adam... This is the meaning of 'two silver chatzotzrot': the human being is a half-form, for he is only dam, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu is called the Aleph of the world. When they attach to one another, a complete form is made."*

The Maggid is working with the word adam. On its own, he says, the human being is only dam, blood (and flesh). What turns dam into adam is the aleph, the presence of the Divine, the Aleph of the world. Without that aleph, a person is alive, full of energy, movement, and desire, but something essential is missing.

So far, one could understand the teaching as a strong claim about human dependence on God. Without God, the human being is not yet fully adam. But the Maggid says more. He speaks not of one half-form, but of two. The human being is one half; God, as it were, is the other “half.” Only when they are joined does a complete form come into being.

Here the teaching becomes theologically bold. We are used to saying that the human being is incomplete without God. The Maggid appears to say that, in some mystical sense, God is also incomplete without the human being. Not God in God’s own infinite essence, of course. But God’s presence in this world, the Divine purpose in creation, remains somehow unfinished without human beings who turn toward God and bring His will into the world. One hears echoes here of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel’s famous formulation: “*God in search of man.*” The Maggid’s language is even more daring: the Divine presence in the world is somehow only a half-form until human beings bring the aleph into their lives.

The contrast is now clear. For Ramban, the trumpets are the source for prayer in a time of distress, the cry of crisis sounded before God by a person or community in danger. For the Maggid, *chatzotzrot* becomes *chatzi tzurot*, half-forms. The dependence is no longer only the dependence of crisis, but the deeper dependence built into the bond between God and humanity.

The trumpets gather, summon, and sound the alarm in danger. In the Maggid’s reading, they also suggest a deeper theological reality: the human being is not whole without the Divine aleph, and God’s presence in the world is not fully revealed without the human being who turns toward it and brings it into life. Only then does dam become adam; only then do the two half-forms become whole.

\* Chair of the Talmud Department and the Director of the Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY. [note: some Hebrew text omitted because of software issues]

---

## **Spiritual Courage: Thoughts for Parashat Beha'aloteha**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

When I was a student at Franklin High School in Seattle, we were required to bring a note from our parents if we missed a day of classes. We were then marked as having an “*excused absence*” rather than having been truant. I ran into problems on several occasions when I brought a note from home requesting that I be excused for missing several days due to the Jewish holidays — Succoth and Shavuoth. The school official denied the request saying that “*all the Jewish students were in school so it couldn’t have been a Jewish holiday.*” I had to ask my rabbi to intervene. He explained to the school official that indeed Succoth and Shavuoth are Jewish holidays that necessitated my absences from school. Jewish children who attended classes on those days were not observing their own religious festivals. My absences were then listed as “*excused.*”

There were a few Jewish students at Franklin, like me, who observed the religious holy days. But for most of the others, attending class was more important than attending synagogue. I suppose those Jewish students learned a lot from the classes they attended. But those of us who missed classes probably learned a good deal more. We learned the importance of standing alone, of being faithful to one’s beliefs even if others believe and observe differently.

Bravo to Jews who forgo days at school or at work in observance of Shabbat and holy days. Even if they lose class time or take financial losses, they demonstrate the courage and commitment to maintain their religious values.

In this week’s Torah portion, we find a singular textual occurrence. Two verses are enclosed by upside down or backward Hebrew letters “*Nun.*” In his new book on Bemidbar, Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo suggests that the “*Nun*” (the letters framing the passage) is also the Aramaic word for fish. Reversed, it suggests a fish swimming against the current — *non-conformist, counter-cultural, audacious...*” He goes on to note that “*to be a Jew is to swim against the current; not*

merely to be different but to defy the very idea that the world as it is should define who you are. The upside-down nuns are not a footnote — they are a theological manifesto” (Cardozo on the Parashah: The Book of Numbers, Kasva Press, 2026, p. 64).

This “theological manifesto” is not only vital for religious observance; it is vital for life in general. If we have high values and principles, we need the courage to stand for them. We prioritize them and don’t surrender them in the face of external challenges or risk of losses.

It is very common for individuals to forgo their values and traditions in order to blend in with others or in order to gain financially or socially. Conforming to prevailing ideas and fashions is the norm for a great many people.

Missing school or work on Jewish holy days is not only a lesson in religion but a lesson in life. We gain much more than we lose.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City. Rabbi Marc Angel has a youtube series on religion and literature, with the first session dealing with the teachings of Ralph Waldo Emerson: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqP9UMJOwmk>

**The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](http://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its current fund raising period. Thank you.**

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3451>

---

## Maimonides, Spinoza and Us: A Significant New Book Review

By Francis Idris \*

*Maimonides, Spinoza and Us: Toward an Intellectually Vibrant Judaism*, by Marc D. Angel, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, 2009

Rabbi Dr Marc D Angel’s *Maimonides, Spinoza and Us* sits in a very specific intellectual tension that most books avoid on purpose. Published in 2009 by Jewish Lights Publishing, it does something slightly risky in plain sight. It puts Maimonides and Spinoza in the same room and refuses to let either behave like a museum piece. One is the rationalist inside tradition. The other is the excommunicated heretic who still somehow keeps influencing modern religious thought. That pairing alone already feels like a conversation that should not be polite.

And yet the tone is not academic distance. It reads more like a living argument that refuses to end. Reason and revelation are not treated as opposing camps to be safely labeled. They are treated like two people who keep interrupting each other mid-sentence. There is a quiet insistence underneath it all, that a thinking Jew should not have to amputate intellect to remain faithful. That line alone. It lands hard. Especially in rooms where questioning is already frowned upon.

What stands out, almost uncomfortably, is how direct the book is about superstition and authority. It does not whisper around the edges of religious discomfort. It names the problem of blind veneration and irrational belief without flinching. And coming from Rabbi Marc D Angel, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York, founder of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, that critique carries weight that is not theoretical. It comes from inside the system it is questioning. That is not a safe position. It never was.

There is something almost ironic here. A Sephardic rabbinic leader born in Seattle, with nearly forty books behind him, writes one of the clearest defenses of intellectual honesty in modern Judaism, and yet the book itself ends up living in a very narrow corridor. Too philosophical for casual religious readers. Too religious for pure academic philosophy shelves. It

ends up in that strange middle space where thinking people quietly find it, and quietly pass it to someone else. No noise. Just transfer.

And that detail matters. Because the book is not abstract theory. It is aimed directly at the kind of reader who feels spiritually homeless while still wanting to remain inside tradition. That specific tension, loving Torah but refusing to turn off the mind, is not a broad audience. It is a very particular kind of discomfort. The kind that does not advertise itself. It just sits there. Quiet. Persistent.

There is a line in the work that essentially exposes the entire paradox. The idea that the Torah path is narrow, with fire on one side and ice on the other. That image is almost too precise for modern religious discourse. Not poetic decoration. A warning about balance that assumes constant intellectual pressure. Most readers do not realize how rare it is to see Spinoza and Maimonides used together without one being treated as an enemy of the other. Here they are collaborators in argument. Strange alliance. It works.

But here is the part that feels almost absurd. A book that explicitly validates the thinking religious reader, the one who refuses both extremism and silence, is still largely discovered by accident. Even though it is already praised by scholars like Menachem Kellner and Neil Gillman, it does not consistently reach the very people it describes. The ones sitting inside congregations thinking privately, am I allowed to think like this. Yes. But they never see the answer sitting nearby.

That gap is where my attention goes. Not changing the argument. Not reshaping the theology. Just making sure the book is not waiting in the wrong shelf space while the exact readers it was written for keep assuming they are alone in the question. Because right now, intellectual honesty in Judaism is being searched for in fragments, while this text already holds it in a structured form that feels almost unreasonably calm about difficult questions.

And there is something unfinished about that. A book about ideas that transcend time and space, still sitting slightly outside the line of sight of the very minds it was written to steady... almost like it is waiting for someone to notice it is already speaking their language before they even finish forming the question.

\* Co-Founder of InsightIgnitee, a research-driven book visibility initiative that studies why significant books fail to reach the readers they were written for.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3452>

**The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](https://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its current fund raising period. Thank you.**

---

## Lashon Horah – Missing Information

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine\* © 2026

*May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel*

Everyone knew that Moshe was on a very special level. But even his sister, Miriam, didn't know quite how special a level he was on.

At the time of the revelation at Sinai, Hashem instructed husbands and wives to separate for three days in anticipation of the revelation (Shemos 19:15). When the revelation concluded, Hashem instructed Moshe to tell the people, "Return to family life" (Devorim 5:27). Immediately following that instruction came a most unusual directive. Hashem told Moshe, "[But

*as for] you, remain with Me and I will tell you all of the Torah so that you can teach them...*" (ibid. 28)

Although family life is a vital part of Torah living, Moshe was charged with an unusual responsibility. Instead of returning to family life with his wife, Tziporah, Moshe was assigned the responsibility to continue in the status of the revelation. He was to always be ready for Divine communication; in this way he would be the conduit of Torah from Hashem to the Jewish people.

No one knew of Moshe's unusual requirement besides his wife. It was a private matter, and it was highly unusual, unique to him. It was something that rightfully should remain unknown to anyone lest someone choose to emulate it in the mistaken belief that it was any man's path to holiness.

Yet somehow the secret got out. One day when Miriam was next to Tziporah, it slipped out of Tziporah's mouth, and it became clear to Miriam that Moshe had separated from his wife (Rashi 12:1). With great concern that Moshe was taking his piety to an improper level, Miriam related the information to her brother, Aharon.

Hashem called Miriam and Aharon aside and rebuked them. He explained that although they were also prophets, Moshe was on a totally different level and was indeed instructed by Divine directive to do what he was doing. Miriam was punished with Tzaraas. She became a paradigm for us to understand the severity of Lashon Horah and to appreciate its rules. The Ramban (Mitzva 7) places this story about Miriam as one of the 613 Mitzvos. As the Torah instructs us, "*Remember what Hashem did to Miriam,*" with the punishment of Tzaraas when she spoke Lashon Horah (Devorim 24:8-9). Even though Miriam loved Moshe and spoke to Aharon with constructive intent to clear things up, she was mistaken and was punished for it.

We wonder: How indeed are we to understand the story of Miriam. What did she do wrong? She spoke privately to Aharon with constructive intent about a behavior of Moshe's that seemed totally inappropriate.

The Chofetz Chaim (3, note 11) explains that Miriam's misdeed was in that she did not judge Moshe favorably. Even though what he did seemed absolutely wrong to her, she was mistaken in jumping to her conclusion. In the laws of Lashon Horah, we are instructed to reserve judgment and remain curious, trying to first find out if there is an explanation. As the Torah describes Hashem's rebuke, "*Why did you not fear to speak about Moshe.*" (Bamidbar 12:8)

In the laws of Lashon Horah, we indeed learn so much from the story of Miriam. The Chofetz Chaim (Chapter 10) tells us that before we talk badly about someone, we are to first approach the person with our perception and make the effort to find out if there is an explanation. So many times, what emerges is that we didn't have all the facts. As the saying goes, "*There are always two sides to every story.*"

The Torah instructs us to study the story of Miriam's Lashon Horah because it is so extreme. Even Miriam, as great as she was, made this mistake. She meant well and felt justified, but she did not realize that she was missing information. She did not know that Moshe was indeed acting correctly under a unique Divine directive, information she could have gotten if she had asked Moshe for his perspective on the matter.

Sometimes, we encounter people speaking what they believe is constructive Lashon Horah, because in their view, the person they talk about is clearly wrong. The Lashon Horah they perceive as constructive and justified can go on for months or years all in the name of venting and seeking validation. In this way a spouse, sibling, or parent, can be painted in a most negative light without ever being given an opportunity to respond to the assumptions of wrongdoing.

Certainly, there are times that a person feels wronged and needs to seek counsel and vent. The laws of constructive Lashon Horah require that we curiously pursue the possibility that there is another perspective. Like Miriam, we might be reaching our conclusions because we are missing information. With that information things might suddenly make sense. Or we can use that information strategically to try to reach a satisfying resolution.

#### **Family Discussion Questions:**

1. The essay says Miriam could have gotten the missing information simply by asking Moshe directly. Why do you think people often don't go to the source when they're upset or confused about someone's behavior?
2. Can you think of a time — in your own life or something you witnessed — where getting "the other side" completely changed how a situation looked?

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos,

\* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are [www.care-mediation.com](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com).  
**For information or to join any Torah613 classes, or to help sponsor his Torah insights, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

---

## **Aseret Dibrot: The Ten Commandments**

By Rabbi Yehoshua Singer © 2026

*[Note: Although Rabbi Singer wrote this Dvar for Shavuot, the subject fits for a part of the Torah where our ancestors fought against accepting Hashem's mitzvot – the reason why the generation of the Exodus could not enter the land that Hashem had promised to our avot.]*

The Ten Commandments cover every facet of human life. They begin with belief in G-d, respecting G-d and acting out that belief and continue with respecting our relationships, the lives and monies of the people around us and the justice system. The tenth one addresses our emotional world and demands us to overcome jealousy.

This last Commandment raises the obvious question – how can G-d demand me to not be jealous? How can I not feel what I feel? As human beings, feelings are natural. In fact, the Medrash teaches us that when Avrohom was preparing to bring his son as an offering, he was crying bitter tears over the loss of his son. If our forefather Avrohom, one of the greatest spiritual giants to ever walk the earth, was allowed to be human, then why are we forbidden to feel the natural emotion of jealousy?

The Ibn Ezra and the Sporno both address this question in their commentaries on the Chumash. They explain that this mitzvah is actually not about controlling the emotions we feel. Rather, the mitzvah is to develop a mindset which prevents the emotion from starting. They teach us that jealousy is an emotional response when I see someone else achieving something that I was dreaming of having myself. When I see them living my dream, my mind recognizes the dream and yearns for it. This is where jealousy starts.

A commoner would never have a feeling of jealousy for a prince who marries a princess. The commoner never expected to marry a princess. The concept is beyond his wildest dreams. It is simply outside of what he expects from life. Since he never expected it, when a prince has that privilege, he does not feel any jealousy.

Based on this, they explain that the mitzvah is to develop an awareness of G-d's love for me and of G-d's ultimate and absolute control of the world. As I develop those philosophies and begin to live life from those perspectives, I learn to be happy with what I have. I develop a deep understanding that I already have access to whatever I need in life. This is coupled with the understanding that whatever G-d gives to someone else, I could never have. If G-d doesn't want me to have it, there is no way for me to earn it and keep it. As such, I never imagine living that life. Once I don't have any expectation, jealousy never starts.

The Ibn Ezra and Sporno are teaching us a profound and valuable lesson for life. We are often faced with emotions we

aren't proud of, but which are hard to overcome – pride, stinginess, anger and others. It is not always necessary to fight our emotions. We don't have to deny who we are and how we feel. Instead, we can stop and think about why we feel the way we do, about how our perspective may be contributing to our emotions.

We feel haughty because we are smart, wealthy or strong and therefore think we are somehow better than others. If we consider how often we need help to achieve our goals, how little we could accomplish if we lived alone on a desert island, we begin to realize and appreciate the value of others, and that in some ways they are better than us.

We feel selfish because we worked hard for our money and possessions and we might need them. If we realize that Hashem is always caring for us, and that our friend also needs this item or these funds right now, we may start to find room in our heart for feelings of generosity.

We can feel angry because life didn't go as we had planned. We were expecting someone to be available for us and they said they have other commitments. How dare they? Don't they realize how much I need their help? If I stop before I ask for help and consider the possibility that the other person may not be available, then I change my expectation. If they in fact aren't available, I am met with less surprise and frustration and can lower my anger.

This tenth Commandment is teaching us how to approach our emotional world. We need to respect and recognize our challenges. Our emotions are real and the challenges they present are real. But, that doesn't mean that I can't change. I can change my perspective and change my expectations. As I develop my wisdom and understanding, my perspective shifts and my emotions will respond on their own.

\* Rav at Sha'arei Tefilla and the co-founder of the RI Torah Network in Providence, Rhode Island. For several years, Rabbi Singer was the Rabbi at Am HaTorah Congregation in Bethesda, MD. The RI Torah Network included this Dvar Torah in a booklet for Shavuot 5786. Rabbi Singer's recent Devrei Torah normally come as podcasts rather than texts.

---

### **Behaalotecha:**

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

[The only writing I have from Rabbi Ovadia for Behaalotecha is his "parsha pointers," which I have shared the past few years. I hope to have new material from Rabbi Ovadia on this parsha in the future. Watch this space for more insights from Rabbi Ovadia in subsequent weeks.]

**Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia, who has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.**

\* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>** . The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights (copyright) to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

---

### **A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community**

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz \*

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation \*\*

About a month ago, we celebrated, at least in a small way, a lesser-known holiday that is mentioned in this week's parsha: *Pesach Sheni*, the Second Passover.

The Torah tells us about a group of people who were ritually impure and therefore unable to bring the Korban Pesach at its appointed time. They came to Moshe with a heartfelt question: "Why should we be left out?" Why should we miss the opportunity to fulfill Hashem's covenant simply because of circumstances beyond our control?"

In most cases, the answer is that reality places limits on us. Sometimes our situation prevents us from doing certain things. A person who is impure cannot bring an offering. A mamzer cannot marry someone who is not a mamzer, despite bearing no responsibility for that status. Some people are born in the wrong place, at the wrong time, or with challenges and limitations that make certain opportunities inaccessible. Sometimes the answer is simply: that's life.

But every once in a while, something remarkable happens.

The Jewish people stand up and ask for another chance. They come before Hashem with a sincere desire to draw closer and say, "We don't want to be left behind."

And when that request comes from the deepest place and the purest intentions, it can change history. In this case, it gave birth to a new mitzvah and even a new holiday.

Today, Pesach Sheni is a minor observance that many people are not even aware of. Yet I think it carries one of the most beautiful messages in Judaism: that there are second chances, and that Hashem listens to the sincere yearning of a Jew who wants to come closer.

Pesach Sheni reminds us that sometimes the greatest spiritual achievements begin with a simple question:

"Why should we be left out?"

B'Ahavat Yisrael

Rabbi Netanel

[Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message for the congregation?]

\* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

\*\* Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher> .

---

## **Rav Kook Torah** **Behaalotecha: Separating from Tziporah**

*Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses regarding the dark-skinned woman he had married. (Num. 12:1)*

What was Miriam and Aaron's complaint? The Sages explained that they were upset that Moses had separated from Tziporah, Jethro's dark-skinned daughter. Miriam and Aaron were able to receive prophecy without resorting to celibacy. Why did Moses feel he needed to separate from his wife?

The separation was in fact Moses' idea; God had not commanded him to do this. The Talmud explains that Moses decided it was necessary after he witnessed the Divine revelation at Mount Sinai. Moses reasoned:

The Shechinah spoke with all of Israel only on one occasion, and at a predetermined hour. Nevertheless, the Torah cautioned [the Israelites at Sinai], *"Do not go near a woman"* Certainly I, with whom the Shechinah speaks at all times and with no set hour, must do the same. (Shabbat 87a)

The Sages noted that Moses' reasoning was sound and that God approved of his decision. Their proof: after the revelation at Sinai, God told the people, *"Return to your tents" [i.e., return to your families]. But to Moses, He said: "You, however, shall stay here with Me"* (Deut. 5:27-28).

Why was this separation something that Moses needed to work out for himself? And why was Moses the only prophet who needed to separate from his wife?

### **Divine Perspective**

Despite the innate greatness of the human soul, we are limited by our personal issues and concerns. Compared to the Shechinah's all-encompassing light — a brilliant light that illuminates all worlds and everything they contain — our private lives are like a candle's feeble light in the blazing sunlight of the sun. The cosmos are brimming with holiness, in all of their minutiae, in their transformations and advances, in their physical and spiritual paths. All of their heights and depths are holy; all is God's treasure.

In order to acquire this higher perspective, a prophet must free himself from his own narrow viewpoint. The pristine dawn of lofty da'at (knowledge) must be guarded from those influences that induce the prophet to withdraw to the private circle of his own family.

Moses, the faithful shepherd, could not be confined to the limited framework of private life, not even momentarily. His entire world was God's universe, where everything is holy.

It was Moses who recognized the need to separate himself from matters pertaining to his private life. From the Divine perspective, all is holy, and such measures are unnecessary. For Moses, however, it was essential. It allowed him to raise his sights and acquire a more elevated outlook. Separating from his family allowed Moses' soul to constantly commune with the Soul of all worlds. It enabled Moses to attain his uniquely pure prophetic vision.

### **Continual Light of Moses' Vision**

What was so special about Moses' prophecy that, unlike all other prophets, he needed to detach himself from private life?

We may use the analogy of lightning to illustrate the qualitative difference between the prophecy of Moses and that of other prophets.

Imagine walking in a pitch-black world where the only source of light is the light emitted by an occasional bolt of lightning. It would be impossible to truly identify one's surroundings in such a dark setting. Even if the lightning occurs repeatedly, the lack of constant illumination makes this form of light inadequate. If, however, the lightning is extremely frequent, like a strobe light set to flash at a fast frequency, its illumination is transformed into a source of constant light.

This analogy may be applied to spiritual enlightenment. One cannot truly recognize the elevated realm, its holiness and eternal morality, the rule of justice and the influence of the sublime, without the illumination of continual prophecy.

Ordinary prophecy is like the intermittent light of an occasional lightning bolt. Only the Torah, the unique prophecy of Moses, is a light that radiates continually. We are able to perceive the truth of the world's inner essence through this constant light, and live our lives accordingly.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Ein Ayah* vol. IV, p. 174; *Orot HaKodesh* vol. I, p. 275.)

[https://ravkooktorah.org/behaalotecha\\_65](https://ravkooktorah.org/behaalotecha_65)

---

## **Behaalotecha: Power or Influence? (5774, 5781)**

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former UK Chief Rabbi \*

There is a lovely moment in this week's parsha that shows Moses at the height of his generosity as a leader. It comes after one of his deepest moments of despair. The people, as is their wont, have been complaining, this time about the food. They are tired of the manna. They want meat instead. Moses, appalled that they have not yet learned to accept the hardships of freedom, prays to die. *"If this is how You are going to treat me," he says to God, "please go ahead and kill me right now – if I have found favour in Your eyes – and do not let me face my own ruin."* (Num. 11:15)

God tells him to appoint seventy elders to help him with the burdens of leadership. He does so, and the Divine Spirit rests on them all. But it also rests on two other men, Eldad and Medad, who were not among the chosen seventy. Evidently Moses had selected six men out of each of the twelve tribes, making 72, and then removed Eldad and Medad by lot. Nonetheless, they too were caught up in the moment of inspiration.[1]

Joshua, Moses' deputy, warns that this is a potential threat, but Moses replies with splendid magnanimity: *"Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were Prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon each of them!"* (Num. 11:29)

This contrasts sharply with Moses' conduct later when his leadership is challenged by Korach and his followers. On that occasion he showed no gentleness or generosity. To the contrary, in effect he prays that the ground swallow them up, that *"they go down alive into the realm of the dead."* (Num. 16:28-30) He is sharp, decisive and unforgiving. Why the different response to Korach on the one hand, and Eldad and Medad on the other?

To understand this, it is essential to grasp the difference between two concepts often confused, namely power and influence. We tend to think of them as similar if not identical. People of power have influence. People of influence have power. But the two are quite distinct and operate by a different logic, as a simple thought experiment will show. Imagine you have total power. Whatever you say, goes. Then one day you decide to share your power with nine others. You now have, at best, one-tenth of the power you had before. Now imagine instead that you have a certain measure of influence. You decide to share that influence with nine others, whom you make your partners. You now have ten times the influence you had before, because instead of just you there are now ten people delivering the message.

Power works by division, influence by multiplication. Power, in other words, is a zero-sum game: the more you share, the less you have. Influence is not like this, as we see with our Prophets. When it comes to leadership-as-influence, the more we share the more we have.

Throughout his forty years at the head of the nation, Moses held two different leadership roles. He was a Prophet, teaching Torah to the Israelites and communicating with God. He was also the functional equivalent of a king, leading the people on their journeys, directing their destiny and supplying them with their needs. The one leadership role he did not have was that of High Priest, which went to his brother Aaron.

We can see this duality later in the narrative when he inducts Joshua as his successor. God commands him: *"Take Joshua son of Nun, a man of spirit, and lay your hand on him ... Give him some of your honour (hod) so that the whole Israelite community will obey him."* (Num. 27:18-20)

Note the two different acts. One, *"lay your hand [vesamachta] on him,"* is the origin of term s'michah, whereby a Rabbi ordains a pupil, granting him the authority to make rulings in his own right. The Rabbis saw their role as a continuation of

that of the Prophets (*"Moses received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua; Joshua to the elders; the elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets handed it down to the men of the Great Assembly,"* Mishnah Avot 1:1). By this act of s'michah, Moses was handing on to Joshua his role as Prophet.

By the other act, *"Give him some of your honour,"* he was inducting him into the role of King. The Hebrew word *hod*, honour, is associated with kingship, as in the biblical phrase *hod malchut*, *"the honour of kingship"* (Dan. 11:21; 1 Chronicles, 29:25).

Kings had power – including that of life and death (see Joshua 1:18). Prophets had none, but they had influence, not just during their lifetimes but, in many cases, to this day. To paraphrase Kierkegaard: when a King dies his power ends. When a Prophet dies his influence begins.

Now we see exactly why Moses' reaction was so different in the case of Eldad and Medad, and that of Korach and his followers. Eldad and Medad sought and received no power. They merely received the same influence – the Divine Spirit that emanated from Moses. They became Prophets. That is why Moses said, *"I wish that all the Lord's people were Prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit on them."*

Korach, or at least some of his followers, sought power, and power is a zero-sum game. When it comes to *malchut*, the leadership of power, the rule is: *"There is one leader for the generation, not two."*[2] In kingship, a bid for power is an attempted coup d'état and has to be resisted by force. Otherwise the result is a division of the nation into two, as happened after the death of King Solomon. Moses could not let the challenge of Korach go unchallenged without fatefully compromising his own authority.

So Judaism clearly demarcates between leadership as influence and leadership by power. It is unqualified in its endorsement of the first, and deeply ambivalent about the second. Tanach is a sustained polemic against the use of power. All power, according to the Torah, rightly belongs to God. The Torah recognises the need, in an imperfect world, for the use of coercive force in maintaining the rule of law and the defence of the realm. Hence its endorsement of the appointment of a King, should the people so desire it.[3] But this is clearly a concession, not an ideal.[4]

The real leadership embraced by Tanach and by rabbinic Judaism is that of influence, above all that of Prophets and teachers. As we have noted many times before, that is the ultimate accolade given to Moses by tradition. We know him as *Moshe Rabbeinu*, Moses our teacher. Moses was the first of a long line of figures in Jewish history – among them Ezra, Hillel, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Akiva, the Sages of the Talmud and the scholars of the Middle Ages – who represent one of Judaism's most revolutionary ideas: the teacher as hero.

Judaism was the first and greatest civilisation to predicate its very survival on education, houses of study, and learning as a religious experience higher even than prayer.[5] The reason is this: leaders are people able to mobilise others to act in certain ways. If they achieve this only because they hold power over them, this means treating people as means, not ends - as things not persons. Not accidentally, the single greatest writer on leadership as power was Machiavelli.

The other approach is to speak to people's needs and aspirations, and teach them how to achieve these things together as a group. That is done through the power of a vision, force of personality, the ability to articulate shared ideals in a language with which people can identify, and the capacity to *"raise up many disciples"* who will continue the work into the future. Power diminishes those on whom it is exercised. Influence and education lift and enlarge them.

Judaism is a sustained protest against what Hobbes called the *"general inclination of all mankind,"* nameless *"a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death."*[6] That may be the reason why Jews have seldom exercised power for prolonged periods of time but have had an influence on the world out of all proportion to their numbers.

Not all of us have power, but we all have influence. That is why we can each be leaders. The most important forms of leadership come not with position, title or robes of office, not with prestige and power, but with the willingness to work with others to achieve what we cannot do alone; to speak, to listen, to teach, to learn, to treat other people's views with respect

even if they disagree with us, to explain patiently and cogently why we believe what we believe and why we do what we do; to encourage others, praise their best endeavours and challenge them to do better still.

Always choose influence rather than power. It helps change people into people who can change the world.

Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I normally select an earlier Devar. Footnotes have not been preserved for this Dvar Torah.

#### **Footnotes:**

[1] See Sanhedrin 17a

[2] Sanhedrin 8a.

[3] Deuteronomy 17:15-20; I Samuel 8.

[4] So, at any rate, is the view of Ibn Ezra, Rabbeinu Bachya and Abarbanel.

[5] See Shabbat 10a.

[6] Hobbes, The Leviathan, part 1, ch. 11.

#### **Around the Shabbat Table:**

[1] What is Joshua's concern about Eldad and Medad?

[2] Why does Moses respond to Joshua that he wishes every person could become a Prophet?

[3] According to Rabbi Sacks, we all have influence. How will you apply your influence to make a positive impact in this world?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/behaalotecha/power-or-influence/>

---

## **Are You Big Enough to Be Humble?**

By Eliezer Shemtov \* © Chabad 2026

One cause of anxiety and anguish is low self-esteem. When one feels worthless or unremarkable, depression is not far off. Today, I want to look at a powerful antidote to low self-esteem: humility. But how can humility protect against low self-esteem? Don't they amount to the same thing? Let's look at what humility actually means from a Chassidic perspective.

In this week's Torah portion, Behaalotecha, we are told that *"the man Moses was more humble than any person on the face of the earth."*<sup>1</sup> According to the standard definition, humility means being aware of one's own limitations and weaknesses, and acting accordingly. But Chassidism understands the verse to mean something more specific: Moses's humility arose from comparing himself to every single person on the face of the earth.

How do we understand this? Moses confronted Pharaoh unflinchingly, facilitated the ten plagues, led the Jewish people out of slavery, split the sea, received the Torah directly from G d, and brought down the manna. How could such a man feel more humble — more aware of his own limitations — than anyone else alive? Didn't his virtues and achievements far outweigh any shortcomings?

Clearly, humility is not the same as an inferiority complex. So what is it?

When one possesses extraordinary gifts, there are two possible responses: 1) *"I am greater and more important than others,"* or 2) *"I was entrusted with something more valuable than others."* The first leads to arrogance, to feeling privileged and distanced from those who seem lesser. The second leads to a profound sense of responsibility — toward one's gifts and toward others. And it leads to humility.

Why humility?

Because if I have gifts and opportunities that others lack, I am expected to produce more than they do. G d judges not how much one does, but how much effort one puts into fulfilling one's mission. One who has more capacity is asked to do more. If David donates \$1,000 and Daniel donates \$100, people praise David more. But if David has a million dollars and Daniel has only a thousand, which of the two deserves greater credit?

Moses felt profound humility before every single person precisely because he knew his gifts far exceeded those of anyone else. That meant more was expected of him than from anyone else — and therefore the effort of any ordinary person was proportionally greater than his. *"Besides,"* he thought, *"who knows whether, given the same gifts, opportunities, and resources as I was given, they might not have achieved even more?"*

*"Of course I fulfill everything,"* Moses may have thought. *"I heard it directly from G d — how could I not? But look at Daniel in Montevideo, 3,332 years after the Torah was given, being faithful to its teachings and performing a single mitzvah ... I don't know if I, in his place, with his challenges, could have done what he is doing!"*

People tend to compare themselves to others, for better or worse. If they believe they are superior, they feel good; if they think someone else is better, they feel bad. This is a great fallacy. You are not "doing well" simply because you are better off than someone else, nor are you "doing poorly" simply because someone else is better. The only meaningful comparison is to yourself: Am I better today than I was yesterday? Am I performing to my potential? And if I encounter someone who seems inferior to me, rather than looking down on them, I should recognize that perhaps their very constraints make their effort far greater in value than mine.

Every single person excels at something — some through what they have, others through what they manage to achieve despite what they lack. Keeping this in mind helps us respect every person we encounter, without exception — including, perhaps especially, ourselves.

The tool for this week: Become aware of the deepest reason why human life matters and you will realize that every life matters, beyond all differences, and also because of them. From this reflection, you will gain a healthy self-esteem, rooted in genuine humility, which will leave you feeling more empowered.

#### FOOTNOTE:

1. Numbers 12:3.

\* Chabad-Lubavitch emissary in Montevideo, Uruguay, and a contributor to Chabad.org.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/7377439/jewish/Are-You-Big-Enough-to-Be-Humble.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/7377439/jewish/Are-You-Big-Enough-to-Be-Humble.htm) [some paragraphs combined from the original]

---

## Beha'alotecha: The Permanence of Temporary Situations

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \* (5781)

[Note: The Kehot email did not reach me by my deadline, so I am using a posting from my archives]

*"At G-d's bidding they encamped, and at G-d's bidding they traveled." (Numbers 9:23)*

The Jewish people never knew in advance how long they would be staying at any given camp — it could have been for a day or for years. Nonetheless, they would set up the Tabernacle in its entirety at each encampment, following G-d's instructions to keep the Tabernacle functioning at all times.

This teaches us two important lessons. First, we should recognize that it is G-d who leads us through all our journeys in life — whether geographical, emotional, mental, or spiritual. We should indeed make our own plans based on our lives' goals, but at the same time, we must realize that G-d knows when it is in our best interest to stay put or to move on to the next station in life, and that He arranges things accordingly.

Second, we should not "put our lives on hold" when we are in temporary situations. Since G-d is beyond time and place, when we connect with Him even for one moment, that moment lasts for all time. Whether a personal journey lasts a day or a decade, we can make it into a sanctuary, imbued with the eternal permanence of G-d's presence.

– From *Daily Wisdom* #1

\* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
Kehot Publication Society  
291 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

---

To receive the complete D'Vrai Torah package weekly by E-mail, send your request to [AfisherADS@Yahoo.com](mailto:AfisherADS@Yahoo.com). The printed copies contain only a small portion of the D'Vrai Torah. Dedication opportunities available. Authors retain all copyright privileges for their sections.

# Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah  
via the Internet

By Elaine Millen and Marilyn Stein  
on the occasion of the yearzeits of their parents,  
Rose Gottlieb, z"l, (21 Sivan) and Sam Gottlieb, z"l, (29 Sivan)

Volume 32, Issue 32

Shabbat Parashat Behaalotcha

5786 B"H

## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### Is a Leader a Nursing Father?

It was the emotional low of Moses' life. After the drama at Sinai, the Revelation, the Golden Calf, the forgiveness, the building of the Tabernacle, and the book-length codes of purity and holiness, all the people can think about is food.

"Who will give us meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost, the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic! But now our throats are dry. There is nothing at all but this manna to look at." Num. 11:5-6

It was enough to make anyone despair, even a Moses. But the words he speaks are shattering. He says to God: "Why have You treated Your servant so badly? Why have I found so little favour in Your sight that You lay all the burden of this people upon me? Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who gave birth to them all, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your lap, as a nursemaid carries a baby'?... I cannot bear all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how You treat me, kill me now - if I have found favour in Your sight - and let me not see my own misery!" Num. 11:11-15

These words deserve the closest attention. Inevitably our attention focuses on the last remark, Moses' wish to die. But actually this is not the most interesting part of his speech. Moses was not the only Jewish leader to pray to die. So did Elijah. So did Jeremiah. So did Jonah. Leadership is difficult; leadership of the Jewish people almost impossible. That is an old story and not an uplifting one.

The real interest lies elsewhere, when Moses says: "Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant?" But God never used those words. He never remotely implied such a thing. God asked Moses to lead but He did not tell him how to lead. He told Moses what to do, but He did not discuss his leadership style.

The man who gave Moses his first tutorial in leadership was his father-in-law Jethro, who warned him of the risk of the very burn-out he is now experiencing.

"What you are doing is not good. You will be worn away, and this people along with you. It is too heavy a burden for you. You cannot carry it alone." Ex. 18:17-18

He then told him to delegate and share his burden with a team of leaders, much as God is about to do in our Parsha.

Interestingly, Moses' burnout occurs immediately after we read, at the end of the previous chapter, of Jethro's departure. Something very similar happens later in Parshat Chukat (Num. 20). First we read of the death of Miriam. Then immediately there follows the scene at Merivah when the people ask for water and Moses loses his temper and strikes the rock, the act that costs him the chance to lead the people across the Jordan into the Promised Land. It seems that in their different ways, Jethro and Miriam were essential emotional supports for Moses. When they were there, he coped. When they were not, he lost his poise. Leaders need soulmates, people who lift their spirits and give them the strength to carry on. No-one can lead alone.

But to return to Moses' speech to God, the Torah may be hinting here that the way Moses conceived the role of leader was itself part of the problem. "Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do You tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant?" This is the language of the leader-as-parent, the "Great Man" theory of leadership.

Building on, and going beyond, the theories of Gustave le Bon and the "group mind," Sigmund Freud argued that crowds become dangerous when a certain kind of leader comes to power.[1] Such a leader, often highly charismatic, resolves the tensions within the group by seeming to promise solutions to all their problems. He is strong. He is persuasive. He is clear. He offers a simple analysis of why the people are suffering. He identifies enemies, focuses energies, and makes the people feel whole, complete, part of something great. "Leave it to me," he seems to say. "All you have to do is follow and obey."

Moses never was that kind of leader. He said of himself, "I am not a man of words." He was not particularly close to the people. Aaron was. Perhaps Miriam was also. Caleb had the power to calm the people, at least temporarily. Moses had neither the gift nor the desire to sway crowds, resolve complexity, attract a mass

following or win popularity. That was not the kind of leader the Israelites needed, which is why God chose Moses, not a man seeking power but one with a burning sense of justice and a passion for liberty.

Moses, though, seems to have felt that the leader must do it all: he must be the people's father, mother, and nursemaid. He must be the doer, the problem-solver, omniscient and omni-competent. If something needs to be done it is for the leader - turning to God and asking for His help - to do it.

The trouble is that if the leader is a parent, then the followers remain children. They are totally dependent on him. They do not develop skills of their own. They do not acquire a sense of responsibility or the self-confidence that comes from exercising it. So when Moses is not there - he has been up the mountain for a long time and we do not know what has happened to him - the people panic and make a Golden Calf. Which is why God tells Moses to gather a team of seventy leaders to share the burden with him. Don't even try to do it all yourself.

The "Great Man" theory of leadership haunts Jewish history like a recurring nightmare. In the days of Samuel the people believe all their problems will be solved if they appoint a king "like all the other nations." In vain, Samuel warns them that this will only make their problems worse. Saul looks the part, handsome, upright, "a head taller than anyone else" (see I Sam. 9), but he lacks strength of character. David commits adultery. Solomon, blessed with wisdom, is seduced by his wives into folly. The kingdom splits. Only a few subsequent kings are equal to the moral and spiritual challenge of combining faith in God with a politics of realism and civic virtue.

During the Second Temple period, the success of the Maccabees was dramatic but short-lived. The Hasmonean kings themselves became Hellenised. The office of High Priest became politicised. No one could contain the growing rifts within the nation. Having defeated the Greeks, the nation fell to the Romans. Sixty years later Rabbi Akiva identified Bar Kochba as another "great man" in the mould of Judah

To sponsor an issue of Likutei Divrei Torah:  
Call Saadia Greenberg 301-649-7350  
or email: [sgreenberg@jhu.edu](mailto:sgreenberg@jhu.edu)  
<http://torah.saadia.info>

the Maccabee, and the result was the worst tragedy in Jewish history until the Holocaust.

Judaism is about diffused responsibility, making each individual count, building cohesive teams on the basis of a shared vision, educating people to their full potential, and valuing honest argument and the dignity of dissent. That is the kind of culture the rabbis inculcated during the centuries of dispersion. It is how the pioneers built the land and state of Israel in modern times. It is the vision Moses articulated in the last month of his life in the book of Devarim.

This calls for leaders who inspire others with their vision, delegating, empowering, guiding, encouraging and making space. That is what God was hinting to Moses when He told him to take seventy elders and let them stand with him in the Tent of Meeting. Then: "I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the spirit that is on you and place it upon them." Num. 11:17

God was telling Moses that great leaders do not create followers; they create leaders. They share their inspiration. They give of their spirit to others. They do not see the people they lead as children who need a father-mother-nursemaid, but as adults who need to be educated to take individual and collective responsibility for their own future.

People become what their leader gives them the space to become. When that space is large, they grow into greatness.

[1] See Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo, and Moses and Monotheism, part III. See also Mark Edmundson, The Death of Sigmund Freud: the legacy of his last days (2007) who argues that this is why Freud spent the last year of his life writing the third part of Moses and Monotheism, as a warning of the danger of the craving for strong leadership.

---

### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin Timely and Timeless Torah**

"And it came to pass, when the Ark traveled forward, that Moses said, 'Rise up O God, and scatter Your enemies; and let them that hate You flee before You. 'And when it rested he said, 'Return O God, unto the myriads [literally ten thousands] of the families of Israel.'" (Numbers 10:35-36)

I would like to invite you to join me in a fascinating detective search, an intellectual journey whose destination is the understanding of a strange typographical biblical insertion in this portion of Beha'alotekha, which gives rise to an even stranger rabbinical assertion. Tradition ordains that the two stirring verses quoted above be bracketed, as it were, by two inverted nuns, the fourteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So strong is this scribal tradition that even the printed Bible texts set these verses off with the two inverted nuns.

The Talmud raises the issue of this curious typography, explaining – in the name of Rebbe, primary transmitter of the Mishna – that "in the Torah parchment this section is preceded and followed by a reversed nun...because it ranks as a biblical book by itself" (Shabbat 116).

I would suggest that our sages are granting these verses the status of a separate book because they encapsulate the true potency of our Torah; indeed, these verses are teaching us that the true source of our strength, endurance, and eternity as a nation is our Torah, and our Torah alone!

Lest we make the mistake that might makes right, and that physical prowess ensures survival, we must be mindful of the fact that the Egyptian pyramids, Babylonian ziggurats, Olympian idols, Roman coliseums, Nazi swastikas, and Bolshevik hammer and sickles have indeed been scattered by the winds of history, while the pages of our Torah parchment – which can be overturned by a strong wind – have nevertheless enabled our beleaguered and often powerless nation (at least for two thousand years of exile) to emerge strong and influential; indeed, it is because of that Torah that we have succeeded in rising from the ashes of Auschwitz, returning as a sovereign nation to our homeland, and effecting an ingathering of exiles from Ethiopia, India, Bosnia, and Russia.

But why utilize the Hebrew letter nun to express the truth of the power of our book? In Berakhot (4b) we are taught that the Ashrei prayer, comprised primarily of the 145th Psalm, which we are enjoined to say thrice daily, follows the pattern of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet by having each of its verses begin with another letter of the alphabet in proper order from aleph to taf. However, one letter is conspicuous by its absence: "Why is there no nun in Ashrei? Because the fall of Israel begins with it, as it is written: 'Fallen, [nifla], she shall not again rise, O virgin of Israel [Amos 5:2].'" This Talmudic passage states that nun is the last letter we would expect to find encompassing a "book" attesting to Israel's eternity. However, we must remember that the nuns which surround our verses are inverted!

If we turn to Nahmanides's explanation concerning the rainbow which God placed in the sky as an expression of His covenant with Noah, we find that, for this great sage, the symbolism of the rainbow is that of an inverted bow [as in bow and arrow]:

"He [God] has not made the rainbow with its feet bent upward because it might have appeared that arrows were being shot from

### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

heaven.... Instead He made it the opposite of this in order to show that they are not shooting at the earth from the heavens. It is indeed the way of warriors to invert the instruments of war which they hold in their hands when calling for peace." (Nahmanides on Genesis 9:13)

If the inverted bow, or rainbow, of the covenant with Noah symbolizes the very antithesis of war, the inversion expressing not war but peace, then it is logical to assert that the inverted nun of this portion symbolizes the ascent of Israel rather than her demise. Indeed, the Talmudic passage we cited previously goes on to reinterpret the verse from Psalms by merely changing the punctuation: "The fallen [daughter of Israel], she shall never [fall] again; Rise, O Virgin of Israel" (Amos 5:2). In effect, our two reversed nuns are a silent covenant between God and the Jewish people that the Torah, eternal source of strength of our nation, has the power to scatter all our enemies as long as we, the People of Israel, always move together with the Ark! In effect, ours is a portable Torah which we must always take with us.

Permit me to develop this idea one step further – and attempt to elucidate the deepest meaning of the words of these verses. "When the Ark traveled forward" alerts us to the significance of the necessity of the Ark, and the Torah it encompasses, to travel together with the nation, albeit a little bit ahead – but never so far ahead that it leaves the people behind. Perhaps this is the real significance of Rashi's comment:

"Since the Ark was three days ahead of where the Jews were when they were traveling, therefore Moses said, 'Stand and wait for us; don't go further away'" (Rashi on Numbers 10:35).

Rashi is teaching us that Moses was scrupulous about making sure that the Ark was never more than three days ahead. Remember the well-known adage of folk-wisdom: If you're one step ahead of the generation, you're a genius. If you're two steps ahead, you're a crackpot! Obviously, we require the proper religious leadership to ensure that the people are in step with the Torah – but the Torah must be in step with the people as well. Hence our sages are forbidden from legislating a decree that the majority of committed Israel cannot abide by.

Furthermore, the latter portion reads: "And when it rested he said 'Return O God unto the myriads [literally ten thousands] of the families of Israel.'" The root of the word "when it rested," nuho, derives from the same root as sweetness, gentleness (noach in Hebrew), expressing the idea that our Torah

must be sweet and gently accepting and inclusive. Seen in this light, the verse enjoins us not only to endeavor to make Torah relevant, but also to see to it that it be an embracing and accepting Torah, a Torah of love and inclusiveness. After all, does not the Talmud teach:

For three years the schools of Hillel and Shammai debated the law, until a heavenly voice declared ... "These and those are the words of the living God, and the law is like Beit Hillel." If so [if both views emanate from God], then why is the law decided in accord with the school of Hillel? Because they are pleasant and accepting [nochin], always teaching their view together with the view of the school of Shammai and even citing the position of Shammai before citing their own position. (Eruvin 13b)

If our Torah is a law of accepting love and not of fanatic hatred, of warming light rather than of destructive fire, then the myriads of families of Israel shall truly return to the welcoming words of God.

---

#### **Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

#### **The Ananei Hakavod Teach Us to Learn Torah and Do Mitzvos in All Conditions**

There is a very interesting Ramban in this week's parsha. The Torah says that the pattern of the Jewish nation travelling and camping in the midbar (wilderness) was dependent upon the movement of the Ananei Hakavod (Clouds of Glory) that accompanied them. The Ramban comments that it was not uncommon for the Jews to arrive at an absolutely undesirable place in the midbar. At times, they wanted to leave a place immediately, but they would need to stay because the Ananei Hakavod stopped over the Mishkan (Tabernacle). At other times, they arrived at a lovely place, exhausted, and wishing to stay for a long time. Often, after only two or three days in such places, the Ananei Hakavod began to move and they continued their travels.

The Ramban adds that sometimes they would come to a spot, the Ananei Hakavod would stop, and they would all unpack. Then, the next morning, after they finished unpacking all of their belongings, the Ananei Hakavod would move and they would need to repack and start travelling all over again.

Imagine such an experience! We know what is involved in going on a trip. Everything is loaded into the station wagon. With great effort, even more may be tied down on the roof. When we finally arrive at our destination, we want to stay at least for a couple of weeks!

This is the meaning of the pasuk (verse), "When the Ananei Hakavod lingered upon the Mishkan many days, the Children of Israel

would maintain the charge of Hashem and would not journey" (Bamidbar 9:19). The travels were not easy. They were a tremendous test.

However, there is an obvious question. Hashem is not a capricious puppeteer who demands that people "jump" for no reason. What was the point of making the sojourn in the midbar so arbitrary and so burdensome?

Rav Dessler offers a very interesting insight in his sefer Michtav Me'Eliyahu (Volume 4). Rav Dessler explains that the time in the midbar was the period during which the Jews received the Torah. Perhaps Hashem was trying to teach us the lesson that we must learn Torah and perform mitzvos in spite of any outside conditions. Many of us say, "If only we had a little more free time" or "If only we did not need to worry so much about making a living..." "If only we did not need to worry about our children" — "Oh boy, would we be able to sit and learn Torah and daven (pray) like we should daven, without rushing through!"

As a Rebbe in the yeshiva, I must, from time to time, chastise a bachur (young man) when he is not performing up to par. I often hear excuses like: "I am busy with school work" or "I am having trouble with shidduchim" (dating) — if only I had my shidduch and if only I had finished college — oh boy would I be able to sit and learn!" But life does not work like that. Life is always full of disturbances. We are not living in Gan Eden (the Garden of Eden). There are financial challenges. There are challenges with parents, challenges with children. There are always challenges!

That is what the Torah is teaching us through the travels in the midbar. Life in the midbar was not easy. It was no picnic. But life must continue. In other words, we must continue learning and living as honest and dignified Jews, in spite of the surrounding conditions.

Anyone who has ever read the history of the Mir Yeshiva during World War II is amazed. The Mir Yeshiva fled from Mir, Poland to Russia and across Russia to Kobe, Japan and from Kobe to Shanghai, China. They were young men — single and married — who did not know what the next day would bring. Bochrin (young men) were separated from their families. They did not know if their families were alive or dead. They did not know if they would ever get out of the morass; and if they would get out, if they would ever get married.

Any "Mirrer talmid" (student at the Mir Yeshiva) from that time period can tell you that in the worst days of Shanghai, the yeshiva

#### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

continued; the sedarim (regular schedule of hours for learning Torah) were maintained, people learned and people wrote Torah sefarim. People learned Torah in the worst of conditions.

Baruch Hashem (thank G-d), we have relatively easy lives. Our parents lived through much more difficult conditions than we can ever imagine. They learned Torah and performed mitzvos, in spite of the tough conditions. This is the lesson of the Ananei Hakavod — even when everything not is provided on a silver platter, we must continue our lives. Torah and mitzvos must continue.

---

#### **Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

#### **Should We Pray Quickly or Slowly?**

This is such a pertinent question, I guess within every single synagogue throughout the world. And we have an insight into the answer from the Gemara in Masechet Brachot, (Daf lamed daled, Amud aleph).

There, our sages tell us that in the Beit Midrash of Rabbi Eliezer, there was somebody who was leading the service and who was going super-fast. So, some of the congregants came up to Rabbi Eliezer, and they said, "Rabbi Eliezer, tell him to go slower!" And Rabbi Eliezer said to them, "are you not aware of what the Torah tells us in Parshat Beha'alotecha? There we find Moses praying for his sick sister, Miriam. And it only uses five words, "Kel Na, Rafa Na, La". He was in a rush! "Please. God heal her, please" So it's all right if this Chazan is in a rush."

On another day, says the Gemara, the person who was the Chazan in the same Beit Midrash of Rabbi Eliezer was schlepping it out, and it was taking such a long time. So, people came to Rabbi Eliezer and said, "please tell him to get a move on!" Rabbi Eliezer said to them, "do you not remember what the Torah tells us about the fact that Moses prayed continuously for 40 days and 40 nights while he was on the top of Mount Sinai. It's fine what he's doing." And that's where the Gemara ends.

I think that the lesson here is so very clear, because at the heart of successful davening is not speed, but rather it is what we call "kavana" — your intention. And kavana comes from the root 'kivun', which means direction. It's the direction of all the sentiments emerging from your heart.

Some people find it better to be quick. For example, the Belzer Chasidim are known to be quick in their davening. The Belzer Rov used to say, "if a wagon is going slowly, it picks up a lot of mud," and therefore, if we want to have proper intention, let's get a move on.

There are others who take a long time, because this is a glorious opportunity to have the

privilege of standing before Almighty God, to pour out our hearts before him. It's wrong to do it in a rush.

But ultimately, what matters most of all is not whether you are going slowly or quickly, but rather, the Kavanah that you have. May Hashem answer all of our prayers, which are poured out from our hearts both for the sake of ourselves, and for the good of the world.

---

### Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

#### The Eternal Nation Is Not Afraid of a Long Journey: Rabbanit Chamutal Shoval

Complaining is fun, isn't it? There's something contagious about it—especially in a group. One person voices a criticism, finds a difficulty, and immediately others chime in. A kind of false intimacy is created, a sense of connection built not on what is, but on what's missing—on shared misfortune. It's so easy to be pulled into a downward spiral of negativity, complaints, and despair.

The Book of Bamidbar opens with a grand census, a majestic description of the Israelite camp marching in formation with the Mishkan at its center, the offerings of the tribal leaders, the priestly blessing. There's a palpable excitement in the air—entry into the Land of Israel feels imminent, everything is in place. And then... the downfall begins.

Bamidbar is the book of Israel's failings and the challenges of being in the wilderness. The people look around and see only endless sand, and the complaints begin. Suddenly, Egypt becomes romanticized. There's a wave of nostalgia for Egyptian cuisine: fish, onions, garlic—all the good Egypt had to offer. The harsh historical context is erased. Slavery seems to vanish from memory, while the imagined aroma of Egyptian stews floats longingly above the people's grievances. The people turn to Moshe and ask for meat, for fish, for melons.

The Torah sages debate whether their life in Egypt was really as good as they recall: were they truly feasting on Nile fish three times a day? Or is this simply the distortion of memory? The Ramban writes plainly that they lacked for nothing in the desert. They had the manna to satisfy them and could make from it various delicacies of refined taste. But they yearned for what they didn't have—they indulged in false longing for a past that never was. He writes:

"There was no lack in the desert, for they had the manna to satisfy their hunger, and could prepare from it various refined dishes, as the text recounts. But they developed in themselves an excessive craving, as if desiring to eat coals, dirt, or spoiled food."

In other words, even when their needs were fully met, they yearned for something else—for something absent. It was a craving rooted not in reality but in fantasy.

Moshe urges them to believe in the direction they are headed, in the future that awaits them. He asks them to keep their eyes lifted forward, toward the Land of Israel—even amid the sand, the heat, and the void that surrounded them. But on the fringes of the camp, not everyone is capable of this. The Torah refers to these dissidents as "asafuf", the mixed multitude—the Egyptians who had joined the Israelites in the Exodus. The latter had attached themselves to the Israelites, and were now leading the rebellion of cravings, the march of discontent. They may have been moving forward, but every so often they glance backward. And like many who leave a familiar place, from a distance it suddenly seems better than it was. Time blurs the hardships, and these Egyptians, who had joined the Hebrews, begin to wonder if they have made the right choice.

The People of Israel ate manna in the desert—that miraculous food that descended from the heavens and provided all their sustenance. It was a symbol of Divine connection, reminding them each morning, as they collected the exact portion for each household, of their bond with the Creator. But the complainers wanted no part of that relationship. They longed for food that came from down below, from the earth itself: onions, garlic, cucumbers, melons, even Egyptian fish. The verse adds an intriguing word: chinam—"We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for free." But of course, nothing was free for a nation of oppressed slaves.

What's really happening here is fear—fear of the responsibility God is placing upon them. Fear of entering into a Covenant; fear of having a destiny and purpose. The terrible suffering they had endured in Egypt is forgotten, and the upward gaze—toward the Promised Land—dims. Their eyes are lowered. In a long-distance race, it's hard to keep the finish line in mind. The cucumbers are just an excuse. A slave doesn't have to choose, doesn't need to believe, and certainly isn't expected to journey toward a distant, promised land. A slave may work hard; however, when it comes to responsibility—one is definitely free of that. Yes, the physical labor in Egypt was brutal, but it required no spiritual commitment whatsoever.

As the Land of Israel draws near, the mixed multitude realizes that the easiest way to sow doubt is to remind the people how simple life once seemed: backbreaking labor, perhaps—but free melons. The manna symbolizes the next phase—one that requires lifting one's

### Likutei Divrei Torah

gaze upwards. The wilderness is hard, frightening, and exposed. But it is a meaningful passage toward the goal. To become not just a nation of ex-slaves but a free and proud Jewish people, you can't keep eating melons. You need food that demands faith—food that connects you to God and obliges you to be in a relationship with Him.

There is something terrifying about taking responsibility, about walking toward a vision you believe in, about leaving behind a place that harmed you—even when the destination is still out of sight. Moshe asks them to look up and face the future with courage. Tough decisions come at a cost; they are never free.

---

### Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

#### Rabbi Mordechai Willig

##### Complaints and Lusts

The eirev rav complained and were consumed by a fire of Hashem (Rashi, Bamidbar 11:1). The eirav rav (Rashi) in their midst lusted for lust (his'avu ta'ava), and Bnai Yisrael cried with them (Rashi) and said, "Who will feed us meat?" (Bamidbar 11:4). The eirev rav was a great mixture of converts from many nations (Rashi, Shemos 12:38), or Egyptians who mixed into Bnai Yisrael (Ibn Ezra). They numbered well over a million (Targum Yonasan).

Later, they caused the chet ha'egel. Hashem told Moshe "Your nation that you brought out of Egypt destroyed" (Shemos 32:7). The eirev rav whom you accepted on your own and converted. You did not consult Me. You said, "It is good that converts should cling to the Shechina". They destroyed (Rashi, from Shemos Raba 42:6) and made the eigel through witchcraft (Rashi 32:4). They said, "These are your gods Yisrael" (32:4), not "our gods". It was the eirev rav who made it and then led Yisrael astray with it (Rashi). And again, they led Bnai Yisrael astray to say "Who will give us meat?" (11:4).

What does the enigmatic expression "his'avu ta'ava", lusted for lust, mean?

II. The Be'er Mayim Chayim (by R 'Chaim of Chernovitz (1740- 1817), an early Chassidic Master) (11:5) explains. The Egyptian descended from Cham (Bereishis 10:6), who disobeyed the prohibition against sexual relations in Noah's ark, and was cursed (Sanhedrin 108b). Later, he had homosexual relations with his drunk father (Rashi Bereishis 9:22), and his descendants were cursed (9:25, see Sanhedrin 70a). For this reason, Hashem did not want the eirev rav to join Bnai Yisrael whose chastity merited them redemption (Vayikra Raba 32:5).

Hashem hates sexual immorality (Rashi Bamidbar 31:16), and He feared, as it were,

that the eirev rav would cause Yisrael to sin, as they did in Shittim (Bamidbar 25:1 see Sanhedrin 106a). Their complaint about meat was followed by weeping over the incestuous relations which were forbidden to them (Rashi Bamidbar 11:10).

To prevent this, Hashem gave us the mon, heavenly food, as regular food leads to sin (Devarim 31:20). Moreover, He subdued and broke all of their lusts for anything physical. The eirev rav lusted for the lust that Hashem had removed. This is his'avu ta'ava, lusted for lust.

III. The episode of the complainers is preceded by the laws of the sotah, who is suspected of adultery (Bamidbar 5:11-31), and the nazir (6:1-21). The juxtaposition is explained by Rashi (6:2) - one who sees a sotah disgraced should become a nazir to abstain from wine which leads to adultery. Alcohol led to the sin of Noach and Cham, the biblical sotah, and, sadly, to sinful behavior today.

The Rambam (Hilchos Issurei Biah 22:18) citing the aforementioned complaint and weeping over their prohibitions, states that for most of our nation it is difficult to abstain from forbidden relations. He notes (22:19) that in every community and in every time period there are those who sin in this area.

The Ibn Ezra (6:2) renders "Ki yaflti", the phrase describing the vow to become a nazir, as follows: he does a wondrous thing (d'var pele), because most people follow their lusts. A nazir has the crown of Hashem on his head (6:7). Ibn Ezra explains: all men are slaves of their worldly lusts. A true king, who has a crown of Kingdom on his head, is anyone who is free from the lusts.

IV. When the nazir completes his term, he must bring himself to the entrance of Ohel Mo'ed (6:13). Rashi notes the unusual expression "bring himself," instead of "come". The Meshech Chochma (6:13) teaches that one becomes a nazir to curb lusts (ta'avos) arrogance (ga'ava) and excesses (mosaros). The Torah does not explicitly state the time necessary to achieve this goal. Each person should evaluate if the time suffices to curb the power of his yetzer. Thirty days, hinted at by a gematria (Nazir 5a), is a minimum based on oral tradition ("mekubal", Rambam Mishna Nazir 1:3).

How can one know that he had reached this level, that his yetzer will not overcome him and his desire will not lead his mind astray? When he views his own matters as he would approach the deeds of another person. When he is no longer suspect of self-love, he is confident that he will partake of the world's pleasures in proper measure and not to come to

excesses (mosaros). "Bringing himself" as if he brings another person indicates achievement of the goal of a nazir.

V. The problem of being led astray continues into the next parsha, in words we say daily: "You shall not stray (v'lo sasuru) after your heart and after your eyes" (Bamidbar 15:39). The heart and the eyes are spies for the body. The eye sees, the heart desires, and the body commits the sin (Rashi).

The Torah places the heart before the eyes, but Rashi reverses the order, stating that first the eye sees, and then the heart desires. Perhaps the heart does two things - one prior to seeing and a second, after. First, the heart strays. As a result, the eyes stray, as natural curiosity takes over. This is then consistent with the order in the pasuk, as "The eyes follow the heart" (Medrash Tehillim 14:1).

The Sifri interprets: After your eyes, this is znus, sexual impropriety. The Sforno adds: to achieve the lusts (ta'avos) that you put your eyes upon. In this area, moderation achieves satisfaction and avoids lust, while excesses only add hunger for more (Sukka 52b), which can yield disastrous results.

However, the concept of his'avu ta'ava, in the original context of food, applies to all types of desires, many beginning with our eyes. In this context the Artscroll translation, "cultivated a craving" is instructive. Sadly, Torah society is not immune from a culture which advertises excess. The blessing of wealth only exacerbates the problem.

Our eyes are exposed, in real life and in print and social media, to a whole slew of mosaros. They include food, clothing, homes, cars, jewelry, and more. Modest living, a hallmark of proper Torah life, is too often replaced by ostentation. This can not only lead to antisemitism (Kli Yakar, Devarim 2:3), but also to jealousy, and even dishonesty, in our own community. Luxury and excess have become de rigueur, affecting spirituality negatively, as discussed at length in Tradition, Spring 2024.

Calls for restraint and modesty have often fallen on deaf ears. Yet, as we read of the story of complaints and lusts of old, we are duty bound to warn about the consequences of a lifestyle of mosaros.

On a positive note, our society can boast of wonderful manifestations of ahavas chessed. But, as the navi (Micha 6:8, end of haftora Parshas Balak) states, Hashem seeks hatzne'a leches, walking modestly before Him, as well.

**Be a Window and Not a Pane**

Aaron did so; he lit the lamps toward the face of the Menorah, as HASHEM had commanded Moshe. (Bamidbar 8:3)

Aaron did so. This shows Aaron's virtue that he did not deviate. —Rashi

What is the great praise of Aaron? Is lighting the Menorah such a display of skill and unusual talent? I have never heard that it was particularly difficult. Is it that he did what HASHEM asked him to do? Who of us would not do what HASHEM wanted us to do?! Was it that the Commandment came through Moshe and not directly to him? We are all doing Commandments that come from HASHEM through the agency of Moshe. So, what's the great praise for?

The Ohr HaChaim explains that it was not just Aaron's doing that warrants great praise. It is more how he did it and with what intention he lit the Menorah. The Possuk testifies in the first half that "he did so" but in the latter part the Possuk we are told critical information, as HASHEM had commanded Moshe". Aaron did what he did because it was the Commandment of HASHEM! That was his sole intention. He was not distracted by or interested in the great honor and publicity and centrality of the deed that he was performing. His mind was entirely dedicated to doing what the Creator was demanding of him at that moment.

Let us take some time to appreciate this! This is a living example of what the Navi tells us that HASHEM requests from man, "...to walk (humbly) privately with your G-d!" It does not say not to do publicly and never to let anyone know what you are doing. Maybe that can be a good thing at times. The verse tells us that we are to be humble with HASHEM! We might find ourselves, like Aaron, in a position where the action we are doing is attracting attention and gaining great notoriety. In those circumstances there resides a great test! Can the man be privately humble while performing publicly!? That is the question! That is the challenge! Aaron did so! That's what he did just so!

If we are seeking proof that such a standard is actually possible and humanly achievable, we need not look beyond another clear example in this same Parsha. The Torah testifies about Moshe, "And this man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more so than any person on earth". (Bamidbar 12:3) I remember one of my Rebbeim marveling at this verse. Here, now, Moshe is writing the Torah being dictated by HASHEM, and the words are being recorded for posterity and in perpetuity for eternity that Moshe is the most-humble person on the face

of the earth. If it is worthy of being transcribed then it must be absolutely and inalterably true.

So, here Moshe himself is penning these words and moments after they are written it is still true. He remains exceedingly humble and unchanged.

If any of us would get a quasi-favorable writeup in a local newspaper for some minor thing we did, we would have it framed for all to see and we would share it with friends and family in a chat. How could we resist!? Our hearts would be swollen with pride immediately and whenever we recall those incredibly accurate and descriptive terms, and that is even though you never agree with anything else that prejudiced paper says. This they got right! Now, how can Moshe remain unchanged by those words about him from HASHEM?! That is a great wonder!

It could be and it must be that Moshe actually saw himself, and Aaron too as ABSOLUTELY NOTHING, "NACHNU MAH" – "We are what"!? They felt the reality of HASHEM more than they sensed themselves. This total nullification is not at all contradicted by the call for action. They do and do but only as a messenger, a vessel, a vehicle of HASHEM. As a clear glass allows light to pass through, so too their job as agents of HASHEM is to be a window and not a pane!

---

**Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's  
Derashot Ledorot**

---

**Old Reliable** - The end of today's Sidra describes an incident which is as intriguing as it is disturbing, as fascinating as it is saddening. Apparently a domestic crisis caused a rupture of relationships in the leading family of the Israelites in the generation of the desert - the family composed of the two brothers, Moses and Aaron, and their sister Miriam. The domestic situation was soon transformed into a kind of spiritual contest, which required the intervention of God on behalf of Moses, and the subsequent punishment of Miriam.

All we are told in this passage, in which it is obvious that the Torah deliberately disguises and conceals what happened, is that Moses was criticized by Aaron and Miriam because of his Kushite (Ethiopian) wife. What the criticism is — that we are not told, but we can assume that it has nothing to do with modern forms of racial bigotry. Any attempt to read such bigotry back into the Bible, as the motive for the criticism of Moses marrying Zipporah, is an anachronism of the most unintelligent sort. Whatever it may be, the criticism of Moses's wife was quickly elevated into invidious comparisons of spiritual competence: Aaron and Miriam felt that they were as close to God, prophetically, as was Moses. Moses remained silent, and God took up the cudgels on behalf of Moses. Miriam was stricken with

leprosy, and Moses was vindicated. The closing words of that vindication remain an eternal testament to the stature of Moses "in all My household, he is most trustworthy", What did God intend by this honorific reference to Moses as, what might be translated as "an old, reliable friend?"

This divine accolade was interpreted by Rabbi Isaac, one of in a volume, of Bible commentary published from manuscripts not many years ago. According to this interpretation: Miriam insisted that Moses divorce Zipporah, his Midianite wife, and marry someone else. Moses, however, refused. Since he had married her when he was poor, and she stayed with him, therefore now that he was a king he would not divorce her. Therefore it is said of him, "in all My household he is most trustworthy."

We must not at all assume that the intrusion into Moses' domestic life by Aaron and Miriam was merely petty family gossip. Aaron was, after all, the High Priest of Israel, and Miriam was a prophetess. Their concerns were much larger than the trivialities that often afflict unintelligent people and cause so many family rivalries. Indeed, I think a good argument can be made to support the contention of Aaron and Miriam. After all, Zipporah was nothing more than a peasant girl, a shepherdess from some remote oasis in the great Midianite desert. She was a daughter of a man who had moved from one idolatry to another, never finding himself. She may have been adequate for Moses when he was a private person, a young unknown. But now he was a king, he was the head of state. How would it look for Moses, representing all of Israel, to entertain other heads of state, to undertake all of the difficult tasks of statecraft, when beside him was a woman who was moulded in the desert, far and isolated and remote? Moses could not afford to look upon his life and his wife sentimentally. He was the head of a people, he represented them in public, and he must make his personal life fit his new status.

And yet, no matter how valid the argument for divorcing Zipporah, Moses would not abandon her. He remembered that she had stayed with him during the time that he was a lonely, penniless, hungry refugee in the great desert. When no one would take him in, Zipporah came close to him. She was with him during his poverty, so he would not abandon her now that he had become prosperous. She was loyal to him when he was alone, so he would remain loyal to her now that he was a great success. He was truly an "old reliable." This teaching is not quite as much a truism in our days as one might be led to believe. It is not only that we live in an era of corruption and immorality. Political corruption always existed, although of a different nature, and immorality is a permanent feature of any society which pretends to moral standards. It

## Likutei Divrei Torah

is, rather, that in this era of counterculture and new philosophies, liberation and self-fulfillment are the great virtues in the lexicon of our modern ethics, whereas the qualities of duty and loyalty have been downgraded. They are often dismissed as inhibiting and ego-curtailling, as forcing man into duplicity and dishonesty, as frustrating his self-realization. An act such as that of Moses, remaining loyal to Zipporah, might well be criticized by some counter-culture philosophers as overly sentimental, negativistic, and ascetic. Yet, Judaism proclaims aloud.

Reliability and responsibility, loyalty and fidelity, remain God-like qualities. It is true that these are qualities which curb man's freedom, because they force him into one specific pattern of action. But they are the results of a decision made in freedom. If freedom is to mean that I am always able to change my mind, then mine is not the gift of freedom, but the curse of chaos; it is not.

I do not mean to say that loyalty must prevail over all other considerations, that it is an absolute. Certainly, the Torah permits and sometimes encourages divorce. There are times when a couple ought to break up and not remain bound to an empty experience, or even a harmful one, because of such sentiments. Yet, our society has gone too far in the other direction. We have made divorce so irrelevant to shame, so easy to obtain, so untainted by social censure, that marriage and divorce have become a game, a kind of sequential polygamy. Indeed, that phenomenon has now been surpassed and transcended, so that instead of marriage and divorce, there is simply living together with different people at different times, without the benefit of either marriage or divorce. Under such circumstances, the lesson of Moses, that of trustworthiness and responsibility and reliability, remains as needed today as never before. Perhaps, in addition, this might inspire young people to much greater care in choosing their marriage partners. When people come to realize that loyalty may force them to remain with a marriage partner under extremely difficult and unhappy circumstances, they will take much more care and precaution in marriage. Far too often, in my experience of years of counseling, I have found that people who "fall in love" fall out of love just as quickly. I am always distressed when people tell me they have "fallen in love." Love is not a thing one ought "fall" into. You fall into a ditch or into a trap; love is not fallen into, but grown into. Love requires time, development, maturity, understanding, and the engaging of two personalities who draw closer with time. The "chemistry" of "falling in love" must either take the road of psychology -- of a mutually developing maturity and reciprocal growing together -- or of biology, of mere erotic infatuation, and then it must disintegrate.

But I feel that our interpretation of the divine compliment to Moses is more than a teaching of marital loyalty. I believe it says volumes about Jewish loyalty to God and to Torah. Moses himself realized this later on when, in a great discourse to his people before his death, he proclaimed, that Jeshurun (Israel) grew fat and kicked. To often, Moses observed in a comment that remains as pertinent today as it did thirty five hundred years ago, Jews are like poor upstarts who suddenly grow rich and are unable to contain their affluence; they discover that they have fallen out of love with their wives and lives — or vice versa — and that they have achieved the kind of status that encourages them to change mates and fates.

Eight centuries ago, Maimonides thought that he was describing a phenomenon peculiar to his times when he commented that Jews who achieve success in business or government usually tend to lose their piety, they forfeit. Actually, he was describing a perennial problem of Jews throughout the ages. We have experienced the same thing in our days.

All too often, Jews for whom the Torah was good enough during their time of poverty, find it wanting in their time of prosperity. What Moses teaches us is ah which gave us courage and confidence and optimism, which provided us with a context of value and meaningfulness, when we were poor and lonely and persecuted, when we emerged from the ghettos and shtetls of East Europe and the small towns of central Europe and came to the lower East Side and to the poorer sections of Brooklyn -- that same Torah is meaningful for us today too. People who change values and religion merely because of growing material possessions, are frauds; they are not authentic human beings.

Such people have exploited Judaism for their own psychological needs. They are spiritual manipulators and not genuine people. Of course, as a Hasidic teacher taught, it is difficult for a rich man to believe in God. When he comes home, all his fine possessions cry out to him, "believe in us" and he hardly hears the voice of "I am the Lord, thy God, or" "believe in Me." The test of prosperity is always greater than the test of poverty. But Moses overcame it, he remained loyal, he would not abandon his wife — not only because of some kind of impersonal test of loyalty, but because he genuinely related to her. Such must be the attitude of Israel to God and to Torah, following the classical metaphor of our relationship as that of husband and wife.

Or better yet, let us learn from God Himself. In the great prophetic parable of Jeremiah, God is a loving husband who always remembers Israel's loyalty to Him, during the days of, as it were, our mutual need and affliction; and thus He may yet forgive us for our treachery to Him in the days of our greater affluence.

God says: I remember the affection of your youthfulness, the love during our early marriage, when you followed Me in the desert,

in a land that was unsowed and uncultivated and uncivilized. At the time that God, as it were, was alone and unrecognized: Israel was willing to remain with Him. And therefore now that God is proclaimed and known, He will not forget the love and the affection of Israel's early days.

May all of us achieve our life's goals. May we succeed in matters material and spiritual, but above all, may we always remain worthy of the compliment paid by God to Moses remaining the "old reliables" of God himself.



BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io  
From: Chaim Shulman  
<cshulman@gmail.com>

## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON BEHAALOSCHA - 5786

[parsha@groups.io](mailto:parsha@groups.io) / [www.parsha.net](http://www.parsha.net) - in our 31th year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://www.parsha.net> and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to [parsha+subscribe@groups.io](mailto:parsha+subscribe@groups.io) Please also copy me at [cshulman@gmail.com](mailto:cshulman@gmail.com) A complete archive of previous issues is now available at <http://www.parsha.net> It is also fully searchable.

---

In memory of **Chaim Yissachar z"l** ben Yecheiel Zaydel Dov

---

To sponsor a parsha sheet contact [cshulman@gmail.com](mailto:cshulman@gmail.com)  
(proceeds to tzedaka)

---

Table of Contents:

- R' Yessoscher Frand on Anivus Is the Way a Person Acts
- R' Daniel Feldman on Miriam's Lashon Hara
- R' Dovid Goldwasser on Knowing Who You Can Become
- R' Leib Bakst on Naaseh Vinishma
- Michal Horowitz on Turning No into Yes

---

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <[ryfrand@torah.org](mailto:ryfrand@torah.org)> reply-to: [do-not-reply@torah.org](mailto:do-not-reply@torah.org) to: [ravfrand@torah.org](mailto:ravfrand@torah.org) date: Jun 4, 2026, 5:27 PM subject: Rav Frand - **Anivus Is About the Way a Person Acts, Not the Way He Thinks**

Parshas Behaaloscha Anivus Is About the Way a Person Acts, Not the Way He Thinks

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1384 Can You Be Mechalel Shabbos To Send A Kevital To A Rebbe? Good Shabbos!

Towards the end of the parsha, the pasuk says that Miriam and Aharon spoke about the Kushite woman that Moshe married. They were upset about the way Moshe conducted himself with his wife: "Was it only with Moshe that Hashem spoke? He also spoke with us!" (In other words, why is Moshe Rabbeinu any different? We have normal husband-wife relationships with our spouses, yet Moshe has nothing to do with his wife.) Then the pasuk says "And the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth!" (Bamidbar 12:3).

Finally, the Torah continues the narration: "Hashem spoke suddenly to Moshe and Aharon and Miriam..." (ibid. 12:4) The Ribono shel Olam chastises Aharon and Miriam, telling them that Moshe

Rabbeinu is not just another navi (prophet). He has a special relationship with the Ribono shel Olam. "I speak to him "peh el peh" (mouth to mouth – directly). Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu needs to be judged by a different standard. It is not possible to say, "Well, we are also nevi'im (prophets). We also have husbands and wives." No. Moshe Rabbeinu is different.

The pasuk "And the man Moshe was exceedingly humble..." seems somewhat incongruous. Why does the Torah need to state that here? This praise could have been mentioned later, when the Torah mentions all of Moshe's unique qualities, such as "peh el peh adaber bo" (mouth to mouth I speak with him), "umareh v'lo bchidos" (in a vision, not in riddles), and so forth. Why does the Torah, somewhat incongruously, stick in this pasuk at the very beginning of the parsha when Aharon and Miriam talk about Moshe?

The Netziv writes a very important idea in his Ha'amek Davar commentary: Don't think the reason the Torah writes this over here is because Moshe was somehow depressed or upset that his brother and sister were talking about him like that. This has nothing to do with any pain of Moshe Rabbeinu. Rather, Moshe was not at all perturbed by those comments because he was the most humble person in the world. He simply didn't care about his kavod. The Torah writes this because it is important to inform us of Moshe's unique stature as a navi.

The Netziv emphasizes that Moshe's unconcern for kavod was not because he did not recognize his great stature. Moshe was fully aware of who he was, but due to his anivus, he was not at all concerned about receiving honor for it.

The Netziv conveys this very important idea. I can assure everyone that Rav Chaim Kanievsky did not think of himself as an am haaretz (ignoramus). He knew very well that he knew the entire Torah and that he finished learning and reviewing the entire Torah on an annual basis. And yet, despite knowing full well who he was, he remained an anav, someone uninterested in kavod.

This is what the pasuk is saying: Don't think that this bothered Moshe Rabbeinu in the least. It didn't, because he was the most modest of men. And it was not because he did not recognize his unique status. He knew that he was Moshe Rabbeinu.

The Netziv references the famous Gemara at the end of Maseches Sotah. The Gemara says that when Rabbeinu Hakadosh died "batla anavah" (modesty ceased to exist). The Gemara states that Rav Yosef argued with that statement: "Don't say that after Rebbi died there were no more modest people, for there is always me!"

Normally, such a statement that "I am an anav" would seem to contradict itself. The Netziv explains that the definition of an anav is someone who recognizes that it is not "Kochi v'otzem yadi assa li es hachayil hazeh" (my strength and the power of my hand made me all this great valor). An anav is a person who is not makpid on his kavod.

Rav Chaim Kanievsky knew that he mastered the entire Torah. The Chofetz Chaim knew who he was and the Vilna Gaon knew who he was. Moshe Rabbeinu knew who he was and Rav Yosef knew who he was. Nevertheless, they could all state "I am an anav."

The Netziv mentions a famous Gemara at the end of Maseches Horiyos. The Talmud there discusses who it is better to appoint as a Rosh Yeshiva: A "Sinai" (someone with exhaustive knowledge of the Torah) or an "oker horim" (literally "someone who uproots

mountains,” meaning an individual with sharp, brilliant analytical skills).

The Gemara there states that Rav Yosef should really have been appointed as the Rosh Yeshiva because he was a “Sinai.” However, for whatever reason, they made his competitor – so to speak – Rabbah into the Rosh Yeshiva. In those days, there were certain privileges that came with the position of a Rosh Yeshiva. One of the perks of the job was that the local blood letter would come to the Rosh Yeshiva’s house (rather than expecting the Rosh Yeshiva to come to his office to procure his services).

(I remember that – at least in his later years – the Ner Yisrael Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yaakov Ruderman, zt”l, did not go to the barber. The barber came to his house.)

Rabbah was the Rosh Yeshiva, so the blood-letter came to his house. Rav Yosef could have very well said “I was really supposed to be the Rosh Yeshiva and I voluntarily gave it up in favor of Rabbah, but at least I should receive this ‘perk’ that I don’t need to go to the blood-letter. He should come to me!

However, the Gemara says that for all the years that Rabbah was the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yosef never called the blood-letter to come to his home. This was true anivus. In other words, anivus is about the way a person acts, not the way he thinks. A person can recognize his own greatness and that self-awareness need not indicate any shortcoming in anivus. However, someone who acts in a non-humble fashion is a baal gayvah.

On a related topic, going back to the beginning of the parsha, Rashi makes one of his most famous comments in all of Chumash: When the Torah gives the mitzva of lighting the candles to Aharon, the Torah says “Aaron did so; toward the face of the Menora he kindled its lamps, as Hashem had commanded Moshe.” (Bamidbar 8:3). Rashi tersely comments (based on the Sifrei): “This indicates the praise of Aharon, namely that he did not deviate.”

Everyone asks: If the Ribono shel Olam says that there is a certain way to light the Menora, of course Aharon lit it that way rather than make up his own procedure for lighting it! What is this praise “she’lo sheenah“?

The Sefas Emes famously interprets that Aharon Hakohen lit the Menora for forty years, every single day, thousands of times, exactly the same way he did it the first time, with the same excitement and the same enthusiasm.

I always cite the example of a bar mitzva bachur putting on his Tefillin in the morning. He does it so slowly and so methodically and so carefully. When we put on our Tefillin in the morning, we do it by rote. Aharon was not like that. He did it each morning for forty years with the same “bren” and “hislahavus.” This is the classic approach of the Sefas Emes (Siman 635).

The Sefas Emes shares another insight (Siman 634) that is also worth noting. “Melamed she’lo sheenah” does not mean that Aharon did not light the Menora any differently as time went on. Melamed she’lo sheenah means that Aharon himself did not change. He was still the same humble Aharon Hakohen. Despite the great honor of being chosen as the Kohen Gadol, lighting the Menora daily, and being the source of all wisdom in the world, he remained as humble as ever.

Most people who are in such a position, change. However, the praise here is that Aharon never changed. He was the same humble Aharon from start to finish. He was the same ohev Yisrael (lover of Israel).

He was the same ohev shalom (lover of peace) and rodef shalom (pursuer of peace). He never let this great honor go to his head. How often do we see people appointed to positions of power or authority who then become different people? Money does that to many people. So does prestige. Aharon realized that he was given a gift from Hashem, but he did not attribute it to “Kochi v’otzem yadi assa li es hachayil hazeh” (Devorim 8:17).

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem  
DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org  
This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Beha’aloscha is provided below:

015 Reinstating the S’micha 060 Waiting Between Meat and Milk: Adults and Children 104 The Seven-Branched Menorah 149  
Bringing the Sefer Torah to a Temporary Minyan 196 Vegetarianism 242  
Military Service and Potential Halachic Problems 286 When Do We Stand in Honor Of a Sefer Torah? 332 Tefilas Tashlumin: Making Up a Missed Davening 376 Davening For A Choleh 420  
Fish and Meat 464 Honoring Levi’im 508 The City of Yericho 552  
Kavod Sefer Torah Vs Kavod Talmid Chochom 596 Sitting on Top of Seforim Name? .... A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org, the Jewish Learning Revolution! Torah.org: The Judaism Site brings this and a host of other classes to you every week. Visit <http://torah.org> to get your own free copy of this mailing or subscribe to the series of your choice. Need to change or stop your subscription? Please visit our subscription center, <http://torah.org/subscribe/> --see the links on that page. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Torah.org. Both the author and Torah.org reserve certain rights. Email copyrights@torah.org for full information. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> [learn@torah.org](mailto:learn@torah.org) (410) 602-1350

-----  
from: RaRIETS Kollel Elyon from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack <riets@substack.com>  
date: Jun 4, 2026, 12:53 PM  
subject: **Behaalotekha: Miriam's Lashon Hara, Israel, and Social Media by Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman**

The story of Miriam speaking to Aaron about their brother Moses is the Torah's central cautionary tale of lashon hara, and many understand this to be the reason for the dedicated commandment to remember the incident (Deut. 24:9; see Nachmanides ad loc.). If that is the case, a significant question emerges from one Midrashic opinion (Sifrei, Bamidbar 99) which maintains that Moses himself was present at the time. Apparently, this did not change the classification of the conversation as lashon hara.

The detail is significant because of a remarkable statement that appears in the Talmud (Arakhin 15b-16a): "any matter said in front of the subject is not lashon hara." The statement is hard to understand. While the disloyalty of speaking against another behind his back is clear, doing so in his presence would seem to compound the offense, since the subject is being disparaged and humiliated at once. There are indeed some authorities who assume that the statement is merely a minority view and not the accepted legal conclusion, an approach that appears to be the position of Maimonides (Hil.

Deiot 7:5, with Kessef Mishneh; see Resp. Mahari Bruna, 38). Accordingly, the Chafetz Chaim (Hilkhos Lashon Hara 3:1) rules that speaking lashon hara about another is a transgression, and doing so in the presence of the subject is significantly worse. Others, however, have taken the statement to be normative, and have offered conceptual readings that endeavor to explain how it could be that speech in front of the subject is excluded from lashon hara.

The medieval authority Rabbi Eliezer of Metz (Sefer Yereim 191), drawing on a verse in Jeremiah (6:28), "walking with slanders, they are bronze and iron," understands the imagery to mean that the speaker of lashon hara has two facades: one which is "bronze," glimmering and pleasant, and one which is "iron," the deadly material of the sword. In other words, the connotation is one who is two-faced, friendly in the presence of the subject but baring his weapons when the subject is absent. Thus, the speaker who openly disparages the subject to his face, while guilty of many things, is nonetheless not engaged in lashon hara.

The rabbinic philosopher Rabbi Judah Lowe (1520-1609), known as the Maharal of Prague, in his *Netivot Olam* (Netiv HaLashon, ch. 7), posited a theory along similar lines. The Maharal's language is somewhat difficult, but his position appears to be that Lashon hara does not apply when the subject is present because that prohibition is directed specifically to speech as a unique tool of harm that can be perpetrated from a distance. In the presence of the subject, there are other ways in which one can directly engage that target; the importance of speech as a weapon is less. Also of significance is the fact that the subject can respond to the allegations.

The Chafetz Chaim (Hil. Lashon Hara Klal 2, BMC 2) challenged the Maharal based on the paradigmatic case of Miriam's comments. If, according to that view in the *Sifrei*, Moses was present, then the central biblical example of lashon hara is itself a counter-example to the Maharal's principle. Addressing this dispute points to an essential understanding of what lashon hara is.

#### The Offense of Unfair Judgment

One way to address the question raised by the Miriam case is to note that the Maharal's theory rests on the expectation that the subject of the speech, if present, would defend himself, thereby neutralizing the threat. Moses, however, was a unique exception, since the Torah describes him in this very passage as exceedingly humble, with the implication that he would not respond even when his presence ordinarily would have made a response possible (see Harchavat Gevul Yaavetz, pp. 92-93). On this reading, Miriam's words constituted lashon hara despite Moses's presence because the usual mechanism of protection did not function in his particular case.

Others take a different path of explanation (see R. Yitzchak Hutner, *Pachad Yitzchak*, Shavuot, ma'amar 3, as well as Iggerot, p. 268, and *Sefer Zikaron LeMaran Baal HaPachad Yitzchak*, pp. 333-334; R. Moshe Miernik, in *Torat HaAdam LeAdam*, V, pp. 178-186, and see as well his essay in R. Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht, *Asufat Maarakhos, BeMidbar*, pp. 169-179; R. Moshe Schapiro, in *BeYad HaLashon*, pp. 373-379. A similar approach can be found in Zera Chaim, pp. 318-319, and a more expansive version of this approach, in the context of a broader analysis of the lashon hara prohibition, authored by R. Ephraim Natan Rothschild, appeared in the journal *Kol HaTorah*, LXIV, pp. 157-164. A critique of this approach, and an alternative, can be found in R. Avraham Gurewitz, *Ohr Avraham to Hilkhos Taaniyot, Kuntres Seder HaKinot*, #2).

They note that there are essentially two forms of lashon hara. One is the conveyance of a damaging factual statement about another, an exposure of harmful material. In this form, the presence of the subject would indeed neutralize the threat, since the subject can correct, contextualize, or otherwise respond to the factual claim. This may be the form the Maharal has in mind. The other, however, goes to the essence of what the prohibition is about, and is probably the reason that the first form is treated as severely as it is: the conveyance of unfavorable judgment. Factual episodes are merely vehicles by which such judgments travel. With this second form, the presence of the subject offers no real protection.

What Miriam said about her brother was not a misstatement of fact, and there does not appear to have been any factual matter for Moses to correct. The Torah does not explicitly say what Miriam said. The commentaries discuss the offense in terms of judgment, an assessment of Moses as comparable to others without regard for his unique status, or a failure to extend the benefit of the doubt to him. The offense lay in the interpretive frame Miriam imposed, not in any datum she conveyed.

When the judgment is the offense, the subject's presence offers no real defense, because there is nothing concrete to rebut. The subject can correct a misreported fact. He cannot easily correct an inference, a tone, a framing, an implication. An unfavorable judgment can be both false and unfalsifiable; the listeners have already been given the lens through which to view the subject, and no statement from the subject can make them unsee the image that framing has painted.

The contemporary case of Israel and its critics displays this in a particularly damaging fashion. Israel is, in a sense, perpetually "present" in the global conversation about its conduct. Every charge is heard, and every accusation can be engaged and contested by its spokespersons. By the Maharal's logic, this should be the most protected position imaginable. The reality is otherwise, because the disparagement is not at the level of fact, where defenses can engage, but at the level of subjective and often arbitrary or biased judgment, which is essentially immune to defenses. Each rebuttal is itself absorbed into the interpretive frame and read as further evidence of the trait being charged. This is the precise terrain on which lashon hara does its most lasting damage, and it is the terrain where no defense can help.

#### The Tosafists' Perception of Human Nature

A different reading of the talmudic rule, addressing it together with a closely parallel statement that what is spoken "in front of three," in other words in public, is not subject to the prohibition of lashon hara, was offered by the Tosafists (Bava Batra 39b s.v. leit, and Arakhin 15b s.v. kol milta). They limit both cases to a speaker whose statement is genuinely ambiguous, and could be heard as either positive or negative. The negative reading is plausible when the speaker is talking in private, where his words might be taken either way; in public, and especially in the subject's presence, it is unimaginable that the speaker would have intended his words to be heard as malicious, and the listeners will assume he meant the positive reading.

The Chafetz Chaim (Hil. Lashon Hara 2:2) formalizes this in two possible models. In one, the audience functions as a check on the speaker, who will hold himself to a positive message because of who is listening. In the other, the audience functions as a clarification of the speaker's intent, since the listeners will assume the positive reading from the fact that the speaker was willing to say it openly. Either way, the operative premise is the same: public speech, in the presence of the subject, is reliably more decent than private speech, because no one would be malicious in such a setting.

The Tosafists are predicating the rule on a feature of human nature, that the visibility of the subject and the presence of an audience exert moral pressure on the speaker, who will modulate his language accordingly. The whole rule rests on the assumption that this pressure is real.

What happens, however, when that pressure no longer exists?

#### The New World of Social Media

Social media has produced, on a vast and accelerating scale, a counterexample to the Tosafists' premise. The subjects of disparagement, in many cases, have full access to what is being said about them; they may also be tagged or addressed in the second person, which only intensifies the dynamic. The audiences are larger than any the Tosafists could have imagined. By every external metric the Tosafists' license should apply with maximal force; one would expect the language to be at its most measured. The opposite has happened. Psychologists refer to the "online disinhibition effect" to describe the observed reality that one who is operating behind the protection of a computer screen often becomes disconnected from ordinary inhibitions such as moral standards, sensitivity, and empathy towards others, and becomes capable of egregious interpersonal behavior that he would otherwise abhor (the term is associated with Dr. John Suler; for an extensive

treatment, see Elias Aboujaoude, *Virtually You: The Dangerous Powers of the E-Personality*, pp. 40-42).

Several factors converge. Being physically disconnected from the subject decreases the ability to empathize. The context deemphasizes personal identity, a phenomenon psychologist Philip Zimbardo identified decades ago and termed "deindividuation," in which the assimilation of a person into a larger crowd loosens his attachment to his personal standards. Anonymity, where it exists, insulates the speaker from external consequence and from internal self-recognition. Studies (described in detail by Francesca Gino in her *Sidetracked*, pp. 199-203) have shown that even minor cues of anonymity, such as a darkly lit room, can produce a marked increase in dishonest behavior, despite the fact that the participants are not actually less visible. The mere sense of being unseen alters conduct.

One example is particularly telling for the question of presence. The empirical evidence of online disinhibition can be observed in the comments sections of news sites when a tragedy is reported. The commenters are aware that the family members will usually see these comments, and yet allow themselves to write things that they would never express verbally to a mourner. The Tosafists' check fails completely. The presence of the subject, which was once understood to constrain the speaker, has become a feature of the spectacle rather than a brake on it.

Empathy itself appears to have eroded under these conditions. A 2010 University of Michigan study found that college students are forty percent less empathetic than their counterparts thirty years prior, a finding the authors associated in part with social media (cited in Susan Cain, *Quiet*, p. 141). Adam Smith observed two and a half centuries ago that a man who would not sleep at night over the loss of his little finger would "snore with the most profound security over the ruin of a hundred million of his brethren" so long as he never saw them (*Theory of Moral Sentiments*). The internet was once imagined as a corrective to this distance, allowing exposure to the suffering of strangers far away. Often, the actual effect has run in the other direction; the screen restores the invisibility that Smith identified as the enabling condition of moral indifference, even when the subject's name and face are technically visible on it.

The cultural changes of the internet have also weakened the process of repair that normally follows an offense. As Sherry Turkle observes in *Alone Together* (pp. 233-234), the conditions of online communication blur the line between confession and apology, allowing the speaker to discharge an obligation in a medium that can require very little of him. Forgiveness, she notes, follows from the experience of empathy, in which one sees that another has acknowledged having caused hurt. When the channel through which the acknowledgment travels strips out the cues by which empathy is experienced, the entire transaction is impoverished; both parties get used to getting less. This matters greatly for lashon hara, which presupposes not only a culture in which speech is bounded but also a culture in which the rupture caused by improper speech can be genuinely mended.

The medium also corrupts the message itself. In his book *Mindwise*, the psychologist Nicholas Epley describes a study in which communications through text were correctly understood only about half the time, in contrast with the same messages transmitted over the phone (pp. 108-109; a similar finding, also at fifty percent, from the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, is reported by John Freeman in *The Tyranny of E-mail*). What is most striking is that, regardless of the error rate, the speaker consistently felt he was transmitting the message clearly, and the listener equally frequently believed he was interpreting it correctly. The exchange becomes, in Epley's phrase, one in which both sides are "amazed that the other can be so stupid". The authors of *Cyberbullying: Bullying in the Digital Age* (pp. 87-88) note that this same dynamic plays a substantial role in the escalation of online cruelty: what may begin as innocent teasing over text or instant messaging can be read as something other than what was intended, and the absence of contextual cues, the wink or the smile that softens a remark, allows even a benign comment to be received as an attack.

This is *avak lashon hara*, the category that the Talmud (Bava Batra 165a) said is impossible to fully escape, scaled by orders of magnitude. Maimonides (*Mishneh Torah*, Hil. Deiot 7:4) defines *avak lashon hara* as positive statements that unwittingly yield negative interpretations, statements made with benevolent intent that are nonetheless heard as malicious. The whole question presupposes a communication environment in which the listener has some access to the speaker's tone and bearing. Strip those away, and even the most innocent statement is one click away from being read as the worst version of itself, and is then forwarded as such.

There is a further inversion of the Tosafists' premise to note. It might be assumed that the wider the audience, the more its presence would moderate the speech, since the listeners would calibrate their interpretation against one another and against the presence of the subject. Contemporary research on group polarization suggests the opposite. As William H. Davidow notes in *Overconnected*, the internet is unmatched as a vehicle for thought contagions, since "potential believers can find like-minded groups just by doing a simple Internet search," and the resulting clusters reinforce rather than challenge each other's interpretations (pp. 156-159). The likeminded group does not moderate; it amplifies whichever reading the group is already inclined toward, almost invariably the less generous one.

The responsibilities of the listener are correspondingly transformed. The prohibition of "accepting" *lashon hara* presupposes a recipient who exercises some judgment about what he hears. On the internet, clicking on a link, sharing a post, and forwarding a message function as endorsements and as further amplification. The line between merely receiving a message and actively participating in its spread has been blurred almost to vanishing. Every reader is, by the small motion of his thumb, also a publisher.

A final irony deserves attention. The premise of *lashon hara* is that even factually true information can present an incomplete or unjustly harmful picture; the prohibition therefore demands a balancing of context, intent, and proportion that goes beyond the question of whether a statement is technically accurate. The internet, however, has produced a parallel commitment to comprehensive factual recording, on the assumption that more information always serves truth. Technology critic Evgeny Morozov, in *To Save Everything, Click Here* (pp. 270-280), argues that the very thoroughness of online archiving can be at odds with the deeper truth a complete picture requires, since the act of preservation favors what is easily recorded and underrepresents what is not, producing a hyperaccurate record that is nonetheless misleading. The point is precisely the one *lashon hara* has always pressed: that an item of speech can be true in the narrow sense and unfair in the larger sense, and that the obligation runs to the larger sense.

#### The Contemporary Challenge

The world has changed. This is not a call to discard the benefits of the internet and social media, which include the rapid sharing of Torah, the extension of kindness across distances, and the protection of the innocent through the transmission of information that might otherwise be suppressed. It is, however, a recognition that the conditions presupposed by some of the halakhic categories no longer hold in the most common arenas of contemporary speech.

The Tosafists found in the presence of the subject and the publicity of the audience a guarded license, resting on assumptions about what people will and will not do when they can be seen and answered. The contemporary environment has tested those assumptions and revealed them to no longer be true. The presence that once operated as a check no longer operates as one. The audience that once moderated now amplifies, in the worst direction. The subject who once could rely on his presence to discipline the speech around him now finds his presence noted as a feature of the disparagement rather than a deterrent to it.

The eternal relevance of the categories of *lashon hara* requires an awareness of what has changed in the realities to which those categories apply. When the older intuition was that presence and publicity would restrain the speech, the newer reality is that they will often encourage it. Acting responsibly

under the current conditions means treating presence and publicity not as safe harbors but as the locations where the most damage may now be done. A single narrative detail in the story of Miriam, the question of whether Moses was present, yields insight into both the nature of the prohibition and the world in which its values are needed more than ever. The story shows that the heart of lashon hara is the conveying of unfair judgment, against which presence offers no certain protection; while our experiences show that previous assumptions of decency and discretion can no longer be taken for granted. The commandment to remember Miriam, therefore, is also a commandment to remember what lashon hara truly is, and to bring that awareness along as one navigates a new world. \_\_\_

from: Team TorahAnytime <info@torahanytime.com>

date: Jun 5, 2026, 12:07 AM

subject: TorahAnyTimes Parashat Be'ha'alotcha

**Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser**

**Knowing Who You Can Become**

In this week's Parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu cries out: "Where will I find meat to give to this entire nation?" (Bamidbar 11:13). At first glance, the Pasuk is difficult to understand. Moshe Rabbeinu had already been the messenger to perform countless miracles.

Through him, Hashem had split the sea, brought forth water from a rock, and sustained an entire nation in the wilderness. Why, then, was he troubled by the challenge of providing meat?

Rav Nosson Wachtfogel zt"l offers a profound explanation. Moshe certainly possessed the ability to bring about the miracle. That was not the issue. Rather, Moshe had reached such an exalted spiritual level that he no longer related to the desire for meat at all. He had become so elevated that the request itself was foreign to him. It existed outside his spiritual radar and reality. For that reason, Hashem established the Shiv'im Zekeinim, the seventy elders, to assist him. Leadership of the Jewish people required not only greatness, but connection. The leader needed to understand the people he served, and Moshe's extraordinary spiritual stature had carried him beyond the experience of the ordinary person.

Such is a powerful lesson: we view life through the prism of our spiritual standing. From where we stand, we see the landscape of the world and people around us. This idea appears elsewhere too in a fascinating passage in the Gemara (Yoma 69b). Moshe Rabbeinu described Hashem as, "HaKel HaGadol HaGibor Ve'HaNorah—The Great, Mighty and Awesome G-d." Yet generations later, the prophets struggled with those very words. Yirmiyah HaNavi looked around and saw foreign nations desecrating the Beis Hamikdash. "Nochrim m'karkerin b'heichalo—Strangers were frolicking in the Sanctuary." "Where," he asked, "is Hashem's awesomeness?" And so he omitted the word Norah.

Daniel witnessed the Jewish people subjugated and exiled. "Nochrim mishtabdim b'banav—Foreign powers ruled over Hashem's children." "Where," he asked, "is Hashem's might?" And so he omitted the word Gibor. Later came the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah, the Men of the Great Assembly, and they restored the original formulation: "HaKel HaGadol HaGibor Ve'HaNorah."

The Gemara says of them: "Hechziru atarah l'yoshnah—They restored the crown to its former glory." Why were they able to say what Yirmiyahu and Daniel could not? The answer, explained R' Wachtfogel, is that Hashem desires truth. Yirmiyah could not honestly perceive the Divine awesomeness amid the destruction he witnessed and Daniel could not honestly perceive the Divine might

amid the suffering and exile of his generation. They spoke according to the reality they experienced. The Anshei Knesses HaGedolah, however, perceived some else. They recognized that Hashem's greatness, might, and awesomeness were present even within the exile itself.

This is one of the foundations of spiritual growth: honesty. In this case, Yirmiyah and Daniel each spoke from where they genuinely stood and were honest with themselves. In life, underscore Chazal, a person must know truthfully what he is or is not doing. He must acknowledge when he has succeeded and when he has failed. Only then can he improve and climb higher. That is one part of the picture. But there is another side to this as well. While a person must honestly recognize his shortcomings, he must also honestly recognize his positive qualities.

When Rav Aharon Kotler zt"l, the great Rosh Yeshivah of Lakewood, passed away, many students became despondent. They feared that the yeshiva could not survive. What would become of the future? Around that time, a great talmid chacham related a remarkable dream. In the dream, Mashiach was sleeping. First, Chasam Sofer appeared and attempted to awaken him. Yet Mashiach remained asleep. Then Rav Aharon Kotler appeared and also tried to awaken Mashiach. Despite his greatness, Mashiach still did not awaken. Finally, a group of simple yeshiva bachurim entered. Together, they approached Mashiach—and he awoke.

Rav Nosson Wachtfogel explained the message. Never underestimate the power of an individual Jew. One cannot know whose mitzvah, whose act of chesed, whose sincere tefillah, or whose dedication to Torah may tip the scales and bring the final redemption. It may not be a rabbi or renowned scholar. It may be a young Jewish boy or girl in school, someone whom the world hardly notices.

Growth begins with honesty: honesty about where we are and honesty about what we can become. We must know our limitations. But we must also know the astonishing potential Hashem has placed within each and every one of us. For it may be that the person capable of bringing the geulah is far closer than we imagine. And that person is you.

Kol Eliyahu Sichos from **Rav A. Leib Baskt** zt"l

Behaaloscha – **Naaseh Vinishma**

Adopted into English

Here is the updated translation with those famous Talmudic and Hebrew phrases integrated in transliteration, along with their italicized English translations.

I.

The Gemara in Bava Basra 44b brings a statement in the name of Shmuel. One who sells a field to his friend without achrayus cannot testify for him about it, because he establishes it before his baal chov. This means we don't accept the seller's testimony against a claimant. He can't help keep the land in the buyer's hands. He sold it without achrayus and won't pay the buyer anything if the claimant seizes the field. Still, we consider him a biased witness. He wants the field to remain with the buyer so his baal chov can collect from it. The Gemara asks what the circumstances are. (i) If he has other unencumbered land, the baal chov will just take that. The seller has no gain or loss, so why is he biased?. (ii) If he has no other land, what difference does it make?. The baal chov can't collect from the seller anyway. Rather, he has no other land, but he says to himself, lo

nicha d'lehevei loveh rasha v'lo yeshalem, meaning I don't want to be a wicked borrower who doesn't pay, as it says in Tehillim 37:21. He doesn't want the land to leave the buyer's hands. His baal chov would find nothing to collect. He would become a loveh rasha v'lo yeshalem, so he is biased.

The Ri Migash asks about this. Why do we suspect him of false testimony just so he won't be a loveh rasha v'lo yeshalem?. An ed sheker is much worse than a loveh v'eino meshalem. The Torah itself calls an ed sheker a rasha. The answer is that he doesn't care about his duty to Heaven. He only cares about his duty to people. If people see he borrows and doesn't pay, they will call him a rasha. He doesn't care if he is a rasha of an ed sheker.

Human nature is that if someone promises to do something, he loathes breaking his word. He can't live with himself if he shows others he isn't trustworthy. Once he promises fully, he feels an extreme obligation. It's easier for him to violate a prohibition from the Ten Commandments, lo saaneh b'reacha ed sheker, meaning You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (Shemos 20:13), than to be a loveh rasha v'lo yeshalem. This shows how powerful this feeling of obligation is. A person might feel more obligated in a light matter he accepted upon himself than in a severe matter he didn't.

Chazal say in Avodah Zarah 2b that Hashem offered the Torah to every nation. They all asked, What is written in it?. When they heard what was written, they refused it. Hashem came to Yisrael, and they accepted it immediately without questions. They immediately said Naaseh V'Nishma. The nations later argue before Hashem. They say, Master of the Universe, klum kafisa aleinu har k'gigis, did You force a mountain over us like a barrel and we didn't accept it, like You did to Yisrael?. Rav Dimi bar Chama explains that Hashem kafa aleihem har k'gigis, meaning He forced the mountain over Yisrael like a barrel. Hashem told them, If you accept the Torah, good, and if not, there will be your burial.

Hashem specifically offered the Torah to every nation without forcing them. He wanted the merit to come through acceptance. Acceptance creates a natural obligation, just like the loveh rasha v'lo yeshalem. A person will be forced to fulfill his acceptance. He'll try all tactics to remain trustworthy. Since he accepted it willingly, he won't tolerate the disgrace of breaking his word. People would ask him, Who asked you to get involved? You accepted it yourself, so why didn't you fulfill it?. That is a disgrace. For this reason, after they willingly said Naaseh V'Nishma, Hashem kafa aleihem har k'gigis. This taught them they were already obligated to keep their word and fulfill the Torah.

The Gemara also says that in the future, the nations will ask for the Torah's reward. Hashem will ask where they fulfilled the seven mitzvos they accepted. The nations will ask where Yisrael fulfilled the Torah. Hashem will call witnesses for Yisrael. (i) Nimrod will testify that Avraham didn't serve Avodah Zarah. (ii) Lavan will testify that Yaakov didn't rob. (iii) Potiphar's wife will testify that Yosef didn't sin. (iv) Nebuchadnezzar will testify that Chanania, Mishael, and Azariah didn't bow to the idol. Yisrael stood faithfully to fulfill all seven mitzvos in the hardest situations. They did this even with mesiras nefesh, like Avraham Avinu in the fiery furnace.

The Gemara emphasizes that the seven mitzvos came to the nations through their own acceptance, yet they failed. Hashem showed them they are unfit for the Torah and its reward. They have a fundamental flaw. Even when they accept something, they lack a sense of

obligation. Bnei Yisrael were careful with this trait. They felt that their acceptance removed their free choice. They were forced to fulfill them even with actual mesiras nefesh just to not violate their acceptance. The Gemara brings testimonies from difficult situations to show they used this trait of not wanting to be a loveh rasha v'lo yeshalem.

II.

We find that Hashem acts this way with Bnei Yisrael. He doesn't give them free choice to go against His Torah. They are threatened with severe rebukes. It seems the choice to leave the Torah is completely taken away. Yechezkel 20:32-33 says Hashem will rule over them with a strong hand. Hashem does this out of His great mercy. It's a great favor to His children that He doesn't let them go out to a bad culture. This explains the verses in Yehoshua 24:14-25. Yehoshua tells the people to choose who to serve, they say they will serve Hashem, and Yehoshua makes a covenant with them. Do Bnei Yisrael really have permission to choose Avodah Zarah?. The explanation is that this strengthened their obligation and removed their free choice. They entered an extra covenant so they would be forced to keep their word despite any test. Rashi explains that Yehoshua saw they would complain in the days of Yechezkel, so he made it heavy on them. He removed their ability to say they only accepted the Torah in the days of Moshe to enter the land. This created a heavier obligation. If they don't keep their word, they are worse than someone who breaks the Ten Commandments. The main thing is to remove any possibility of doing bad. It isn't good to act with democracy and free choice. It's Hashem's kindness to put Bnei Yisrael in a state of no choice. A person has choice in his early days. But if he accepts being a Ben Torah and then wastes his days on making a living, he should be disgusted with himself. I don't know how a Ben Yisrael who acts secular can stand himself.

III.

Bnei Yisrael also complained about the Manna in this parsha. Bamidbar 11:4-6 says they cried for meat and remembered the fish and vegetables they ate in Egypt. They said their souls were dry with only the Manna to look at. They apparently desired physical things like onions and pickles. But it's hard to say the Manna was lacking, since Shemos 16:31 says it tasted like honey wafers. The Gra explains this using the Gemara in Yoma 75a. The Gemara says the Manna revealed people's secrets. If two people came to Moshe for a trial, the Manna's placement the next morning revealed the guilty party. (i) For the tzaddikim, it fell at their door. (ii) Average people went out to gather it. (iii) Reshaim had to wander far to find it. The Manna was a very restrictive food. Bnei Yisrael were forced to do good because the Manna's location revealed who was keeping the mitzvos properly. It placed a huge obligation on Yisrael. They likely feared sinning just to avoid the embarrassment of their bad deeds being exposed. Imagine a righteous woman who usually opened her door to find the Manna right there. One day she opens the door and there is no Manna. She would immediately ask her husband what terrible sin he committed last night. This is a huge embarrassment. Or imagine a famous tzaddik who fell into sin. The next day he had to go outside the camp to the area of the reshaim to get his food. The scoffers would mock him and ask if he was a fraud like them. This took away their free life. This explains their complaints. When they said they remembered the fish they ate for free, Chazal explain they meant free from mitzvos. The Manna forced them to keep the

mitzvos strictly. They complained that the Manna was like a peddler telling all their sins. They wanted free choice. A person naturally wants to act on his own choice. The Gemara says a person prefers a little of his own over a lot from his friend. No one likes being forced by someone else, even to do good. But Hashem didn't agree to this. Hashem sees that total free choice is a huge danger. A person can't rely on his own good choice. He needs pressure to push him to keep the mitzvos. It's like a mother leaving her kids at home. She hires a babysitter because the kids might hurt themselves. Hashem knows His creations need constant supervision to save them from their Yetzer Hara. Hashem didn't want to rely on their free choice. This is how yeshivas should be run. They give the bochurim dorms and three meals a day. If a bochur misses Shacharis, he should lose lunch. If he sleeps when he shouldn't, he should be kicked out of the dorm. Democracy isn't always good. Hashem acted this way in the midbar. Whoever stepped out of line lost his portion of the Manna and had to work hard to find it. This behavior is really for the benefit of the bochurim.

IV.

This explains the sin of the spies. Commentators wonder how they fell so hard when they just did their mission to tour the land. Rashi explains the core issue based on the Tanchuma. Hashem told Moshe He wasn't commanding him to send them. Yisrael asked to send them, Hashem said the land is good, and He gave them room to err. The whole mistake of the spies and Bnei Yisrael happened because they relied on their own free choice. Once you choose to act without Hashem's help and approval, you have room to make mistakes. Sukkah 52b says without Hashem's help, a person can't overcome his Yetzer Hara. Bnei Yisrael should have said they wouldn't go without Hashem's help. They fell into error because they wanted to go naturally instead of relying on miracles. We pray the Hashkiveinu blessing every evening for this reason. We ask Hashem to put us to sleep, like a baby who needs its mother to sing it to sleep. We ask Him to remove the Satan from before and behind us. We speak as frightened people. We are adults, but we recognize the danger of the Yetzer Hara at every step. We ask for Hashem's help constantly, like a baby needs a guard. Hashem taught this to the great Tanna Pelimo in Kiddushin 81a. Pelimo used to say every day, gira b'eina d'Satan, meaning an arrow in the eyes of the Satan. One day the Satan tricked him and pretended to die. Pelimo ran to hide in the bathroom. The Satan revealed himself and asked why Pelimo always cursed him. Pelimo said it was to push the Satan away. Pelimo's intention was good, but his mistake was thinking he could beat his Yetzer Hara alone. The Satan showed him that without Hashem's help, it's impossible. He told Pelimo to just say, Rachmana nigaar bei b'Satan, meaning let the Merciful One rebuke the Satan. We pray in the morning blessings not to be brought to sin or a test. The main thing is that Hashem saves us from tests, not that we try to fight the Satan ourselves. A person can't rely on his own strength. Rashi on Bereishis 28:13 says Hashem doesn't associate His name with the righteous during their lifetimes because He doesn't trust them. Berachos 29a says not to trust yourself until the day you die. Yochanan Kohen Gadol served for eighty years and then became a Tzeduki. Imagine him being honored with a mitzvah like acting as a Sandek after so many years. He would have to decline because he became a Tzeduki. Hashem taught all of this to Bnei Yisrael when He told Moshe, send for yourself.

Section 5

A person isn't trustworthy to rely on himself. He must always put himself in a situation that limits his free choice. This forces him to follow the straight path after Hashem. This is the concept of aseh lecha rav, meaning Make for yourself a rav (Avos 1:16). Jews don't have a concept of I can already do it alone. We are always students who need a rav. We find this immediately when Hashem took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt. Shemos 13:17 says When Pharaoh let the people go, Hashem didn't lead them through the land of the Philistines, because it was near, for Hashem said perhaps the people will reconsider when they see war and return to Egypt. Hashem specifically led them on a crooked path through the midbar. This put Bnei Yisrael in a situation where they almost couldn't turn back. This is Hashem's greatest help, taking away the possibility to make a mistake. Because it is very hard to defeat the Yetzer, Hashem did several types of He led them around for Yisrael and the generation of the midbar. They were beloved before Hashem, and Yirmiyahu 2:2 says about them I remember the kindness of your youth. They merited this guidance. As we explained, through the Manna Hashem proved and taught them they have no other job besides being a mamleches kohanim v'goy kadosh, meaning a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Shemos 19:6). They had to fulfill everyone who is called by My name, I created him for My glory (Yeshaya 43:7).

We must know that the root of Bnei Yisrael is different from other creations. Scientists understand the laws and traits of the human species today through mummies they find from ancient generations. But Bnei Yisrael are different. They have hereditary traits from the generation that lived forty years in the midbar. They didn't have a natural economy or regular physical needs. They ate from the Manna and drank from the well. They didn't need bodily cleanliness or clothing cleanliness. They just lived with Hashem's providence over them. They all had one role, to serve the Creator. There is no room for a Ben Yisrael to think he will be a doctor or a lawyer and do as he pleases. Hashem didn't allow them to control their lives. He watches over them like a babysitter without letting them act as they want. That could bring them harm and make them fall into mistakes that can't be fixed. Yet we hear some Jews talking as if they already taught themselves the way. They found a private purpose for themselves according to their nature and desire. But Hashem didn't show this to His nation. He led an entire nation in the midbar with no occupation besides serving Hashem. He led them in a state of great restriction, where He almost didn't let them step out of line at all.

Section 6 (1)

The main thing is to recognize we can't rely on ourselves. Not like those we hear saying they can learn by themselves, make a shidduch with a rich mechutan, and he'll buy them a nice apartment and a car. They are like those who think they have a large army and an atomic bomb, so they can win without any help. A person has no power on his own. He always needs help and assistance. On the contrary, it's worth giving up a nice apartment outside the camp in a place with no peer pressure to live in a decent environment. Then he will be embarrassed in front of his neighbors to come home from work late close to Shabbos. Always aseh lecha rav u'kneh lecha chaver, meaning make for yourself a rav and acquire for yourself a friend (Avos 1:16) for excellent self-guarding so you won't step out of line. We must always pray to Hashem to help us. This only comes through prayer, because everything depends on Hashem. This is the success

of Bnei Yisrael that brings them to eternal life. As Yeshaya 60:21 says, Your people are all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever.

---

from: **Michal Horowitz** <michalchorowitz@gmail.com>

date: Jun 4, 2026, 8:03 AM

subject: Beha'aloscha 5786: Turning "No" into "Yes"

At the beginning of Parshas Beha'aloscha, the Torah describes Aharon Ha'Kohen's fulfillment of the mitzvah to light the Menorah. The Torah states: וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן אֶהְרֹן - And Aharon did so; toward the face of the Menorah he lit its lamps, as Hashem commanded Moshe (Bamidbar 8:3).

Rashi comments: וְלֹא שָׁנָה שֶׁל אֶהְרֹן - This tells us the praise of Aharon, that he did not deviate.

At first glance, this comment is difficult to understand. What is so remarkable about the fact that Aharon followed Hashem's instructions exactly as commanded? Would anyone expect Aharon Ha'Kohen, one of the greatest spiritual leaders in Jewish history, to alter the Divine command?

It is fair to say that every insight in my new book, *Abled*, is my favorite (just as those who learn with me know that every Dvar Torah is my favorite! Because it's true - they are all my favorite). Hence, the following insight is at the top of my list of "favorites," and it is recorded in the conclusion of *Abled*.

[When writing my book, I reached out to Rebbetzin Weinberger to confirm if the idea is Rabbi Weinberger's own chiddush, and she replied that indeed, it is. My thanks to Mr. Rob Levinson for sharing it with me.]

Rabbi Moshe Weinberger offers a beautiful and inspiring insight. He notes that the Torah does not simply say that Aharon performed the mitzvah. Rather, it states: וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן אֶהְרֹן - And Aharon did "kein." The word "kein" means "yes."

Building upon this idea, Rabbi Weinberger suggests a deeper reading of Rashi's words. The praise of Aharon was not only that he followed instructions precisely. Rather, throughout his life, he possessed the remarkable ability to transform "no" into "yes."

Every challenge that might have caused another person to become discouraged, Aharon faced with faith and determination. Every obstacle that appeared impossible became an opportunity for growth. Every situation that seemed to invite despair was met with hope.

In this sense, Rashi's comment takes on a deeper meaning. וְלֹא שָׁנָה - he changed every "no." וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן אֶהְרֹן - and transformed it into a "yes" (*Abled: Living With a Disability, A Torah View*, p.217 - [mosaicapress.com/Abled](http://mosaicapress.com/Abled)).

This idea resonates far beyond the life of Aharon Ha'Kohen.

Every person encounters moments of difficulty. We face disappointments, setbacks, unexpected challenges, and circumstances we never would have chosen. There are times when life presents us with realities that seem impossible to understand or overcome.

Our first reaction may be to say: "I cannot do this." "This is too difficult." "There is no way forward." Yet the example of Aharon teaches us that while we may not always be able to change the circumstances before us, we can choose how we respond to them.

Very often, the greatest spiritual growth occurs not when life proceeds according to our plans, but when we learn to navigate situations that require resilience, patience, faith, and perseverance.

I once read the following powerful idea: "G-d gives us challenges,

and along the way we become people who can handle them." And one of the ways we do so is by changing what seems to be a "no" into "yes."

It is fitting to recall a lesson of my youth. I remember when growing up, I was often reminded by my parents that, "There's no such thing as I can't."

Additionally, there is another dimension to this idea. Saying "yes" does not mean denying that a challenge exists, nor does it mean pretending that something difficult is easy. Rather, it means refusing to allow the challenge to define us. Aharon teaches us that we can acknowledge hardship honestly while still choosing to move forward with faith, purpose, and hope.

And finally, the Menorah also required consistency. It was not enough to light it once. Day after day, Aharon returned to perform the same sacred task. True greatness is often built in exactly this way—not through dramatic moments alone, but through steady commitment and faithful service over time.

When challenges arise, we sometimes wait for a sudden breakthrough or a perfect solution. The Menorah reminds us that even a small flame, tended faithfully and consistently, can illuminate an entire room. Progress is often achieved one step at a time, one positive choice at a time, one act of faith at a time.

The difference between "I cannot" and "I will try," between "this is impossible" and "with Hashem's help I will do my best," can transform an entire situation.

Perhaps this is part of the enduring praise of Aharon Ha'Kohen. His greatness was not only in performing sacred service within the Mishkan. It was in approaching life itself with the power of "yes" - with faith, hope, and the willingness to continue despite difficulty.

May we merit to follow the example of Aharon Ha'Kohen. May we find the strength to face challenges with courage, to replace discouragement with determination, and to transform moments of difficulty into opportunities for growth.

And in this merit, may we bring more light, strength, and hope into our own lives and into the lives of those around us.

בברכת בשורות טובות ושבת שלום

Michal

## Parashat B'ha'alot'kha Rav Soloveitchik's Lecture on Leadership

Lecture given by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik zt"l on June 10, 1974, transcribed by Yitzchak Etshalom.  
[note: a section of this lecture can be found in "Reflections of the Rav", vol. 1, pp. 150-159. This presentation was transcribed from a tape-recording; any errors or unclarity should be ascribed to the transcriber. Please take into account that it is a straight transcription - the beauty of the oral presentation is diminished by the written format.]

This paper will deal with a problem which is quite acute now - as it was 3500 years ago - the problem of leadership. The paper won't be restricted to the Sidra of B'ha'alot'kha, which is one of the most difficult Sidrot in the entire Humash. The Sidra of B'ha'alot'kha is very puzzling. It is puzzling for two reasons. First, certain events described in the Sidra are incomprehensible. We simply cannot grasp the etiology of these events - nor their teleology.

For example, we do not understand the story about Miriam, her criticism and disapproval of Moshe. It is hard to grasp that Miriam, the devoted and loyal sister, who, as a little girl, stood alone on the shore of the Nile and watched the floating ark because she had faith and hope in the matter of her little brother (the baby in the ark) was concerned, while all adults, including his mother and father, resigned and abandoned the baby.

And his sister stood from afar, in order to know...

It is quite puzzling that this sister should suddenly turn into the accuser and prosecuting attorney of her great brother. Equally incomprehensible is the strictness, sadness and speed with which the Almighty meted out her punishment. Equally difficult to grasp is the connection between this episode and the tragedy which was recorded in the Torah earlier - the tragedy of "Kivrot haTa'avah" (the graves of the voluptuaries). This is one difficulty.

There is a second difficulty. Moshe went through many crises. He lived through many distressful experiences and moments. And worst of all, as you know, was the Egel (golden calf) experience, which threatened to terminate the very relationship between God and Israel. Yet, he never panicked, never complained, never acted out of black despair. On the contrary, steadfastly and heroically, he petitioned the Almighty for forgiveness; defending the people, arguing their case like an attorney in court. Our Rabbis describe this by way of a metaphor, commenting on the verse: Vay'chal Moshe. Vay'chal, in contradistinction to vay'vakesh or vayit'chanen Moshe, emphasizes the element of strength and boldness. There is bold prayer and there is humble prayer. Vay'chal has the connotation of bold prayer. In a strange, yet beautiful metaphor, Our Rabbis say:

Moshe seized the corner of the mantle of the Almighty, and said: "I will not let you loose unless you forgive the sin of the people."

Suddenly, in our Sidra, Moshe began to complain. When the multitude, began to rebel, Moshe, instead of defending the people, began to complain, almost accusing the people. He said things which he had never before uttered:

So Moshe said to YHVH,

"Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me. If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once if I have found favor in your sight and do not let me see my misery."

These are words which were never uttered by Moshe. It is true that he uttered a similar phrase when he was sent to Pharaoh on his first errand and his mission ended with complete failure. He came back to God and said:

YHVH, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me?

This was the question of a young, inexperienced man. But Moshe, the leader who took the people out of Egypt, never repeated the question. It is not Moshe-like to act like a frightened person and to speak out of the depths of resignation and to condemn the people. These are two examples of events which require interpretation to understand. We have to study Humash the way we study Gemara, to analyze and conceptualize the Humash and to find in every verse the meaning, the connotation and the principle.

However, the most difficult problem with B'ha'alot'kha is not limited to the substance of events as to the continuity of the Sidra. The lack of systematic development of the story which the Torah is trying to tell us is perplexing. The Torah is always careful about continuity and wholeness of the narrative. The Torah never tells us half a story. There is always development, transition, complete narration - when the Torah is finished with a story, the story is complete. As far as B'ha'alot'kha is concerned, we just don't know. We don't know how many stories there are in B'ha'alot'kha, how many stories are complete, how many are incomplete, we simply don't see the thread of continuity in B'ha'alot'kha.

Let us just simply review B'ha'alot'kha, the events which were recorded in the Sidra of B'ha'alot'kha. It commences with the Sanctification of the Levites (several verses were dedicated to the Menorah; Our Rabbis were right that B'ha'alot'kha et haNerot (the Mitzvah of the Menorah) actually belongs in Parashat Naso. That's what Rashi wanted to convey when he said: Aharon became upset) - "and you shall present them as an elevation offering".

Then the Torah tells us about Pesach Sheni - it is Pesach baShana haShenit (Pesach in the second year) and Pesach Sheni (the second Pesach). Halakhically, Pesach Sheni refers to the Pesach which is offered in Iyyar, by the one who is far away and the one who is impure (at the time of the first Pesach). But here the story is of the Pesach baShana haShenit and the Torah recorded the incident with the ritually impure people within the framework of the Pesach baShana haShenit. They approached Moshe,

why must we be kept from presenting YHVH's offering at its appointed time among the Israelites?;

Moshe inquired of the Almighty and the institution of Pesach Sheni was established.

Where is the transition from the Sanctification of the Levites to the Pesach baShana haShenit? We don't know. Two different stories? We have no continuous development.

Then, following the description of the Pesach baShana haShenit and Pesach Sheni, we have another description of the cloud, the pillar of cloud guiding the people on their journeys.

There is no transition from the story about the Pesach to the story about the pillar of cloud, and the Torah tells us in detail how the journeys of B'nei Yisrael are completely dependent upon the position of the pillar of cloud.

Whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, then the Israelites would set out...

Following the narrative about the cloud, the Torah relates to us the commandment pertaining to Hatzotzrot- the two trumpets - and their use for assembling the community and the journeying of the camps. And the Torah describes almost in detail the signal system connected with the Hatzotzrot; one blast, so one camp moves, another blast, a different camp moves, the T'ruah, the T'ki'ah. At the conclusion of the section dealing with the Hatzotzrot, the Torah reviews the previous theme; the journeying of the camps, and again tells us in detail the order in which the camps traveled, Yehuda at the head, followed by Yissakhar and so forth. Then, after the Torah describes the organization of the camps and how they moved and traveled, suddenly we hear a very strange conversation which, prima facie, is puzzling and enigmatic. A conversation between Moshe and his father-in-law. Moshe, humbly extending an invitation to his father-in-law:

Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place of which YHVH said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us, and we will treat you well; for YHVH has promised good to Israel." But he said to him, "I will not go, but I will go back to my own land and to my kindred." He said, "Do not leave us, for you know where

we should camp in the wilderness, and you will serve as eyes for us. Moreover, if you go with us, whatever good YHVH does for us, the same we will do for you.

Moshe argued with his father-in-law; he wanted his father-in-law to leave Midian and to join B'nei Yisrael, but Yitro was stubborn.

Following this conversation, we are suddenly confronted with a Parasha consisting of two Pesukim:

Vay'hi bin'soa ha'aron... - Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say, Arise, YHVH, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you." And whenever it came to rest, he would say, Return, YHVH of the ten thousand thousands of Israel."

At the beginning of the Parasha there is an inverted Nun and at the end of the Parasha there is an inverted Nun, in order to emphasize that this parasha is out of context here. Indeed it is out of context. And the question is obvious: if it is out of context, why did the Torah insert the Parasha into a section within which it would always stand out as out of context. The Parasha could have been beautifully inserted at the end of Pekudei:

For the cloud of YHVH was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey.

The two Pesukim would have been a most appropriate conclusion or sequel to that: Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say, Arise, YHVH, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you." And whenever it came to rest, he would say, Return, YHVH of the ten thousand thousands of Israel."

And finally, following the Parasha of Vay'hi bin'soa ha'aron..., the Torah tells us the tragic story - which we will analyze - of the Kivrot haTa'avah - the people who desired. They didn't do anything else, no crime, no idolatry, no murder, no sexual promiscuity, no robbery, no burglary - nothing, they just were overcome by a desire and they wept that's all - they didn't yell, they didn't throw stones at Moshe, like they did in other situations. Nothing, they didn't say anything, they weren't threatening anyone, just complaining. People of desire - this tragic story is told. The name Kivrot haTa'avah - could have been invented today, to characterize modern man. The grave of desire which man digs for himself, or I would rather say, the grave which the desire digs for man. The grave of the voluptuaries.

Finally, the conclusion of the Sidra is the story of Miriam.

We simply are perplexed. How many stories are in B'ha'alot'kha? One story or many stories? If there is one, there must be transition; if there is no transition, if there is no gradual and systematic development of a theme, then there is no unity. Whoever writes a composition paper, in first year English, knows that there must be unity. Unity is when a theme is developed. Prima facie, there is no development of anything and there is no literary unity. There are many stories. But each story per se is half a story, not a complete story. (Whatever I tell you tonight occurred to me during the Torah reading on Shabbat - it's completely new, so you won't find it anywhere - no one plagiarized me yet. I'm just reviewing my thoughts to you tonight, for the first time.) I had a feeling when the Ba'al Qeriah (Torah reader) was reading the Sedra, as if we were jumping like a bee on a clear warm summer morning from flower to flower accumulating the sweet nectar. Is it possible that the principle of the unity of the Torah, the unity of the themes which the Torah develops was lost in Parashat B'ha'alot'kha? It is an impossibility.

Now let me move slowly - my job, you understand very well, is to restore the unity of the Parasha.

The Parasha is one story, one tragic story. A tragic story which changes Jewish history completely, from top to bottom. The inverted Nuns symbolize an inverted historical process here. An inverted Nun is not so bad. But when history is being inverted, not realized or stopped suddenly, this is very tragic. Our Rabbis speak about punishment in B'ha'alot'kha

as the worst distressful events in Jewish History, "In order to separate between one punishment and another punishment."

Let us start with the Exodus. When the Almighty charged Moshe with the assignment of redeeming the Jews, liberating them from Egypt, he told him the following: (He told him many things, but the Hinuch, R. Aharon haLevi (?), said that the necessary prerequisite of the Exodus is the following sentence:)

And it shall be your sign that it was I who sent you, when you will free the people from Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.

This is a difficult sentence. In other words, the Almighty told Moshe that the Exodus drama will culminate in two events:

you shall worship God on this mountain

How many events does this encompass? It means that the Exodus will not be consummated until you worship God at this mountain. What does He mean by this? What did Moshe understand by these words?

The Hinuch says: He meant two things: Mattan Torah the giving of the Law, the Torah teaches Man how to worship God, the continuous worship of God; the Man who lives according to the principles and rules of the Torah is a steady worshipper of God. There is no neutral moment; worship is a continuous process.

However, he meant something else, namely the construction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). Certainly the purpose of the Mishkan is worship. As a matter of fact, the Torah was given at Mount Sinai and the Mishkan was constructed immediately after Moshe came down from the Mount, Betzalel started the work of constructing the Mishkan on the day after Moshe came down from Mount Sinai, assembled the people and told them that a Mishkan should be constructed. It's no wonder that following the Aseret haDibrot (Ten Statements, - "Ten Commandments") in Parashat Yitro, God mentioned to Moshe the construction of an altar:

But if you make for me an altar of stone...

If the Jews hadn't succumbed to the hysteria of the Erev Rav (multitudes), had they rejected the Egel, the two objectives would have been realized much sooner. Because of the Egel, the time schedule was changed and the consummation of the "you shall worship God on this mountain" was delayed for 80 days. If the Egel had not been made and the whole tragedy of the Egel had been avoided, Moshe would have come down on Tamuz 17 and immediately they would have started to construct the Mishkan. Because of the Egel, Moshe had to spend 80 more days on Mount Sinai in prayer. Moshe came down from Mount Sinai on the day following Yom HaKippurim -so the construction of the Mishkan was delayed for 80 days. However, on the day after Yom HaKippurim, after Moshe came down with the second set of Tablets and the message of forgiveness, he quickly assembled the congregation and told them about the immediate task to be discharged - the building of the Beit HaMikdash. The work of construction began immediately. How long did it take them to construct the Mishkan, to complete the work? The Mishkan was completed and put together on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, which was, according to Our Rabbis, the Shemini laMilu'im - (eighth day of the Milu'im - handing over the priesthood to Aharon) - the day on which the princes began to offer their gifts to the Beit HaMikdash. When those two objectives, Mattan Tora and the construction of the Beit HaMikdash, were achieved, the Geula found its realization. The "you shall worship God on this mountain" was translated into reality, into fact.

The people, therefore, had no business prolonging their stay in Midbar Sinai (the Wilderness of Sinai). They stayed in Midbar Sinai as long as it was necessary to receive the Torah - which had to happen twice, due to the Egel, and as long as it was necessary in order to complete the work on the Beit HaMikdash, because both are encompassed by the commandment: But the very moment that the second set of tablets were delivered to Yisrael and the Beit HaMikdash was constructed and completed, the vessels erected and the sacrifices offered, the task of Yisrael in Midbar Sinai was discharged and fulfilled. There was no purpose in extending the sojourn any longer.

The Torah in Naso tells us about the final act of the dedication of the Mishkan, namely, the sacrifices by the princes. The Torah did not forget to mention a secondary matter, like the sanctification of the Levi'im. The Torah apprises us in Tzav about the sanctification of the Kohanim, which was of primary significance. In a word, with the dedication of the Mishkan by the princes and the election of the Levi'im, everything which was necessary in order to have the Mishkan serve the great purpose of worship was prepared and ready; the work was completed. When could B'nei Yisrael simply get up and leave Midbar Sinai? The Mishkan was completed on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the twelve princes offered their gifts, the Almighty said:

They shall present their offerings, one leader each day, for the dedication of the altar...

meaning Rosh Chodesh Nissan plus 12 days. They were ready to march on the 13th of Nissan. However, the cloud did not move or rise, because the next day was Erev Pesach, the Korban Pesach, so the march was postponed until after Pesach. Everybody knew that the stay of the Jews in the wilderness of Sinai came to a close; the job was done; the Beit HaMiqdash built, the Torah given, now we have to resume our march. However, the march had to wait until after the Jews offered the Korban Pesach. The second Pesach they celebrated in Midbar Sinai:

YHVH spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: Let the Israelites keep the passover at its appointed time.

(The Almighty said:) "I will postpone the journey until after the Korban Pesach will be offered."

So the Torah told us about the Korban Pesach in B'ha'alot'kha, because the Korban Pesach was the only obstacle to the resumption of the march. During the offering of the Pesach, the ritually impure men inquired about their status, Moshe Rabbenu asked the Almighty and the institution of Pesach Sheni was introduced for those who were unable to offer the Pesach in Nissan. It is perfect continuity: The sanctification of the Levi'im was the last act of "you shall worship God on this mountain." It was not as important as the sanctification of the Kohanim, which is why the Torah tells us about the sanctification of the Kohanim in Tzav and Tetzaveh. The sanctification of the Levi'im is not as important; you could operate the Beit HaMikdash without the Levi'im. Shira (the main function of the Levi'im) is not indispensable; the Levi'im are more or less a luxury. The Torah tells us that every detail was completed, we were ready to march, the Almighty told Moshe to offer the Pesach first in Midbar Sinai and after the Pesach was offered, the B'nei Yisrael were supposed to resume their march. In a word, I repeat, the two prerequisites for moving on were met: the Torah given and accepted and the Mishkan ready for worship. The great march was supposed to start; the march to Eretz Yisrael.

All 4 freedoms were attained, "I will take out...I will save...I will redeem...", and with Mattan Torah and the construction of the Mikdash, the "I will take..." was realized as well. The hour was struck for the fifth freedom to be realized and be translated into a reality, namely "I will bring (you into the land...)". Now, how long was the march supposed to last? Several days. That's why the Torah reveals to us the details of the march. First, who was the guide, the leader? If you march towards a certain destination, particularly in the desert, you need a leader. The answer is the pillar of cloud- as an instrument in the hands of the Almighty. The guide was the Almighty as the Torah told us in B'shallach: YHVH went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night.

Now the Torah tells us how the camps were arranged marching, which tribes formed the avant garde and which tribes formed the rear guard: M'asef lekhol haMachanot. The Torah speaks of Tziv'otam (hosts) of warriors: Kol Yotz'ei Tzava. The Torah also relates to us the story of the two Hatzotzrot in this context because it's very important, the story of the signal system. Since Moshe was the commander he instructed the various camps on their march to the promised land, so there was need for communication. And the means of communication were the two silver trumpets, the Hatzotzrot of silver.

Torah is not only important to explain intellectually in categories, but also in emotional categories. If you want to understand the beauty and greatness of the Torah, the emotional mood which is created by the reading of the Torah is perhaps more important than the intellectual gesture. Read B'ha'alot'kha carefully,

So they set out from the mount of YHVH three days' journey with the ark of the covenant of YHVH going before them three days' journey, to seek out a resting place for them,

and

When both are blown, the whole congregation shall assemble before you at the entrance of the tent of meeting. But if only one is blown, then the leaders, the heads of the tribes of Israel, shall assemble before you. When you blow a T'ruah, the camps on the east side shall set out; when you blow a second T'ruah, the camps on the south side shall set out. A T'ruah is to be blown whenever they are to set out.

There is a mood of expectancy and tension. Expectancy permeates the pages of B'ha'alot'kha. There is a mood of mobilization and rigid order in the air. All conditions were met, the reward is about to be granted, finally the promise to Abraham is about to be fulfilled. The "I will bring them" will become the fifth freedom. The people are on their final triumphal march. In this mood, Moshe was excited. He was expecting great things. There is tenseness in the air and there is determination and boldness to break through if necessary.

Interesting is the conversation between Moshe and his father-in-law. What kind of mood on the part of Moshe is mirrored or reflected by this conversation? We get a glimpse into Moshe, into his mood, those days, after the second Passover as the people started to march.

In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle of the covenant. Then the Israelites set out by stages...

It was not one of the many journeys; it was the journey, the final journey.

What is the emotional climate of this conversation:

Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place of which YHVH said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us, and we will treat you well; for YHVH has promised good to Israel."

It is a climate of serenity, of peace of mind, an unqualified assurance. Moshe spoke of the final journey to the promised land. No waiting anymore, no Ani Ma'amin - I believe in the coming of Mashiach, even if he may tarry, I will wait for him... There would be no need for it anymore. No delays, no procrastination, no if and no when: Im Shamo'a Tishm'u - If you will listen - It is now! It is going to happen right now, not tomorrow. It is present tense, not "We will set out" - rather, "We are setting out"

...for the place of which YHVH said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us, and we will treat you well; for YHVH has promised good to Israel.

all the promises will be fulfilled. I won't have to ask questions

YHVH, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh...

no problems, no questions, no doubts, nothing! It will be very simple.

I want to let you in on another secret. It was not an invitation which a son-in-law extended to his father-in-law. It was not an invitation extended by an individual to another human being to share the good things in life. It was more than that. It

was an invitation extended by Moshe, as a representative of Klal Yisrael to all Gerim of all generations. The Midrash in Kohelet says:

All of the rivers flow into the sea and the sea is never filled" - these are the Gerim who come to Eretz Yisrael to convert.

It was extended to the entire non-Jewish world: Join us! Join us in the promised land - provided that the non-Jew is ready to subject himself to the same Divine discipline as we did. Any human being was offered the opportunity to join the march to the promised land, the march to the Messianic era. If that march had been realized, the coming of Mashiach would have taken place then and Moshe would have been the Melekh haMashiach. It was quite optional - the Jews could have reached it, they lost it so Moshe is not the Melekh haMashiach and the distance between them in time is long and far. The Torah was given to us. Eretz Yisrael was given to us, certainly. However, we were told to pass on God's word to mankind as such. We all know the famous verse in Shofarot of Rosh HaShana:

All you inhabitants of the world, you who live on the earth, when a signal is raised on the mountains, look! When a trumpet is blown, listen!

We are all invited - all the dwellers on this world.

We are setting out for the place of which YHVH said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us, and we will treat you well...

What does Moshe think? That Yitro, the non-Jew, is dependent upon us? Our Torah is commodious enough to encompass the entire world.

There is enough Hessed, goodness and happiness in the Torah to be transmitted to others and to be shared by others. Join our triumphal march, Moshe said to Yitro, towards our destiny. It may become your destiny as well. When I read this Parasha, it attracts me; there is something moving, touching. Sometimes I want to cry when I read this Parasha. The simplicity with which the great Moshe, the master of all wise men and the father of all prophets speaks. He uses the grammatical first person:

We are setting out...come with us, and we will treat you well...whatever good YHVH does for us...

What does it mean? Moshe was certain - there was not even a shadow of doubt in his mind - that he was going to enter the promised land. He and the entire congregation will be classified as both Yotz'ei Mitzrayim (departers from Egypt) and Ba'ei ha'Aretz (those who come into the Land). He was sure, he was convinced that he would see the beautiful land, the hills of Judea, the prairie land of the Sharon Valley, he was certain that he will climb the mount of Levanon. Later he prayed, but his prayer did not come true:

...Let me cross over to see the good land beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and the Lebanon.

But that time he felt no need for prayer: there was no doubt about his destiny.

The whole operation, if successfully brought to a close would have lasted several days. And at that time there was no need for Meraglim, for scouts to explore the land, to see whether the land is good or bad, or to see whether the cities are surrounded by walls or they are open cities, what kind of population is there - strong, weak, a sickly population or a healthy population. There was no need for it, all those scouts and all the exploration and intelligence work is only necessary if a man has doubts. This was the pre-doubt period in Jewish history.

We are setting out for the place of which YHVH said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us, and we will treat you well...

Share with us! An open invitation to everybody. Yitro or no Yitro, father-in-law of Moshe or the stranger. The Torah tells us indeed,

And they journeyed from the mount of the Eternal three days journey, and the Ark of the Covenant went before them in the three days journey to seek out a Menucha (resting place) for them,

Where did it go? Where is Menucha for the Jews? What was the destination? Rashi, quoting Sifri, says:

A distance of three days journey they miraculously traveled in one day, because the Almighty wanted to bring them into Eretz Yisrael.

My dear friends, tell me, at that time, before the great reversal took place, was the Parasha of Vay'hi bin'soa' ha'aron in its proper place or out of context? Before the Jews alienated God, before they fell from Him and they needed the Meraglim as scouts and they had doubts. Before, every Jew was convinced: This is the final consummation of all hope. It was beautiful, the Torah tells us:

And they journeyed from the mount of the Eternal three days journey, and the Ark of the Covenant went before them in the three days journey to seek out a Menucha (resting place) for them, the cloud of YHVH being over them by day when they set out from the camp. (meaning security on all sides)

Vay'hi Binsoa' ha'aron - Whenever the ark set out (leading them right into Eretz Yisrael) Moses would say, "Arise, YHVH, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you."

Who were the enemies? The last war they fought was the war against Amaleq and the next war was against Sichon and Og, 40 years later. Why was Moshe speaking about enemies and fiends and people who threatened them? Who did Moshe have in mind? We are traveling fast to Eretz Yisrael - there we will be confronted by somebody, if the great hope had been realized, there would have been no need to engage in battle for seven years.

Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say, Arise, YHVH, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you." And whenever it came to rest, he would say, Return, YHVH of the ten thousand thousands of Israel."

It was not misplaced. It was the continuation of the great story of the final, triumphal Messianic march into Eretz Yisrael, which was supposed to take place approximately 3500 years ago.

It was certainly in its place and there was no need for an inverted Nun at the beginning and for an inverted Nun at the end, it would have been the climax of the whole story. Had this come true, nothing had happened, the whole Jewish history would have taken a different turn. According to our tradition, (Hazzal said it many times) had Moshe entered Eretz Yisrael, it never would have been taken from us - because Moshe would have been crowned as Melekh haMashiach. The Messianic era would have commenced with the conquest of Eretz Yisrael by Moshe. Moshe believed with a great passion and love that the final march of redemption had begun - it was only a question of days.

Suddenly, something happened. Neither Moshe nor anybody else expected the event to transpire. What happened? In the story of the Egel, we know what happened. Concerning the Meraglim (spies) we know what happened. About Pe'or in Midian, 40 years later, we know what happened. What happened here? [Seemingly] nothing in particular.

And the multitude that was among them felt a lust, had a desire. And B'nei Yisrael wept again and they said: Who shall give us flesh to eat?

And the Torah tells us that this seizure by desire was evil. It aroused the wrath of the Almighty and also Moshe resented it. Uv'einei Moshe ra' - In Moshe's eyes it was evil - first time in Jewish history. Moshe was not the defense attorney: it was evil. This interrupted the great march. - it has brought the march to an end. The vision of Mashiach, of Eretz Yisrael, of the redemption of Yisrael, became a distant one, like a distant star on a mysterious horizon. It twinkled, but the road suddenly became almost endless. Why did Moshe feel discouraged? Why didn't he offer prayers for the people as was his practice in past situations?

Because the incident of Kivrot haTa'avah differed greatly from that of the Egel. The making of the Egel was the result of great primitive fright. The people thought that Moshe was died, they were afraid of the desert, they did not know what the future held in store for them, they were simply overwhelmed by a feeling of loneliness and terror, consequently, they violated the precept of Avodah Zarah. There were mitigating circumstances - they wanted the golden calf to substitute for Moshe, as all the Rishonim (medieval commentators) say.

When you speak about Avodah Zarah (idolatry), you have to distinguish between Avodah Zarah as a ceremony/ ritual and between the pagan way of life. In Hazal's opinion, an Avodah Zarah-worshipper will also adopt the pagan way of life. But in this day and age, we know that it's possible for people to live like pagans even though no idolatry is involved. Paganism is not the worship of an idol, it encompasses more - a certain style of life. What is the pagan way of life, in contradistinction to the Torah way of life? The pagan cries for variety for boundlessness for unlimited lust and insatiable desire, the demonic dream of total conquest, of drinking the cup of pleasure to its dregs. The pagan way of life is the very antithesis of Yahadut, which demands limitedness of enjoyment and the ability to step backwards if necessary, the ability to withdraw - to retreat. The unlimited desire, which the Greeks call hedone, is the worst desire in Man. When Man reaches out for the unreachable, for the orgiastic and hypnotic, then they don't violate the prohibition of Avodah Zarah, but they adopt the pagan way of life; and the Torah hated the pagan way of life more than it hated the idol. Because an idol cannot exist for a long time, it cannot last. Finally, an intelligent person realizes that it is just wood and metal; it has no life. Avodah Zarah per se is short-lived, however the pagan way of life has a tremendous attraction for people. The Torah describes so beautifully the way in which the pagan gathers, accumulates property - gathers the Slav, the quail, how he gathers property, means of gratification for his hungry senses.

So the people worked all that day and night and all the next day, gathering the quails; the least anyone gathered was ten homers; and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp.

They were mad with desire, there was no controlling/limiting element in their desire for vastness, the imagination excited them and their good sense was surrounded with a nimbus which was irresistible, "the more, the better, and you start gathering new goods even before you have completed gathering the other goods." The pagan is impatient and insatiable. That 's what the Torah describes in Kivrot haTa'avah.

There's another story in the Torah which, in contradistinction to the unlimited desire of the pagan, the Torah describes the Jewish way of life. It's interesting - it's the Manna. And Moshe said to them: this is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat, gather as much of it as each of you requires to eat, an omer to a person, for as many as you as there are. But when they measure it, by the omer, he who gathered much had no excess and he who gathered little had no deficiency. This is the approach of Yahadut.

The great tragedy happened, the great triumphal final march suddenly came to a stop, the people who rejected the basic principle of economic limitedness and aesthetic enjoyment, these people were not worthy to enter the Land. Suddenly, parashat Vay'hi binsoa' ha'aron found itself dislocated. The distance to that land suddenly became very long. Of course, there was no edict yet concerning the 40 years, the time the people would have to spend in the desert, but Moshe felt intuitively that the great march had come to an end. Hopes he had will be unfulfilled and visions he had will not be realized and his prayers will be rejected. He knew that.

I tell you frankly, I don't have to say Moshe, Moshe was the master of the prophets, God revealed everything to him. I remember from my own experience, during the illness of my wife, who was sick for four years. Of course, I am a realist, and it is very hard to fool me - not even doctors can fool me. But, somehow I was convinced that somehow she would manage to get out of it. And I lived with hope and tremendous unlimited faith. I remember, it was the last Yom Kippur before she died. It was Kol Nidrei and I was holding a Sefer Torah for Kol Nidrei and when the Hazzan finished Kol Nidrei and said Shehech'yanu veqiy'manu vehigi'anu laz'man hazeh I turned over the Sefer Torah to a Talmid of mine and told him to put it in the Aron Kodesh. He put it in the Aron Kodesh, apparently he didn't place it well, I don't know what, but the Sefer Torah slipped and fell, not on the floor, but in the Aron Kodesh. At that time I was filled - don't ask me how or why - I felt a gefil - nothing will help. And indeed it was.

When the Am haMit'avim ( the people who had the craving) began to complain and to weep, Moshe knew: This is the end, he'll never see Eretz Yisrael, never! That's why he said:

If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once...and do not let me see my misery.

And how beautifully our Rabbis said:

"Eldad and Meidad were having prophecy in the camp" What did they say? What was the excitement about? They said just one short sentence: Moshe 's hopes: "We are setting out...come with us, and we will treat you well..." will never come true Moshe will die - he'll be buried in the sand dunes in the desert - he'll never see the beautiful land and the Levanon - Moshe meit viY'hoshua makhnis Moshe will die and Yehoshua will lead [the people] in to the Land.

And then parashat Vay'hi binsoa' ha'aron lost its place - it was dislocated and displaced. Do you know why it was dislocated and displaced? Because two little Nuns were inverted - the march was inverted. Instead of the march bringing them closer to Eretz Yisrael, the march took them away from Eretz Yisrael. Binsoa' ha'aron the Nun was inverted and with the inversion of the Nun, Jewish history became inverted- and it is still inverted. The Parasha is still "dislocated". We cannot say "we are setting forth" with the same assurance and certitude that Moshe said it to Yitro his father-in-law just 24 hours before the Mit'avim inverted the Jewish process of redemption.

Finally, is now the continuation of the Parasha - I didn't yet explain the problem of Miriam, which I will now explain. The Torah describes the Exodus, Mattan Torah in Parashat Yitro, the construction of the Mikdash in Parashat Teruma. Suddenly, something happened which interrupted the continuity - the Egel, the construction was delayed for a certain number of days. Sefer Vayyikra (Leviticus) is devoted completely to the worship, to "you shall worship God on this mountain."

In Sefer Bamidbar (Numbers) the Torah tells us about the last act of dedication by the princes, and the lighting of the candles, and the sanctification of the Levi'im, so "you shall worship God on this mountain" was attained, the two objectives were reached, now the march began. The Torah tells us how the Jews were marching on the final triumphal march on the final triumphal journey to Eretz Yisrael, the pillar of cloud covered them, protected them, shielded them it was in front and was also the rear guard protecting them in back, and then how Moshe communicated with the camps, the Hatzotzrot of silver, and Moshe's conversation with Yitro, he already had Eretz Yisrael within his reach, he extended the generous invitation to mankind, to share in our Ge'ulah - our redemption, and everything was ready. Vay'hi Bin'soa' ha'aron - it should take us just a few more days. During the last few days, something happened - disaster struck. That disaster inverted Jewish History and that disaster dislocated Parashat Vay'hi Bin'soa' ha'aron. And that disaster inverted the march - instead of marching to Eretz Yisrael, we began to march away from Eretz Yisrael. Moshe discovered something else - he realized something else. He knew pretty well that he was chosen as the teacher of Klal Yisrael. God did not elect him as a diplomat, as a negotiator, but as the teacher or the Rebbe of the people, as their spiritual and moral leader. God Himself told him, when Moshe asked: "Who am I, that I should go to Phar'aoh?" He said: "you shall worship God on this mountain".

Basically, "Moshe, had I been looking for a negotiator, I wouldn't have selected you. But I'm not looking for a negotiator - I can do the art of negotiating by myself. I need a teacher for my people - as a teacher, you yourself will agree that you are the best one - you are a teacher par excellence. And that's why I selected you: 'And it shall be your sign' - and that is the reason 'that it was I who sent you'; that I selected you and not somebody else (this is how the Sefer haHinukh understands it)." There were many people in Egypt who were qualified to be negotiators; because the purpose of the Exodus is not political freedom, but the conversion of a slave society into a Kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation. And for that you are wonderful. Moshe knew this. However, he did not expect, until the Mit'avim, that he would assume the role of a teacher, but of a nursing mother/father - an Omein.

What is an Omein?- it is a nursing mother or father. Of course, a nursing mother teaches the baby. Perhaps the mother is the best and most important teacher in the life of a baby. But she does something else - the Rebbe teaches the talmidim. The nursing mother, in addition to teaching, carries the baby in her bosom or in her arms. "...as a nurse carries a sucking child,". What does this mean? Usually the father doesn't do it, the mother does it. The father has no patience for that. It has more meaning than the literal meaning of the word. The teacher does teach his disciple, but the disciple very seldom becomes a part of him. When the mother teaches the baby, the baby becomes a part of her. The mother, when she rears the baby, has one calling, one purpose, to protect the baby. The Omein or the mother basically do not belong to themselves. Many may be very critical of my statement but this is true according to Yahadut. A mother has no life of her own. She belongs to the infant. At least as long as the infant is helpless and is exposed to the dangers of a hostile environment. She belongs to the infant.

Moshe discovered now that teaching is not enough for a leader of Yisrael. A teacher, no matter how devoted, has a life of his own. That his job is nursing, carrying the baby in his arms, watching every step, guessing the baby's needs (a baby cannot say what she wants, you have to guess) feeling pain when the baby cries and being happy when the baby is cheerful. Teaching or instructing her good performances, but that is not everything. Moshe, who reconciled with his role as a teacher and leader of adults, began to doubt his ability to play the role of an Omein or mother nurse. Listen to his words: Did I conceive all these people, did I bear them, that you say to me: Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries an infant? Moshe discovered something tragic in a mother's life. That from now on, as an individual, he has no rights at all, no right to rejoice, whenever God will be good to him. As a private person, he is not entitled to enjoy life as an individual, to be happy in an ordinary way, like any other human being, because his children will never belong to Moshe. He lost his family. He became the mother nurse of K'lal Yisrael, no family of his own.

This is what our Rabbis say: "he separated himself from his wife." It isn't just his wife from whom he separated, it's the wife and children (two lovely boys), his sister, his brother. He could not share his joy with them, they could not share their joy with him, he is the father of Yisrael, the father of K'lal Yisrael, and that is what he means: the role of "as a nurse carries a sucking child" was imposed upon him during the rebellion of the Mit'onenim. He separated himself, not only from his mate, but also from his children. Where are Moshe's children? Do we ever come across Moshe's children? There was a census taken in the desert the beginning of the 40 years and at the end of the 40 years. Are Moshe's children mentioned? Not once.

This is the lineage of Aaron and Moses...These are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar;

Where are Moshe's children? Moshe didn't have children. And it is later, in T'nakh, the name of Moshe's child was mentioned, not as the son of Moshe, but the son of "Menasheh". Why was a little Nun added to the name? Not only in order to reflect unfavorably upon Moshe - this is ridiculous, Moshe was not responsible for what happened, but because Moshe did not have children. I always say that if Moshe had a child, then according to the law he would have been in a most awful dilemma. According to the law, it would have been required of him to give preference to his child, as far as the study of Torah is concerned, over the child of his next-door neighbor. This is a law which Moshe Rabbenu taught us:

Your own son takes precedence (in teaching Torah) over the son of your fellow.

On the other hand, Moshe had no right to give any preference, or to give an additional second to his son, because he was the father of every child within the Jewish community. So Moshe lost his children. He became the Omein, the nursing mother, of K'lal Yisrael.

And that is exactly what God told him at the time of Mattan Torah:  
You say to them, return to your tents, to your private lives, but you, stay here.

Moshe realized it during the incident of the Mit'onenim. And that is what Miriam, the true, loyal sister, resented. Does prophecy require of Man alienation of his family? Does God require of the prophet that he should forget his sister and brother, his children and wife, and dedicate himself only to the people?

...Has he not spoken through us also?

And we live a beautiful life with our husbands and children and relatives. And it doesn't interfere with our devotion to the people. That's exactly what God resented and told her: There is a difference between you and Moshe. An ordinary prophet does not have to sacrifice his private interest, his selfish concern, his family, his father, mother children, brother, sister; he can be a prophet, communicate with God, and at the same time be a devoted father, a loving brother, and a helpful head of the family. "Not so my servant Moshe." He's consecrated fully and wholly to me. And that's how the Parasha of B'haalot'kha concludes its long story - it's one story, this story - of a great march which could have led us into the Messianic era, but which was interrupted by some multitude which was permissive, hedones.

On that day, God will be one and His Name one.

Text Copyright © 2012 by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom and Torah.org. The author is Educational Coordinator of the Jewish Studies Institute of the Yeshiva of Los Angeles.

## **Parshat Be-Ha'alotecha** by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Parashat BeHa'alotekha is a lot like its name: long and complicated. To appreciate this parasha, we need special preparation. We will first look at themes and events from a "bird's eye" perspective to get a sense of the flow of things, and then will focus on a few specific incidents in the parasha.

### **PART I: THE BIRD'S EYE VIEW:**

1) The parasha begins with the lighting of the menorah in the Mishkan and moves on to other matters, some connected to the Mishkan and its service, some connected with the proper functioning of the camp as it makes its way through the desert. Which events toward the beginning of the parasha (perakim 8-10) relate to the Mishkan, and which to the setting up of or proper functioning of the camp? (Categorizing things helps in understanding and memory.)

2) The second half of the parasha reports a series of disasters: make yourself familiar with the names "Tav'era" and "Kivrot HaTa'ava" and with the events that happened there. Also make yourself familiar with the events surrounding the incident at the end of the parasha involving Miryam, Aharon, and Moshe.

3) If you were splitting the Torah into parshiot, wouldn't you have put the events of question #2 and the events of question #3 in separate parshiot? What are they doing together here in Parashat BeHa'alotekha? How does their presence in one parasha reflect the overall theme of Sefer BeMidbar as we have discussed it?

### **PART II: SOME SPECIFIC ISSUES:**

1) Most of us probably assume that the bechorim (firstborn sons) lose their holiness because they participated in (or led) the worship of the Egel. What are some other possibilities?

2) Whatever we answer to the above question, another question remains: why did Shevet Levi deserve to receive the holiness of the bechorim and their status as servants of Hashem in the Mishkan and Beit HaMikdash?

3) In perek 9, the Torah reports how the cloud signaled whether the camp should travel or stop. What is strange about this short section, and how would you account for this strange feature?

4) Two events occur in perek 10 which seem unnecessary for the Torah to report to us: the narrative which tells how the camp begins its first move, and the invitation of Moshe to Hovav, his father-in-law. The former seems unnecessary because the previous parshiot have already described in repetitious detail exactly how the camp was supposed to move. The latter seems unnecessary because it appears not to teach us much. How would you explain why the Torah records these events?

5) In the middle of perek 11, amid the people's complaints and demands for meat, Moshe seems to run out of steam as leader, and he too complains against Hashem. Shortly afterward, he seems to question Hashem's omnipotence (by doubting that Hashem can produce enough meat for the people). What is Moshe disappointed with? What was he unprepared for as leader of this people? Does he learn from this experience and revise his expectations, or does he remain bitter and disappointed? What do we learn about leadership from Moshe's experience?

6) As for the Miryam/Aharon episode in the end of the parasha, there are so many questions that I don't know where to begin. [As you will see from the shiur, we didn't have time for this section.]

### **THE SHIUR:**

Before we start, I want to say that my ideas about this parasha have been greatly impacted by the perspective of the Rav, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zt"l, who gave a shiur on this parasha many years ago (1974) which has become somewhat famous. The shiur is available as an audio cassette and is also transcribed and available somewhere on the internet, I'm

not quite sure where. I have used several short pieces of this transcription in this shiur. Let me introduce the parasha with a quote from the Rav:

"Torah is not only important to explain intellectually in categories, but also in emotional categories. If you want to understand the beauty and greatness of the Torah, the emotional mood which is created by the reading of the Torah is perhaps more important than the intellectual gesture. Read BeHa'alotekha carefully."

First we will take a bird's eye view of the parasha and try to figure out what its theme might be in the context of the Humash Ha-Pekudim (the most meaningful of the names for Sefer BeMidbar, as we discussed on Parashat BeMidbar; if you missed that shiur, it is pretty important to read it in order to understand this week's).

### **TAKING STOCK:**

What events occur in this parasha?

8:1-4 -- Moshe is given some instructions for how Aharon is to light the Menora.

8:5-26 -- Hashem gives instructions for the ceremony in which the Leviyim are dedicated to Hashem as servants of the Mikdash under the supervision of the kohanim.

9:1-14 -- Hashem instructs the people to bring the Korban Pesah and provides a 'second chance' option for those unable to bring the korban on Pesah (i.e., Pesah Sheni).

9:15-23 -- An elaborate, repetitive description of the movement of the Divine cloud as the signal to the people to camp and to travel.

10:1-10 -- Hashem gives instructions for the creation and use of trumpets: to gather the people or their leaders, to signal travel or war, and to blow over certain korbanot.

10:11-28 -- A detailed description of the actual moving of the newly constituted camp for the first time, organized according to degalim (military formations).

10:29-32 -- Moshe's invitation to Hovav, his Midyanite father-in-law, to accompany Bnei Yisrael to their land.

10:33-36 -- Description of the function of the Aron in the travels of the people.

11:1-3 -- The people complain and are punished (Tav'era).

11:4-35 -- The people complain for meat and are punished (Kivrot Ha-Ta'ava); Moshe complains to Hashem and is told to spread his authority among the Zekenim; in an aside, Moshe wishes that all of the people could be prophets.

12:1-16 -- Miryam's complaint to Aharon against Moshe, and Hashem's reaction.

### **WHERE IS THE CONTINUITY?**

One way to categorize the above events would be the following:

- 1) "Setting up the camp / appointing people to various functions."
- 2) "Narrative of how this all goes into action."
- 3) "Catastrophe / things falling apart."

Categories 1 and 2 occupy perakim (chapters) 8-10; category 3 occupies perakim 11-12. Right in the middle is the short section of "va-yhi binso'a," which is surrounded by upside-down "nuns" like parentheses.

On the preparation sheet, we asked what these different sets of events -- those in perakim 8-10 and those in perakim 11-12 -- are doing together in one parasha. It is pretty clear that the commands to assign various functions to different groups

(category 1) flow naturally into the narrative of how all these things swing into action (category 2). But how about 11-12? What is the connection between 8-10 and 11-12? They seem to be working in opposite directions.

## **PREPARING FOR DESTINY:**

In our introduction to Sefer BeMidbar, we talked about the two clashing visions expressed in the sefer (book): the vision of Hashem and Moshe and the vision of the people. Hashem and Moshe envision a grand, triumphant march from Sinai straight to Eretz Canaan, where the conquest of the land will provide the nation with the home they have been promised. Preparing for this march, the nation is organized militarily and religiously:

1) Militarily: The men are counted and assigned to military units; commanders are appointed over the armies. Trumpets are used to gather the people and to signal to travel. The special Divine cloud leads the way and signals when to move and when to camp.

2) Religiously: Paralleling the army ("YOTZE'EI tzava," the army which "goes OUT,") the Leviyim are counted and appointed (in place of the bechorim) to serve Hashem in the Mikdash and transport it through the desert (i.e., they are the "BA'EI tzava," the army which "goes IN," focusing not on external enemies, but on the Mishkan which is at the center of the camp. Paralleling the use of the trumpets to call to the people (above), the trumpets are set up to call to Hashem in times of crisis (war) or religious excitement and triumph (festival korbanot). The special Divine cloud indicates Hashem's constant presence among the people, as does the Aron's (Ark's) progress ahead of the people to lead them on the correct path through the desert.

This process is a nationwide revolution, the imposition of order on an unruly confederation of loosely organized tribes. Until now, no one had a particular job besides Moshe, the kohanim, and the tribal leaders. Now, 600,000 men are soldiers with commanders, several thousand are assigned to service in the Mishkan, and an intracamp communication system has been set up.

The Rav puts all of this into perspective:

"There is a mood of expectancy and tension. Expectancy permeates the pages of BeHa'alotekha. There is a mood of mobilization and rigid order in the air. All conditions were met, the reward is about to be granted, finally the promise to Abraham is about to be fulfilled. The "I will bring them" will become the fifth freedom. The people are on their final, triumphal march. In this mood, Moshe was excited. He was expecting great things. There is tenseness in the air, and there is determination and boldness to break through if necessary."

Now that all of these structures have been built, the entire camp shifts with ponderous, thunderous grace into motion. Imagine an elephant moving at the instructions of its trainer. Then imagine a herd of elephants all traveling together in formation; and now imagine 1,000 herds of elephants all moving together in perfect synchronization, and you will have some idea of the colossal scale of the movement of this group of people and the beauty and grace of its organization into formations, all around the Mishkan.

Confidently, Moshe invites his father-in-law to join in his people's good fortune, as the Rav puts it:

"Join our triumphal march," Moshe said to Yitro, "towards our destiny. It may become your destiny as well." When I read this parasha, it attracts me; there is something moving, touching. Sometimes I want to cry when I read this parasha. The simplicity with which the great Moshe, the master of all wise men and the father of all prophets, speaks. He uses the grammatical first person: "We are setting out . . . come with us, and we will treat you well . . . whatever good the LORD does for us . . ." What does it mean? Moshe was certain. There was not even a shadow of doubt in his mind that he was going to enter the promised land. He and the entire congregation will be classified as both Yotz'ei Mitzrayim (departers from Egypt) and Ba'ei ha'Aretz (those who come into the Land). He was sure, he was convinced that he would see the beautiful land, the hills of Judea, the prairie land of the Sharon Valley, he was certain that he would climb the mount of Lebanon.

## **MURMURS OF TROUBLE:**

But then comes perek 11. Suddenly, the entire flow of the parasha is reversed.

It starts quietly -- the first we hear is a murmured report of "mit'onenim," complainers, but we get no elaboration. Then we hear the shocking news that Hashem is so upset with these complainers that He begins to kill them! This is "Tav'era."

The next story launches into a full-blown report of another set of complaints: the people's demand for food other than the "man" (manna). They are tired of the "same old same old," and they look nostalgically back at Egypt and the great variety of different foods they ate there. They long for meat. Imagine what sort of mentality could look back at Egypt with wistful nostalgia.

What is Hashem's reaction, and what is Moshe's? Hashem becomes angry, and Moshe, the Torah tells us, sees the situation -- or the people -- as 'ra,' 'evil.' But then the Torah turns aside for a few moments from how Hashem deals with the desirous people and focuses on a shocking interaction between Hashem and Moshe.

Moshe is apparently so disheartened by the people's behavior that he asks Hashem to kill him rather than saddling him with this burden. Moshe, never one to mince words with Hashem, says quite directly that he did not sign on as a nursemaid and that he refuses to bear this burden alone. It seems that the gulf between Moshe's vision of the religious destiny of the people and the people's own interests -- more varied foods -- is too much for Moshe, and he gives up. He cannot bridge the gap, he cannot educate these people, he cannot drag them along with him. He sees his failure looming up before him, and he prefers death over demoralization. Moshe is beyond disgusted with the people; he despairs of them.

Abravanel raises a key question: why doesn't Moshe jump to defend the people against Hashem's anger, as he did on other occasions, such as in the wake of the Egel?

#### **ABRAVANEL:**

"It was revealed and known before Moshe what punishment would come upon them because of this [their complaints]. When he saw this, the Master of Prophets thought of a strategy which would assuage His anger, blessed be He, so that He, in His mercy, would pass over their sin. It [the strategy] was that before the decree and punishment which He would do because of this, Moshe would 'make himself' pained because of the Bnei Yisrael and say that he does not want to lead them, so that Hashem would beseech Moshe to pass over their sin and not abandon them. This, [Moshe thought,] would be a way to have them forgiven, and so Moshe hurried to say before Him, "Why have you done evilly . . . ."

This is a clever suggestion, in my humble opinion, but perhaps too clever. There is too much authenticity in Moshe's despair, too much melodrama in his request to die, to allow this to be a ploy. In any event, if this is what Moshe is up to, he fails, as Hashem is not "distracted" by Moshe's complaint and, after dealing with Moshe, he punishes the people severely. We may come to a better answer than the Abravanel's, but for now let us hold the question.

#### **MOSHE THE NURSEMAID:**

Now, it is clear that Hashem is upset with the people -- "va-yihar af Hashem" -- but is this Moshe's reaction as well? A careful reading of the end of this same pasuk shows that Moshe's reaction is hard to read at this point: "u-ve-einei Moshe ra" -- "and in the eyes of Moshe, it was bad"; it is not clear yet what this means. Was the people's behavior bad? Was Hashem's anger bad in his eyes? Was Moshe's own position bad? But then Moshe turns to Hashem to complain and provides a fuller picture of what is on his mind.

Moshe, it seems, is not upset with the people. Moshe is upset with Hashem. If you remember back a long way, back in Sefer Shemot when Hashem commanded Moshe to go to Paro (Pharaoh) and demand the release of Bnei Yisrael, Moshe finally acceded to Hashem's insistent command and delivered Hashem's word to Paro. Paro concluded that his Israelite slaves had too much time on their hands and were relieving their boredom by cooking up dreams of freedom. His reaction was to increase the people's already inhuman workload. The people, of course, were furious with Moshe. Using almost the same exact words as he uses here, Moshe turns to Hashem and complains: "Lama harei'ota la-am hazeh" -- "Why have You done evil to this nation?" (Shemot 5:22). Here, Moshe says, "Lama harei'ota le-avdekha" -- "Why have You done evil to Your servant?"

Back then, Moshe was angry with Hashem, not only for making him a villain in the eyes of the people, but also for worsening the plight of the people: "Why have You acted evilly toward this nation?" is the first complaint, and "Why did You send me?" is the second claim. Now, in Sefer BeMidbar, Moshe makes no complaint on behalf of the people; by now, Hashem has shown Moshe that He has the intent and power to immeasurably improve the lives of these former slaves. Back then, "And you have not saved Your nation"; by now, Hashem has indeed saved them from Egypt and honored them and elevated them with His Torah.

Moshe therefore has only one complaint: he feels like a complete failure, and it is Hashem's fault for giving him a job he cannot do. "Where will I get meat for all of these people?", Moshe complains despairingly. "Why have You done evil to me?" He claims that he cannot bear this burden on his own, and if he is forced to do so, he would rather die and "not see my own failure." Here Moshe twice uses the same word -- "ra" -- as the Torah used just before to describe Moshe's reaction to the people's complaints. Hashem was angry, but "u-ve-einei Moshe ra." What was the "ra?" Was it the "ra" of the people, their ungratefulness, their pettiness? Apparently not -- "al er'eh be-ra'ati" -- I would rather die than continue "to witness my own failure [ra]." The "ra"/evil that Moshe saw was his own: he felt so responsible for the people that he preferred to die than to lead them without being able to provide for their needs.

Moshe asks Hashem, "Am I a nursemaid, that I should carry them in my bosom?" Abravanel asks why Moshe uses the word "omein" as opposed to "omenet"; the first means "male nursemaid," while the second means "female nursemaid." In answering, Abravanel paraphrases Moshe:

**ABRAVANEL:**

"What is worse among all this is that you have made me like a male nursemaid, not a female nursemaid, for a female nursemaid, when she carries the suckling baby and he cries, can calm him by giving him milk from the comforting breast. But the male nursemaid, the husband of the female nursemaid, cannot calm the suckling, for he has no breast and milk. The baby will simply cry and cry and not be comforted! Similarly, I have become like a male nursemaid, since You have placed upon me the burden of this entire people; and I have not found favor in Your eyes, that You would give me the power to grant their request and petition, for where shall I get meat for this entire nation, since they are crying upon me and saying, 'Give us meat so that we can eat it! They are like a baby who demands milk from the \*male\* nursemaid's breast, but he has nothing at all to give him to calm him.'" Because of this, "I cannot alone bear this entire nation."

According to Abravanel, Moshe uses this image to express his frustration at his failure to meet the people's needs. A baby cries, the people cry. A baby wants milk, the people want meat. Moshe has no milk to offer as a nursemaid, and he has no meat to offer as leader of these crying people. Hashem has set him up to fail.

But why is Moshe not angry also at the people? Why is his frustration here not directed at them as well as at Hashem? Again, Moshe provides the answer: when he angrily insists that he cannot bear the burden of this people, he asks indignantly: "Did I father this people, did I give birth to them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom,' as a nursemaid would carry a suckling?!" Moshe does not blame the people because he sees the people as a "yonek," a suckling.

My son Avraham Yosef is just over two months old, a very cute and smiling little boy, but I don't expect him to know better than to complain and whine (sometimes). He is quite literally a "yonek," just a suckling. Moshe looks at the Bnei Yisrael the same way: he must hold them by the hand and provide for their every need, and he does not expect greatness from them at this early stage in their development. But now those needs grow beyond Moshe's ability to provide, and he turns to Hashem to lay blame. Hashem has hired him to baby-sit, but has left him no food to feed the baby. What is he supposed to do when the baby gets hungry and starts to scream for food? He is powerless, so he turns to Hashem and tenders his resignation as baby-sitter.

Moshe remembers that these are the same people who became fearful when he did not return from the mountain, the same people who built an idol and danced around it to soothe their fears and provide themselves with at least symbolic leadership in his unexplained absence. Moshe knows this people well, and he has been hoping that as events unfold, the people will begin to trust Hashem and take an interest in the lofty goals Hashem has set for them as a nation. But as our parasha intimates, the people remain "yonekim," sucklings. They are unable to mature, frozen in the dependent and insecure mentality of slavehood. They have no interest in a grand destiny. They want meat, fish, tasty vegetables. They are tired of "just one taste," even if it comes straight from Hashem every morning with the dew.

Eventually, Moshe will lose patience with the people as well, as we will see later on in Sefer BeMidbar, but for now, he blames only Hashem.

### **MOSHE'S SLIP:**

Perhaps this perspective on Moshe's sense of failure and consequent anger with Hashem can explain the shocking exchange which takes place between Hashem and Moshe in the next moment. Hashem first instructs Moshe to gather seventy elders to share the burden of leadership with him. Then he tells Moshe that He will soon provide the people with meat. But Moshe seems not to believe that Hashem can produce enough meat.

How can Moshe doubt Hashem's power? He who split the sea, He who produced locusts beyond number, swarms of frogs, lice, wild animals, He who pelted Egypt with burning hail, cannot also produce some meat?

Many commentators attempt answers. Here, Rav Yosef Bekhor Shor (a medieval commentator) paraphrases Moshe:

### **BEKHOR SHOR 11:21 --**

Moshe said, "Six hundred thousand . . ." This is what it means: "What kind of meat will be enough for them? For if You had said, 'I shall rain for them meat from the heavens,' as You said regarding the 'mon,' I would not wonder. If You had said, 'I will bring them animals and beasts,' there would be no wondering, for I know that You are all-powerful. But You said, 'I shall give them meat,' which makes it sound like this meat is already somewhere in the world! Where in the world is there enough meat to satisfy them?!" This is the reason Hashem was not angry at him, for he never said that He \*could not\* give them, he just wondered where in the world it was, so Hashem answered him, (11:23) "Is the arm of Hashem too short?", meaning, "Even in the world, I have many creations of which you do not know."

This will not do, I humbly assert: Hashem responds to Moshe's disbelief by saying, "Is Hashem's hand too short? Now you shall see if My words come to pass or not!" It certainly sounds like Hashem understood Moshe's statement as disbelief in His ability.

Abravanel suggests a number of answers; the first answer is that Moshe misunderstood Hashem's instructions and thought that Hashem was telling \*him\* that \*he\* was responsible to gather meat for them. Moshe expressed disbelief, asserting he could not do it, and Hashem responded by telling him that he had misunderstood, that He Himself would take care of it and that it was not Moshe's responsibility.

But this too is weak. Hashem's response is unequivocal: he scolds Moshe for doubting His power. Hazal recognize the problem here, and they comment that Moshe was forgiven for this lapse because it was private. The people did not witness his doubting of Hashem. In contrast, later on in Sefer BeMidbar, when Moshe hits the rock to draw water from it instead of speaking to it as commanded, he is punished severely, losing his opportunity enter the Land because his faith faltered in public, before the people (or because he fumbled an opportunity to strengthen the people's faith in Hashem through the great miracle).

Perhaps what is at issue here is not theology, but psychology. Moshe is not punished for doubting because he says what he says only out of despair. It is not his true belief. But he is so overwhelmed by his own failure to provide for the people that he begins to imagine that it is \*impossible\* to provide for them. Their needs are too great, their demands too high; he has encountered an insurmountable challenge and failed the people. That the challenge momentarily looms so large in his mind that even Hashem cannot meet it, is a stumbling which can surely be overlooked, considering the circumstances.

### **SUMMING UP:**

Sefer BeMidbar turns in the middle of our parasha: the orderly administrative process is actualized when the camp begins to move, but things quickly change course for the worse. What begins as a trickle of complaint turns to hemorrhage, growing into a torrent that before the sefer is over will sweep away Moshe, Aharon, Miryam, and all of the members of the generation which left Egypt. They will all die in the desert. The two visions of the sefer, the destiny-starred vision of Moshe and the mundane, security-hungry vision of the meat-hungry people, clash in our parasha. At first, Moshe maintains a deep feeling of responsibility for the people. In coming weeks, however, we will see the people turn with increasing

aggressiveness against Moshe, and we will see Moshe's bitterness rise and his anger and disappointment grow.

[As an afterthought, see Bekhor Shor on why the firstborn lose their "job" as servants in the Mishkan (8:19). If you'd like to talk about his idea, drop a line.]

Shabbat Shalom

\*\*\*\*\*

## THE TANACH STUDY CENTER [www.tanach.org](http://www.tanach.org)

*In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag*

### Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

\*\*\*\*\*

#### PARSHAT BEHA'ALOTCHA

Three books in one? So claim Chazal in regard to Sefer Bamidbar! And what's more, one of those three books contains only **two** psukim!

[This statement is based on the 'sugya' in Shabbat 116a (top of the daf) concerning the two psukim of 'va-yehi bi-nso'a ha-aron...' (that we recite when we take out the Sefer Torah / see Bamidbar 10:35-36).]

To better appreciate the deeper meaning of this statement, this week's shiur discusses an important thematic transition that takes place in Parshat Beha'alotcha.

#### INTRODUCTION

As anyone familiar with Chumash knows, the text of Chumash in the actual Sefer Torah does not contain any symbols of punctuation. Nonetheless, in Parshat Beha'alotcha we find a very peculiar exception, as the two psukim of 'va-yehi bi-nso'a ha-aron...' are delimited by two upside down 'nun's' - acting like parenthesis, and thus causing these psukim to 'stand out'.

For this 'technical' reason alone, we can certainly assume that these two psukim must be special. In an attempt to understand the reason for this phenomenon, the following shiur discusses the thematic importance of these two psukim by considering their location at a very pivotal position in Sefer Bamidbar.

#### HIGH HOPES

To appreciate the internal structure of Sefer Bamidbar, we must first consider what its theme 'should have' been. To do so, let's quickly review the primary themes of the previous three books, as we have discussed in our series of shiurim.

Sefer Breishit focused on God's choice of Avraham (and his offspring) to become His special nation ['bechira']. Sefer Shmot described God's redemption of His nation from Egypt, their subsequent journey to Har Sinai to receive the Torah, and construction of the mishkan – the symbol of God's presence in their midst. Finally, in Sefer Vayikra, Bnei Yisrael received additional laws relating to both the mishkan and 'kedusha' [holiness] in their land and their daily lives.

At this point, Bnei Yisrael were now ready to continue their journey from Har Sinai to inherit the 'Promised Land'. Hence, Sefer Bamidbar 'should have' been the story of that journey and their inheritance of the land. Tragically, in Sefer Bamidbar those goals are never attained; however - by considering those high expectations – we can better appreciate its content and structure.

For example, Sefer Bamidbar began by describing how Bnei Yisrael prepared for their journey to Eretz Canaan by organizing the army while establishing the mishkan at the center of their camp.

Note how this theme (of Bnei Yisrael's preparation for this journey) continues throughout the narrative in the first ten chapters of Sefer Bamidbar:

- \* The army is organized and counted (chapters 1-2)
- \* The mishkan is placed at the focal point of the camp (2-5)
- \* The national leaders participate in its dedication (7)
- \* The levi'im are appointed to become the spiritual leaders (chapters 3->4 & 8)
- \* The entire nation offers pesach rishon & sheni (chapter 9)
- \* Final instructions are given re: how and when to travel (10)

Had nothing 'gone wrong', it would have been precisely at this point (after chapter 10 in Sefer Bamidbar) that Bnei Yisrael should have begun their magnificent journey to the Promised Land. Instead, the next sixteen chapters (i.e. chapters 11-26) discuss exactly the opposite, i.e. how (and why) Bnei Yisrael **did**

**not** inherit the Land. In those chapters, the Torah describes numerous incidents when Bnei Yisrael rebelled against God, culminating with God's decision not to allow that generation to enter the land.

[The final ten chapters of Sefer Bamidbar (27-36) discuss how the second generation prepares to enter the Land.]

#### THREE BOOKS

This analysis can help us appreciate the location of the two psukim of 'va-yehi bi-nso'a ha-aron', as they lie at this junction that divides Sefer Bamidbar into two distinct sections:

- A) **Chaps. 1-10** - Bnei Yisrael's **preparation** for this journey
- B) **Chaps. 11-26** - The actual **journey** (i.e. what went wrong)

The last two psukim of chapter 10 ['va-yehi bi-nso'a ha-aron...'] form the divider between these two sections!

With this background, we can appreciate why Chazal consider Sefer Bamidbar as three books.

As the first ten chapters - preparation for travel - form a complete unit, they can be considered a 'book'. Similarly, chapters 11-36, describing the failure of the first generation, also form a complete unit, and hence can also be considered a 'book'. However, even though the two psukim of 'va-yehi bi-nso'a ha-aron...' form a divider, we must still explain why Chazal consider them as a book as well.

#### WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN

One could suggest that these two psukim serve as more than just a buffer. Albeit their brevity, they do describe the ideal fashion in which Bnei Yisrael **should** have traveled on their journey to inherit the Land. [For example, compare with Shmot 23:20-27, which describes God's original plan for how Bnei Yisrael would conquer the land.]

To emphasize what 'could have been' in contrast to what actually took place, the Torah intentionally delimits these two psukim with upside down nun's.

If so, then the 'three books' of Sefer Bamidbar would be:

**BOOK ONE** - Bnei Yisrael's preparation for their journey (1-10)  
This 'book' is followed by two 'versions' of that journey:

**BOOK TWO** - the **ideal** (two psukim) - what 'could have been'

**BOOK THREE** - the **actual** journey that 'failed'  
(i.e. chapters 11-36)

To accent the tragedy of **book three**, the Torah first presents a 'glimpse' of what 'could have been' in **book two** - the glorious manner in which Bnei Yisrael could have travelled, had they not sinned.

#### WHAT WENT WRONG?

So what went wrong? What caused Bnei Yisrael to sin at the incidents of the 'mit'onenim', the 'mit'avim' and the 'meraglim' etc.?

Chazal find a 'hint' in the pasuk (which immediately precedes 'va-yehi bi-nso'a ha-aron') that describes Bnei Yisrael's departure from Har Sinai":

"And they travelled **from** God's mountain..." (see 10:33-34).

The Midrash comments:

"Like a child leaving school - running away, in the same manner Bnei Yisrael ran away from Har Sinai a three day distance, for they studied [too much] Torah at Har Sinai..."

[Quoted in first Tosafot on Masechet Shabbat 116a].

This Midrash compares Bnei Yisrael's stay at Har Sinai to a 'school year' [quite appropriate for this time of year]. Even though they studied God's laws at Har Sinai, it seems as though the spirit of those laws were not internalized. The people were indeed

looking forward to **leaving** Har Sinai, but they were not looking forward to keeping God's laws in Eretz Canaan.

Technically speaking, they may have been 'prepared' for this journey, but they most definitely were not spiritually 'ready'. [See further iyun section.]

In this manner, the Midrash is highlighting the underlying reason that led to these sins. Once Bnei Yisrael left with the 'wrong attitude', it was inevitable that they would sin.

But who is to blame? Certainly, first and foremost the people themselves; but if we follow the 'school' analogy of this Midrash, we should also consider the possibility that the 'faculty' may share some of the responsibility as well.

As we study Sefer Bamidbar, we will see how certain incidents may even allude to this possibility. However, the first 'early warning' of teacher 'burn-out' is found already in Parshat Beha'alotcha.

### HAS MOSHE 'HAD ENOUGH'?

Beginning with chapter 11, and in almost every incident when Bnei Yisrael sin in Sefer Bamidbar, we find a growing strain in the relationship between Moshe Rabbeinu and the people. Not only do the people constantly complain to Moshe about their plight in chapter 11, even his own brother and sister criticize him in chapter 12!

In chapters 13-14, the meraglim [spies] incite a national rebellion calling for new leadership to take them back to Egypt (see 14:1-5), while in chapter 16 (Parshat Korach) we find yet another rebellion against the leadership of both Moshe and Aharon.

So, what went wrong?

The first sign of this leadership crisis already surfaces in the case of mit'avim (see 11:4-14), immediately after Bnei Yisrael left Har Sinai. Let's note Moshe's petition to God in reaction to Bnei Yisrael's complaint about the stale taste of the manna:

"... And Moshe pleaded to God: Why have You dealt so harshly with Your servant, and why have I not enjoyed Your favor that You have laid the **burden** of this people upon me? I cannot carry all this people by myself for it is too much for me. If you would deal thus with me, **kill me** rather..." (11:11-15).

In contrast to the Moshe Rabbeinu that we were familiar with from Sefer Shmot - who consistently defends Bnei Yisrael before God when they sin, now in Sefer Bamidbar Moshe's attitude appears to be quite the opposite -he would rather die than continue to be their leader!

Note as well the obvious textual parallels that highlight this contrast. Compare:

\* "lama hareyota le-**avdecha**..." (Bamidbar 11:11) - with "lama hareyota la-**am** ha-zeh..." (Shmot 5:22)  
["Why have you dealt so harshly with Your **people** - for what purpose have you sent me, for since I have gone to Pharaoh in Your Name, things have only become worse..."]

\* "lama lo matzati chein be-einecha..." (Bamidbar 11:11) - with "ve-ata im matzati chein be-einecha..." (see Shmot 33:13,16!)

["And now, if I have found favor in Your eyes, let me know Your ways so **I can** find favor in Your eyes - and see that they are **Your people**... and how will I know that I and Your people have indeed found favor - when You allow Your Presence to travel with us..."]

and

\* "If this is my plight [to lead them]- I'd rather die..."(11:15)  
"If You forgive their sin [fine]... but if not **erase** me from Your book that you have written..." (see Shmot 32:30-32)

[In the above comparisons, note as well the Torah's use of key phrases such as 'charon af Hashem', 'ra'a', 'matzati cheyn be-einecha' etc.]

Is it not ironic that after the incident of 'chet ha-egel' Moshe is

willing to die in order to **save** his nation (see Shmot 32:32), while now he would rather die than **lead** his nation! In Sefer Shmot, Moshe was always 'sticking out his neck' to defend Bnei Yisrael, while now he appears to have 'given up'.

[Note Rashi on Bamidbar 11:28 where he quotes the Sifri that explains how Eldad's & Meidad's prophecy at this incident was that 'Moshe will die and Yehoshua will lead Bnei Yisrael into the Land instead'. This Midrash suggests as well that the failure of Moshe's leadership already begins with this incident of the mit'avim and is not solely due to his sin at 'mei meriva' in chapter 20. / See further iyun section.]

This parallel, suggesting a possible flaw in Moshe Rabbeinu himself, must bother every student of Chumash. Could it be that Moshe Rabbeinu reacted in an improper manner? Is it possible that the greatest prophet of all times, who received the Torah and taught it to Bnei Yisrael, just 'gives up'?

Is Moshe Rabbeinu - who took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt and faithfully led them to Har Sinai - now unable to lead them on the last leg of their grand journey from Har Sinai to Eretz Canaan?

To answer **yes** would be blasphemous, yet answering **no** would appear to be rather naive.

### TOO HOLY TO LEAD

One could suggest that the contrast between Moshe's reaction to chet ha-egel and his reaction to the mit'avim stems from the motive behind each sin.

Despite the severity of chet ha-egel, Bnei Yisrael's sin was the result of a misguided desire to fill the spiritual vacuum created by Moshe's absence. [See shiur on Parshat Ki Tisa.] In contrast, the sin of the mit'avim seems to have been totally physical - an uncontrollable lust for food ['hit'avu ta'ava'].

Chet ha-egel presented an educational challenge that Moshe Rabbeinu is willing to accept, i.e. to take this misguided desire and channel it in the proper direction. [Note commentators who understand the building of the mishkan as a 'tikkun' for the misguided intentions that led to chet ha-egel.]

However, after the lustful sin of the mit'avim, Moshe Rabbeinu simply 'gives up'. He is unable to fathom how this nation, after spending an entire year at Har Sinai, have become so preoccupied with such mundane desires. Moshe simply does not have the educational tools to deal with such a low level of behavior. [In other words - Moshe was hired to be a teacher, not a baby-sitter!]

God's immediate reaction to Moshe's petition may reflect this aspect of Moshe's leadership. God finds it necessary to take some of the **ruach** (spirit) from Moshe and transfer it to the seventy elders (see 11:16-17). God realizes that Moshe must now share some of his leadership responsibilities with elders who can possibly deal more realistically with this type of crisis.

One could suggest an additional insight. In Sefer Bamidbar, Moshe Rabbeinu could be considered 'over qualified' or 'too holy' to lead the people.

After spending some six months on Har Sinai, Moshe Rabbeinu is on a spiritual level far higher than that of his nation. It is not that Moshe Rabbeinu is incapable of leading, rather the nation is on too low a level to benefit from his leadership. Quite simply, 'over-qualified' for the job. [Iy'h, we'll return to this topic in our shiur on Parshat Chukat.]

Ultimately, Yehoshua will be chosen to lead Bnei Yisrael into the Promised Land. As the dedicated student of Moshe Rabbeinu, and the experienced leader of his own tribe (and of the entire army in the battle against Amalek), Yehoshua possesses the necessary leadership qualities. He is also sufficiently 'down to earth', and therefore will be able to lead Bnei Yisrael into the 'land'.

The lesson that we can learn from this Parsha is certainly not 'how to criticize' Moshe Rabbeinu. Rather, it should remind us when teaching - to keep in mind the emotional needs of our students; and when studying - to keep in mind the potential of how much we can gain from our teachers.

shabbat shalom  
menachem

=====

## FOR FURTHER IYUN

1. See Shmot 34:30-35 in relation to the 'masveh' - the veil - that Moshe wore after his descent from Har Sinai.

How does this relate to the above shiur?

2. Considering the parallel between Har Sinai and Gan Eden, why do you think that the sin of the **mit'avim** ('ta'ava') is significant?

[Relate to Breishit 3:6-8!]

3. In relation to the Midrash quoted in the shiur on: 'Va-yis'u me-har Hashem ....' (10:33) : 'ke-tinok ha-boreiach mi-bet ha-sefer' [like a child running away from school]

Most children stay in school because they must. Usually, school attendance is not an outcome of total identification with the importance of education, rather a result of parental coercion. A child's joy on the last day of school usually does not stem from recognition of his academic achievements, but more likely from his expectations for having fun during vacation.

This, according to Chazal, was the level of Bnei Yisrael after their year at Har Sinai. They did not fully appreciate the privilege of receiving the Torah. Instead of looking forward to transferring the ideals of the Har Sinai into daily life in Eretz Yisrael, they were more interested in just getting on with normal life, while 'running away' from their spiritual obligations.

4. Note how later on in Sefer Bamidbar, Moshe's initial reaction to most every complaint is 'va-yipol al panav' - and "he fell on his face"./ See meraglim, korach and mei meriva.

Thus, Moshe's reaction to the mit'avim is not an isolated event. It opens an entire chain of incidents in which Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership appears to falter, concluding with the events of mei meriva (20:7-13) where God decides that Moshe cannot lead Bnei Yisrael into the Promised Land.

As we explained, the famous Midrash concerning the 'nevu'a of Eldad and Meidad (the two elders who were not included with the other seventy / read 11:26-29) reflects this connection between Moshe's reaction to the sin of the mit'avim and his ultimate fate of not entering Eretz Yisrael. Even though the Torah does not specify precisely what Eldad & Meidad had said, the Midrash fills it in for us:

"Moshe meit ve-Yehoshua machnisam la-aretz" - Moshe is going to die and Yehoshua will lead them into the Land (Rashi 11:26).

Although this interpretation is not the obvious 'pshat' of these psukim (as we can discern from Moshe Rabbeinu's reaction to Yehoshua's complaint / see 11:26-29), the Midrash may be alluding to the overall pshat of this parsha in Sefer Bamidbar. In the very same 'parsha' where Moshe is unable to deal with the mundane complaints of the people, the Midrash already sees his ultimate inability to lead Am Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael.

## PARSHAT BHA'ALOTCHA (shiur #2)

### "CHALSHA DA'ATO SHEL AHARON"

Why was Aharon depressed?

The first Rashi in this week's Parsha deals with this question as he explains the juxtaposition between the first topic in Parshat Bha'alotcha - for Aharon to light the Menorah (8:1-5), and the last topic in Parshat Naso - the twelve day dedication ceremony of the Mizbayach (7:1-88):

"Why is the parsha of the Menorah juxtaposed to 'chanukat ha'nssiim' (the special offering brought by the princes of each tribe)? - When Aharon saw the daily dedication offering by the 'nssiim', he became DEPRESSED, because neither he, nor his shevet, took part in this ceremony. - God assured Aharon saying: Do not worry, YOUR PORTION IS GREATER than theirs, for you are to light and attend to the MENORAH every morning and evening."

## IS AHARON REALLY 'LEFT OUT'?

Ramban immediately questions the basic assumption of this Midrash (as quoted by Rashi):

"Could it be that Aharon is depressed because he felt 'left out'? After all, each "nasi" enjoyed only ONE day of special attention, while Aharon was at the center of attention during each of those TWELVE DAYS! Did he not offer all of the korbanot on each of those days, as well as the ktoret and korban tamid?

Furthermore, during the miluim ceremony (see Vayikra 8:1-36) that preceded that dedication, he and his children enjoyed seven days of 'exclusive attention'. For what possible reason could Aharon have felt 'left out'?

In this commentary, Ramban is unable to find a satisfying explanation of this Midrash according to "pshat". Instead, he suggests that the intention of the Midrash is not to explain the psukim, but rather to show a biblical source for the Hasmonean revolt:

"Even though Aharon did not participate in the dedication of the mizbayach of the Mishkan, in the merit of his descendants - the Hasmoneans - the mizbayach of the Second Temple will be dedicated. Furthermore, in commemoration of that event, a Menorah will be lit in every home, even after the destruction of the Temple "  
(see Ramban 8:1).

One could suggest an alternative explanation of the Midrash, without the need of limiting its significance to the events of the Hasmonean revolt.

## COALITION POLITICS

The opening statement of the Midrash - "chalsha da'ato shel Aharon" (Aharon became depressed) - requires explanation. [Note that Ramban had raised this question, but did not answer it directly.]

Considering that Aharon is indeed at the center of attention and very busy during each day of the dedication ceremony, why should he have become depressed?

To understand Aharon's reaction (according to the Midrash) we must consider the political realities of his predicament. Bnei Yisrael are about to leave Har Sinai and begin their journey to conquer and inherit the Land of Israel. Although Aharon is indeed a very key figure during Bnei Yisrael's short stay in the desert, he is apprehensive about what will most probably take place once Bnei Yisrael leave Har Sinai. The focus of national attention will shift to the excitement of military initiatives and political enterprise. Har Sinai, and maybe even the Mishkan, will soon be 'long forgotten'.

Once the conquest of Eretz Canaan would begin, it will be the twelve "nssiim" (the tribal leaders) who will hold the highest positions of national leadership. They will establish economic policy; they will make treaties with foreign dignitaries; they will make the speeches at national gatherings; they will lead the nation in war. [In modern phraseology, they will become the Ministers of Defence and the Treasury; Secretaries of State and Foreign Affairs.]

Thus, it is quite understandable why Aharon becomes depressed. When he sees the attention that the twelve "nssiim" receive, he realizes the insignificance of his position within the emerging national leadership. What ministry post will he receive? In his own eyes, he may have begun to view his job as merely the "shamash" (a beadle/ attendant) taking care of the Mishkan. Indeed, a very technical job at best.

Will he have any influence lasting influence on the nation? At best, he may possibly be appointed "sar ha'datot" - the Minister of Religion. Within a short time, Aharon fears, he will be distanced from national leadership.

## AN IMPORTANT CABINET POST

Thus far, we have suggested a reason for Aharon's depression (according to the Midrash). What is the significance of

God's consolation -that he will light the Menorah?

Although the Midrash is well aware of Aharon's numerous responsibilities in the Mishkan, it chooses specifically the Menorah to symbolize an additional aspect of his national duties, i.e. teaching God's laws to the people. This double purpose is mentioned in the blessing to Shevet Levi in Parshat v'Zot ha'bracha:

"They shall TEACH Your laws to Yaakov, and your instructions to Yisrael, they shall offer Your incense... and offer the 'olah' ("kalil") on Your mizbayach..." (Devarim 33:10)

Once Bnei Yisrael will enter the land, teaching the laws of the Torah will become the PRIMARY duty of the Kohanim and Leviim. Since their work is divided into 24 week shifts, the average kohen or levi would find himself working in the Mishkan only two weeks a year. Therefore, most of their time would be spent teaching and judging the people (see Devarim 17:8-10). It was for this reason that their cities are scattered throughout the twelve tribes of Israel (see Bamidbar 35:1-8 and Yehoshua 21:1-40).

Thus, the Menorah may symbolize specifically this duty of the Kohanim - "chinuch", teaching. If the purpose of the Menorah is to spread light, then the purpose of the kohanim is to spread Torah to the entire nation. This understanding can explain why Aharon is consoled when told that it is his job to light the Menorah.

If we continue with our parallel to the realm of national politics, one could explain that Aharon and his "shevet" are consoled - for they are given a responsibility similar to the control the Ministry of Education and Justice (in addition to the Ministry of Religion) - a cabinet position no less important than any other!

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

=====

#### **FOR FURTHER IYUN - PART II:**

1. According to pshat, one could suggest a simple reason for the juxtaposition of these two parshiot?

Notice that the final psukim of perek 7, which summarize the korbanot brought by the nssiim, are actually referring to the first day of the dedication ceremony when all the nssiim brought their korbanot together, at the same time (read 7:10-11 carefully!). Furthermore, 7:89 - the dibur to Moshe - also takes place on the first day.

Therefore, Bha'alotcha opens in the 'afternoon' of the first day of the dedication of the Mishkan. The only avodah left, which did not begin in the morning, is the lighting of the Menorah, for it is lit "m'erev ad boker" - from evening to morning! This may explain why this mitzvah is included at this time.

2. Compare this juxtaposition between the dibur to Moshe (7:89), and his relationship to Aharon (8:1-5) and the Nsiim (7:1-88) to the psukim which describe Moshe descent from Har Sinai - according to Shmot 34:29-32! Relate this to the connection between Har Sinai and the function of the Mishkan!

## Introduction to Behaalotecha

By Alan A. Fisher <sup>1</sup>

Behaalotecha is a long, complex parsha that contains numerous incidents and changes in mood. God has returned His presence to the midst of B'Nai Yisrael, with His presence above the Ark in the center of the Mishkan. He leads B'Nai Yisrael with a cloud by day and fire by night. All the preparations are complete, and B'Nai Yisrael start on the short journey from the base of Har Sinai to the land that Hashem has promised to our Patriarchs. The language shows this excitement. The Torah contains repeated words such as nasa and vayim – traveling and going forward. Repeatedly we read “tov” – all is good.

The sixth aliyah opens with two pasookim in inverted nuns, giving the appearance of brackets. The brackets (inverted nuns) enclose Moshe's exuberant words describing the camp moving toward Israel (10:35-36). The text describes how the God's presence would protect the people during the journey. Suddenly everything changes. The people start complaining, exhibit fear and depression, and search for a reason to complain (11:1). As the people leave the base of Har Sinai, the Mishkan is supposed to enable them to keep the Sinai experience with them. However, something is very wrong. God sends a divine fire to the edges of the camp to show His displeasure (11:1). This sign of divine displeasure does not stop the complaints. The mixed multitude accompanying B'Nai Yisrael instigate and encourage the complaints (11:4). The language changes. We see repeated references to “ra” (evil) and mentions of gathering in (language of death that the Torah uses frequently, especially in Sefer Bereishis). As the Rav (Joseph B. Soloveitchik, z”l) states in his famous Dvar Torah on this parsha, 10:35-36 have brackets to indicate that once the people start complaining and angering Hashem, this short section becomes misplaced. There is no place for Moshe's praises when the people's complaints stop the progress toward Israel. <sup>2</sup>

Moshe, who until this point had defended B'Nai Yisrael every time that God became angry and threatened them, now complains to Hashem that he cannot be a mother or nurse maid to needy babies. This time, God responds by offering to help Moshe with the people. He says that Moshe should collect seventy elders, and He will share some of Moshe's divine ruach with them to take some of the burden of leadership.

A psychologist in our century might infer that many of these people are suffering from depression – a common disease that affects many Jews (as well as non-Jews). <sup>3</sup> Rabbi David Block, who works with Rabbi David Fohrman (Alephbeta.org), notes that the Jews have trouble accepting the manna (a complete food from God that arrives six days a week). They try to process the manna, by grinding and pounding it, making it into cakes, and cooking it (11:7-8). Rabbi Block interprets this behavior as the people wanting some control over what they are eating. They are unwilling to feel vulnerable and entirely

---

<sup>1</sup> Potomac Torah Study Center; archives at PotomacTorah.org.

<sup>2</sup> <https://torah.org/torah-portion/mikra-5774-behaaloscha/> The Rav concludes that Moshe suffers a crisis in his leadership when the people start looking for complaints as soon as they leave the base of Har Sinai for what should have been the final trip to Canaan. The Rav's conclusions, while brilliant, at times depart from traditional interpretations in the Rabbinic literature.

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z”l, concludes that Moshe suffers from depression and despair when B'Nai Yisrael search for reasons to complain as soon as they leave the base of Har Sinai for the final approach to the land that Hashem promised to the Avot. Rabbi Sacks shows that other prophets and leaders, including Churchill, also suffer from depression. He states that prophets do not believe in themselves; rather, they believe in Hashem. They lead because there is a need for a leader, not because they wish to lead. Being a leader is a cure for despair. See <https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/behaalotecha/leadership-beyond-despair/>

dependent on God. This unwillingness to accept God's gift of watching over all aspects of their lives scares the generation of the Exodus. They have a paralyzing fear of being vulnerable, and that fear comes out in ways that both Moshe and God consider evil. Rabbi Yehoshua Singer adds Sforno's insight that the people could have focused on God's love and protection, and recognized their awe and fear of Hashem, rather than looking for ways to complain about trivial matters. God would have accepted and respected complaints for proper rather than improper reasons.

Rabbi Yitzchok Magriso, an 18<sup>th</sup> Century author from Constantinople, studied the dates in the Torah carefully and discovered that the remaining events involving the generation of the Exodus all took place during a single week. Miriam's tzaraat (chapter 12), the departure of the Meraglim (chapter 13), and Korach's rebellion (chapter 16) all take place between 22 and 29 Sivan in the second year after the Exodus.<sup>4</sup> After the Torah reports the law of the Red Heifer (chapter 19), there is a 38 year gap, and the Torah resumes at chapter 20 with the events of the final year.<sup>5</sup> My interpretation is that after the evil events when B'Nai Yisrael leave the base of Har Sinai, Moshe and God soon realize that the generation of the Exodus is not qualified to enter the land of Israel. Events in chapters 12-18 reinforce this dawning realization. For the remainder of Sefer Bemidbar, key members of the next generation, such as Pinchas and the daughters of Zelophehad, start taking more prominent roles. Along with Yehoshua, these younger leaders provide the leadership that B'Nai Yisrael will need to enter, capture, and settle the land of Israel.

The psychological analysis of the problems of the generation of the Exodus, focusing on their apparent depression and fear of accepting gifts from Hashem, suggests a lesson for Jews even today. God left our world incomplete so that we humans can be partners with Hashem in repairing the world. Tikkun olam is a mitzvah for Jews. We have a mandate to do our part to improve the world – and to be leaders in this effort if necessary. Behaalotecha teaches us that when we step aside and complain rather than making an effort to be Hashem's partner, we are asking for disaster. When we do our part, we can improve the world. I see some of this effort in recent news. Russia's invasion, rampant destruction, and brutal murders in Ukraine have shocked the world. One effect is European nations looking for ways to boycott Russia's petroleum and natural gas to impose economic losses on the country. Several countries that until recently have been enemies of Israel are turning to us to enter into long-term contracts for gas. Israel is looking to open a third natural gas field off its coast to meet this demand, and Israel is devoting 20 percent of its gas reserves to these exports. Turkey is inviting Israel to have a gas pipeline crossing

---

<sup>4</sup> (See Torah Anthology 13:333-34.) Rabbi Magriso bases his conclusion on a careful study of where B'Nai Yisrael stopped during the years in the Midbar, how long there were at each stop, and where they were when they waited for Miriam to recover from tzaraat, when the Meraglim departed, and similar evidence in the Torah.

When B'Nai Yisrael leave the base of Har Sinai in chapter 10, we can deduce that it is after a full year by Har Sinai. The Jews cross the Sea of Reeds on the seventh day of Pesach in the year 2448. They travel and pass a few locations before they reach the base of Har Sinai. Parshat Yitro opens with Moshe's family reaching the camp at the base of Har Sinai (Shemot 18:1), although commentators conclude that this chapter takes place after the Revelation. We know that Hashem tells Moshe to spend three days having the people prepare for the Revelation, so they must have arrived and set up camp before Rosh Hodesh Sivan – probably late in Iyar 2448. The people resume their journey, leaving the base of Har Sinai, on 20 Iyar 2449. This analysis demonstrates that they remain at the base of Har Sinai for almost exactly a year. The Torah devotes 20 parashot, containing 60 chapters, to activities during little more than a year from the end of Pesach 2448 to 20 Iyar 2449. (Miriam's tzaraat, the departure of the Meraglim, and Korach's rebellion all take place the same week, so we have 23 parashot, containing 67 chapters, covering 13 months, before the Torah skips over 38 years in parshat Chukat.)

<sup>5</sup> The Torah could have placed the Red Heifer material any place after Yitro. Hashem obviously presented this law to Moshe on Har Sinai; otherwise, any Jew who came into contact with a dead body would not have known how to become tahor.

Turkey to increase capacity for Israeli gas to reach other parts of Europe. A few dozen countries in the U.N. that had always voted against Israel now have supported Israel against some anti-Semitic petitions, and the U.N. has even selected Israel to be one of the vice presidents in the U.N. Leadership in tikkun olam is even helping Israel in the U.N., of all places that would have seemed unlikely until very recently.

For several decades, Avi West directed educational resources for the Jewish Federation of Washington and many other organizations. Delving into the seventy levels of depth in the Torah is an appropriate venue for honoring this humble man who was a mentor to so many educators in our community. One example of the type of effort in which Avi West excelled is working out what is happening and when in the Torah. Bereishis and Noach cover two thousand years of history in two weeks of Torah reading. We are about to conclude 23 parashot, covering 67 chapters spanning 13 months – and find that three different stories, which cover three weeks in the Torah (Miriam's tzaraat, the Meraglim, and Korach), all take place the same week. The Torah then skips over 38 years before resuming in the final year in the Midbar. Nuances of this sort require close study, what Avi West made available to educators and students in our community for many years.