

## Potomac Torah Study Center

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**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.**

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**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.**

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**May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, hostilities cease, and a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace. May Hashem protect our brave IDF fighters as they seek to protect Israel and the world by destroying Iran's nuclear capability. We continue to mourn for Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim, murdered May 21 outside the Capital Jewish Museum in Washington, DC. For more, see the outstanding tribute by Bari Weiss: <https://www.thefp.com/p/welcome-to-the-global-intifada>**

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As I prepare to send out my material, I have learned that Israel started attacking Iran's nuclear facilities a few minutes ago. May this military action prove successful, with the help of Hashem.

Behaalotecha is a long, complex parsha with numerous incidents that at first seem not all to be related. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik (the Rav) presented a brilliant Dvar Torah on the parsha 51 years ago this week. (Rabbi Yitz Etshalom transcribed this Dvar, and it is available in the archives of Mikra on Torah.org, as well as attached to the email version of this posting.) The Rav connected all the incidents in the parsha into one unified explanation that showed that they are all part of one story, which he summarized as a crisis in Moshe's leadership. As I read the various Devrei Torah in this compilation, I wonder why almost none of the authors deal with the Rav's insights. Rather, we read about Aharon's unhappiness at not being able to participate in giving a gift for installing the Mishkan, Hashem's promise of an even more important contribution (lighting the Menorah every morning), Yitro's meeting with Moshe, the inverted nuns setting off the beginning of the sixth aliyah, the meaning of the lights in the Menorah – all significant details. However, why are there so few discussions taking advantage of the Rav's insights about Moshe's depression, the meaning of the inverted nuns, the impact of the sixth aliyah on the coming doom of the generation of the Exodus, and Miriam's tzaraat?

Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Dov Linzer observes that it is easy to relate to faith in Hashem in an isolated desert, as B'Nai Yisrael have been, by the base of Har Sinai for more than a year, when the parsha opens. The real challenge is when the Jews leave the neighborhood of Har Sinai to travel to Canaan, going into unknown territory and encountering other tribes from time to time. Two million Jews who until recently had been slaves for many years need to learn to trust God and look to a better future rather than remembering the greater variety of food items available in Egypt. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, focuses on Moshe's crisis of faith and depression from the constant complaints of many of the Jews. Hashem instructs Moshe to appoint seventy elders to share the burden with him. God shares some of Moshe's spirit with these men, and the spirit of these men helps bring Moshe out of his depression. The Torah here relates that Moshe's humility, which others might interpret as weakness, is actually his greatest virtue and strength.

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine relates Aharon's craving to honor Hashem to remind us that we should honor and support those who contribute to the Torah. Positive cravings pave the way to greatness. Rabbi Marc Angel and Eran Rolls provide case history stories to demonstrate that Jewish institutions grow when they welcome people to emulate the welcoming

that Aharon provides to the Jews of his time. These messages are relevant to the parsha and tikkun olam – however they do not incorporate the Rav's amazing insights on what I consider the key features of the parsha.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander, as usual, focuses on what I consider some of the key elements of the parsha. The sixth aliyah opens with the two short verses inside two inverted nuns (10:35-36) describing how the Aron miraculously leads the people to move, after more than a year at the base of Har Sinai. As the Rav explains, these verses symbolize the ideal of the people aligned with Hashem as the Ark leads the people forward to the land that Hashem promised to our ancestors. Immediately, however, some people start complaining – looking for a reason to complain. The people seem unable to trust in Hashem and follow His lead. Everything falls apart from this point. Moshe cannot control the people. Miriam and Aharon complain about Moshe and his wife, and Hashem reacts by giving Miriam tzaraat. The people ask for some leaders to view the land, and Moshe sends leaders from the tribes to view the land and bring back a report (more next week). Korach initiates a revolt. (Rabbi Yitzchok Magriso, an 18<sup>th</sup> Century author from Constantinople, studies the dates in the Torah carefully and discovers that the remaining events involving the generation of the Exodus all take 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. (See *Torah Anthology*, 13.333-34.)) These are the final incidents for the generation of the Exodus. The Torah presents the laws of dealing with tumah from contact with a dead body (since there will soon be hundreds of thousands of deaths). There is a gap of thirty-eight years in the Torah, and we are suddenly in the final year before entering Canaan.

God reacts to the constant complaints of the people by ruling that the generation of the Exodus will all die out (with only two exceptions) over the next forty years, and that only the children of the current adults will survive to go into and take over the land (14:20-23). As Rabbi Brander states, the generation of the Exodus fails and must die out in the Midbar. However, the next generation, the children of the time, will renew the promise and inherit the land. Rabbi Brander relates this story to the Haftorah. Zechariah calls on the people of his time to return from exile, rebuild their spiritual identity, rebuild the Temple, and bring in a new period for B'Nai Yisrael in the land that Hashem had promised to our ancestors. In Zechariah's vision, Yehoshua, the Kohen Gadol, stands before an angel, removes his filthy garments (symbol of sin), washes, and puts on pure vestments. Hashem permits Yehoshua and the generation of Zechariah's time to reaffirm His promise to our ancestors.

Rabbi Brander reminds us that our generation faces the same challenge and opportunity as that of Yehoshua, the Kohen Gadol. May we see a time when Israel, with the various segments of our people, unite so we can bring peace and move toward a new, golden age for Israel and Jews everywhere..

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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**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.**

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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; 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; 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.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

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### **Haftarat Parshat Behaalotcha: Between Failure, Struggle and Growth**

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander \* 5785 / 2025 President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

*Dedicated dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the return of our hostages still in Gaza, for the refuah shlayma of our wounded in body or spirit, and for the safety of our brave IDF soldiers. \*\**

Parshat Beha'alotekha begins with a sense of hope, purpose, and spiritual momentum. Am Israel is still in the desert, yet special commandments only to be celebrated in Israel, like Pesach Sheini, are already being introduced in this parsha. The Mishkan has been dedicated; the camp is arranged in military and spiritual formation. Moshe invites his father-in-law to join the journey — physical and spiritual — toward Eretz Yisrael.

This readiness is not just logistical; it is deeply aspirational. The Jewish people are poised for a moment of destiny. The trumpets will soon sound, the divine cloud will lift, and the nation will begin its march toward redemption.

And then — suddenly — the narrative fractures, becoming much more complex and hinting at the challenges that lie ahead on this journey to redemption.

In two short, cryptic verses, Bemidbar 10:35–36, bracketed by inverted or backward versions of the Hebrew letter nun, lies a turning point. These verses begin with “*Vayehi bin’soa ha’aron*,” describing the Ark of the Covenant miraculously leading the people. These lines capture the people’s drive toward spiritual elevation and their sense of divine purpose. Highlighting these verses’ unique importance, our rabbis (Mishnah Yadayim 3:5; Bavli Shabbat 115a) teach that these verses are not just poetic interruptions — they constitute a separate book of the Torah in their own right. According to this count, the Torah consists of seven books, not five.

Why elevate such a brief passage into its own Biblical book?

Rav Soloveitchik offers a profound insight. He suggests that these verses, brief as they are, symbolize the ideal: the people aligned with God’s vision, the Ark going forth before the people unimpeded, God’s enemies scattered. It is a picture of religious triumph, clarity of mission, and spiritual direction. But the ideal is short-lived. Immediately following these verses, the narrative unravels: the people complain; first generally, then about the manna, and finally about Moshe himself. The dream collapses into anxiety, fear, and rebellion.

This tension — between the ideal and the real, between spiritual aspiration and human frailty — is one that speaks deeply

to our condition. The Torah is not merely a story of divine perfection; it is the story of human beings striving toward God, and often falling short. Between the ideal and the real, between spiritual vision and human weakness, lies the messiness of life.

The Haftarah from Zechariah mirrors this theme. Here, too, we encounter the challenge of renewal after failure. The prophet calls on the people to return from exile, to rebuild not only the Temple but their spiritual identity. The image of Yehoshua the Kohen Gadol standing before an angel, being instructed to remove his filthy garments — symbolic of sin — and to don pure vestments, offers a powerful image of spiritual rehabilitation. God does not reject Yehoshua for his failure; rather He purifies him and reaffirms his mission.

So, too, in Beha'alotekha, the sinfulness that follows the text inside the backwards nuns does not mean that the journey has failed. It means the journey is more complicated than we imagined. Spiritual growth is not linear. The inverted 'nun's may hint at a detour, a digression from the straight path forward. Yet, Chazal's decision to set those verses apart as their own "book" reminds us that the ideal still matters. Even in the messiness of growth we must cling to the vision. Beha'alotekha — when you rise up — is not the promise of a smooth ascent but an invitation to perseverance. The Ark still goes before us. God is still in our midst. The mission still calls.

May we have the strength to live within this tension, to strive toward the ideal, and to renew ourselves — individually and communally — after every stumble, just as our ancestors did on their long journey toward redemption.

\* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, 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. **Ohr Torah Stone is in the midst of its spring fund-raising drive. Please support this effort with Donations to 49 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

\*\* This week's OTS Devrei Torah are dedicated in loving memory of **Bryna (Bertha) Charif, z"l**, whose yartzzeit is on 21 Sivan by Ian and Bernice Charif of Sydney, Australia.

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### **Dvar Torah: Beha'aloscha: Anybody Anybody (2007)** by Rabbi Label Lam

***Then HASHEM said to Moshe, "Is the Hand of HASHEM short? Now you will see if My word comes true for you or not!" (Bamidbar 11:23).***

This phrase is a stand-alone line in the Torah? Is the Hand of HASHEM short? It is hauntingly similar to the rebuke Abraham delivers to Sara after the laugh. "*Is something too wondrous for HASHEM!?*" As if to say, "*Oh ye of little faith, if HASHEM wills it a 90 year old woman can be a mother!*"

While in Israel one summer I joined a class given by Uri Zohar. He had been Israel's top entertainer for many years until an encounter with a rabbi turned the talents of his mind to Torah at the age of forty. At the end of one class he related a story: He had just received a call from an old friend, someone from the old bohemian days. This fellow and his wife had gone out to the beach like so many others on the Holy Shabbos! After a day of sun bathing he returned to the car with his wife and soon became aware that he could not find his keys. After checking all his pockets he implored his wife to search the depth of her pocket book for the missing keys. He retraced his steps in the sand back to the place where their blanket had been. No keys. He emptied the nearby trash can. No keys. He looked under the car. Still no keys! People were driving away with ease and the sun was an orange ball setting in the western sky. In a moment of desperation he began to march across the sand and out to the water as his wife looked on in horror. He waded up to his thighs in water.

Rabbi Uri Zohar stood from his chair to demonstrate. It was obvious he had lost none of his dramatic flair. The fellow raised his hands and shouted out, *"Elochim! Elochim! Give me my keys!"* At that very moment, floating in the water, touching his leg were his keys. He came back to the car shaken and his wife observed that he had found the keys. He told her that he had found more than the keys. That Sunday morning he gave a call to his old friend Uri Zohar to ask, *"Where do I begin?"*

What was the greater improbability; that this man untutored in prayer should find his keys in the Mediterranean Sea the very moment he cried out or that this secular Israeli at the beach one Shabbos would wake up the next week as a Shomer Shabbos or as one who puts on Tallis and Tefilin? We should not be so surprised because three times a day we say, *"HASHEM is close all, to all who call out to Him in truth!"* (Tehillim 145) Now, if that story sounds like it was across the ocean, it was. Here's the same story on this side of the Atlantic. A couple who had gone to a number of seminars decided months earlier to send their boy and girl to a Hebrew Day School. At an evening class in their apartment in Riverdale the father told me something that had just occurred. Since he would come home from work earlier than his wife he would take his kids and a few others out to a local park after school. Later he would shepherd them back to the apartment for dinner- homework.

That week, when it came time to leave the park, and all the children were around him he realized that he couldn't find his keys. Even if the door man would let them into the building he would be left waiting for hours in the hallway till his wife came home. He began to fret anxiously as he searched and searched for the keys. His eight year old boy, now newly immersed in Yeshiva for only a few months watched as his father became nervous, and he too began to feel upset. So he grasped his tennis ball, the one he had just been playing with, like you and I would hold a Sefer Tehillim, and he whispered with sincerity, *"HASHEM, please help my father find his keys!"* Then he threw the ball any which way with all his might and when he went to pick up the ball there were his father's keys touching the ball. Astonished? Why? "

HASHEM is close to all who call to Him in truth!" Nothing is lost in HASHEM's world. No one is lost. HASHEM can find anybody-anything and **anybody-anybody**.

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5775-behaaloscha/>

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## **Behaalotecha: Traveling Forth with the Aron Semikha**

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2011. 2015

**Reprinted from 2011 and dedicated in honor of this year's 2018 semikha class of our amazing new rabbis travelling forth to serve Klal Yisrael!**

As the academic year ends, many of us will be beginning new chapters in our lives. High school students preparing to go to Israel or college; College students preparing to enter into the job world; men and women becoming lawyers, doctors, scientists, professors; and rabbinical students becoming rabbis. The Torah as well, in this coming week's sidra, introduces a new parsha. *"And it was when the ark moved forth, and Moshe declared"* – this tiny section, these two verses, are – according to the Gemara Shabbat, a book of the Torah in its own right, so that what comes after it is a different book, an entirely different parsha, of the Torah. In what way is this so?

Until this moment, in the Torah's narrative, time has been held in suspension. The Children of Israel had received the Torah, but they had not yet brought the Torah into their lives. That had organized a camp around the Mishkan, but they had yet to leave Mount Sinai. Now, it is relatively easy to construct a perfect system, with Torah and mitzvot, with God in the center, as long as one is in the desert. The true challenge is how does one leave Har Sinai, how does one move forward with the aron, how does one take the Torah and make one's way towards the Promised Land?

When we transition from a secure and familiar reality, when the camp shifts from a stable square to a shaky line, we become vulnerable, we can become fragmented, we can lose our way. In the new book, the one that begins after the

aron moves, problems abound. The people complain, they grumble. Things are not as familiar, not as comfortable. Some will use the opportunity to leave altogether, departing from Mount Sinai as a child who runs as far away from school as possible the moment that school lets out. Others will want to go back to an imagined past, when everything was – at least in their minds – perfect and predictable – We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt from free. Oh, how wonderful things were back in Egypt! So this new parsha has its dangers. But to stay in the previous parsha, to stay encamped at Mount Sinai, is to keep the Torah in the desert, to never enter the Promised Land.

There are times when we are where we need to be, when we should stop moving, when we should build and strengthen our camp. *“On the word of God they would encamp.”* And, indeed, for many centuries we had indeed been in the Promised Land, encamped around the Temple. But when change came, when the Temple was destroyed, we were ready to move forward. *“On the word of God they would travel forth”* – we were able to reinvent ourselves, and to shift our focus from Temple to Torah.

Since that time we have been encamped in another stable reality – in a pre-Modernity, galut Judaism. When change came this time, when our reality was shaken – were we ready to move forward? When Modernity and the *haskalah* presented compelling alternate views of the world, when they posited epistemological assumptions and value-systems that were at odds with those of tradition – did we rise to the challenge or did we build our walls higher? When the Holocaust destroyed a third of our people and wiped out European Jewry, when it raised the most profound questions about God as a God of history – did we begin to think theologically or did we once again say that halakha will answer all of our religious questions? When post-modernism raised questions about any and all truth-claims, and when feminism raised profound questions about power, equality, and morality – did we also struggle with these, or did we continue to live in an imagined, romantic past? When the State of Israel was created and for the first time in two millennia we had true sovereignty and nationhood – did we re-think what the role of Judaism is and can be in the world, and how to translate halakha and aggada into the public, national and international sphere, or did halakha and aggada continue to operate in the same narrowly-defined parameters of the past?

What was our response when presented with these challenges, this new reality? For many the response this time was obvious. Judaism had – in their eyes – lost all relevance, all claims to truth, all claims to morality. The answer was to leave – as the school child who runs away. And for many others, the only solution was to pretend as if nothing had happened. To shift from the nice stable reality that they had become accustomed to over all these years, was unthinkable. The solution was to remain firmly encamped in the desert. Only a few understood that we had entered a new parsha, that we needed to move, but that we had to discover how to move – how to move forward with the aron at the center. While this new parsha undoubtedly means struggles, challenges, and risks, the alternative is unthinkable – to remain encamped in the desert, to relegate ourselves to irrelevance.

As those of us enter new chapters in our lives, we must ask ourselves how we will bring the Torah with us, how it will guide us during the shaky transition, and how it will remain at our center as we enter our new realities. And for those who are now leaving yeshiva, leaving rabbinical school and becoming rabbis, the challenge is even greater. These soon-to-be rabbis are throwing themselves into the larger challenges of the world, of Klal Yisrael, and of rabbinic leadership. They must have no illusions that we can keep the Torah in the desert. They must be keenly aware of the challenges that confront us. They must know that, on the one hand, they must strengthen the camp as much as possible, must establish it on a foundation that is foursquare and firm – that they must teach Torah in ways that are profound and meaningful, that they must give halakhic guidance that is sensitive to the individual and true to halakha, that they must run minyanim, visit the sick, be present at semachot and at times of loss and suffering, that they must be wise pastoral counselors and inspiring religious leaders.

But they also must know that to do just this is to keep the Torah from moving forward. Our future religious leaders must know that to truly face the challenges of today they must be prepared to take on questions of the relevance of Torah Judaism, questions of faith and Biblical criticism, questions of God and the Holocaust, questions of the legitimacy of the State of Israel, its relevance and its role in world affairs, questions of the morality of halakha. They must know that perhaps the most pressing question today is not how to get to the Promised Land, but what and where is the Promised Land? Not in the geographic sense, but in the spiritual, religious sense. What is the purpose of being Jewish? What does God want from us? What is our role in the world? They must know that to not address these questions is another . . . way of running away from the demands of the Torah, a Torah that must be brought into our world. To know this is to

be the religious leaders that we most desperately need. To know this is to be the ones that will, that must, lead our people forward, to grapple with these challenges openly and honestly, to find their way out of the desert. To know this is to be the leaders that will bring the Torah, that will bring the Jewish People, into the Promised Land.

From my archives. Note: Hebrew text omitted because my software does not translate Hebrew properly.

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## **Sweetness and Light: Thoughts for Parashat Beha'alotcha**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

For many years, we were regular customers of a local store. The proprietor always greeted us with a smile, called us by name, asked about our family. If our bill amounted to \$51.10, he would often just round it off at \$50. He genuinely loved his work and had a warm relationship with us and his many other customers.

But a few years ago, he retired and another person took over the business. The new proprietor always has a glum expression on his face, rarely greets us when we enter the store, seems to wish he was anywhere else but in the store. If our bill amounts to \$51.10, we pay every cent of it, since he never rounds off the total.

We find that we now rarely shop at this store. The merchandise is the same...but the shopping experience has become unpleasant. We've found other stores to patronize.

What's true in business is also true in religious life. When a rabbi/synagogue/community is welcoming, approachable and genuinely interested in us, we are more likely to respond positively. If a rabbi/synagogue/community doesn't really seem to care about us — except for our membership dues and donations — we are likely to look for a more congenial religious setting.

This week's Torah portion relates the details of the lighting of the menorah by Aaron the High Priest. Aaron's role was not merely to provide light for the sanctuary, but to symbolically create an atmosphere of holiness, warmth, and enlightenment for the public.

In the Pirkei Avot, we read the words of Hillel: Be among the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving people and drawing them close to the Torah. Aaron, who lit the menorah in the sanctuary, was himself a personification of the spirit of kindness; he brought light to others through his warmth, caring, and genuine desire to develop friendships among the community. He was successful in bringing people closer to Torah because they were attracted to his kindness, to his concern for them and their families.

The late Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach founded a synagogue in Berkeley during the 1960s in order to reach out to the many young Jews who had drifted away from Jewish tradition. He named it the House of Love and Prayer. In the summer of 1967, he was asked to explain his vision for this synagogue.

He answered: *"Here's the whole thing, simple as it is. The House of Love and Prayer is a place where, when you walk in, someone loves you, and when you walk out, someone misses you."* (Quoted in "Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach: Life, Mission and Legacy," by Natan Ophir, Urim Publications, 2014, p.119)

In these few words, Rabbi Carlebach expressed a profound insight worthy of immortality! He offered a vision not just for the House of Love and Prayer...but for all places of Jewish worship. When we enter a synagogue, do we feel welcomed? Does our presence mean anything to those in attendance? When we leave, does anyone miss us? Do the rabbi and synagogue officials take the time to get to know us, our needs, our concerns?

One might attend various synagogues and find the same general liturgy and customs — but in one synagogue one feels ignored or rebuffed, and in another synagogue one feels warmly received and appreciated. Which would you choose to attend and support?

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3131>

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## **From "secular" to "getting religious": an important story for modern Jews**

By Eran Rolls \*

If, ten years ago, someone had told me that I would be a member of the board of a religious, rabbinic organization, that I would attend synagogue services every Shabbat, that I would put on tefillin, and that I would even write an article for a religious publication – I would have laughed and explained how severely mistaken that person was: I, the proud member of Hashomer Hatzair, who is secular in every fiber of his body?! Nevertheless, something no less than a revolution took place in my life, and a substantive change in my worldview. Like many revolutions, the change began with something small.

But, if I may, I would like to begin at the beginning. I was raised near Haifa, and I was taught the values of secular socialism, the love of Israel, tolerance, social responsibility – and many other values that can also be found in the Torah – as a member of the Kiryat Haim section of Hashomer Hatzair. In my childhood, there was no connection between the religious and secular residents, and no attempt was made to establish such a connection. The two communities lived side-by-side like oil and water, never mixing. In the army, I served in a mostly secular unit, whose members came from backgrounds similar to my own. When a religious soldier would arrive, our mission was to see how long it would take for us to get him to watch television on Shabbat, and to remove his kippah. We had quite a few “successes.”

After the army, I met my wife, Irit, who had been raised in a traditional Jewish home, and we had four children. Until about a decade ago, a connection with God was foreign to me, and was always associated with the corrupt religious establishment, on the one hand, and extremist settlers, on the other. I wrongly assumed that there was a part of the Jewish people that had an exclusive license from God. In the meantime, my hard work bore fruit, and I managed to purchase the Israeli Building Center.

The biggest change in my relationship with religion and Judaism began in that framework, as I came to know several religious people involved in the construction industry. Work-related discussions began to digress to discussions about life, family, children, lifestyle, and we even got together with our wives. Slowly, for the first time in my life, I began to have real friendships with religious people. One day, our friends, Meir and Revital Noga, invited us to their home for Shabbat dinner. Meir gently suggested that I come early and accompany him to the synagogue. What I did not know at the time was that Meir had consulted with his rabbi, and had received what was then a rather innovative rabbinic decision, allowing him to invite me and my family for Shabbat, even though it meant that we might desecrate Shabbat. We went to synagogue together – for me, it was the first time in 30 years – and we sat down together for Shabbat dinner with their beautiful family.

Back then, we also became very close friends with a family from Givat Shmuel, Michal and Meir Mizrahi, whose children became close friends of our children, and Iris and Dvir Granot from Tzur Yigal. Through those acquaintances with those special people, I learned how beautiful and special Judaism is, and that, wow, some of it suits me. Who would have imagined that one day the rabbi who allowed us to come for Shabbat, and who opened that door, Rabbi Ronen Neuwirth, would become a friend whom I would join in working together to establish the Beit Hillel organization?!

More than ten years ago, I began putting on tefillin daily, making kiddush and saying birkat hamazon after meals. Two



years later, I began attending synagogue services on Friday evenings (in the community center of my moshav, Ramot Hashavim), and a year later, I began attending Saturday morning services, as well, becoming a regular member of the minyan. Due to the small number of worshippers in the synagogue in Ramot Hashavim, Benzi (perhaps the only Orthodox person in the community), began to encourage us to lead services. Slowly, we began to add other “secular” Jews.

But the turning point came during the Second Lebanon War (2006), when one of the women began attending Friday night services on a regular basis, and other women followed. The women began bringing their children, and their husbands soon followed. Today, twenty-five families are members of the Ramot Hashavim congregation. If you had asked people in Ramot Hashavim five years ago if such a thing were possible, they would have said that you were hallucinating. Every Monday, we study the weekly Torah portion at one of the homes in the community. Because we did not have a kosher Torah scroll, I assumed the responsibility of having one written (when I was told that I was crazy, and that it was very expensive, I replied that, in any case, everything I earn is granted to me from Above, so it really isn't mine anyway), and two years ago, I brought it to the synagogue in a procession in which hundreds of residents participated, with musical accompaniment that rocked the whole neighborhood.

This year, we held hakafot shniyot for the first time. We are on the way. We are not (yet) Shabbat observant, and perhaps some of us never will be. But we are now firmly rooted in the world of Torah and tradition, like thousands of other Israelis throughout the country – people with “invisible kippot.” None of this would have occurred had it not been for the Noga family from Kfar Ganim, the Mizrahi family from Givat Shmuel, and the Granot family from Tzur Yigal, who opened their hearts and their homes, and were it not for the invitation to be their Shabbat guests, and having us as guests in their home. They lit the Jewish spark that exists in every Jew. They showed me the beautiful side of Judaism and Jewish tradition. Thanks to their outstretched hands, my children are growing up together with theirs, and when my son joins the army, he will not be motivated to encourage his observant friends to watch television on Shabbat, but the opposite.

So, what do I ask of the religious community? I ask them to learn from the Noga, Granot and Mizrahi families. Open your hearts and homes to your friends, coworkers and neighbors. Friends, the time is ripe in Heaven and in Israel. You must take advantage of this opportunity to be part of the unification of the Jewish People. That, I believe, is the current mission of Religious Zionism. May we fulfill the statement of the rabbis in the Midrash (Song of Songs, 5:2) -- “*Open up for me an opening like the eye of a needle and in turn I will enlarge it to be an opening through which wagons can enter.*”

\* Chairman of the Israeli Building Center, Beit Hillel Congregation, Israel. Beit Hillel works to spread an intelligent and inclusive Orthodoxy in Israel. You can learn more about Beit Hillel by going to their website [beithillel.org.il](http://beithillel.org.il). There is a link to click to get the English translation of the website material.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/secular-getting-religious-important-story-modern-jews>

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## Kosher Cravings

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

*Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.*

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

The words of Mishlei (27) express it well: A man is defined by what he praises. The message is that for the most part, we become that which we admire. Even if we don't, we can well be defined by what we praise. After all, “*Everything is up to Hashem except of yearnings.*” (Brachos 33) If we truly yearn for something but circumstances get in the way, we cannot

be faulted. As the Talmud (Brachos 6) says, *"If one tried to do a Mitzva but was held back in a way that was beyond his control, he is credited as if he did the Mitzva."* We are judged by our sincere desire and efforts. In fact, even if the Mitzva doesn't materialize, the positive energy of our desire to do the Mitzva will surely make an impact.

In this week's Parsha, we read of the Jews who were ineligible to bring the Korban Pesach. They were members of the Chevra Kadisha, assigned to take care of the deceased. They approached Moshe with a craving. They said, *"Why should we be excluded from this precious Mitzva of Korban Pesach?"* As the story plays out, we see that their craving for the Mitzva did not allow them to do the Mitzva itself. But their craving was the impetus for Hashem to give us the Mitzva of Pesach Sheini, a makeup opportunity for them and for generations to bring the Korban Pesach.

In a similar way, Rashi at the beginning of the Parsha tells us that Aharon had a craving. At the inauguration of the Mishkan Aharon was disappointed that he was not given the opportunity to bring an inauguration donation like the princes of each tribe. Hashem informed him that something even greater was to be his. The Ramban explains that the rededication of the Beis Hamikdash which we commemorate with Chanuka is what Hashem was referring to. Although Aharon wouldn't get to bring a personal inauguration offering at this time, in the future his descendants (the Chashmonoim/ Maccabees) would be the responsible ones to rout the Yevonim from the land and rededicate the Beis Hamikdash.

Rav Matisyahu Salomon suggests that Hashem wasn't simply saying that Aharon's family had a different inauguration in store for them to do. Rather, **Aharon was purposely not included in the Mishkan's inauguration so that he should feel a void and have a craving. It is that craving of Aharon that infused greatness into the spiritual genetic makeup of his family and caused them to be predisposed and have the supporting merit to forge into existence a type of inauguration that was miraculous and is commemorated to this day.** [emphasis added]

The value of cravings can be further appreciated through the way Moshe worded his blessings to the tribes. *"Rejoice Zevulun as you go out [to commerce] and Yissachar in your tents [of Torah]."* (Devorim 33:18) Moshe noted the precious partnership of these brothers by which Zevulun, a successful businessman, supported his brother's Torah study and scholarship. Interestingly, Moshe placed Zevulun's name first as he paid tribute to this celebrated partnership. The question is, *"Why would Moshe, who so valued Torah, place Zevulun's name first in his description of this partnership?"*

Many commentators understand this as a lesson that although we value Torah more than money, in the context of those who support Torah, we must make sure to give them honor and show appreciation. The Chasam Sofer (Parshas Toldos) explores a different angle. The Chasam Sofer explains that in the context of this partnership of Yissachar and Zevulun, each is looking to the other for a contribution towards the partnership; each is craving something. In the context of this partnership, Yissachar is craving Zevulun's support, and Zevulun is craving Yissachar's Torah. Therefore, in this context of the partnership, Zevulun's cravings are greater and deserve to be mentioned first.

Although we are strongly warned against craving what belongs to another person — it is called jealousy — there is a type of craving that paves the way for greatness. As our Sages taught, *"The jealousy of great people increases goodness."* (Baba Basra 21) When Jews feel a void in being excluded from the Korban Pesach, when Aharon feels a void from being excluded from bringing a personal inauguration donation, and when a Jew feels a void that he can't study Torah personally as much as he would like to so he supports those who do, greatness and miracles will follow. Cravings such as these are admirable. Cravings such as these truly define people and their destiny.

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, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

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## **Parshas B'ha'aloscha: Coping with the Pandemic**

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer\* (2020)

For three long months, we have been without minyan, without Torah reading, without kaddish, without so many of the communal elements of Torah observance which are normally the staple of Jewish society. We have been separated and alone through two holidays and the entire period of Sefirah. As the country begins to reopen and we begin to consider our options locally, hope for reconnection is in everyone's heart.

Much has been said by leading Rabbis across the word regarding our attitude throughout this period. It has been discussed how we have to reflect upon the loss of our shuls and communities, and at the same time it has been discussed how that yearning itself is a tremendous merit for us and for our entire nation and the entire world. We must equally consider our attitude and approach to shul, minyanim and communal Torah study and to ensure we properly value the return of this great gift, which we have so dearly missed.

There is another element to consider at this time. There is a famous and oft-quoted Ramba"n found in the beginning of this week's Parsha. The Ramba"n explains, based on the Medrash, that Aharon Hakohein was greatly disheartened after the inauguration ceremony of the leaders of the tribes, when realizing that neither he nor his tribe had participated in dedication of the Mishkan. Although he was the central figure of the Mishkan and had been the one sacrificing and offering all that the leaders had brought through the dedication ceremony, Aharon felt disheartened that he was not involved in the inauguration and dedication itself.

The Ramba"n explains that B'ha'aloscha begins with the lighting of the Menorah as a message to Aharon Hakohein that he would have a greater inauguration than the other leaders. The time would come during the second Temple, when the Temple would be desecrated by the Syrian Greeks and their followers. It was to be Aharon's descendants, the Chashmonai family, who would lead the rededication of the Temple at that time, and that consecration was to have a lasting impact. That consecration would be remembered long after the destruction of the Temple through the Chanukah candles, which we light every year.

This Ramba"n highlights for us the significance of our involvement at the beginning – and even the reopening – of our communal service of G-d. Despite the involvement that Aharon and his tribe had in every element of the Temple service, he felt weakened and disheartened to have not had the merit of dedication, of not having the merit of being part of those who established the foundation of what was to come. Aharon's only consolation was from the future reopening ceremony, rededicating the desecrated Temple by his descendants the Chashmonaim.

This Ramba"n also highlights for us that it is not simply the involvement which matters, but the lasting nature of what we

achieve. Aharon was told that his descendants' rededication was to be greater, in that the devotion and lessons of that rededication would be celebrated by all future generations through Chanukah.

As we begin to consider reentering our shuls, we have the unique opportunity to rededicate our shuls as places of devotion to G-d, and proper prayer and service of G-d. The joy and devotion which we invest now, can significantly impact the beauty of our minyan and prayers when we return. Whether it is through making the adjustments and efforts to participate when and where appropriate, or through helping to make arrangements or sponsoring the medical necessities to facilitate safe minyanim for those who can participate. Any way we can involve ourselves at this time, is an opportunity to be a part of all that is to come. The joy and devotion we can develop within ourselves will certainly impact our communal joy and have a lasting impact in our approach to shul and davening. Our efforts on behalf of the shul and community at this unique juncture can in some way be even far more significant than all of our regular shul attendance.

\* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and associated with the Savannah Kollel.

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## **Behaalotecha: Parsha Pointers**

### **Parsha Food for Thought**

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

1. What is the meaning of lighting the candles וְשֵׁנִי \_\_\_\_\_? (Numbers 8:2-3)
2. Why do the Levites have to shave their whole bodies, and why do they do it with a razor? (8:7)
3. How can the Israelites put their hands on the Levites, and what is the meaning of \_\_\_\_\_ וְשֵׁנִי? (8:10-11)
4. The Levites were told to place their hands on the bulls which were sacrificed. There were two bulls and thousands of Levites, so how was that done? (8:12)
5. In 8:25 it says that the Levites worked in the Mishkan from the age of 25, but previously (4:3) we read that they started serving at 30. How can we explain the contradiction?
6. Why is the description of the travels dictated by the position of the pillar of cloud so verbose and redundant? (9:15-23). Note that the terms \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ appear 8 times in that paragraph. Could it be related to 11:19-20?

7. Who is \_\_\_\_? Did he stay with the Israelites or did he leave them? (10:29-32)
8. They traveled from the Mount of HaShem. Did this happen right after Matan Torah? (10:33)
9. What is the meaning of the inverted Nunim which frame verses 10:35-36?
10. What are the Israelites complaining about in 11:1?
11. Who are the שָׁמְרִים? Note that the verb שָׁמַר and its variants appears also in 11:16; 11:22; 11:24; 11:25; 11:30; 11:32; 12:14-15.
12. According to 11:4-5, did the Israelites eat meat in Egypt?
13. Compare 11:18 with the preparation for Matan Torah.

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

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### Behaalotecha: Anti-Semitism by Rabbi Moshe Rube\* © 2021

Some things are so obvious and have been repeated so often that it becomes nauseating to talk about. With Anti-Semitic attacks on the rise, I feel a collective sigh of exasperation. Here we go again. Why should we have to keep repeating this? Can't we all just move on? The world is so vast and beautiful for us to explore but instead we get dragged back into discussing things that should have been settled many moons ago.

But it makes me feel better that Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato (1707-1746), Italian rabbi and Kabbalist, started one of his most famous books on spirituality with *"I'm not here to teach you anything new, but rather to remind you of what you already know."* Stating the obvious has been happening for a while. So let's do just that.

1) The specific hatred of Jews has been a millennia long plague that has caused tremendous suffering, death, and pain, both physically and mentally to the Jewish People.

2) Anti-Zionism is a thin veil for Anti-Semitism. Simply saying *"Let's attack Jews because we hate Jews"* doesn't work as well anymore, but saying *"Let's attack Jews because we don't like that they're in Israel"* gets a little more leeway. The results and motivations are the same. If you want to have a nuanced conversation about history and Israeli policy, then let us first agree that Israel has a right to exist and that Jews have a right to live safe and free under their own governance in Israel. If you can't agree to that, then no conversation can take place.

3) Israel is not perfect and must behave morally with all its citizens, Jews and non Jews. But with people who deny their right to even exist, Israel has the sacred mitzvah to defend itself and assure that these people will never harm a hair on the head of any of those who live within its borders. (Yes. It is a mitzvah to guard your life. How much more so for an entire Jewish state.)

4) Hamas's charter denies Israel's right to exist and preaches war against the Jews, while Israel's contains no such similar

statement about Hamas or about any Arab nation. Who's the aggressor?

5) Any attack on one Jewish person for their Jewishness is an attack on every Jew. You and me. We just happen to be in a different geographic location.

So what do we do? Social media can be useful if that's your thing. Here are 3 other suggestions based on Yaakov our father's preparations when he had to meet Eisav:

a) **Defend yourself.** You can work on getting physically stronger so you can increase your confidence in your ability to stand up for yourself. Or you can read more about Israel's history. Then if you need to defend yourself with words (which I hope would be the case rather than physically), you can do so more effectively.

b) **Sanctify God's name** by always being nice to everyone both to our Jewish and non Jewish friends and neighbors. Thank God we have a lot of friends here and abroad, and I have heard support from many of them. Let us make sure we recognize that all humans are made in God's image, and our greatest wish is to live in peace and friendship with all our neighbors.

c) **Pray.** Nachmanides finds the source for the mitzvah of prayer from our Torah portion this week. Numbers 10:9 states that when an enemy comes against us, we must cry out to God and He will save us.

Shabbat Shalom!

\* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera (Auckland), New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel (Birmingham, AL).

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## Rav Kook Torah Beha'alotecha: The Seven Lamps of the Menorah

Why does the Torah emphasize this particular detail — that the seven lamps should face the center of the Menorah? Why not begin with the overall mitzvah — to light the Menorah each evening?

Also, what is the significance of the Menorah's seven branches?

### Different Paths of Wisdom

The Sages wrote that the Menorah represents wisdom and enlightenment (Baba Batra 25b). All wisdom has a common source, but there exist different approaches to wisdom. Every individual pursues those spheres of knowledge to which he is naturally drawn.

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 15:7) compares the seven lamps of the Menorah to the seven planets in the solar system, illuminating the nighttime sky. What is the meaning of this symbolism?

Many of the ancients understood that the planets and constellations influence our nature and personality traits. A person under the influence of Mars, for example, will have different traits than one under the influence of Jupiter (see Shabbat 165a). In other words, God created each of us with a unique character in order that we should perfect ourselves in the particular path that suits us. In this way, all of creation is completed; through the aggregation of all individual perfections, the universe attains overall perfection. Just as each planet symbolizes a distinct character trait, each branch of the Menorah is a metaphor for a specific category of intellectual pursuits. God prepared a path for each individual to attain wisdom according to his own character and interests.

## Towards the Center

However, we should be careful not to follow our natural intellectual inclinations exclusively. The Torah stresses that “*when you light the lamps*” — when we work towards that individual enlightenment that suits our particular character — we should take care that this wisdom will “*shine towards the center of the Menorah*.” What is the center of the Menorah? This is the wisdom of the Torah itself. We need to draw specifically from the light of Torah, whose source is the underlying unity of all wisdom.

In truth, the seven branches of the Menorah are not truly distinct, separate paths. All seven receive light from the unified wisdom with which God enlightens His world. For this reason, the Menorah was fashioned from a single piece of gold, mikshah zahav. The special manner in which the Menorah was formed reveals the underlying unity of all forms of wisdom.

(*Gold from the Land of Israel* pp. 239-240. Adapted from *Midbar Shur*, pp. 53-55.)

<https://ravkooktorah.org/BEHA62.htm>

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## Behaalotecha: From Pain to Humility (5775, 5782)

By Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.\*

David Brooks, in his bestselling book, *The Road to Character*,<sup>[1]</sup> draws a sharp distinction between what he calls the résumé virtues — the achievements and skills that bring success — and the eulogy virtues, the ones that are spoken of at funerals: the virtues and strengths that make you the kind of person you are when you are not wearing masks or playing roles, the inner person that friends and family recognise as the real you.

Brooks relates this distinction to the one made by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik in his famous essay, *The Lonely Man of Faith*.<sup>[2]</sup> This essay speaks of “*Adam I*” — the human person as creator, builder, master of nature imposing his or her will on the world — and “*Adam II*,” the covenantal personality, living in obedience to a transcendent truth, guided by a sense of duty and right and the will to serve.

Adam I seeks success. Adam II strives for charity, love, and redemption. Adam I lives by the logic of economics -- the pursuit of self-interest and maximum utility. Adam II lives by the very different logic of morality, where giving matters more than receiving, and conquering desire is more important than satisfying it. In the moral universe, success, when it leads to pride, becomes failure. Failure, when it leads to humility, can be success.

In that essay, first published in 1965, Rabbi Soloveitchik wondered whether there was a place for Adam II in the America of his day, so intent was it on celebrating human powers and economic advance. Fifty years on, Brooks echoes that doubt. “*We live*,” he says, “*in a society that encourages us to think about how to have a great career but leaves many of us inarticulate about how to cultivate the inner life*.”<sup>[3]</sup>

That is a central theme of Beha'alotecha. Until now we have seen the outer Moses, worker of miracles, mouthpiece of the Divine Word, unafraid to confront Pharaoh on the one hand, his own people on the other, the man who shattered the Tablets engraved by God Himself and who challenged Him to forgive His people, *"and if not, blot me out of the book You have written"* (Ex. 32:32). This is the public Moses, a figure of heroic strength. In Soloveitchik terminology, it is Moses I.

In Beha'alotecha we see Moses II, the lonely man of faith. It is a very different picture. In the first scene we see him break down. The people are complaining again about the food. They have manna but no meat. They engage in false nostalgia:

*"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!"* Num. 11:5

This is one act of ingratitude too many for Moses, who gives voice to deep despair:

*"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

Then comes the great transformation. God tells him to take seventy elders who will bear the burden with him. God takes the spirit that is on Moses and extends it to the elders. Two of them, Eldad and Medad, among the six chosen from each tribe but left out of the final ballot, begin prophesying within the camp. They too have caught Moses' spirit. Joshua fears that this may lead to a challenge to Moses leadership and urges Moses to stop them. Moses answers with surpassing generosity:

*"Are you jealous on my behalf? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that He would rest His spirit upon them all!"* Num. 11:29

The mere fact that Moses now knew that he was not alone, seeing seventy elders share his spirit, cures him of his depression, and he now exudes a gentle, generous confidence that is moving and unexpected.

In the third act, we finally see where this drama has been tending. Now Moses' own brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, start disparaging him. The cause of their complaint (the *"Ethiopian woman"* he had taken as wife) is not clear and there are many interpretations. The point, though, is that for Moses, this is the *"Et tu, Brute?"* moment. He has been betrayed, or at



least slandered, by those closest to him. Yet Moses is unaffected. It is here that the Torah makes its great statement:

*“Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than any other man on Earth.”* Num. 12:3

This is a novum in history. The idea that a leader’s highest virtue is humility must have seemed absurd, almost self-contradictory, in the ancient world. Leaders were proud, magnificent, distinguished by their dress, appearance, and regal manner. They built temples in their own honour. They had triumphant inscriptions engraved for posterity. Their role was not to serve but to be served. Everyone else was expected to be humble, not they. Humility and majesty could not coexist.

In Judaism, this entire configuration was overturned. Leaders were there to serve, not to be served. Moses’ highest accolade was to be called Eved Hashem, God’s servant. Only one other person, Joshua, his successor, earns this title in Tanach. The architectural symbolism of the two great empires of the ancient world, the Mesopotamian ziggurat (*the “tower of Babel”*) and the pyramids of Egypt, visually represented a hierarchical society, broad at the base, narrow at the top. The Jewish symbol, the menorah, was the opposite, broad at the top, narrow at the base, as if to say that in Judaism the leader serves the people, not vice versa. Moses’ first response to God’s call at the Burning Bush was one of humility: *“Who am I, to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”* (Ex. 3:11). It was precisely this humility that qualified him to lead.

In Beha’alotecha we track the psychological process by which Moses acquires a yet deeper level of humility. Under the stress of Israel’s continued recalcitrance, Moses turns inward. Listen again to what he says:

*“Why have I found so little favour in Your sight...? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? ... Where can I get meat for all these people? ... I cannot carry bear these people alone; the burden is too heavy for me.”*

The key words here are “I,” “me” and “myself.” Moses has lapsed into the first person singular. He sees the Israelites’ behaviour as a challenge to himself, not God. God has to remind him, *“Is the Lord’s arm too short?”* It isn’t about Moses, it is about what and whom Moses represents.

Moses had been, for too long, alone. It was not that he needed the help of others to provide the people with food. That was something God would do without the need for any human intervention. It was that he needed the company of others to end his almost unbearable isolation. As I have noted elsewhere, the Torah only twice contains the phrase, *lo tov*, “not good,” once at the start of the human story when God says: *“It is not good for man to be alone,”* (Gen. 2:18), a second time when Yitro sees Moses leading alone and says: *“What you are doing is not good.”* (Ex. 18:17) We cannot live alone. We cannot lead alone.

As soon as Moses sees the seventy elders share his spirit, his depression disappears. He can say to Joshua, *“Are you jealous on my behalf?”* And he is undisturbed by the complaint of his own brother and sister, praying to God on Miriam’s behalf when she is punished with leprosy. He has recovered his humility.

We now understand what humility is. It is not self-abasement. A statement often attributed to C. S. Lewis puts it best: **humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.** [emphasis added]

True humility means silencing the “I.” For genuinely humble people, it is God and other people and principle that matter, not me. As it was once said of a great religious leader, *“He was a man who took God so seriously that he didn’t have to take himself seriously at all.”*

Rabbi Yochanan said, *“Wherever you find the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, there you find His humility.”* (Megillah 31a). Greatness is humility, for God and for those who seek to walk in His ways. It is also the greatest single source of strength, for if we do not think about the “I,” we cannot be injured by those who criticise or demean us. They are shooting at a target that no longer exists.

What Beha’alotecha is telling us through these three scenes in Moses’ life is that we sometimes achieve humility only after a great psychological crisis. It is only after Moses had suffered a breakdown and prayed to die that we hear the words, *“The man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone on earth.”* Suffering breaks through the carapace of the self, making us realise that what matters is not self-regard but rather the part we play in a scheme altogether larger than we are. Lehavdil, Brooks reminds us that Abraham Lincoln, who suffered from depression, emerged from the crisis of civil war with the sense that *“Providence had taken control of his life, that he was a small instrument in a transcendent task.”*[4]

The right response to existential pain, Brooks says, is not pleasure but holiness, by which he means, *“seeing the pain as part of a moral narrative and trying to redeem something bad by turning it into something sacred, some act of sacrificial service that will put oneself in fraternity with the wider community and with eternal moral demands.”* This, for me, was epitomised by the parents of the three Israeli teenagers killed in the summer of 2014, who responded to their loss by creating a series of awards for those who have done most to enhance the unity of the Jewish people – turning their pain outward, and using it to help heal other wounds within the nation.

Crisis, failure, loss, or pain can move us from Adam I to Adam II, from self- to other-directedness, from mastery to service, and from the vulnerability of the “I” to the humility that *“reminds you that you are not the centre of the universe,”* but rather that *“you serve a larger order.”*[5]

Those who have humility are open to things greater than themselves while those who lack it are not. That is why those who lack it make you feel small while those who have it make you feel enlarged. Their humility inspires greatness in others.

#### FOOTNOTES:

[1] David Brooks, *The Road to Character*, Random House, 2015.

[2] Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, Doubleday, 1992.

[3] David Brooks, *The Road to Character*, xiii.

[4] Ibid., 93.

[5] Brooks, *ibid.*, p. 261.

#### Around the Shabbat Table:

[1] Are “resume virtues” significant, or should we only work on developing our “eulogy virtues”?

[2] Why is it important that we understand humility as ‘thinking less about ourselves’?

[3] Why do crisis moments and pain often lead to personal growth and humility? Where do we see this in the life of Moses?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/behaalotecha/from-pain-to-humility/> 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 have selected an earlier Dvar.

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### What Did Miriam Say About Moses?

By Mordechai Rubin \*

Parshat Behalotecha concludes with the infamous episode of Miriam and Aaron talking about Moses behind his back:

*Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses concerning the Cushite woman he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman. They said, ‘Has the L rd spoken only through Moses? Hasn’t He spoken through us too?’ And the L rd heard.”<sup>1</sup>*

This passage, however, leaves many questions unanswered. Who exactly was this Cushite woman? What did Miriam and Aaron say and what was their intent? And how does whatever was said connect to the fact that G d spoke to Miriam and Aaron, not just Moses?

### 1. She Was Talking About Tzipporah

Most commentators, including Rashi, explain that Miriam was speaking about Tzipporah, Moses' Midianite wife. The term "*Cushite*" is not literal; it's a euphemism for beauty — just as a person of obvious complexion is universally recognized, so was Tzipporah's beauty.

Miriam discovered — by overhearing Tzipporah's lament — that Moses had separated from his wife in order to maintain prophetic readiness. She questioned this decision: "*Why has Moses withdrawn from his wife? G d also speaks with me and with Aaron, yet we remain with our spouses.*" Rashi emphasizes that even though she was motivated by concern and her words were not intended as an insult, since it involved discussing Moses' private life without his knowledge, G d rebuked them.<sup>2</sup>

Baal Haturim adds that the Hebrew word "\_\_\_\_\_" ("*the Cushite*"), has the same numeric value (gematria) as the phrase "\_\_\_\_\_", which translates as "*beautiful of appearance*" — both totaling 736.

### 3. Miriam Accused Moses of Separating From His Wife Because She Was a Convert

Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (known by the acronym Netziv) suggests that Aaron and Miriam assumed that Moses had separated from her because, in their view, it was beneath his dignity to remain married to someone not from distinguished Israelite lineage. They argued that this was inappropriate since Moses had willingly married her, knowing her background. She hadn't deceived him, so it was wrong for him to now cause her pain by separating from her.<sup>3</sup> However, the real reason he separated was to maintain an appropriate state of readiness to converse with G d "*face to face*."<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Miriam Was Referencing a Cushite Wife Moses Had Taken Years Earlier

Rashbam, who explains the "*plain meaning*" of these verses, understands the Cushite woman mentioned in the verse not as a reference to Moses' wife Tzipporah, but a Cushite queen he married during the 40 years he ruled in Cush, as described in Chronicles.

Miriam was critical of the fact that he had taken this woman as a wife. However, Moses never had relations with her, and Miriam and Aaron were unaware of this when they spoke about him. This explanation fits the plain meaning of the verse, since if the complaint were about Tzipporah, there would be no need to introduce her as a "*Cushite*" — we already know she was a Midianite. Moreover, Tzipporah could not accurately be called a Cushite, as Midian descended from Keturah, the wife of Abraham, whereas Cush descended from Cham.<sup>5</sup>

This is similar to Bechor Shor's reading, who articulates Miriam's complaint:

*"Was there no woman among the daughters of Israel for Moses to marry, that he went and took a wife from among the Cushites, who are uncircumcised? Is it because G d speaks with him that he holds himself above others—too proud to marry a Jewish woman, seeking instead a wife from afar?"*

He explains that the fact that Moses married Tzipporah, who was also not from the descendants of Jacob, was not something to be criticized, as he had no control over those circumstances. He had to flee Egypt to Midian after Pharaoh sought to execute him and was therefore not able to marry a woman of Jewish descent.<sup>6</sup>

### 4. She Was Criticizing the Fact That He Married Tzipporah in the First Place

Some commentators,<sup>7</sup> while agreeing that the criticism was not about Tzipporah's appearance or character, understand it as questioning how Moses — Israel's greatest prophet — could have married a foreign woman at all. These views draw

on the earlier tradition that Moses once married a Cushite queen, but apply that critique instead to Tzipporah, his Midianite wife. In this reading, Miriam and Aaron weren't criticizing Moses for separating from his wife, but for marrying someone not from the daughters of Israel in the first place.

## 5. It was Not What She Said

In a complex talk exploring Rashi's explanation for the juxtaposition between this episode and the disastrous mission of the Spies that immediately follows, the Rebbe uncovers the core of Miriam's error.

Her mistake was not that she wished to speak ill of her brother Moses, as Rashi points out: "*She did not intend to speak negatively about him.*"<sup>8</sup>

So what, then, was her wrongdoing? The issue, as Rashi explains, was that she was "*involved in speech*" — she was punished simply for speaking about her brother at all. If Miriam observed something in Moses' conduct that troubled her, the proper course of action was not to discuss it with someone else. Such conversations rarely lead to a constructive outcome. If she truly had a concern, she should have addressed it — discreetly and directly — with Moses himself.<sup>9</sup>

## FOOTNOTES:

1. Numbers 12:1–2.
2. Rashi Numbers 12:1.
3. Baal Haturim Numbers 12:1.
4. Netziv Numbers 12:1.
5. Rashbam
6. Bechor Shor Numbers 12:1.
7. See Moshav Zekenim, Radak, Tur, Numbers 12:1.
8. Rashi Bamidbar 12:1.
9. *Likkutei Sichot* vol 18 p 147.

\* A content editor and staff writer at Chabad.org.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/6917653/jewish/What-Did-Miriam-Say-About-Moses.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6917653/jewish/What-Did-Miriam-Say-About-Moses.htm)

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## Beha'alotecha: The Two-Pronged Struggle

by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky

*On you joyous days, on your festivals, and on your new-moon celebrations, you must blow on the trumpets over your ascent-offerings and your peace-offerings, and it will be a remembrance before G-d. I am G-d, your G-d. (Num. 10:10)*

The two types of sacrifices mentioned here represent the two components of our struggle against the negativity of materialism.

First is the ascent-offering, whose meat and fat is totally consumed on the Altar. Next is the peace-offering, part of whose

meat is eaten by those who offer it up. This teaches us that we must first submit ourselves to G-d (just as the ascent-offering is totally consumed), but after we have done so, we should enhance our relationship with Him by understanding as much about Him and His role in our lives as we can (just as we eat some of the peace-offering), thereby bolstering our enthusiasm for the Torah and its commandments.

On a daily basis, our “*ascent-offering*” is our morning prayers, in which we surrender our sense of self and cling devotedly to G-d. Our “*peace-offering*” is the pursuit of our affairs throughout the day, intending that all we do be for the sake of heaven and in order to enhance our Divine consciousness.

– From *Daily Wisdom* #3

\* An insight by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parshat Beha'alotecha from our *Daily Wisdom* #3 by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky.

May G-d grant wisdom, strength and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
Kehot Publication Society

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Shabbat Parashat Behaalotcha

5785 B"H

## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### Two Types of Leadership

In this week's parsha, Moses has a breakdown. It is the lowest emotional ebb of his entire career as a leader. Listen to his words 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 find any found favour in Your sight, and let me not see my own misery." Num. 11:11-15

The cause of his distress seems utterly disproportionate to its effect. The people have done what they so often did before. They have complained. They say:

"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

Many times Moses has faced this kind of complaint from the people before. There are several such instances in the book of Exodus, including one almost exactly similar:

"If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate our fill of bread. Instead you have brought us out into this desert to starve the entire assembly to death." Ex. 16:3

On these earlier occasions Moses did not give expression to the kind of despair he speaks of here. Usually, when leaders face repeated challenges, they grow stronger each time. They learn how to respond, how to cope. They develop resilience, a thick skin. They formulate survival strategies. Why then does Moses seem to do the opposite, not only here but often throughout the book of Numbers?

In the chapters that follow, Moses seems to lack the unshakeable determination he had in

Exodus. At times, as in the episode of the spies, he seems surprisingly passive, leaving it to others to fight the battle. At others, he seems to lose control and becomes angry, something a leader should not do. Something has changed, but what? Why the breakdown, the burnout, the despair?

A fascinating insight is provided by the innovative work of Prof. Ronald Heifetz, co-founder and director of the Center for Public Leadership at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.[1]

Heifetz distinguishes between technical challenges and adaptive challenges. A technical challenge is one where you have a problem and someone else has the solution. You are ill, you go to the doctor, he diagnoses your condition and prescribes a pill. All you have to do is follow the instructions.

Adaptive challenges are different. They arise when we are part of the problem. You are ill, you go to the doctor, and he tells you: I can give you a pill, but the truth is that you are going to have to change your lifestyle. You are overweight, out of condition, you sleep too little and are exposed to too much stress. Pills won't help you until you change the way you live.

Adaptive leadership is called for when the world is changing, circumstances are no longer what they were, and what once worked works no more. There is no quick fix for such things, no miracle pill, no simple following of instructions. We have to change. What's more, the leader cannot do this for us. He must inspire, but we have to follow through.

The fundamental difference between the books of Exodus and Numbers is that in Exodus, Moses is called on to exercise technical leadership. The Israelites are enslaved? God sends signs and wonders, ten plagues, and the Israelites go free. They need to escape from Pharaoh's chariots? Moses lifts his staff and God divides the sea. They are hungry? God sends manna from heaven. Thirsty? God sends water from a rock. When they have a problem, the leader, Moses, together with God, provides the solution. The people do not have to exert themselves at all.

In the book of Numbers, however, the equation has changed. The Israelites have completed the first part of their journey. They have left

Egypt, reached Sinai, and made a covenant with God. Now they are on their way to the Promised Land. Moses' role is now different. Instead of providing technical leadership, he has to provide adaptive leadership. He has to get the people to change, to exercise responsibility, to learn to do things for themselves while trusting in God, instead of relying on God to do things for them.

It is precisely because Moses understands this that he is so devastated when he sees that the people haven't changed at all. They are still complaining about the food, almost exactly as they did before the revelation at Mount Sinai, before their covenant with God, before they themselves had built the Sanctuary, their first creative endeavour together.

He has to teach them to adapt, but he senses – rightly as it transpires – that they are simply unable to change their pattern of response, the result of years of slavery. They are passive, and overly dependent. They have lost the capacity for self-motivated action. As we eventually discover, it will take a new generation, born in freedom, to develop the strengths needed for self-governance, which is the precondition of freedom.

Adaptive leadership is intensely difficult. People resist change. They erect barriers against it. One is denial. A second is anger. A third is blame. That is why adaptive leadership is emotionally draining in the extreme. Many of the great adaptive leaders – among them Lincoln, Gandhi, John F. and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr, Anwar Sadat and Yitzhak Rabin – were assassinated. Their greatness was posthumous. Only in retrospect were they seen by their own people as heroes. At the time, they were seen by many as a threat to the status quo, to all that is comfortably familiar.

Moses, with the insight of the greatest of the Prophets, intuitively sees all this. Hence his despair and his wish to die. It is far easier to be a technical leader than an adaptive one. It is

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easy to leave it to God, hard to realise that God is calling us to responsibility, to become His partners in the work of redemption.

Of course, the Torah does not leave it there. In Judaism, despair never has the last word. God comforts Moses, tells him to recruit seventy elders to share the burden of leadership with him, and gives him the strength to carry on. Adaptive leadership is, for Judaism, the highest form of leadership. That is what the Prophets did. Without relieving the people of their responsibility, they gave them a vision and a hope. They spoke difficult, challenging truths, and they did so with a passion that still has the power to inspire the better angels of our nature.

But with devastating honesty – never more so than in its account of Moses' temporary breakdown – the Torah tells us that adaptive leadership is not easy, and that those who exercise it will face anger and criticism. They may come to feel that they have failed. But they have not. Moses remains the greatest leader the Jewish people has ever known, the man who almost single-handedly shaped the Israelites into a nation that never gave up or gave way to despair.

Nowhere is the difficulty of adaptive leadership more simply summarised than in God's words to Moses' successor, Joshua.

Be strong and courageous, for you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. But you must be strong and very courageous indeed to faithfully uphold all the Torah that Moses My servant commanded you . . . Joshua 1:6-7

The first sentence speaks about military leadership. Joshua was to lead the people in their conquest of the land. The second verse speaks about spiritual leadership. Joshua was to ensure that he and the people kept faith with the covenant they had made with God. The first, says the verse, demands courage, but the second demands exceptional courage. Change always does.

To fight an enemy is hard, to fight with yourself harder still. To help people find the strength to change: that is the highest leadership challenge of all.

[1] Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, Harvard University Press; Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, Harvard Business Press; Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky and Alexander Glashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*, Harvard Business Press.

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### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin** **The Ram's Horn and the Trumpet – The Secret of Jewish Music**

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"Make yourself two silver trumpets. Make them out of beaten metal. They shall be used by you to assemble the community and for causing the camps to break camp for their journeys." (Numbers 10:2)

Although the beginning of the book of Genesis records that Yuval was the inventor of the lyre and the pipe, when it comes to the performance of the commandments in the Torah, the only instruments which play any role are the shofar (ram's horn) and the Chatzotzrot (silver trumpets). So, in a sense (at least from the Torah's point of view), it is these latter two which are uniquely Jewish instruments, each with their specific, symbolic significance; the lyre and pipe are part of the heritage of humanity at large.

The shofar, as we know from Parashat Emor in Leviticus, is virtually synonymous with Rosh HaShana, resonating the creation of the world and intoning our dream of ultimate perfection of the world in the Kingship of God. The shofar next appears in Behar, the portion right after Emor, where we are commanded to sanctify the fiftieth year as a jubilee. With the completion of the forty-nine-year period of seven sabbatical cycles, the shofar proclaims the freedom of all slaves, and the return of the original owners to their ancestral homes and lands – the redemption of the land. And it was the shofar that was heard emanating from Mount Sinai during the divine revelation of the Torah (Exodus 19:19). Hence the shofar symbolizes creation, revelation, and redemption, the perfection of the world and humanity through the Torah's commandments.

Indeed, the very word itself, shofar, literally means beauty – the majesty expressed in the horn that crowns the ram's regal bearing, the beauty of the ram. Perhaps it's no coincidence that one of the two Jewish midwives who defied Pharaoh's edict to kill all male Jews at birth – in effect the first redeemers of the Jewish people – was named Shifra, from the same root as shofar. It is no surprise, then, that the instrument marking such important occasions as the giving of the Torah, the Kingship of God on the birthday of the creation of the world, as well as the redemption of the Land of Israel, are all served by an instrument whose essence is majestic beauty.

But what about the chatzotzra, the silver trumpet? Its name connotes the very antithesis of beauty: tz-a-r means pain, narrow straits, the same root from which we derive Mitzrayim (Egypt), the land which caused pain and oppression to the Jews. In fact, the Torah alludes to this idea when it uses the words

### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

hatzar hatzorer, "the adversary who oppresses you" (Numbers 10:9) in the next to last verse in the segment dealing with these "silver trumpets."

The tenth chapter of Numbers in Behaalotcha opens with God commanding Moses to make two silver trumpets, chatzotzrot, and then, for ten verses, the Torah gives us the various occasions and requirements for the sounding of these "silver trumpets," when the Israelites set out on their wanderings and when they had to assemble for war.

At this point, the chatzotzrot are very much in line with their name, expressing pain and angst, wanderings and war.

But is it all pain and angst? The same biblical section of silver trumpets also commands us to use this instrument to herald the festivals and new months, genuine occasions for joy. "And in the day of your gladness, and in your appointed seasons, and in your new moons, you shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings" (Numbers 10:10). Undoubtedly, even within a world of suffering, there are moments of victory and happiness. Moreover, we must also remember that our festivals and new months also reflect angst as well as exaltation, fear as well as freedom.

After all, on Pesach we recall the matza, which is "bread of affliction," the food we ate as slaves in Egypt, as well as the "bread of faith" we took with us to the desert. And the Sukka recalls our wandering in an alien, dry desert as well as divine rays of protective splendor; similarly Rosh Chodesh reminds us that the essence of the moon lies both in its waxing as well as its waning nature, which expresses incompleteness and imperfection at the same time that it holds out hope for ultimate wholeness and redemption. Might not the real lesson of the chatzotzra be that it is in the challenge of the angst and the pain, in our ability to overcome the limitations and rise above the evils of servitude and exile, that the highest joys of human accomplishment and success are found?

And indeed, it is important to note that the Torah, in the chatzotzrot segment, categorizes two kinds of occasions, and two kinds of sounds. One is perhaps the expected terua sound, a broken sigh-sob (ra'o'a, broken): "And when you go to war in your land against the adversary that oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm [terua] with the trumpets." Terua is also sounded when the Jewish people must break camp, embarking on a long journey, wandering from place to place, the forty years in the desert being a prophetic foretaste of the thousands of years of exile and wandering the Jews would have to endure.



But in addition to the *terua* sound, the Torah also commands the *chatzotzrot* to blow a *tekiya*, a straight, exultant, expansive sound, demonstrating that even within this world of imperfection, and perhaps emanating from our empowerment to rise above and overcome that pain and suffering, the very *chatzotzra* can be employed to express a *tekiya* sound of joy and well-being, of eventual perfection and redemption. The dual nature of the festivals, the very dual nature of life in the world wherein the sweet may emerge from the bitter, the honey a by-product of the bee's sting, is expressed by the two interconnected sounds of the *chatzotzra*, the *terua* and *tekiya* which emanate from the silver trumpet: witness Naomi Shemer's song, "Concerning the honey and the sting, concerning the bitter and the sweet, concerning all these things, please guard them for me, my good God." Both are necessary, the bitter as well as the sweet, for the true challenge in this world is to turn the matza of slavery into the matza of freedom, to make sweet lemonade out of bitter lemons.

With this understanding, let us revisit the Rosh HaShana shofar. The Bible calls the first day of the New Year "the day of the *terua* sound shall it be unto you" (Numbers 21:1), the day of the staccato, broken sound. Why a broken *terua* emanating from the beautiful majestic shofar, and on the day of our celebration of the creation of the world, no less?! The answer ought to be indubitably, if not painfully, clear. God created an imperfect, incomplete world – with evil as well as good, with chaos as well as order, with darkness as well as light (Isaiah 45:7). Our task is to complete it, to perfect and repair it, to mend it and make it whole. We must turn a broken *terua* into an exultant *tekiya*!

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**The Person in the Parsha**  
**Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**  
**Humble, Not Meek**

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I don't usually disagree publicly with lecturers, particularly when they are expressing opinions which are mostly consistent with my own. But there was one time when I felt that I had to speak up and object to one of the speaker's expressions.

It was at a lecture on the subject of self-absorption. The speaker characterized the time we live in as "the age of narcissism." He argued that we live in an era when most people are totally self-centered and guilty of false pride and arrogance. He advanced many examples to bolster his position.

Although I found his hypothesis to be somewhat extreme, I could agree with much of what he was saying. I, too, have often felt that the phrase "the me generation" was an apt appellation for contemporary society.

But then the gentleman at the podium made a statement that touched a raw nerve in me. He said something that I had heard expressed many times over the years and have invariably felt compelled to correct.

He said that, as a good Christian, he found the hubris which predominated contemporary society to be quite contrary to "the Christian values of forgiveness and humility." It was his description of these noble values as being of Christian origin, and the way in which he conveyed his conviction that his own faith tradition somehow "owned" them, that brought me to my feet.

"I must object," I asserted, "not to your major thesis about the faults of our generation, but to your insistence on identifying what you believe to be the desirable qualities for the human race with Christianity, and with Christianity alone."

I must confess that I was secretly hoping that my protest would cause him to at least modify his remarks, and perhaps speak, as so many do, of the "Judeo-Christian values of forgiveness and humility."

But that was not to be. Instead, he cited chapter and verse in the Christian Bible on the importance of forgiveness, and then, raising his voice for emphasis, said: "Surely, the learned Rabbi knows that it is in the Book of Matthew that we find the phrase, 'And the meek shall inherit the earth.'"

I will not report what I said to him about forgiveness as a Jewish virtue. I will save those remarks for another occasion. But, because of the connection to this week's Torah portion, Beha'alotecha (Numbers 8:1-12:16), I will share with you the essence of my retort with regard to the Jewish origin of the all-important virtue of humility.

"Yes, my dear sir," I replied, "this learned Rabbi does indeed know that the phrase that you translate as, 'And the meek shall inherit the earth,' appears in your Scriptures. But I also know that the identical phrase appears in the Book of Psalms chapter 37, verse 11, written many centuries before Matthew. And I also know that translating the Hebrew word *anavim* as 'the meek' is not quite correct. We preferred to translate *anavim* as 'the humble,' and not as 'the meek'."

I continued to build my argument by quoting the verse near the end of this week's Torah portion, "Now Moses was a very humble man, more so than any other man on earth." (Numbers 12:3) "There is no way," I insisted, "that the Torah would use the word *anav* to describe Moses if the word meant 'meek.' Moses was not meek. I think you will agree that the image evoked by the phrase 'a meek

## Likutei Divrei Torah

person' is that of a weak person, or at least a mild-mannered one. Moses was most certainly neither weak nor mild-mannered. He was strong, in body and in spirit, and could be quite assertive when circumstances called for assertiveness."

While I do not delude myself into thinking that I changed my adversary's mind, I did get the audience thinking. This was proven when about a dozen of those present gathered around me after the lecture was concluded and asked me to expand upon the Jewish definition of humility.

I told them that a comprehensive discussion of the importance which Judaism assigns to the character trait of *anava*, or humility, would take a very long time. I agreed, however, to share with them but one thought upon the subject.

I quoted to them the following passage in the Talmud (Nedarim 38a): "Rabbi Yochanan said: 'The Holy One Blessed Be He allows the Shechinah [the Divine Presence] to rest only upon someone who is strong, wealthy, wise, and humble. All of these traits were to be found in Moses. Humility, as it is written, 'Now Moses was a very humble man...'"

It was not long before one member of the group asked the question that I was expecting. "Does the Almighty really favor people with the mundane virtues of strength and wealth? I would think that He would rather favor spiritual virtues."

"Your question," I responded, "was anticipated by a rabbi who wrote in the early 20th century. His name was Rabbi Baruch Epstein, and whereas his magnum opus, entitled Torah Temimah, was written in 1904, he lived to an advanced old age and witnessed the Holocaust. His answer is a most instructive one."

I then went on to describe that answer. I told the group that the test of humility can only be passed by one who is strong and wealthy and wise. If someone who lacks those resources acts humbly, we cannot be sure that he in truth possesses a humble character. It could be that he acts humbly simply because he is weak, or poor, or of limited intelligence. God, therefore, chooses to have the Shechinah dwell with the person who, despite his many assets and talents, remains humble. He is the one who is genuinely an *anav*.

Thus, writes Rabbi Epstein, "It is precisely because Moses was powerful and wealthy and wise and tall, and yet humble, that we can speak of him as the 'humblest of men.'"

There is much wisdom in this manner of understanding the virtue of humility, of *anava*. The *anav* is not a meek person. Quite the

contrary. He has many talents and many skills. He is fully aware of his capacities and of his strengths. And yet he recognizes that these gifts are just that, gifts. Moreover, these gifts are Divine blessings, and he has no right to be proud of them as if they were his personal achievements.

The humble man recognizes that his very advantage over others is a gift of God. That is what allows him to utilize his powers to help achieve God's purposes, not out of meekness, but out of humility.

Once again, Moses is a model for all of us. We are called upon to be humble, but that doesn't mean that we are to be weak, passive, or submissive. We can be strong, active, and assertive—and humble.

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

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#### **The Greater the Gavra, the Greater the Gratitude**

The pasuk in Parshas BeHa'alosecha says, "And the people were k'mis'onenim (as murmurers), speaking evil in the ears of Hashem; and when Hashem heard it, His anger was kindled; and the fire of Hashem burnt among them and devoured in the uttermost part of the camp." (Bamidbar 11:1). The Ribono shel Olam became very angry. Moshe Rabbeinu had to pray to Him, and the fire was extinguished. What exactly is the meaning of the word "mis'onenim"? The Ramban quotes the Ibn Ezra that it comes from the word *aven* (sin), meaning that the people said "sinful things." The Ramban disagrees with the Ibn Ezra because the Torah did not mention any "sinful things" that the people spoke, and the Torah is usually not shy about mentioning what *aveira* is being punished when there is a Divine punishment.

The Ramban suggests that when the people distanced themselves from Har Sinai and moved deeper into the vast and awesome desert, they panicked and did not know what to do. "How are we going to survive in this desert? What are we going to eat and drink? How will we manage through all the depravation and suffering that exists in this barren stretch of land? How are we ever going to get out of this place?" According to the Ramban, the etymology of the word "mis'onenim" is the same as the expression "Mah yis'onen adam chai" (Of what shall a living man complain) (Eicha 3:39), which connotes pain and complaint about a person's situation. A *mis'onen* is a person who is feeling sorry for himself. "Woe is me that I have such tzores."

The Ramban explains that the Torah is thus teaching us what they did wrong: They acted like the worst thing had just happened to them. The Torah uses a simile here "like

*mis'onenim*." They were not people in desperate straits, but they acted LIKE such people! This upset the Ribono shel Olam, who felt that they should be following Him in joy and rejoicing by virtue of all the positive things they had experienced: Yetzias Mitzrayim (The Exodus from Egypt), Krias Yam Yuf (the splitting of the Red Sea), Kabbalas HaTorah (receiving the Torah), as well as being provided with the mann and the *be'er* (well)! How dare they complain after all that?

Hashem said that someone who has it so good and nonetheless complains as if he has it so bad is guilty of a terrible *aveira*. That *aveira* is the inability to be '*makir tova*' (recognize favors), failing to appreciate the positive. The Ribono shel Olam cannot tolerate ingratitude and therefore punishment immediately followed.

The Brisker Rav, *zt"l*, once said that if a person has a bad character trait (such as being haughty, or having a bad temper), we judge him as an imperfect human being (not an '*adam shalem*'), a person who has a fault – perhaps even a bad fault. However, if a person is not *makir tova*, the Brisker Rav said that he is not merely not an '*adam shalem*', but rather, he is not an *adam* at all. He lacks the most basic component of humanity! We all have our challenges with certain ideal character traits. We need to work on them. But someone who is an ingrate is not a *mensch* at all!

The truth of the matter is that the Ramban alludes to this in Parshas Ha'Azinu. The pasuk there says, "Is it to Hashem that you do this, O vile and unwise people?" (Devorim 32:6) The Ramban writes that Moshe Rabbeinu is chastising the people: "This is how you treat the Ribono shel Olam after all that he did for you?" What does Moshe Rabbeinu call them? Am *naval*. The Ramban notes that when an animal dies, it is called a *neveilah*, indicating it is no longer an animal, but rather it is a dead carcass. So too, a person who is not *makir tova* is a *naval*, because he ceases to be a human being. He is no longer a *mensch*.

That is the meaning of "Vayehi ha'am k'mis'onenim".

In truth, this is not the only example of ingratitude in Parshas BeHa'aloscha. There is a second incident as well:

"And the mixed multitude that was among them felt a lusting; and the children of Israel also wept on their part, and said: 'Would that we were given flesh to eat! We remember the fish, which we used to eat in Mitzrayim for free; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic; but now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all; we have only this mann to look to.'" (Bamidbar

#### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

11:4-6) The next pasuk, after those three *pesukim* is "Now the mann was like coriander seed and the appearance thereof was like the (white and sparkling) appearance of bdellium" (Bamidbar 11:7). The Jews are complaining about their lack of onions and garlic and then suddenly, the Torah makes an editorial comment. What is that all about? Rashi clarifies: In the first three *pesukim*, Bnei Yisrael were talking. Pasuk 7 is Hashem talking! They are complaining that all they have is mann and then Hashem inserts into the Torah the divine character of the mann, as if to say, "Let the world come and see about what My Children are complaining. The mann is so special!" If you can complain about mann, you can complain about anything!

I once heard a schmooze from Rav Pam, *zt"l* (subsequently printed in his *sefer*), in which he says that he often hears such a *bas kol* (heavenly Voice) proclaiming "Look at what my children are complaining about!" When a young man comes and complains to him that he comes home from yeshiva or from work and finds the house strewn with toys all over the place, he complains to his wife, "Why can't you keep a neat house?" Rav Pam says that when he hears such complaints, he hears the *bas kol*: "Look at what my children are complaining about?" How many infertile couples are there who would give their right arms to have a house full of strewn toys lying around! And these fellows are complaining that the house isn't neat!

He goes through several examples in his *sefer*: A child comes home from school at 5:30. Supper is ready on the table. The mother prepares meatloaf and a plate of vegetables, the child comes home to a set table and a hot meal and he complains. "I hate meatloaf!" Look at what my children complain about!

The following very instructive Medrash is not located in Parshas BeHa'aloscha, but I feel it is appropriate to share at this time. The Medrash is in Sefer Shemos (Parsha 4): When Hashem told Moshe that it was time to take the Jews out of Mitzraim, Moshe responded, "Master of the Universe, I am not able to take on this job. I need to ask permission from my father-in-law, Yisro. If he will not give me permission, I guess You will need to get another man."

The *baalei mussar* make two very interesting comments on this Medrash: It is our assumption that it is only necessary to show *hakaros hatov* to someone who is doing something positive for you out of the goodness of his heart. But if a person is doing something because it is his job or it is for his or her own personal reasons, then he or she does not deserve my *hakaros hatov*. They are just doing what they need to do or what they really want to do anyhow! The *baalei mussar* infer just the opposite from this Medrash:

Consider: Who owed whom? Moshe did not owe Yisro. Yisro owed Moshe. First of all, Moshe saved Yisro's daughters (Shemos 2:17). But moreover, Yisro could not get a shidduch for his daughters for all the money in the world because he was a pariah. He was ostracized by his community. He had been an idolatrous priest and suddenly, he adopted Judaism! Who wants to marry into his family? Moshe Rabbeinu did Yisro a great favor by marrying his daughter. Nonetheless, Moshe Rabbeinu did not say, "He owes me. I do not owe him." The lesson is that it does not make a difference. If someone has benefited from someone else, he must show gratitude no matter why the other fellow did what he did.

I saw the following incredible story in a sefer:

A Jewish fellow in New York was going to work by subway. He was standing by the side of the tracks and suddenly, he fell onto the tracks and could not get up. Everyone was paralyzed after having witnessed what just happened. An African-American man standing on the platform with everyone else jumped onto the tracks, pulled the fellow up, and saved him, shortly before the next train came riding right over the tracks where this fellow had fallen. The news crews of the New York papers tracked down this fellow and told him, "You are a hero!" He responded "I am not a hero. I did not do this to be a hero. I have a job. I am a dishwasher in a restaurant earning ten dollars an hour. I knew what would happen if this fellow had been run-over. The train would have been delayed for two hours. I would lose twenty dollars off my salary. I did not jump down onto the tracks to save him. I jumped down there to pull him off the tracks so that the train would not be delayed and I could get to my job on time."

This is not the end of the story. This Jew who had fallen onto the tracks made a neder (vow) while lying on the tracks: "If someone will save me, I will give him \$100,000." He now read the newspaper account where he learned that his savior did not do what he did to save him, but in order to not lose the \$20 from his job! He sent the shaylah to Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein: Does he need to give the \$100,000 or not?

Rav Zilberstein paskened that he needed to give 1/3 of that amount. (I am not certain about the logic Rav Zilberstein used to come up with this specific figure.) Rav Zilberstein, however, then took the shaylah to his brother-in-law, Rav Chaim Kanievsky to see if he agreed with his psak. Rav Chaim told him: The fellow needs to give the entire \$100,000! Rav Chaim ruled that it does not matter why the fellow did what he did. He could have done it to become a hero or he could have done it to save \$20. The reason he did it is not relevant. He saved

this Jew's life. The Jew said that if someone will save his life, he will give him \$100,000. The Jew has to keep his neder.

Hakaras hatov does not depend on why the person does it. Hakaras hatov is an obligation regardless of the motive. A person must be a mensch. As the Brisker Rav said, a person who does not appreciate, iz nit kin mensch (is not a person).

Over the years, I have read dozens, scores, and perhaps hundreds of stories about how great people were makir tova over things that we might take totally for granted, perhaps not even considering them favors at all. And yet, great people consider these things favors and remember them forever. The understanding of this is simple: Someone who is not a makir tova is not a mensch, and the bigger the mensch, the bigger makir tova a person is. The two go hand in hand. People who are literally gedolim, know what it is to be a makir tova.

I once mentioned the story of a bochur in Yeshiva Torah Voda'as who was not coming to minyan. No matter what they tried to do, they could not get him out of bed. The dormitory supervisor came to Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, who was the Rosh Yeshiva at the time, and requested to throw this fellow out of the dormitory for not coming to minyan. Rav Yaakov said, "Yes. If his not coming to minyan affects other people, you can throw him out of the dormitory." But first, Rav Yaakov said, send him in to see me. I want to speak with him.

The head of the dorm told the fellow, "You are being kicked out of the dormitory and Rav Yaakov wants to see you." The fellow was literally shaking in his boots. Rav Yaakov said to him, "I understand that you need to leave the dormitory because you do not come to minyan, but tell me, where are you going to sleep from now on?" The boy said, "I don't know. I have no back-up plan." Rav Yaakov said, "You will come to my house. You will sleep by me." (This is what we call an 'upgrade'.)

The boy was astonished: "The Rosh Yeshiva said that I am being thrown out of the dormitory and now he is telling me that I am going from the dormitory to the Rosh Yeshiva's house?"

Rav Yaakov explained, "Yes. It is because I learned in the Kovno Kollel when I was a young man in Lithuania. Your grandfather used to give money to the Kovno Kollel. Therefore, I feel I owe you a debt of gratitude and so therefore, if you don't have a place to sleep, you can sleep by me." This grandfather was not the sole supporter of the Kovno Kollel, but he was on their contributor's list.

## Likutei Divrei Torah

This is just an example of the maxim: The bigger the mensch, the bigger the makir tova and the lesser the mensch, the lesser the makir tova.

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### Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

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Here are two key features of outstanding Jewish leadership... They are presented to us in Parshat Beha'alotcha.

The Leviim, the ancient Levites, were the spiritual leaders of our people. The Torah says 'Ki Netunim Netunim hemmah li'. God pronounces they will be presented, they will be presented to me.

Why is the word 'Netunim' – 'to be presented', repeated? Rashi comments 'Netunim l'masa, Netunim la shir' – they are to be presented because of their carrying, they are to be presented because of their singing.

What are we referring to here? The Levites were the people who carried all the parts of the Mishkan from place to place to guarantee that wherever the Israelites were, the Mishkan would be right at the heart of their camp.

Thanks to the Levites, the people never strayed physically away from the sanctuary, as a symbol of the fact that wherever they were in life, they should always take Almighty God with them.

That is the mark of a true leader, somebody who guarantees that the community doesn't only feel the presence of Hashem in Shul, in the sanctuary, but wherever we are. That when we are in the office, when we are on holiday, when we are on vacation, when we are engaging in leisure – our Yiddishkeit will always be an integral part of what we are.

The ultimate mark of true leadership is not what happens in Shul, but rather what happens in our lives as a result of Shul.

This brings me to the second key element of outstanding leadership, 'Netunim la shir', the Levites used to lead the community in song. We need to feel our Judaism, there needs to be 'ruchaniut' – spirituality. We cannot just go through the mechanical output of activity; it needs to touch us.

As a result, through the spiritual experiences that we have, we will be motivated to guarantee that we don't only live a materialistic way of life, but rather that we are forever connected to our creator.

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### Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

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#### Insights to Inner Lights

#### Rabbi David and Tirtza Benchlouch

Parshat Beha'alotcha highlights themes central to the inner spark of Jewish belonging that

concur with leadership and service, in tandem with individually embraced notions of greatness.

One of the key lessons in Beha'alotcha is the importance of strong leadership. This is emphasized through the appointment of Aaron and the Levi'im as his assistants. According to Rav Kook, "The role of the priestly leadership is to serve as a conduit for Divine grace and to guide the people towards spiritual growth and development" (Orot HaKodesh, vol. 3, p.82). This understanding of leadership as a spiritual calling has remained central in our continued linear standings, for without it breaches are made, and through which traditions are laid.

Another important theme is the need for unity and cooperation within the community. This is exemplified through the lighting of the menorah in the Mishkan, a symbol of unity and harmony. Rabbi Yehuda Halevy writes, "The menorah is a symbol of the unity of Israel, for it is made up of many branches which are all connected to the central stem" (Kuzari, 3:7). This understanding of the menorah as symbol of unity reflects the importance placed on community and communal responsibility within Jewish thought.

Finally, Beha'alotcha emphasizes the role of Divinity in guiding the Jewish thinker. This is exemplified through the guidance provided by the cloud and fire leading the Israelites through the wilderness. Rabbi Soloveitchik writes, "The Divine Presence serves as a guiding force for the Jewish people, providing them with direction and purpose in their journey through life" (Halakhic Man, p.99). This understanding of the Divine Presence as a guiding force in Jewish circles resonates much within the context of Shlichim, who deliberately make strides to enhance Jewish belonging in the farthest of places, notably foreign in other social circles.

From a sociological and anthropological perspective, the emphasis on leadership, community, and spirituality in the Torah portion of Beha'alotcha reflects the importance of these themes in shaping social and cultural practices within Modern Orthodox Jewish communities. The appointment of strong leaders, the emphasis on communal responsibility, and the centrality of faith and spirituality in daily life all serve to reinforce social cohesion and promote a sense of shared purpose and identity.

This Parsha is filled with powerful metaphors and symbols that illuminate the deep truths of our kedusha.

A highmax theme is the importance of inner illumination. This is exemplified through the lighting of the menorah, which is mirrored as a

symbol of Divine light that illuminates the soul. According to Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, "The lighting of the menorah symbolizes the illumination of the inner soul, which is the source of true spiritual growth and development" (Tanya, ch. 34). This understanding of the menorah as a symbol of inner illumination reflects the importance of spirituality and self-reflection in Chassidic thought.

We also encounter the concept of spiritual elevation. This is exemplified through the appointment of the Levi'im as assistants to Aaron the High Priest, who serves as a conduit for Divine grace. According to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, "The role of the Levites is to elevate the physical world through their service in the Tabernacle, thereby bringing the Divine Presence into the world" (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, p.1045). This understanding of spiritual elevation as a transformative process reflects the importance of spiritual growth and development in our shlichut.

I remember once visiting an elderly man whose home burned to ashes. He was non-observant, and rather traditional. What sparked me most was his excitement in his Megilat Esther being saved from the fire and his measures to its restoration. I was deeply moved and promised myself to never forget how kedusha is found in the fire. There is a real longing for Godliness contained in the heart of every Jew. Our service as shlichim, educators, rabaniyot and rabanim at a micro level is to speak to that warmth within, and direct our attention to its beauty. In our interactions with every Jew we must revert to their higher mind, apply kavod and esteem to their standing, and be patient until it chooses to find expression.

This could possibly form an alliance with the teachings of Rav Kook regarding the cloud and fire that led Am Yisrael through the wilderness. According to Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, "The cloud and fire serve as symbols of the Divine Presence, which guides us on our spiritual journey and provides the strength to overcome obstacles" (Orot HaKodesh, vol. 2, p.93).

While not limited to shlichim and shlichot, I believe that interventions in our respective communities have a dual premise, namely; the cloud approach and the fire approach. A hybrid leadership of both warm directives yet clouds of softness and patience, imbue the blend to a higher calling.

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**Rabbi Yakov Haber**

**Individual and National "Strangers"**

"And Moshe said to Chovav...; we are traveling to the place about which Hashem

## Likutei Divrei Torah

said He will give it to us. Go with us and we shall benefit you, for Hashem has spoken of good things for Israel!" (Bamidbar 10:29). In this emotion-laden call, Moshe attempts to convince his noble father-in-law, Yisro (Chovav), to join the Jewish people in their journey to the Promised Land. In light of the fact that the book of Shoftim (1:27) records that the descendants of Yisro were in the Land of Israel, the commentaries debate whether Yisro himself joined the Jewish people after converting his family or only his children did. (See Rashi to Yisro (18:27) and Seforno on the above verse.)

Rav Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik zt"l in one of his more well-known derashos[1] notes that the entire first section of our parasha consists of the final preparations for entry into Eretz Yisrael. Starting with the dedication of the Levites followed by the bringing of the korban Pesach - both highlighting the resting of the Divine Presence among B'nei Yisrael in the mishkan and beyond and then moving on to the description of the traveling of the Cloud of G-d followed by the commandment to fashion trumpets - indicating the march toward the Land of Israel under direct Divine guidance, our parasha carefully choreographs the imminent entry of the entirety of the Jewish people, under Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership, into the Land flowing with milk and honey. Had Moshe succeeded in leading the Jewish people into Eretz Yisrael, Moshe would have been the melech hamashiach and the messianic era would already be here, and no subsequent exiles would have been necessary.

Based on this approach, the Rav explains that the call to Yisro was symbolic of a call to all those interested among the nations of the world to convert and join in this great historical adventure of accepting Hashem Yisborach's master plan for all of humanity - led by the Jewish people, the kohanim of the world - in order to partner with Him in perfecting the world and, by doing so, gain eternal existence granted by their Creator and Master of History.

I humbly attempt to expand upon the Rav's poignant words, based on another dersasha of his, presenting a somewhat different interpretation of Moshe's conversation with Yisro. Rashi quotes the halacha that converts, not belonging to a specific tribe, do not receive land in Eretz Yisrael. What then would be the "benefit" that Moshe promised Yisro? Rashi quotes Chazal that since Moshe knew that a specific place (ultimately Jerusalem) would be chosen as the place of the Beis Hamikdash, the land of the members of b'nei Yisrael living there at that time would have to be expropriated. Consequently, Yisro's descendants would temporarily receive fertile land near Jericho until the time of the expropriation, when they would have to forfeit

that land, surrendering it to those Jews originally residing in the place of the future mikdash. This indeed occurred later in history as recorded in Shoftim (ibid.) according to Chazal's interpretation of the verse (see Radak ibid.).

In light of the Rav's interpretation of Moshe's call to Yisro as being nothing short of anticipating the messianic era, perhaps we can suggest a more literal reading of the text based on passages in Yechezkel (47:22-23). There, Yechezkel hanavi informs us that in the messianic era, converts will indeed receive a portion in the Land of Israel in the section allotted to the tribe among which they lived in the exile. (See Rashi (ibid.)) Based on this, if Moshe was indeed anticipating the blessed pinnacle of history with the Jewish people's imminent entry into the Land, then the "benefit" could reasonably be interpreted to mean a permanent portion in the Land of Israel since, in the messianic era, even converts receive an inheritance.

In a different lecture, Rav Soloveitchik asked why we refer to a convert to Judaism as a "ger," a stranger. In light of the Torah's directive to love converts and exert extreme caution not to cause them emotional hurt, why would the Torah refer to one who accepts Judaism as a "stranger?" The Rav's insightful answer greatly illuminates for all of us the Torah's viewpoint on the nature of this world. Avraham Avinu refers to himself as "ger v'toshav - a stranger and a resident" (Bereishis 23:24). One homiletic interpretation of this verse is that Avraham was presenting a Jew's proper dual mindset concerning this world. On the one hand, Hashem has charged us to be a "part of the world:" to cultivate its fields, to develop its industry, to form governments, armies and social systems according to the dictates of the world's blueprint, the holy Torah. But, on the other hand, we are to be "apart from the world," viewing our main destination as the World to Come, the world of ultimate deveikus baShem, cleaving to our very Source of Life in Eternal bliss. From the vantage point of the second perspective, this world is foreign to us and we are just "strangers." In the famous words of the Chafetz Chaim - explaining his meager furnishings to a traveling wealthy man who questioned their frugality, "I'm just a traveler here just as you are." Indeed, when we reflect on the fact that all souls were created at the beginning of time and have existed ever since - with their entrance into this world being only for a relatively short period of time in their eternal existence, the Chafetz Chaim's piercing message becomes all the more apparent. But most people, especially in the world at large, act as if this world is the sum total of existence, not preparing themselves here for the next step of their eternity. The Jewish people are expected to absorb the message of

our illustrious patriarch that we are indeed "strangers" as we prepare for another World by simultaneously engaging this world in the proper fashion. When a convert joins the Jewish people, he is crowned with the title of "stranger" as if to tell him: "Welcome to the Jewish people, a community which views itself ultimately as strangers (geirim) in this world!"

Based on the above, perhaps we can suggest one reason as to why converts do not receive inheritance in Eretz Yisrael in the pre-messianic era but do in the post-messianic one. Another group among the Jewish people does not receive inheritance, namely, kohanim and levi'im. Concerning them, the Torah writes, "Hashem is their inheritance" (Devarim 18:2) which can be taken to mean that since they devote themselves to avodas hamikdash and all the intense cleaving to Hashem that represents, their engagement in this world, their status as "toshavim," is limited; they are truly only "geirim." Perhaps, in a converse manner, we can suggest that converts serve as a living example of the attitude that all Jews ultimately should strive for, the status of "stranger" in this world, similar to that of kohanim and leviyim (see Rambam end of the laws of Shemitta v'Yovel). In the messianic era though, with the lessening or elimination of the Evil Inclination (see Ramban, Nitzavim 30:6), the danger that engaging in the matters of this world will cause a disconnect from our primary, spiritual focus ceases. Ownership of land in Israel, the only real estate in our world endowed with sanctity is, in the words of the Ibn Ezra, like owning a share in the World to Come (Bereishis 33:19). Nonetheless, in the pre-messianic era, ownership of even part of that Holy Land and engaging in developing it in a physical way, can bring one to pre-occupation with physicality and is therefore not the lot of the kohanim and levi'im, nor, according to our approach, of converts (cf. the view of R. Shimon b. Yochai, Berachos 35b). But ideally, all should be able to own part of the Holy Land, elevating its physical aspects[2]. Indeed, Yechezkel prophesies exactly that both for converts and seemingly levi'im (ibid. 45:5)[3].

The recently celebrated holiday of Shavuot, in addition to being Chag Matan Toraseinu, is also the holiday of our national conversion. (See Kerisus 9a, Rambam (Issurei Biah 13:1-3). This is one of the reasons for the reading of Megillas Rus on that holiday. The personal experience of recent world events of the past five years and all the more so the study of the tragic events the Jewish people have undergone during the millennia-old exile have taught us how precarious existence in this world in general and specifically that of the Jewish people are without Divine protection. Recent events have underscored the reality as to how tenuous our grasp on the Land of Israel is even with a standing government and army. In a word, the truism of our status as "geirim"

## Likutei Divrei Torah

is unescapable. The Torah constantly adjures us to not rely solely on our own power and initiative or, in other words, not to view the natural order in this world as the sum total of its essence. Instead, we are directed to seek Heavenly assistance and providence in all of our endeavors while generally simultaneously being active participants in the activities of the world and the defense of our people. This is true of all life events and is certainly highlighted in times of war in which the Jewish people once again find themselves. In the merit of our allegiance to the dual attitude of "ger v'toshav" of our patriarch Avraham, may we merit shalom ba'aretz and the geulah sheleima speedily in our days!

[1] A transcript of this lecture by Rav Yitzchak Etshalom is available at <https://torah.org/torah-portion/mikra-5774-behaaloscha/>.

[2] See the fascinating parallel of the sanctity Land of Israel to that of the Torah presented by Rabbi Benjamin Yudin, quoting the Arvei Nachal, in his article, The Torah Gives "Allot" to Every Jew.

[3] Kohanim remain landless except for areas designated for residence as was true always (ibid. 44:28). This distinction requires additional study. Above, we followed the view of Rashbam (Bava Basra 122a) and Malbim (Yechezkel ibid.) that leviyim will receive a regular inheritance of land in the messianic era. Others maintain that leviyim, similar to their kohanic counterparts, only receive land for residence. (See Rambam ibid. and Ran to Bava Basra (ibid.))

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### Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

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#### Missing Much More than Half

And when the people complained, it displeased HASHEM; and HASHEM heard it; and His anger was kindled; and the fire of HASHEM burnt among them, and consumed those who were in the outlying parts of the camp. (Bamidbar 11:1)

One thing is for certain. If you want to try to figure out what HASHEM wants from us and what HASHEM does not want from us, it is abundantly clear, even without a deep reading, that complaining is strongly not recommended. Frankly, nobody appreciates complaining. It betrays a lack of trust and a shortage of gratitude. Not only that, but it is not an effective tool to "win friends and influence people". Maybe it works in the short run. "The squeaky wheel gets the grease!" However, for the long haul, it's not an effective way to build or retain a relationship with the important people in our lives or with the Creator of the Universe either.

Rabbi Yonason Eibshitz ztl. pointed out a percentage point difference between two statements from the sages. One says that "If somebody has 100 then he wants 200!" It's the nature of a person to want even more than what he has attained. This statement seems to say that he has reached 50% of his ambitions. Another phrase states that "a person does not leave this world having fulfilled half of his desires." That means he reached, at best, 49.9%, and certainly he did not get to the 50-yard line of his hopes and dreams. How do we square this circle? How do we reconcile the subtle and percentage point differential between these two statements about human nature. It's not a joke!

Rabbi Yonason Eibshitz ztl. offers a brilliant answer with profoundly personal implications. He says that the half that the person does not have is more-dear to him than the half that he does have. So, while quantitatively he may have reached 50%, attitudinally and qualitatively he is still shy of that halfway mark. When my daughters would ask me, if they can go buy more shoes in Marshalls, I would point out to them how many shoes they have in the shoe bag behind the door. I came to appreciate that the shoes that are in Marshalls are more-dear to them than the shoes they have already.

The Mishne in Pirke (4:1) asks, "Who is the wealthy person?" It answers, "The one who is (SOMAYACH B'CHLKO) happy with his portion."

We understand that the person who celebrates what he has rather than complaining about what he doesn't have or lacks is the truly wealthy person. That makes a lot of common sense.

I was thinking of a different answer recently. The word that's used for one's portion is CHELEK. The mystical books are telling us that Hashem breathed a breath of life into humanity and that divine investment is referred to as a "CHELEK ELOCHAI M'MAAL MAMASH" – An actual piece of G-dliness that resides within the person. One who knows how to exercise, stimulate, and rejoice with his G-dly soul, is the wealthy person. How is it done?

Rabbi E.E. Dessler says that worry and unhappiness begin when one has ambitions that are dependent upon other people. When someone has a spiritual goal that is only reliant upon his degree of desire and doing, then he has control over his destiny and can choose to excite and rejoice his G-dly CHELEK.

Rather than complaining and blaming and looking for fault, and feeling lack, frustration, and jealousy, it becomes possible to adjust our mindset and become truly optimistic. We always hear that an optimist is someone who sees the glass as half full and the pessimist sees the glass as half empty. The Torah has an entirely different approach, I do believe to optimism and pessimism. There is a story about two brothers, twins one was an optimist, and the other one was a pessimist. On their birthday, their father decided to put their attitudes and nature to test. For the pessimist, he bought a room filled with toys. When he went to see what his response was, he observed his son sitting there and fretting about all the toys. "What if it runs out of batteries!? What if it breaks?! What if somebody borrows it and doesn't return it? Where am I gonna keep all of this stuff!?" Then he went to visit the optimist. For his birthday, he filled a room with a giant pile of horse manure. He found the boy was jumping and skipping with joy. He asked his son, "Why are you so happy?" The boy replied, "there has to be a pony in here someplace!"

The world is dense with the presence of HASHEM. There is no place which is absent of His presence. A Torah optimist does not see a glass as half full. It is brimming! If a pessimist sees a glass half full, he is missing much more than half.

going to war: we need to defend ourselves, G-d forbid having to kill people, including unfortunately civilians which are never targeted by Israel but sometimes caught in the attempts to save lives, release hostages and kill terrorists. How do we put this into a spiritual perspective?

In this week's parasha we are told to make two silver trumpets, which we are to blow to gather the troops to go to war – the same trumpets that are used in the service in the Temple at the time of sacrifices. In fact, the Rambam counts this as one mitzvah, the same trumpets used to gather people for war and for sacrifices. Rav Moshe Feinstein said that this doesn't apply today, because the trumpets used for war must be the same ones used in the Beit HaMikdash. We see an incredible principle – wars to be fought are a spiritual endeavor, not something only for physical and security measures, they are something that stem from the deepest, spiritual principles. When we go out to war, we have to know that the trumpets calling us to war are the same trumpets used in the Beit HaMikdash, as an extension of the service of Hashem. The harsh and tragic reality of war is the need to fight for our values, to defend the values that are most important to us.

In addition, every time we take out and put back the Torah, we read the verses from this week's parasha – the verses said when the Jewish people go out to war and take the Aron out with them. From this we see the values of Hashem that are defended in war are not only the survival of the Jewish people but also the values that we believe in. Therefore, we see the battles of the Jewish people are the battles of G-d. It is a battle against the barbaric, dark values by those who portray the beauty and G-dliness of life.

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#### Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez

#### The Jewish Approach to War

One of the most challenging things today is what is the religious, Torah perspective of war? How should we view the harsh and difficult circumstance of



BS"D

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From **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** [ryfrand@torah.org](mailto:ryfrand@torah.org) [ravfrand@torah.org](mailto:ravfrand@torah.org)  
Date Jun 11, 2025, 11:34 PM  
Subject Rav 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 continued; the sederim (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 is not provided on a silver platter, we must continue our lives. Torah and mitzvos must continue.

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/behaalotecha/the-duality-of-camp-and-congregation/>  
Covenant & Conversation

**Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZTL**

**The Duality of Camp and Congregation**

בהעלותך

**Beha'alotecha • 5779**

**silver trumpets**

The Duality of Camp and Congregation

The parsha of Beha'alotecha speaks about the silver trumpets — clarions — Moses was commanded to make:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Make two trumpets of silver; make them of hammered work. They shall serve you to summon the congregation [edah] and cause the camps [machanot] to journey." Num. 10:1–2

This apparently simple passage became a springboard for one of the most profound meditations of the late Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik. It appears in his great essay Kol Dodi Dofek, on the Jewish approach to suffering.[1]

There are, says Rabbi Soloveitchik, two ways in which people become a group — a community, society, or nation. The first is when they face a common enemy. They band together for mutual protection. Like all animals who come together in herds or flocks to defend themselves against predators, we do this for our survival. Such a group is a machaneh — a camp, a defensive formation.

There is another, quite different, form of association. People can come together because they share a vision, an aspiration, a set of ideals. This is the meaning of edah, congregation. Edah is related to the word ed, witness. Edot (as opposed to chukim and mishpatim) are the commands that testify to



Jewish belief – as Shabbat testifies to creation, Passover to the Divine involvement in history, and so on. An edah is not a defensive formation but a creative one. People join together to do what none could achieve alone. A true congregation is a society built around a shared project, a vision of the common good, an edah.

Rabbi Soloveitchik says these are not just two types of group, but in the most profound sense, two different ways of existing and relating to the world. A camp is brought into being by what happens to it from the outside. A congregation comes into existence by internal decision. The former is reactive, the latter proactive. The first is a response to what has happened to the group in the past. The second represents what the group seeks to achieve in the future. Whereas camps exist even in the animal kingdom, congregations are uniquely human. They flow from the human ability to think, speak, communicate, envision a society different from any that has existed in the past, and to collaborate to bring it about.

Jews are a people in both of these two quite different ways. Our ancestors became a machaneh in Egypt, forged together by a crucible of slavery and suffering. They were different. They were not Egyptians. They were Hebrews – a word which probably means “on the other side,” “an outsider.” Ever since, Jews have known that we are thrown together by circumstance. We share a history all too often written in tears. Rabbi Soloveitchik calls this the covenant of fate (brit goral).

This is not a purely negative phenomenon. It gives rise to a powerful sense that we are part of a single story – that what we have in common is stronger than the things that separate us:

Our fate does not distinguish between rich and poor...[or] between the pietist and the assimilationist. Even though we speak a plethora of languages, even though we are inhabitants of different lands...we still share the same fate. If the Jew in the hovel is beaten, then the security of the Jew in the palace is endangered. “Do not think that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king’s palace” (Esther. 4:13).

Rosenberg, *Theological and Halachic Reflections on the Holocaust*, p. 84. Our shared community’s fate leads also to a sense of shared suffering. When we pray for the recovery of a sick person, we do so “among all the sick of Israel.” When we comfort a mourner, we do so “among all the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.” We weep together. We celebrate together. This in turn leads to shared responsibility: “All Israel are sureties for one another.”[2] And this leads to collective action in the field of welfare, charity, and deeds of loving kindness. As Maimonides puts it:

All Israelites ...are like brothers, as it is said, “You are children of the Lord your God” (Deut. 14:1). If brother shows no compassion to brother, who will? ...Their eyes are therefore lifted to their brothers.[3]

All these are dimensions of the covenant of fate, born in the experience of slavery in Egypt. But there is an additional element of Jewish identity. Soloveitchik calls this the covenant of destiny (brit ye’ud) – entered into at Mount Sinai. This defines the people of Israel not as the object of persecution but the subject of a unique vocation, to become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6).

Under this covenant, we became defined not by what others do to us but by the task we have undertaken, the role we have chosen to play in history. In Egypt we did not choose to become slaves, that was a fate thrust upon us by someone else. We did, however, choose to become God’s people at Sinai when said, “We will do and obey” (Ex. 24:7). Destiny, call, vocation, purpose, task: these create not a machaneh but an edah, not a camp but a congregation.

Our task as a people of destiny is to bear witness to the presence of God – through the way we lead our lives (Torah) and the path we chart as a people across the centuries (history).

G. K. Chesterton once wrote that “America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed.”[4] Chesterton was notoriously antisemitic, and this evidently prevented him from recalling that the reason America was founded on a creed was that its founders, Puritans all, were steeped in what they called the Old Testament. They took as their model the covenant made between God and the Israelites at Sinai, and it was this that linked

nationhood and the idea of a specific task or mission. Herman Melville gave this one of its classic expressions in his 1849 novel, *White-Jacket*:

We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people – the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world.... God has predestined, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls. The rest of the nations must soon be in our rear. We are pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours.

Herman Melville, *White-Jacket* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 153. [5]

It is the concept of covenant that gives Jewish (and American) identity this strange dual character. Nations are usually forged through long historical experience, through what happens to them – rather than what they consciously set themselves to do. They fall into the category of machaneh. Religions, on the other hand, are defined in terms of beliefs and a sense of mission. Each is constituted as an edah. What is unique about Judaism is the way it brings together these separate and quite distinct ideas. There are nations that contain many religions and there are religions that are spread over many nations, but only in the case of Judaism do religion and nation coincide.

This has had remarkable consequences. For almost two thousand years Jews were scattered throughout the world, yet they saw themselves (and were seen by others) as a nation – the world’s first global nation. It was a nation held together not by geographical proximity or any other of the normal accompaniments of nationhood. Jews did not speak the same vernacular. Rashi spoke French, Maimonides Arabic. Rashi lived in a Christian culture, Maimonides in a Muslim one. Nor was their fate the same. While the Jews of Spain were enjoying their Golden Age, the Jews of northern Europe were being massacred in the Crusades. In the fifteenth century, when the Jews of Spain were being persecuted and expelled, those of Poland were enjoying a rare spring of tolerance.

What held Jews together during these centuries was shared faith. In the trauma that accompanied European Emancipation and the subsequent rise of racial antisemitism, many Jews lost that faith. Yet the events of the past century – persecution, pogroms, and the Holocaust, followed by the birth of the State of Israel and the constant fight to survive against war and terror – tended to bind Jews together in a covenant of fate in the face of the hostility of the world. So when Jews were divided by fate they were united by faith, and when they were divided by faith they were united again by fate. Such is the irony, or the providential nature, of Jewish history.

Judaism in the past two centuries has fissured and fractured into different edot: Orthodox and Reform, religious and secular, and the many subdivisions that continue to atomise Jewish life into non-communicating sects and subcultures. Yet in times of crisis we are still capable of heeding the call of collective responsibility, knowing as we do that Jewish fate tends to be indivisible. No Jew, to paraphrase John Donne, is an island, entirely to him- or herself. We are joined by the gossamer strands of collective memory, and these can sometimes lead us back to a sense of shared destiny.

So, a camp and a congregation. Judaism is both. This duality was given its first expression this week in Beha’alotecha, with the command: “Make two trumpets of silver; make them of hammered work. They shall serve you to summon the congregation [edah], and cause the camps [machanot] to journey.” Sometimes the clarion call speaks to our sense of faith. We are God’s people, His emissaries and ambassadors, charged with making His presence real in the world by healing deeds and holy lives. At other times the trumpet that sounds and summons us is the call of fate: Jewish lives endangered in Israel or the Diaspora by the unremitting hostility of those who call themselves children of Abraham yet claim that they, not we, are his true heirs.

Whichever sound the silver instruments make, they call on that duality that makes Jews and Judaism inseparable. However deep the divisions between us, we remain one family in fate and faith. When the trumpet sounds, it sounds for us.



- [1] Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Kol Dodi Dofek: Listen, My Beloved Knocks, trans. David Z. Gordon ( Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2006). A translation also appears in Bernhard H. Rosenberg (ed.), Theological and Halachic Reflections on the Holocaust (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1992).
- [2] Sanhedrin 27b; Shavuot 39a.
- [3] Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Matanot LeEvyonim 10:2.
- [4] G. K. Chesterton, What I Saw in America (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1922), 7.
- [5] Also see Jonathan Sacks, "The Universal Story", in Pesach Haggadah (Jerusalem: Maggid, 2013), 75–84.

**Rabbi Michael Taubes** <mtaubes@y...>

Thu, Jun 12, 9:05 PM ..

The Torah tells us in this week's parashah:

"כִּי תֵבֹאוּ מִלְחָמָה בְּאַרְצְכֶם... וְהִרְעַתֶּם בְּקִצְצֹרוֹת וּנְזִכְרֶתֶם לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְנִשְׁעַתֶּם מֵאֲדִיכֶם"

"When you go to war in your land... you shall sound the trumpets, and you shall be remembered before Hashem your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies." (Bamidbar 10:9)

Though we are geographically far away from the current battle in Eretz Yisrael, we nonetheless have a responsibility to daven (which in cases like this constitutes a Mitzvah MideOraisa according to all authorities in light of the above passuk).

I urge everyone to daven with heightened kavannah at this critical time and to recite extra Tehillim, either alone or with others. ..

May Hashem answer all of our Tefillos and protect our chayalin and all of our brothers and sisters. And may we merit hearing only Besoros Tovos bekarov. By'didus Rabbah, M. Taubes

from: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com>

date: Jun 12, 2025, 10:04 PM

subject: Potomac Torah Study Center Devrei Torah for Shabbat Behaalotecha 5785

BS"D June 13, 2025.

Potomac Torah Study Center Vol. 12 #34, June 13-14, 2025;18 Sivan 5785; **Behaalotecha 5785**

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 during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, hostilities cease, and a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace. May Hashem protect our brave IDF fighters as they seek to protect Israel and the world by destroying Iran's nuclear capability. We also continue to mourn for Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim, murdered May 21 outside the Capital Jewish Museum in Washington, DC. For more, see the outstanding tribute by Bari Weiss:

<https://www.thefp.com/p/welcome-to-the-global-intifada>

*As I prepare to send out my material, I have learned that Israel started attacking Iran's nuclear facilities a few minutes ago. May this military action prove successful, with the help of Hashem.*

Behaalotecha is a long, complex parsha with numerous incidents that at first seem not all to be related. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik (the Rav) presented a brilliant Dvar Torah on the parsha 51 years ago this week. (Rabbi Yitz Etshalom transcribed this Dvar, and it is available in the archives of Mikra on Torah.org, as well as attached to the email version of this posting.) The Rav connected all the incidents in the parsha into one unified explanation that showed that they are all part of one story, which he summarized as a crisis in Moshe's leadership. As I read the various Devrei Torah in this compilation, I wonder why almost none of the authors deal with the Rav's insights. Rather, we read about Aharon's unhappiness at not being able to participate in giving a gift for installing the Mishkan, Hashem's promise of an even more important contribution (lighting the Menorah every morning),

Yitro's meeting with Moshe, the inverted nuns setting off the beginning of the sixth aliyah, the meaning of the lights in the Menorah – all significant details. However, why are there so few discussions taking advantage of the Rav's insights about Moshe's depression, the meaning of the inverted nuns, the impact of the sixth aliyah on the coming doom of the generation of the Exodus, and Miriam's tzaraat?

Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Dov Linzer observes that it is easy to relate to faith in Hashem in an isolated desert, as B'Nai Yisrael have been, by the base of Har Sinai for more than a year, when the parsha opens. The real challenge is when the Jews leave the neighborhood of Har Sinai to travel to Canaan, going into unknown territory and encountering other tribes from time to time. Two million Jews who until recently had been slaves for many years need to learn to trust God and look to a better future rather than remembering the greater variety of food items available in Egypt. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, focuses on Moshe's crisis of faith and depression from the constant complaints of many of the Jews. Hashem instructs Moshe to appoint seventy elders to share the burden with him. God shares some of Moshe's spirit with these men, and the spirit of these men helps bring Moshe out of his depression. The Torah here relates that Moshe's humility, which others might interpret as weakness, is actually his greatest virtue and strength.

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine relates Aharon's craving to honor Hashem to remind us that we should honor and support those who contribute to the Torah. Positive cravings pave the way to greatness. Rabbi Marc Angel and Eran Rolls provide case history stories to demonstrate that Jewish institutions grow when they welcome people to emulate the welcoming that Aharon provides to the Jews of his time. These messages are relevant to the parsha and tikkun olam – however they do not incorporate the Rav's amazing insights on what I consider the key features of the parsha.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander, as usual, focuses on what I consider some of the key elements of the parsha. The sixth aliyah opens with the two short verses inside two inverted nuns (10:35-36) describing how the Aron miraculously leads the people to move, after more than a year at the base of Har Sinai. As the Rav explains, these verses symbolize the ideal of the people aligned with Hashem as the Ark leads the people forward to the land that Hashem promised to our ancestors. Immediately, however, some people start complaining – looking for a reason to complain. The people seem unable to trust in Hashem and follow His lead. Everything falls apart from this point. Moshe cannot control the people. Miriam and Aharon complain about Moshe and his wife, and Hashem reacts by giving Miriam tzaraat. The people ask for some leaders to view the land, and Moshe sends leaders from the tribes to view the land and bring back a report (more next week). Korach initiates a revolt. (Rabbi Yitzchok Magriso, an 18th Century author from Constantinople, studies the dates in the Torah carefully and discovers that the remaining events involving the generation of the Exodus all take 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. (See Torah Anthology, 13.333-34.)) These are the final incidents for the generation of the Exodus. The Torah presents the laws of dealing with tumah from contact with a dead body (since there will soon be hundreds of thousands of deaths).

There is a gap of thirty-eight years in the Torah, and we are suddenly in the final year before entering Canaan.

God reacts to the constant complaints of the people by ruling that the generation of the Exodus will all die out (with only two exceptions) over the next forty years, and that only the children of the current adults will survive to go into and take over the land (14:20-23). As Rabbi Brander states, the generation of the Exodus fails and must die out in the Midbar. However, the next generation, the children of the time, will renew the promise and inherit the land. Rabbi Brander relates this story to the Haftarah. Zechariah calls on the people of his time to return from exile, rebuild their spiritual identity, rebuild the Temple, and bring in a new period for B'Nai Yisrael in the land that Hashem had promised to our ancestors. In Zechariah's vision, Yehoshua, the Kohen Gadol, stands before an angel, removes his filthy

garments (symbol of sin), washes, and puts on pure vestments. Hashem permits Yehoshua and the generation of Zechariah's time to reaffirm His promise to our ancestors. Rabbi Brander reminds us that our generation faces the same challenge and opportunity as that of Yehoshua, the Kohen Gadol. May we see a time when Israel, with the various segments of our people, unite so we can bring peace and move toward a new, golden age for Israel and Jews everywhere..

Shabbat Shalom,  
Hannah and Alan

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From **RIETS Kollel Elyon** from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack <riets@substack.com>

Date Jun 10, 2025, 5:25 PM

subject **Behaalotekha: Humility and the Dangers of Virtue Signaling**  
**Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman**

It would not be false modesty to acknowledge that humility is a challenging concept. Moses is identified in this week's Torah reading as "the most humble (anav) of all men (Num. 12:3)", clearly a statement of praise, although its exact parameters, and relevance in this context, inserted in the middle of the recording of his siblings speaking negatively (lashon hara) about him, remain unclear.

One of the most baffling references is the statement of the Talmud (Sotah 49b), after declaring that with R. Yehudah HaNasi's death, 'anavah' disappeared from the world. R. Yosef objects: Do not say anavah has disappeared, as there is me ("ana")!

This passage has perplexed many; the idea of anyone proclaiming their own modesty certainly seems contradictory. Some have even suggested that there must have been a third person being referenced with the name 'Ana' (or Anna?).

At a minimum, this passage conveys that the true meaning of the term is elusive. In our parashah, we can assume that it did not require Moses to deny his uniqueness; in fact, the meaning may have been the opposite.

Rabbi Judah Lowe, known as the Maharal of Prague, posited a theory of lashon hara that excludes speech in front of the subject (Netivot Olam, Netiv HaLashon, ch. 7) which essentially is an extension of a Talmudic opinion that speech in front of the subject is not lashon hara. From a textual narrative perspective, the Chafetz Chaim (Klal 2, in n. 2.) and others challenged the Maharal's position by noting the central story of Miriam's lashon hara against her brother Moses. According to at least one midrashic opinion, Moses was present at the time. Apparently, this did not change the classification of the conversation as lashon hara.

Some suggest that the story of Moses is actually a proof to the Maharal's position. Their assumption is that the main factor is the ability of the victim to respond. However, since Moses is described by the Torah in this context as exceedingly humble, the implication is that this constitutes a unique situation where the victim would not respond, and therefore his presence does not mitigate the lashon hara, an exception to the general rule (R Dovid Kohn, Harchavat Gevul Ya'avetz, pp. 92-93).

Perhaps anavah as typified by Moses refers to a sense of self-awareness that does not require validation from any other human being. Some suggest, in this context, that Moses' humility was such that he did not need his closest relatives to know of his unique status and why their judgements regarding him were unfounded.

The Rabbis taught, "Say little and do much"; my grandfather noted an interpretation that combined the two: say little about the much that you do. The phenomenon of "virtue signaling" is not only immodest; its harm is actually greater than that. First, it has a tendency to crowd out actual accomplishment, and thus reduce virtue in favor of signaling.

Second, and more egregiously, it often takes the easier path, i.e. that of condemning others, so that one can look superior in comparison. The Talmud calls this "mitkabbed b'klon chavro", honoring one's self through the disgrace of his fellow, and indicates variously great reward for avoiding this behavior or terrible punishment for engaging in it (Megillah 28a; Yerushalmi Chagigah 2:1; Gen. Rabbah 1:5; Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos Deiot

6:3 and Hilkhos Teshuvah 3:14). That can be readily understood: as all the attention is comparative, there is no actual substantive merit to be found in the one utilizing this tool.

This desire for comparative glory is also one of the motivations for speaking lashon hara (see Divrei Yirmiyahu, Hil. Deiot 7:2. See also The Watercooler Effect, p. 69 and p. 101 for expansions on this theme). Social psychologists call this "downward social comparison", in contrast with upward comparisons, which are efforts to improve by following the practices of those perceived as being superior (see John D. Mayer, Personal Intelligence, p. 198).

This distinction is evocative of a story related about R. Yisrael (Lipkin) Salanter, the founder of the "mussar movement", devoted to personal introspection and improvement. The story describes the rabbi coming upon two children quarreling. The subject of their heated dispute was which of the two boys was the taller. In a final act of desperation, one child pushed the other to the ground, and, standing over him, proclaimed, "There, now I am the taller one!" R. Yisrael helped the defeated child to his feet and then said to the aggressor, "There was no need to push him to the ground to prove that you were taller—all you had to do was stand on a box!"

R. Eliyahu Meir Bloch (Shiurei U'Pinenei Da'at), the Rosh Yeshiva of the Telz Yeshiva, commented that it is easy for one who does not want to overtly praise himself to instead claim that he is righteously bemoaning the failings of his surroundings, and thus to boost himself by comparison. This desire to inflate oneself at the expense of the other may be rooted in simple self-aggrandizement, or it may target the subject specifically, either because of a pre-existing antipathy, or, very commonly, because of jealousy (See R. Eliezer Geldzehler, Torat Eliezer, letter #1, p. 164, and R. Matisyahu Solomon in the journal Kol Torah, XL, pp. 112-115).

Paradoxically, all of this may have contributed to R. Yosef's need to "signal" his humility. Of course, there is apparent irony, almost humorously so, in the proclaiming of one's own humility; but a second statement is equally surprising: "R. Nachman said, do not say fear of sin [has disappeared], for there is me." Presumably, the righteous would not be expected to sing their own praises regarding any attribute. As the Maharsha suggests, this atypical behavior is perhaps driven by the need to correct the record on a crucial matter. To anyone who would say, there is no room for humility in the modern era; fear of sin, religious belief, is antiquated, incompatible with the contemporary ethos, it is vitally necessary to protest - there is still a place, a possibility for modesty, restraint, and quiet Godliness, and there are still role models to prove it so. We still may not completely understand what anavah is; we definitely know what it is not.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

**Drasha**

**By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

Parshas Behaaloscha

Fatherly Rebuke

This week's portion ends with a disheartening story, one that Jews are reminded to recount every day of their lives. The great prophetess, Miriam, sister of Moshe and heroine to a nation, spoke lashon horah (gossip) about her brother Moshe, "regarding the Cushite woman he had married. And Hashem heard." (Numbers 12:3)

She was upset at Moshe's righteous reaction to his omnipresent Divine communication, which had him separate from an intimate matrimonial life. "(Miriam) said (to Ahron), 'Was it only to Moshe that Hashem spoke? Did He not speak to us, as well?'" (ibid v.3)

After harsh rebuke from the Almighty for the audacity to speak against her brother Moshe, the world's greatest prophet and most humble man, Miriam

was punished with leprosy. Her skin turned white as snow. But Moshe was not daunted by her remarks. His unyielding concern for her welfare proved itself as he fervently prayed for her immediate recovery and looked for Divine direction for the next step of penitence.

“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Were her father to spit in her face, would she not be humiliated for seven days? Let her be quarantined outside the camp for seven days, and then she may be brought in.’”(ibid v.14)The Talmud in Tractate Bava Kama, infers a logical supposition: if a father’s wrath would result in a seven-day quarantine, surely (kal v’chomer) G-d’s wrath should effect a fourteen-day punishment. However, an integral component of Talmudic exegesis states that a law that is derived by a kal v’chomer (a fortiori conclusion) can be only as strict as the baseline law from which it is derived, and not go beyond it. Therefore, even as a consequence of G-d’s reprimand, surely more potent than a father’s rebuke, would also warrant only be a seven-day punishment.

For example, if assault warrants a 30-day prison sentence, the logic of kal v’chomer cannot help us deduce that the crime of murder would warrant the death penalty. It can only meet the level of the baseline premise. Thus, if assault warrants a 30-day prison sentence, surely, or kal v’chomer, murder would warrant a 30-day prison sentence. For a longer sentence you would need a direct command.

However, while Divine chastisement should warrant a harsher ban, nevertheless, since Hashem used a fatherly analogy, Miriam was spared and only excommunicated for seven days. The question is why did Hashem use the parental analogy and thus limit the punishment to seven days? If there was a slight to the Divinity, then why not immediately use the Divine analogy to inflict a harsher punishment? What did Hashem want in mitigating the reprimand by asking, “If her father would spit in her face, would she not be humiliated for seven days.”?

William Howard Taft, the 27th President of the United States, did not have a record as chief executive without distinction, though it was beclouded by the bitter political factional quarrel that ended his presidency after one term. He was sitting at the supper table with his family one evening, and, as children sometimes do, his son directed a disrespectful remark toward him. Mrs. Taft looked at her husband and exclaimed, “I am sure you will not let that pass unpunished!”

Taft replied, “If he directed the remark toward me as President of the United States, I will let it pass as his Constitutional right. However, as a father to his child, I will surely deal with this abuse!”

Perhaps Hashem, in reprimanding Miriam as a father and not the Divine Presence, sent us all a message about the pain of lashon horah. Lashon Horah is considered a terrible sin. The Torah has no less than 31 warnings concerning that crime, and it is incumbent upon Jews to remember the story of Miriam as a daily reminder of the difficult test we face in our encounters and our oral reactions to them.

However, Hashem did not want to rebuke Miriam as Master of the Universe. He did not use the severity of the rebuke of the Divine Presence to ban her from the camp for fourteen days. Instead, he used a parental analogy, “If her father would spit.” His rebuke did not come as a King but rather as a Father, hurt and dismayed about how one of his children talked against a sibling.

If we fail to avoid speaking lashon horah because of the pain that it inflicts upon our fellow Jews, I will give you another reason. Worry about the pain we inflict upon our Father in Heaven when we talk ill of his children. Think about how a parent cries when he sees his children quibble, and then remember that it is also Our Father in Heaven who hears how we talk about our sisters and brothers.

Dedicated in memory of Irving I. Adelsberg by the Adelsberg Family — Reb Yitzchok Isaac ben R’ Gedalia o”h 12 Sivan  
Good Shabbos!

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from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>

**B'halotcha**

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The troubles, disappointments and disasters that visit the Jewish people on their trek through the Sinai desert begin in this week’s parsha. Moshe announces that “we are traveling now to our ultimate destination – the Land of Israel.”

But deep down in their hearts the people are not really that anxious to go there. They have in their minds and hearts two options, either to remain in the desert and live a life of supernatural miracles and there become the dor deah – the generation of exclusive intellect and Torah knowledge, or to return somehow to Egypt with all that that radical move would entail, physically and spiritually.

The Torah will soon detail for us that neither of these two options are satisfactory either. They will complain about the manna that falls from heaven daily and the seeming lack of variety in their meals. They don’t like the water supply, which is never guaranteed to them. They remember the good food that they supposedly had in Egypt, but according to Midrash, only a small minority actually wishes to return to Egypt on a permanent basis. They will press forward with Moshe to reach the promised Land of Israel, but they will do so reluctantly and halfheartedly.

This will lead inexorably to further rebellion, tragedy and the death of an entire generation – notwithstanding its being a dor deah – in the desert of Sinai. This makes this week’s parsha a sad and depressing one, for we already know the end of the story. We can already see that this generation has doomed itself to desolation and destruction.

Coming to the Land of Israel and its Jewish state, whether as a tourist and most certainly when someone immigrates, requires commitment and enthusiasm. There are many who came to Israel over the past one hundred years by default, but the country has truly been served and built by those who came with a sense of mission, purpose, happiness and expectation. Moshe’s clarion call, “that we are traveling to the place” of our destiny, echoes throughout the Jewish ages. Not all such calls are heard and even fewer are followed. Nevertheless, the call has resonated within the Jewish people throughout its history. It is that call that appears in today’s parsha and again it is that call that Moshe proclaimed millennia ago that was and is the guiding motive for the existence of the State of Israel today.

Just as then in the desert, there are options for Jews today present in our world. The many “Egypt” of the world beckon with their seeming allure but also with great underlying faults and dangers. And there are those who wish to continue to live in a desert that demands nothing from them and contemplate themselves somehow as being a dor deah. History has always arisen and smitten these options from the Jewish future. The long trek begun by Moshe and Israel in this week’s parsha continues. We hope that we are witnessing, at last, its final successful conclusion.

Shabat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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subject: [Rav Kook Torah]

**Rav Kook Torah**

**Beha'alotcha: Great Dreams**

Unlike the unique clarity of Moses’ prophecy, ordinary prophecy is communicated through the medium of visions and dreams:

“If someone among you experiences Divine prophecy, I will make Myself known to him in a vision; I will speak to him in a dream.” (Num. 12:6)  
But why dreams?

The Power of Dreams

Dreams, Rav Kook wrote, perform a vital function in the world. Great dreams are the very foundation of the universe.

Dreams come in many forms. There are the prescient dreams of prophets. The conscious dreaming of poets. The idealistic dreams of great visionaries for a better world. And our national dreams of redemption — “When God will return the captivity of Zion, we will be like dreamers” (Psalms 126:1).

Of course, not every dream falls under the category of a great dream. Most dreams are petty or pointless, as it says, “Dreams speak falsely” (Zechariah 10:2).

So what determines whether a dream is meaningless or prophetic?

True Dreams and False Dreams

It all depends on the dreamer.

Those who are truly servants of God concentrate their aspirations and efforts on rectifying the world. When one’s thoughts and actions are devoted exclusively to perfecting all of creation, then one’s imagination will only be stimulated by matters that relate to the universal reality. Their dreams will naturally be of great significance, reflecting the inner truth of reality, to its past, present, and future.

But the imaginative faculties of people preoccupied with self-serving pursuits will be limited — like their waking thoughts and actions — to personal matters. What great truth could be revealed in imaginings that never succeeded in rising above the vain thoughts and desires of a self-centered individual?

The Sages expressed this idea allegorically by explaining that angels bring prophetic dreams and demons bring false dreams (Berachot 55b). What does this mean?

Angels are constant forces in the universe, pre-arranged to perfect the world. True dreams relate to these underlying positive forces. Demons, on the other hand, are unholy forces rooted in private desires which are inconsistent with the overall universal order. False dreams are the resultant fantasies of such personal wishes.

The True Reality of Dreams

What would the world be like without dreams?

Life immersed solely in materialism is coarse and bleak. It lacks the inspiring grandeur of expansive horizons. Like a bird with clipped wings, it cannot rise above the bitter harshness of the present reality. We are only able to free ourselves from these shackles through the power of dreams.

Some foolishly pride themselves on being “realists.” They insist on taking into account only the present state of the world. But that’s a partial and fragmented view of reality. In fact, it is our dreams that liberate us from the limitations of the current reality. It is our dreams that accurately reveal the inner truth of the universe.

As that future reality is revealed, we merit an increasing clarity of vision. Our perception begins to approach the *aspaklaria* *hame'irah*, the clear vision of Moses, with whom God spoke “face to face, in a vision not containing allegory, so that he could see a true image of God” (Num. 12:8)

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from: Ohr Torah Stone <ohrtorahstone@otsny.org>

subject: **Rabbi Riskin** on the Weekly Torah Portion

**Parshat Behaalotcha: The Ram’s Horn and the Trumpet – The Secret of Jewish Music**

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

“Make yourself two silver trumpets. Make them out of beaten metal. They shall be used by you to assemble the community and for causing the camps to break camp for their journeys.” (Numbers 10:2)

Although the beginning of the book of Genesis records that Yuval was the inventor of the lyre and the pipe, when it comes to the performance of the commandments in the Torah, the only instruments which play any role are the shofar (ram’s horn) and the Chatzotzrot (silver trumpets). So, in a sense (at least from the Torah’s point of view), it is these latter two which are uniquely Jewish instruments, each with their specific, symbolic significance; the lyre and pipe are part of the heritage of humanity at large.

The shofar, as we know from Parashat Emor in Leviticus, is virtually synonymous with Rosh HaShana, resonating the creation of the world and intoning our dream of ultimate perfection of the world in the Kingship of God. The shofar next appears in Behar, the portion right after Emor, where we are commanded to sanctify the fiftieth year as a jubilee. With the completion of the forty-nine-year period of seven sabbatical cycles, the

shofar proclaims the freedom of all slaves, and the return of the original owners to their ancestral homes and lands – the redemption of the land. And it was the shofar that was heard emanating from Mount Sinai during the divine revelation of the Torah (Exodus 19:19). Hence the shofar symbolizes creation, revelation, and redemption, the perfection of the world and humanity through the Torah’s commandments.

Indeed, the very word itself, shofar, literally means beauty – the majesty expressed in the horn that crowns the ram’s regal bearing, the beauty of the ram. Perhaps it’s no coincidence that one of the two Jewish midwives who defied Pharaoh’s edict to kill all male Jews at birth – in effect the first redeemers of the Jewish people – was named Shifra, from the same root as shofar. It is no surprise, then, that the instrument marking such important occasions as the giving of the Torah, the Kingship of God on the birthday of the creation of the world, as well as the redemption of the Land of Israel, are all served by an instrument whose essence is majestic beauty.

But what about the chatzotzra, the silver trumpet? Its name connotes the very antithesis of beauty: tz-a-r means pain, narrow straits, the same root from which we derive Mitzrayim (Egypt), the land which caused pain and oppression to the Jews. In fact, the Torah alludes to this idea when it uses the words *hatzar hatzorer*, “the adversary who oppresses you” (Numbers 10:9) in the next to last verse in the segment dealing with these “silver trumpets.” The tenth chapter of Numbers in Behaalotcha opens with God commanding Moses to make two silver trumpets, chatzotzrot, and then, for ten verses, the Torah gives us the various occasions and requirements for the sounding of these “silver trumpets,” when the Israelites set out on their wanderings and when they had to assemble for war.

At this point, the chatzotzrot are very much in line with their name, expressing pain and angst, wanderings and war.

But is it all pain and angst? The same biblical section of silver trumpets also commands us to use this instrument to herald the festivals and new months, genuine occasions for joy. “And in the day of your gladness, and in your appointed seasons, and in your new moons, you shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings” (Numbers 10:10). Undoubtedly, even within a world of suffering, there are moments of victory and happiness. Moreover, we must also remember that our festivals and new months also reflect angst as well as exaltation, fear as well as freedom.

After all, on Pesach we recall the matza, which is “bread of affliction,” the food we ate as slaves in Egypt, as well as the “bread of faith” we took with us to the desert. And the Sukka recalls our wandering in an alien, dry desert as well as divine rays of protective splendor; similarly Rosh Chodesh reminds us that the essence of the moon lies both in its waxing as well as its waning nature, which expresses incompleteness and imperfection at the same time that it holds out hope for ultimate wholeness and redemption. Might not the real lesson of the chatzotzra be that it is in the challenge of the angst and the pain, in our ability to overcome the limitations and rise above the evils of servitude and exile, that the highest joys of human accomplishment and success are found?

And indeed, it is important to note that the Torah, in the chatzotzrot segment, categorizes two kinds of occasions, and two kinds of sounds. One is perhaps the expected *terua* sound, a broken sigh-sob (*ra’o’a*, broken): “And when you go to war in your land against the adversary that oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm [*terua*] with the trumpets.” *Terua* is also sounded when the Jewish people must break camp, embarking on a long journey, wandering from place to place, the forty years in the desert being a prophetic foretaste of the thousands of years of exile and wandering the Jews would have to endure.

But in addition to the *terua* sound, the Torah also commands the chatzotzrot to blow a *tekiya*, a straight, exultant, expansive sound, demonstrating that even within this world of imperfection, and perhaps emanating from our empowerment to rise above and overcome that pain and suffering, the very chatzotzra can be employed to express a *tekiya* sound of joy and well-being, of eventual perfection and redemption. The dual nature of the festivals, the very dual nature of life in the world wherein the sweet may emerge from the bitter, the honey a by-product of the bee’s sting, is expressed by the two

interconnected sounds of the chatzotzra, the terua and tekiya which emanate from the silver trumpet: witness Naomi Shemer's song, "Concerning the honey and the sting, concerning the bitter and the sweet, concerning all these things, please guard them for me, my good God." Both are necessary, the bitter as well as the sweet, for the true challenge in this world is to turn the matza of slavery into the matza of freedom, to make sweet lemonade out of bitter lemons.

With this understanding, let us revisit the Rosh HaShana shofar. The Bible calls the first day of the New Year "the day of the terua sound shall it be unto you" (Numbers 21:1), the day of the staccato, broken sound. Why a broken terua emanating from the beautiful majestic shofar, and on the day of our celebration of the creation of the world, no less?! The answer ought to be indubitably, if not painfully, clear. God created an imperfect, incomplete world – with evil as well as good, with chaos as well as order, with darkness as well as light (Isaiah 45:7). Our task is to complete it, to perfect and repair it, to mend it and make it whole. We must turn a broken terua into an exultant tekiya!

Shabbat Shalom

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[https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/6917661/jewish/16-Facts-About-the-Jews-of-India.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6917661/jewish/16-Facts-About-the-Jews-of-India.htm)

### **16 Facts About the Jews of India**

**By Yehuda Altein**

India isn't the first place that comes to mind when people think of Jewish communities around the world. But from the Cochin Jews on the Malabar Coast, to the Bene Israel in the Mumbai region, and the Baghdadi Jews of the bustling port cities, Jewish life in India goes back many centuries. Read on for 16 facts about the fascinating story of the Jews of India.

#### **1. India Was a Safe Haven for Ancient Jewish Refugees**

Cochin is a city in the state of Kerala along the Malabar coast in southwest India. Remarkably, this city was home to a Jewish community for over 600 years. According to a tradition preserved by Cochin's Jews, their ancestors fled to India after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, settling in a town called Shingly (modern-day Kodungallur). Around 1340, they began to move to nearby Cochin, where the community flourished for centuries.

#### **2. They Were Welcomed by Local Rulers**

India's rulers were historically tolerant of minority groups, including Jews, respecting them and encouraging them to uphold their practices and beliefs. When the Jews first arrived in Shingly, the local raja (prince) welcomed them warmly, and Cochin Jews continued to enjoy peaceful relations with the leaders of Kerala up until modern times.

#### **3. There Were Malabaris and Paradesis**

In the 1500s, the Portuguese took control of parts of India's coastline. Around the same time, Jews who had been expelled from Spain and Portugal arrived in the new colony. These newcomers—called Paradesis (meaning "foreigners" or "white ones")—settled alongside the local Cochin Jews, who were known as Malabaris, meaning "People of the Malabar Coast."

#### **4. They Lived in "Jew Town"**

In about 1565, the ruler of Cochin gave the Jews a plot of land right next to his palace. This area became known as "Jew Town." At its heart was "Synagogue Lane," home to many Jewish homes and three synagogues—including the famous Paradesi Synagogue, built in 1568, which is still in use today!

#### **5. The Portuguese Brought the Inquisition to India**

The only real case of antisemitism in Indian history prior to modern times came under Portuguese rule. In 1560, the Portuguese established an Inquisition in Goa, their main Indian stronghold. In the following decades, the Inquisition issued several discriminatory edicts against the Jews, restricting new Jewish arrivals and limiting their interactions with Christians. In 1662, the Portuguese burned the Cochin synagogue along with its Torah scrolls and holy books. For the most part, however, the Jews of India escaped the worst horrors of the Inquisition that ravaged Spain and Portugal.

#### **6. They Maintained Ties With Jews Around the World**

Despite their remote location, the Jews of Cochin stayed connected to global Jewry. They sent halachic questions to leading rabbis like Rabbi Dovid ibn Zimra in Egypt,<sup>1</sup> and Jews joined them from Yemen—including Rabbi Eilyahu Adeni, a prolific poet whose works became part of Cochin's liturgy. Later, when Kerala became a Dutch colony, the Cochin Jews developed strong ties with the Jewish community in Amsterdam. For many years, they celebrated the 15th of Av to commemorate the arrival of gifts shipped by the Dutch Jews: Torah scrolls and books to replace those destroyed by the Portuguese.<sup>2</sup>

#### **7. The Paradesi Synagogue Holds Priceless Artifacts**

The historic Paradesi Synagogue holds several ancient artifacts that tell the story of Cochin's Jews. Two copper plates were given by an 11th-century raja to a Jewish leader named Joseph Rabban, granting the Jews rights and privileges. A solid-gold 22-carat goblet is kept there, which was used at Jewish weddings in Cochin for centuries. And a tablet on the outdoor wall is a remnant of Cochin's oldest synagogue, dating all the way back to 1344! These treasures, and more, can be seen today by visitors to the historic site.

#### **8. The Bene Israel Held On to Their Jewish Practices**

Further north along India's western coastline lived the Bene Israel, centered in villages near what is now Mumbai. Isolated from the rest of the Jewish world for centuries, they still held on to several core Jewish practices, such as observing Shabbat and saying the Shema. Many of them worked in oil pressing, earning the nickname Shanwar Teli, or "Saturday oil pressers," because they did not work on Shabbat.

#### **9. Maimonides Mentioned the Jews of India**

In a letter written around the year 1200, the great Jewish leader Maimonides mentioned Jews in India, saying, "They do not know the written Torah, and all they practice from our religion is Shabbat and circumcision."<sup>3</sup> While he didn't specify which group he meant, many believe he was referring to the Bene Israel.

#### **10. David Rahabi Revitalized Jewish Practice**

While the details are fuzzy, it seems that a Cochin Jew named David Rahabi made contact with the Bene Israel and shared with them many practices and beliefs from the mainstream Jewish community that they were either unaware of or had forgotten. Interestingly, while all agree that he existed, there is a wide range of opinions regarding when he lived.

#### **11. They Venerate Elijah the Prophet**

Elijah the Prophet plays a prominent role in the culture and beliefs of the Bene Israel. In fact, there is a tradition in which he appeared to the community in a striking nighttime visit on the holiday of 15 Shevat, which they celebrate with an extra layer of meaning. Today in Israel, many of them visit Mount Carmel, the site of Elijah's showdown with the prophets of Baal, every year on that day.

#### **12. Baghdadi Jews Built Thriving Communities**

Under British colonial rule, Indian port cities like Mumbai (then Bombay), Calcutta, and Yangon (then Rangoon, in nearby Myanmar) became major trade hubs. Jews from Iraq and Syria—often referred to as Baghdadi Jews—settled in these cities and established flourishing communities with synagogues, schools, and vibrant Jewish life.

#### **13. They Helped Shape the City of Mumbai**

Baghdadi Jews, especially the influential Sassoon family, left a lasting mark on Mumbai. They funded the construction of hospitals, schools, libraries, and other institutions, as well as the famous Gateway of India landmark. And they didn't forget their own community: the Sassoons built synagogues and employed many Jews in their businesses, helping support Jewish life in the city and beyond.

#### **14. Jewish Books Were Printed in India**

Believe it or not, India was home to several Jewish printing presses. The first opened in Calcutta in 1840, followed by others in Mumbai, Pune, and Cochin. They printed everything from prayer books to halachic texts to newsletters—sometimes even translating them into local languages like Malayalam (spoken by Cochin Jews) and Marathi (spoken by the Bene Israel).<sup>4</sup>

#### **15. Most Indian Jews Eventually Moved Elsewhere**

After 1948, most of India's Jewish population immigrated. The Cochin Jews and Bene Israel primarily settled in Israel, while most Baghdadi Jews moved to English-speaking countries like the UK. Still, small Jewish communities remain in India—especially in Mumbai—continuing a Jewish presence that has lasted thousands of years.

16. The Holtzbergs Left a Lasting Legacy in Mumbai

In 2003, Rabbi Gabi and Rivky Holtzberg moved to Mumbai as Chabad emissaries to offer hospitality and Jewish awareness to Jewish tourists and backpackers and serve the local Jewish population. Tragically, they were killed in a brutal terrorist attack in 2008, along with four of their guests.

But their memory lives on: Chabad activities have only increased in Mumbai, transforming tragedy and darkness into growth and light.

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date: Jun 12, 2025, 7:05 AM

subject From Printing Press to X, When Instant Can Become Insidious, Anonymous Hero on Behind the Bima, Latest Shiurim, and More. . .

**From Printing Press to X, When Instant Can Become Insidious  
By Rabbi Efreim Goldberg**

It was a clash between two respected and prolific people with elevated positions. Nobody knew what to expect next, and everybody was shocked by how intense and at times vicious this back-and-forth was.

Rav Yaakov Emden (1697-1776), also known as the Ya'avetz, was one of the greatest halachic decisors of his time, and his opinions continue to be quoted every day around the world. In 1728, he answered the call to serve as the Rabbi of Emden, the German city from which he ultimately took his surname. In an effort to preserve his independence and ability to speak freely, he resigned after only four years and moved back to his hometown of Altona, refusing to take another official rabbinic position ever again. Soon after, he obtained permission from the King of Denmark to own a printing press, which he established in his home and used to publish his countless writings.

Rav Yonasan Eibshutz (1690-1764) was a child prodigy and became the head of the Yeshiva of Prague at only twenty-one years old. He became well known for his brilliance, scholarship, and oratory ability and ultimately became the Chief Rabbi of the "Three Communities" of Altona-Hamburg-Wandsbek.

At the time, Rav Emden was dedicated to opposing and fighting the growing movement claiming that the recently deceased Shabtai Tzvi was the messiah.

In the early 1750s, amulets prepared by Rav Eibshutz were presented to him with the claim that its author was secretly a Sabbatian and had embedded heretical messages in them. Rav Emden examined them and concluded that indeed, the author of the amulets was a follower of Shabtai Tzvi, a heretic who must be opposed. Rav Eibshutz denied the allegations and accused Rav Emden of misreading and misinterpreting the amulet.

An enormous controversy erupted throughout Germany and beyond, creating a major split, with the greatest rabbis of the generation taking sides. Rav Yaakov Emden wrote and published relentlessly, leveling suspicions and accusations against Rav Yonasan Eibshutz, not only about following Shabtai Tzvi but of other outrageous and deviant behavior. In addition to many letters and pamphlets, in 1753, he published *Lema'an Da'as*, a collection of letters and evidence about Sabbateans in general and Rav Eibshutz in particular. In 1755, he published a polemic called *Vayakem Edus B'Yaakov*.

In 1759, he published *Sheviras Luchos HaAven*, a refutation of Rav Eibshutz's defense. (Our own Rabbi Yosef Kassorla once gave a wonderful class at BRS that delved into a detailed history of this famous episode, click [here](#) to listen to it.)

In the cemetery of Altona, Germany, only four headstones apart, are the graves of Rav Yaakov Emden and Rav Yonasan Eibshutz. Vicious public

adversaries in their lifetime, these two Torah giants are buried for eternity, essentially side by side. It is said that before he passed away, members of the Chevra Kaddisha saw Rav Emden greeting his ancestors before he joined them in the Olam Ha'emes, the world of truth. And then, to the astonishment of the members of the Chevra Kaddish, he continued and said, "And Shalom Aleicha, Rav Yonasan Eibshutz." The man whom he had opposed so vocally and vociferously had passed away twelve years earlier and was now coming to greet him and welcome him into the next world. When he learned about this, the Noda B'Yehudah, Rav Yechezkel Landau, instructed the Chevra Kaddish to find the closest grave possible so the two who had made up and reconciled in the next world, would forever lie together in this one.

While this controversy has a heartwarming end, it threatened to tear apart the Jewish community while it raged. The conflict had grown so intense, the Emperor Frederick of Denmark, the kingdom which controlled the relevant cities, got involved. At first, he sided with Rabbi Yaakov Emden and removed Rabbi Yonasan Eibschutz from his position, but he later reversed himself, and restored him. The controversy lasted for years and led to a series of excommunications and counter-excommunications.

Much of the controversy and conflict was the result of the published polemics that spread widely. It has been pointed out that if only Rav Yaakov Emden didn't have a printing press in his home, perhaps the harshness of the controversy could have been mitigated or avoided. If he had to enlist a publisher, have his works edited and taken time to publish, it is likely that the whole story wouldn't have been. Instead, each time Rav Emden had a thought, a reaction, something he wanted to say, he was able to write and share almost instantaneously. Time to think, reflect, and consider would have been helpful in avoiding a conflict that continues to reverberate until today.

To be clear, Rav Emden and Rav Eibshutz were Torah giants, leaders whose words we continue to study and whose lessons we continue to learn. Their machlokes was certainly l'shem Shomayim, sincerely driven, and their places in the cemetery testify to how much more in common they had than that which separated them and their shared legacy and place among our people. We must not trivialize this episode or minimize their greatness with comparisons to others, particularly to those who shouldn't even be mentioned in the same sentence as them.

Yet, I thought about the particular observation of the role of the printing press as we all watched the unravelling of the partnership and bromance between the wealthiest man in the world and the most powerful man in the world in real time. Disagreeing with President Trump's "Big, Beautiful Bill," Elon Musk took to X to express his criticism. It didn't take long for their public spat to escalate with each side responding in real time with insults, accusations, and behavior that frankly we might expect more from dueling children than from the most high-profile people in the world. For now, it seems the spat has simmered, with Musk publicly supporting President Trump's actions supporting ICE raids in Los Angeles. But the conflict brought us (and may still bring us again) dangerously close to impacting politics, policies, and the economy. As the tweets were flying, all I could think to myself was how this could have been avoided if they didn't each have keyboards, phones, and internet access at their fingertips. Imagine if they had to convene their public relations teams, work with their PR experts to decide if they should issue this statement and publish this response? Surely they would have been counseled to slow down, catch their breath, express themselves maturely and productively.

There is no question that technology, including AI, have brought enormous blessings and gifts in the dissemination of Torah, in connecting us, and in a variety of productive ways. This spat, however, is a startling reminder of how these innovations have a much darker side: they can be dangerous and damaging and wreak havoc. As they are developed and in choosing how to engage them, one must be tremendously judicious, careful, thoughtful, and guarded.

The Kotzker Rebbe was once asked, if Shlomo HaMelech was truly the wisest of all men, the most brilliant of all time, why didn't he invent the

train? The Kotzker's answer is penetrating and prescient. He said that surely Shlomo thought of the train and could have introduced it to the world but he understood the downside, the risk, how it could be used negatively, and he determined it wasn't worth it, better to keep it to himself.

AI can expedite efficiency and productivity, but it can also introduce endless deceptions and lies, leaving us all wondering which correspondence, image, and video are even real.

Of course this hypothetical is too late, but knowing what we know now about the negative impact of the internet and social media on mental illness and happiness, how it is used to spread hate, would we bring it to the world anyway or would we have concluded the world is better without it?

The conclusion is not clear or black and white. The answer is debatable but as we plow forward with technological innovation, the question must be asked and considered.

The Chafetz Chaim, R' Yisrael Meir HaKohen, (Shem Olam, Volume I) writes that while technology adds efficiency, ease, and comfort to our lives, its ultimate purpose is to serve as a metaphor that can strengthen our Emunah, our faith in Hashem and in His hashgacha, His providence in the world and in our lives.

Writing a century ago, and relating to the new inventions of his time, the Chafetz Chaim says they can help us understand and apply the Mishna (Avos 2:1), "Contemplate three things and you will not come to make mistakes: Know what is above you: a seeing eye, a listening ear, and all your deeds being inscribed in a book."

Earlier generations were stronger in their basic Emunah and didn't need these illustrations to bolster their faith but in the last few hundred years, he writes, when our faith has weakened and our doubt has increased, Hashem sends us these amazing technologies, each designed to help us connect with another aspect of living with Emunah.

For example, the telescope enables us to understand that Hashem sees and observes everything we do here on Earth, even though He may be very far away. The wonder of the phone enriches our belief in prayer. Just like we can talk in the phone on one side of the world and be heard on the other, Hashem hears all our prayers, even though there is a great distance for them to travel. Says the Chafetz Chaim, the photograph is a recorded picture of someone who may not even be aware they are being watched or that their picture is being taken. It lasts long after the person is gone. One day, we will appear before our Creator, Who will review the recorded life we led that exists even after we are gone. The phonograph, which is the recording of a person's voice that can be captured and played back later, is a metaphor for how one day we will be accountable for all the ways we used our speech inappropriately to gossip, criticize, or slander.

In many ways we are beneficiaries of the printing press, the internet and AI but the controversies of the past and l'havdil, the present are reminders to be thoughtful and judicious in how we use them and to always ask ourselves how they can enhance our relationship with Hashem.

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<https://www.jpost.com/judaism/torah-portion/article-709004>

### **Parashat Beha'alotcha: Ark of the Covenant in a war zone?**

**By RABBI SHMUEL RABINOWITZ**

JUNE 10, 2022

In this week's parasha, Beha'alotcha, we read a very mysterious verse that describes the journey of the Ark of the Covenant – the ark that contained the two tablets given on Mount Sinai – before the nation. From the Torah, it seems that the journey involved a war with an enemy, and the ark was taken to war at the head of the fighting army. The Torah quotes what Moses would say when the ark would go out to war ahead of the army:

"So it was, whenever the ark set out, Moses would say, 'Arise, O Lord, may Your enemies be scattered and may those who hate You flee from You.'" (Numbers 10:35)

The ark setting out to war before the army is also described in the Book of Samuel, where we read about a war between the tribes of Israel and the Philistines, the inhabitants of the land before the Children of Israel entered.

The Book of Samuel tells us about this war in a place called Afek (where the city of Rosh Ha'ayin is now located). In the first battle of the war, the Philistines were winning and about 4,000 soldiers from among the Children of Israel fell in battle. After the battle, the elders of the nation consulted with one another and decided to bring the Ark of the Covenant to the battlefield, saying: "Let us take to us from Shiloh the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, and He will come in our midst, and save us from the hand of our enemies" (1 Samuel 4:3).

When the ark was brought into the camp, "all Israel shouted a great shout" (4:5). The nation was certain that the presence of the ark would bring them victory. The Philistines also saw the presence of the ark as a determining factor against them and called out anxiously, "Woe is unto us! Who will save us from the hand of this mighty God?!" (4:8). But despite this, in the second round of battles, the Philistines won again and the losses to Israel were great – 30,000 soldiers fell in battle! And if that wasn't enough, the Ark of the Covenant itself was taken into captivity by the Philistines!

This turn of events doesn't easily mesh with the verses we started with. From this week's parasha, it seemed that the presence of the ark would bring salvation to the nation and victory over its enemies. But the Book of Samuel tells us about a crushing defeat that was not prevented by the presence of the ark.

Some of the biblical commentators who dealt with this question focused on an important principle that arises from looking at these two stories. The presence of the ark in the war is not a magical means with power to bring about victory. The role of the ark in war is that the army carrying it will be influenced by it, that the army camp will be a holy place with the values and commandments of the Torah.

When the nation is not influenced by the ark, it becomes nothing more than pieces of wood coated in gold and the tablets become nothing more than pieces of stone etched with letters. The power of the Ark of the Covenant lies in people drawing from it the values of Torah, morality and derech eretz. The Ark of the Covenant taken to war as described in the Book of Samuel had no influence on the nation. They continued to worship idols, to practice incest and other social immoralities. They wanted to use the ark as a magical means, and that is not its purpose. The purpose of the ark is to cause a person to transcend and repair his ways, and only then does the ark bring about victory in war.

We no longer have the Ark of the Covenant, but this discussion still applies to our lives. The mezuzah is an example – that piece of parchment with texts from the Torah that is covered and attached to our doorposts. Many see the mezuzah as a means of protecting the home. There are sources for this in the literature of Chazal. But we must remember that that is not its purpose. The Rambam, Maimonides, writes about this in his typical decisiveness: They, however, who write names of angels, holy names, a biblical text... within the mezuzah, are among those who have no portion in the world to come. For these fools not only fail to fulfill the commandment but they treat an important precept that expresses the unity of God, the love of Him, and His worship, as if it were an amulet to promote their own personal interests... (Mishneh Torah, Mezuzah 5)

We put a mezuzah at the entrance to our home to remember the values written in it: the unity of God, the love of Him and keeping His commandments. If we remember that, the mezuzah indeed protects us from harm. But if we see the mezuzah as some sort of magical amulet, it loses its power.

The Torah and commandments are not magical means of attaining victory and success. They are meant to influence us and elevate us from the quagmire of materialism and egocentrism to lofty peaks of spirituality and morality. ■

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

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<https://jewishlink.news/chalsha-daato-shel-aharon/>

### **'Chalsha Daato Shel Aharon'**

**By Rabbi Menachem Leibtag**

| June 12, 2025

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 Behaalotecha—for Aharon to light the Menorah (8:1–5), and the last topic in parshat Naso—the 12-day dedication ceremony of the mizbeach (7:1–88): “Why is the parsha of the Menorah juxtaposed to ‘Chanukat haNesiim’ (the special offering brought by the princes of each tribe)? When Aharon saw the daily dedication offering by the Nesiim, 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 the menorah every morning and evening.”

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 begins, it will be the 12 Nesiim (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 speeches at national gatherings; they will lead the nation in war.

Thus, it is quite understandable why Aharon becomes depressed. When he sees the attention that the 12 Nesiim 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.

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.

Once Bnei Yisrael enters the land, teaching the laws of the Torah will become the primary duty of the Kohanim and Levi'im. 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. It was for this reason that their cities are scattered throughout the 12 tribes of Israel.

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.

To read the full shiur, please go to [tanach.org/bamidbar/bhal/shiur2.htm](http://tanach.org/bamidbar/bhal/shiur2.htm).

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## 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 HaMikdash 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 YHWH three days' journey with the ark of the covenant of YHWH 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 YHWH said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us, and we will treat you well; for YHWH 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 YHWH said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us, and we will treat you well; for YHWH has promised good to Israel.

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

YHWH, 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 Lebanon. 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'ao?" 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.

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## **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 bekhorim (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 bekhorim 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-Pekkudim (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

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**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-arón...' (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-arón...' 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-arón', 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-arón...'] 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-arón...' 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-arón') 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.

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menachem

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#### 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!

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#### **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 nssim, are actually referring to the first day of the dedication ceremony when all the nssim 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 Nsim (7:1-88) to the psukim which describe Moshe's 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

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<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

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<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.