

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Beha'alotcha
June 18, 2022 *** Sivan 19, 5782

[Beha'alotcha in a Nutshell](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2181/jewish/Behaalotecha-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

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Aaron is commanded to raise light in the lamps of the menorah, and the tribe of Levi is initiated into the service in the Sanctuary.

A "Second Passover" is instituted in response to the petition "Why should we be deprived?" by a group of Jews who were unable to bring the Passover offering in its appointed time because they were ritually impure. G-d instructs Moses on the procedures for Israel's journeys and encampments in the desert, and the people journey in formation from Mount Sinai, where they had been camped for nearly a year.

The people are dissatisfied with their "bread from heaven" (the manna), and demand that Moses supply them with meat. Moses appoints 70 elders, to whom he imparts of his spirit, to assist him in the burden of governing the people. Miriam speaks negatively of Moses, and is punished with leprosy; Moses prays for her healing, and the entire community waits seven days for her recovery.

[Haftarah in a Nutshell: Zechariah 2:14-4:7.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/598114/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/598114/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This haftarah contains a vision of the golden Temple Menorah, whose daily kindling is discussed in the opening of this week's Torah reading.

This prophecy was communicated by Zechariah shortly before the building of the Second Temple. The haftarah opens with a vivid depiction of the joy that will prevail when G-d will return to Jerusalem: "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for, behold! I will come and dwell in your midst, says the L-rd."

The prophet then describes a scene in the Heavenly Court: Satan was seeking to incriminate Joshua, the first High Priest to serve in the Second Temple, because of the "soiled garments" (i.e. sins) he was wearing. G-d himself defends the High Priest: "And the Lord said to Satan: The Lord shall rebuke you, O Satan; the Lord who chose Jerusalem shall rebuke you. Is [Joshua] not a brand plucked from fire?" I.e., how dare Satan prosecute an individual who endured the hardships of exile? "And He raised His voice and said to those standing before him, saying, 'Take the filthy garments off him.' And He said to him, 'See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I have clad you with clean garments.'"

G-d then proceeds to outline the rewards awaiting Joshua if he and his descendants follow G-d's ways. The ultimate reward is, "Behold! I will bring My servant, the Shoot, " an allusion to Moshiach, the Shoot of David.

Zechariah then describes a vision of a golden seven-branched Menorah. An angel

interprets the meaning of this vision: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel [descendent of King David, one of the protagonists in the building of the Second Temple], 'Not by military force and not by physical strength, but by My spirit,' says the Lord of Hosts." Meaning that Zerubbabel's descendent, Moshiach, will have no difficulty in his task, it will be as simple as lighting a menorah.

Food For Thought

From Pain to Humility by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (z"l)

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/behaalotecha/from-pain-to-humility/>

David Brooks, in his bestselling book, *The Road to Character*,^[1] 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*.^[2] 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.”^[3]

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.

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.

[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.

Judaism: A Two-Sided Coin by Rabbi Prof. David Colinkin

<https://schechter.edu/a-two-sided-coin-called-judaism/>

We read in this week’s parashah regarding the Levites (Numbers 8:16): נתונים לי — “They are given, they are given unto Me from among the Children of Israel”.

Similarly, we read in Numbers 3:9: “You shall assign the Levites to Aaron and to his sons, they are given, they are given unto him from among the Children of Israel”.

One may inquire: why did the Torah repeat the words “they are given”? After all, in Numbers 18:6 it says regarding the Levites “they are given to God” just once. The Rashbam, following the *peshat* or simple meaning, explains in his commentary to Numbers 3 that there is a doubling of the verb as is common in the Bible (e.g. Numbers 27:7).

On the other hand, *Midrash Hahefetz* written in Yemen in the 15th century by Rabbi Zekharia ben Shlomo Harofeh gives a homiletic explanation to the verse in Numbers 3: ” ‘They are given’ as singers, ‘they are given’ as gatekeepers“. In other words, the Levites, on the one hand, were chosen for the lofty and enjoyable task of singing in the Temple to the accompaniment of “cymbals, harps and lyres” (I Chronicles 6:16-28; *ibid.*, Chapter 25; and more). On the other hand, they were also chosen for the prosaic task of guarding all the entrances to the Temple (*ibid.*, 9:17-27; *ibid.*, Chapter 26; and more) Indeed, I did this for many years in *miluim* (reserve duty) in the IDF; there is no task more boring!

A similar explanation is given in *Midrash Aggadah* (France, 12th century) to Numbers 8: “And why did the verse repeat ‘they are given’ twice? To teach that they are given for burden, they are given for singing” (and cf. Rashi, *ibid.*). In other words, the Levites, on the one hand, were chosen for the difficult and exhausting task of carrying the Tabernacle and, on the other hand, to sing in the Temple.

These two midrashim contain an important message for Jews, for Zionists and for modern human beings. Everything important in life demands effort and suffering on the one hand, while granting spiritual and emotional rewards on the other.

On the Jewish-halakhic level, one can point to the example of Shabbat: Jews opposed to the halakhic observance of Shabbat see only the “burden” of the 39 forbidden types of labor. Yet they fail to understand that that “burden” allows the “song” of *Oneg Shabbat* spent with the family and accompanied by singing, prayer, sleeping and respite for the soul. And so it is with Pesah. The “burden” of cleaning the house and removing the hametz leads to the “song” of the Seder at which we experience anew the Exodus from Egypt year after year. Negative commandments and positive commandments are two sides of the coin called “Judaism”; one enriches and completes the other.

On the Zionist level, one can look at the State of Israel in these difficult times and see only the “burden” of taxes and reserve duty and terrorist attacks. On the other hand, one can look at the “song” of the Ingathering of the Exiles, the revival of the Hebrew language and the building of a Jewish State. But there is no “song” without a “burden”; coping with all the difficulties has allowed us to achieve all of the wonderful things which exist in Israel today.

Finally, on a personal level, one can look at modern human beings and see only the “burden” of hard work and constant pressure. On the other hand, one can look at the “song” of a shorter work-week, of fast and efficient transportation, of labor-saving devices and of instant communication with the four corners of the earth.

Therefore, one can say regarding all of the above: “They are given, they are given” to us – “they are given to burden, they are given to song”. May we have the wisdom to understand this important message.

(inspired by a sermon by Rabbi Ralph Simon z”l)

Shavua Tov From Schechter

**Beginning immediately after Pesach and until August, Parashat Hashavua in the Diaspora is one week ‘behind’ the Parasha in Israel. Shavua Tov@Schechter will follow the Diaspora schedule.

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Parashat Beha'alotcha: The Grand March Toward the Good by Rabbi Seth Farber

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/parashat-behaalotcha-the-grand-march-toward-the-good/>

This Torah portion illustrate what happens when we put our individual needs first.

Winston Churchill is said to have said: “A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity. An optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.

Parshat Beha'alotcha is a Torah portion of both difficulty and opportunity. Here's the sequence of events in this portion.

1. The Levites prepare for service in the Tabernacle.
2. The commandment to offer the Passover sacrifice is given.
3. The cloud and fire that accompanied the Israelites during their sojourn in the desert is described.
4. God commands the blowing of trumpets in the Israelite camp.
5. The structure of the camp is described.
6. Moses invites his father-in-law to join the Israelites on their travels.
7. The Israelites complain about the lack of meat to eat, leading God to send an excessive amount of quail into the camp as retribution.

Each of these moments represented either a challenge or an opportunity for the Israelites as they began the second year wandering in the desert following the Exodus. And yet, they don't really seem to form a cohesive literary unit. What does the Passover sacrifice have to do with trumpets? And why is the description of the Israelite encampment positioned next to the invitation from Moses to his father in law to accompany them on their travels?

In a public lecture in the 1970s, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik suggested a unified theory of Parshat Beha'alotcha. He posited that in the year following the Exodus, the Israelites were beginning a “grand march” and that each of these elements was part of their preparation for entering the land of Israel. First, the spiritual leadership of the people prepares for its work. Then the Passover sacrifice, the reminder of the Exodus, is introduced. Then the march begins: The trumpets stand ready, the

camp is set up to go, and Moses symbolically invites the nations of the world to join. To a large extent, the redemption was upon them.

But then disaster strikes. The people complain, and God exacts punishment. Rather than seeing the opportunity that lay before them, the Israelites were too concerned about their immediate (and largely individual) needs. They simply weren't cognizant of the historical moment they were facing. The redemptive moment passes the individuals who were meant to actualize it. This is the great tragedy of Jewish history: opportunity knocks, but the Jews don't recognize its significance.

The missed opportunity in Parashat Beha'alotcha becomes even more striking when looking closely at the language in the text. The complaint of the Israelites is described with an adjective in Numbers 11:1: "The people took to complaining bitterly [*ra*]." This bitterness (or even evil, another possible translation of the Hebrew word *ra*) stands in direct contrast to the vision that Moses articulates to his father-in-law upon inviting him to join the Israelites: Please join us, Moses says, for "the good [*hatov*] that God will give us will be good for you as well." In fact, variations on the Hebrew word *tov* appear throughout Moses' invitation.

For Moses, the grand march is an opportunity for the realization of all things good. The land of Israel is a place that sanctifies life and is a place of the ultimate goodness. Moses sees this as something that all should have access to.

But the Israelites see only the bad. And from the moment they miss the opportunity, everything turns bad. Later in the book of Numbers, when the spies return from scouting out the land of Israel, only two — Joshua and Caleb — describe the land as "good." The others describe the land as "bad." In short, once the Israelites put their individual needs before the needs of the nation, their entire experience is colored — everything looks bad.

We live in a remarkable era of opportunity. While we don't always know the best way to capitalize on this wondrous moment in Jewish history, it behooves us to recognize all the good that our era has enabled us to achieve, and not let small moments of bitterness take away from our march toward a better future.

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[Never Mind the Garlic: Get off the Wagon by Rabbi Dan Bronstein](https://truah.org/resources/parshat-bahaalotecha-dan-bronstein-moraltorah/)

<https://truah.org/resources/parshat-bahaalotecha-dan-bronstein-moraltorah/>

Ever hear the expression "do you kiss your mother with that mouth?" This, of course, is a rhetorical question highlighting the way people can become tainted through the abuse of the gift of speech. Jewish tradition has confronted the abuse of speech and the problem of *lashon harah*, or "evil tongue." Amidst the glittering

detail of building the Menorah, and other ritual objects, the Torah portion Beha'alotcha also touches upon a broader category of *lashon harah*, but in this instance, the power of speech is misused through “murmurings,” and unreasonable criticisms.

Never mind God’s redemption of Israel, and never mind the Israelites’ direct encounter with the Divine. In this parshah, our ancestors literally complain over God’s catering ability, or more accurately, the people are angry over God’s choice of menus. The Israelites are very specific; they first demand meat, and then bemoan the fact that since their redemption from slavery they have been deprived of such delicacies as cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. I, too, would hate to live without garlic and onions. Despite the fact that the Israelites had been miraculously redeemed from bondage, and all their food needs were being supplied through the God-given Manna, the Israelites grumbled about culinary matters.

Maybe the Israelites bemoaning a meat shortage is a way to highlight the Israelites’ genuine anxiety about surviving the wilderness. Maybe complaints about produce, however seemingly frivolous, really point toward the disorientation experienced by the Israelites as they left slavery even while aspiring to become a nation of priests. Maybe complaining about melons and onions is really a misplaced expression of fear over their uncertain future, as individuals and as a people.

The text of Numbers 11:4, relates that it is the riff raff, or “*asafsuf*,” living within the midst of the Israelites, who are instigating the food rebellion. Many commentators connect the *asafsuf* with the “*erev rav*” or “mixed multitude” mentioned in Exodus 12:38 (i.e., the strangers who latched themselves onto the Israelites’ community at the start of the exodus). But even if this was all the outsiders’ fault, we nevertheless need to confront the moral implications of tacitly accepting, if not enabling, the misuse of language by others.

Some in our community believe that ostensibly “pro-Israel” political posturing somehow mitigates or justifies otherwise reprehensible words or behavior. But can we stand by or even affirm the ethics of those who engage in *lashon harah*? For the sake of Jewish interests, is it okay to ally with those whose language, besides being grossly vulgar, inflames hatred and violence? Should we as contemporary Jews tolerate, let alone ally ourselves with, those who openly use incendiary language and antidemocratic ideology? Is our community meant to ignore the lies and fear-mongering because these individuals “support Israel”?

It’s only the spring of 2022, but American society is already deeply engaged with the midterm elections and even the 2024 presidential election. American Jews historically have participated widely in American political life and vigorously supported democratic principles. A belief in democracy and commitment to the democratic process have always been shared across the spectrum of American

Jewry. But the traditional American Jewish commitment to democracy may be waning in some quarters. Since when did it become kosher to support financially and politically those who would incite violence and undermine democracy and the rule of law?

Eleanor Clift, writing in *the Daily Beast*, reported that a major organizational pillar of the American Jewish community, AIPAC, has been “wading into this racist, anti-democratic, conspiratorial stew,” in its support of insurrectionist politicians in the aftermath of January 6. Even Abraham Foxman, former national director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and hardly a leftist, called it a “sad mistake to endorse candidates who undermine democracy.”

I am not so naïve as to think that politics never requires difficult decisions and even alliances with those with whom we do not always agree. But compromise is not the same as supporting demagoguery and fear mongering.

Yisroel Meir HaCohen, the Chofetz Chayim, knew a thing or two about *lashon harah*. He wrote in great detail about the use and misuse of speech. A story is told that he once found himself riding in the same wagon carriage as an unsavory group of individuals incessantly engaging in *lashon harah*. After several failed attempts at tempering their hateful words, the Chofetz Chayim realized that he could neither change them nor remain unsullied by their speech and got out to walk the rest of the way.

Today, we, too, find ourselves surrounded by hateful language and antidemocratic dogma. It is incumbent upon our community to get off the wagon of demagoguery and stop enabling *lashon harah*.

(Following his ordination at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in 1996, Rabbi Dan Bronstein went on to earn his doctorate in Jewish history at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Dan teaches in the department of Sociology and Jewish Studies at Hunter College.)

Yahrtzeits

Cornelia and Francesca Peckman remember their grandmother Regina Rostoker on Tue. June 21 (Sivan 22).

Alice Solomon remembers her sister Teddy (Theodora) Blitzer Fine on Tue. June 21. (Sivan 22).

Fran Nelson remembers her father Lewis Rapaport on Thurs. June 23 (Sivan 24).