

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**D**avid Brooks, in his new best seller, *The Road to Character*, (Allen Lane, 2015) draws a sharp distinction between what he calls the rsum 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*. (Doubleday, 1992) There he 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."

That is a central theme of Behaalotcha. 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 G-d himself and who challenged Him to forgive His people,

**As you learn these words of torah,  
please keep in mind  
Moshe ben Sara  
for a refuah shelaima!**

"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 Behaalotcha 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: "How we remember the fish that we used to eat in Egypt for free! And the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic!" (Num. 11: 5). This is one act of ingratitude too many for Moses, who gives voice to deep despair. "Why did You bring all this trouble to your servant? Why haven't I found favor in your eyes, that You are placing the burden of this entire people on me! Did I conceive this people or give birth to them, that You tell me to carry them in my lap the way a nurse carries a baby... I cannot carry this whole nation! The burden is too heavy for me! If this is how you are going to treat me, please kill me now, if I have found favor in your eyes, because I cannot bear seeing all this misery!" (Num. 11: 11-15).

Then comes the great transformation. G-d tells him to take seventy elders who will bear the burden with him. G-d 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 G-d's people were prophets and that He would rest his spirit on each of them" (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 the face of the earth"

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(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 to serve, not to be served. Moses' highest accolade was to be called eved Hashem, G-d's servant. Only one other person, Joshua, his successor, earns this title in Tanakh. 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 G-d's call at the burning bush was one of humility: "Who am I to lead?" (Ex. 3: 11). It was precisely this humility that qualified him to lead.

In Behaalotecha 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 you brought all this trouble to your servant?... Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth?... Where can I get meat for all these people?... I cannot carry all these people by myself; 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 G-d. G-d 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 G-d 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 G-d says that "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 saw the seventy elders share his spirit, his depression disappeared. He could say to Joshua, "Are you jealous on my behalf?" And he is undisturbed by the complaint of his own brother and sister, praying to G-d on Miriam's behalf when she is punished with leprosy. He had recovered his humility. We now understand what humility is. It is not self-abasement. C. S. Lewis put it best: humility, he said, is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less. True humility means silencing the "I." For genuinely humble people, it is G-d, 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 G-d so seriously that he didn't have to take himself seriously at all."

"Rabbi Jochanan said, Wherever you find the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, there you find His humility." (Megillah 31a) Greatness is humility, for G-d 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 Behaalotecha 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." (Ibid., 95)

The right response to existential pain, he 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 epitomized by the parents of the three Israeli teenagers killed last summer, 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." (Brooks, *ibid.*, 263)

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. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### **Shabbat Shalom**

**"A**nd Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite (Midianite) woman he had taken to wife (and divorced) ....And they said, 'Did the Lord speak only to Moses? Did He not also speak to us'" (Num. 12:112). Towards the end of our biblical reading, we find this very strange dialogue between Miriam and Aaron, the elder brother and sister of Moses. Why are his siblings criticizing Moses, and what do they mean by insisting that G-d spoke to them as well as to their younger brother?

I believe that this text can become clarified by a proper understanding of the general name for the study of our mystical tradition, the Kabbala. The Hebrew term "kabbala" means "acceptance"; for our great mystical teachers, everything is dependent upon our ability to properly accept.

Rabbi David Aaron, the founder and director of Israelight, tells of the first time he attended a class given by a well-known mystic in Jerusalem. The teacher summoned Rabbi David and held out an apple--presumably for him to take. Rabbi David put his hand over the apple only to find that the teacher removed his hand with the apple. This procedure was repeated a number of times with Rabbi David attempting to lift the apple from the mystic's hand and the mystic "teasing" him by removing his hand again and again. The other students began to laugh; one of them whispered to David not to grab or take the apple, but rather to accept it in his open and cupped hand. That's what David did and the mystic immediately placed the apple in his cupped hand and smiled. So he learned the first lesson of Jewish mysticism: Everything depends on one's ability to accept. One's hand must always be ready to receive, to share one's bounty with anyone else who may wish to partake of it.

In the portion of Balak, we shall read of Balaam's talking donkey which teaches him an important lesson (Num. 22:21-35). Rabbenu Tzadok of Lublin explains that the Bible is teaching us that G-d is constantly sending out "Divine Rays of Splendor" which are waiting for human beings to receive them; we must

have the antennae to receive the transmissions which are around us.

Rabbenu Tzadok proves his point by recounting how he was once walking along a desolate road when he saw a peasant walking towards him carrying a large bale of hay; the bale turned over, the hay fell to the ground, and the hapless farmer asked the rabbi to help him lift his produce. "I'm sorry but I can't", answered Rabbenu Tzadok, already feeling weak and thirsty from his travels. "You mean you won't" responded the peasant farmer. Rabbenu Tzadok immediately began helping the gentile, thanking him for the invaluable message he had taught him. Whenever we say that we can't, we really mean that we won't; if there is a strong enough will, virtually anything becomes possible. Apparently, G-d speaks through donkeys, through farmers; through children...We must develop within ourselves the finely honed antennae to receive the Divine transmissions.

This is the meaning of the verse "These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice which never ceased" (Deut. 5:19). The Divine Voice heard at Sinai constantly continues to communicate; it is up to us to develop our minds and our souls sufficiently to be able to accept the Divine waves or rays.

Let us now return to Moses's siblings, who couldn't understand how this great prophet could have divorced his Midianite wife Zipporah. Maimonides explains that, in an attempt to raise the spiritual level of the Israelites and prepare them for the Revelation at Sinai, the Almighty instructed them to separate from their spouses for three days prior to the appearance of the Almighty atop the Mount. At the conclusion of the Revelation, G-d instructs His prophet, "Go now and tell them to return to their tents (and their wives)" (Deut. 5:27). Miriam, therefore, tells Aaron that Moses, too should have returned to his wife Zipporah. After all, was not the commandment to return to the natural familial situation after the Revelation given to everyone, including Moses?

What Miriam did not understand was that Moses was *sui generis*, unique and different from everyone else, and even from every subsequent prophet. G-d specifically singled out Moses and separated him from the general return to the family tents when He said to him, "But you stand here with Me and I shall (constantly) speak to you..." (Deut. 5:28).

"All other prophets had their 'prophetic moments of Divine communication', either in a dream or in a vision; Moses prophesied when awake and standing...the holy spirit garbed and enveloped him, whenever he desired it...He was constantly prepared and ready for Divine communication, just like a heavenly angel. Therefore, the other prophets would return to their homes and to their bodily, physical needs

once the spirit of prophecy departed from them, whereas Moses could not return to his wife, but had to separate himself from her forever, because his mind was constantly bound up the 'mind' of the Rock of Eternity, whose Divine glory never left him.."(Maimonides, The Laws and Basic Principles of the Torah 7:6).

Moses was in a continuous state of prophecy, always attuned to the Divine signals of emission; he was an eternal "receiving" (kabbala) station, a receptor of the Divine rays of splendor. He was the mekubal par excellence. ©2015 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### RABBI AVI WEISS

### Shabbat Forshpeis

**C**omplaining to Moshe (Moses), the Israelites cry out that they remember the fish served to them in Egypt that they received without price, "hinam." (Numbers 11:5) Could they really have received food with no strings attached? After all, these are the same Egyptians who refused to even give the Jewish slaves straw for bricks. As the Midrash asks: "If they wouldn't give them straw for naught, would they have given them fish for naught?"

Nachmanides believes that this is certainly possible because at the riverside, the Jews would be given small fish that had no value in the eyes of the Egyptians.

Ibn Ezra reflects this line of reasoning but adds that the term "hinam" should not be taken literally – it should be understood to mean inexpensive. They received fish at bargain basement prices.

Rashi offers a most insightful answer to this question. "Hinam," says Rashi, means "free of mitzvot (commandments)." In Egypt, without the commandments the Jews felt unencumbered; as they were free to do as they pleased. Here, after the giving of the Torah at Sinai, with all of its prohibitive laws, the Jews felt that there were strings attached as they felt restricted by the commandments. This seems to make sense. Freedom and limitation are antithetical. If, for example, I'm not allowed to eat a particular food my options are severely narrowed and no longer am I feeling "hinam" or free.

However, there is another way of understanding the presence of the commandments. The mitzvot, even the laws that seem to be the most restrictive, can often teach self-discipline. Self discipline is a passageway to freedom. Limitation is, therefore, a conduit to freedom.

Additionally, we commonly associate freedom with the ability to do whatever we want, whenever we want. Freedom is not only the right to say yes, it is the ability to say no. If I cannot push away a particular food-my physical urges may have unbridled freedom, but my mind is enslaved. What appears to be a clear green light, can sometimes turn out to be the greatest of

burdens.

The opposite is also true. What appears to be a burden, can often lead to unlimited freedom. A story illustrates this point. When G-d first created the world, the birds were formed without wings. They complained to G-d: "we're small, and feel overpowered by the larger animals." G-d responds: "Have patience, you'll see."

In time, G-d gave the birds wings. The complaining even intensified. "It's worse than ever," cried the birds. "Until now we were all small, but still quick enough to elude the animals of prey. Now we have these appendages by our side and we feel weighed down.

G-d gently took the birds and taught them how to fly high and then higher. They were able to reach above the clouds and escape all threats from their animal adversaries.

The mitzvot are like the wings of the Jew. When not understood fully, they can make us feel stifled and weighed down. Yet, when explored deeply and given significance they give us new ways of looking at the world, and looking at our selves. They teach us meaning and self-discipline. With these gifts we then can truly fly high and far---we then can truly be free – "hinam." ©2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

### Wein Online

**W**ithout warning disaster strikes the people of Israel on their journey to the Land of Israel.

Moshe boldly proclaimed that "we are traveling now on the way to the land of our destination." The tribes have been numbered and counted, assigned flags and positions of march and they are accompanied on their journey by the Tabernacle of G-d placed in their midst. Everything is seemingly poised for their successful entry into the Land of Israel.

But one of the traits of human nature is the penchant for dismissing the good that we enjoy and the blessings that we have. Instead we long for and complain loudly about what we believe we don't have. The search for perfection in human life is equivalent to drinking saltwater in an attempt to slake one's thirst.

So we read in the parsha how the father-in-law of Moshe abandons the Jewish people in the desert to return home to Midian where, according to Rashi, he is convinced that he will be able to convert a pagan society into believing in one G-d. His absence is harmful to the Jewish people encamped in the desert and as is apparent from the later narratives in the Bible, his conversion attempts were in the main unsuccessful.

Though blessed with daily food – manna from heaven – the Jewish people complain about their diet - they express their ingratitude and demand meat and

other foods. They were tired of having to eat directly from G-d's hand, so to speak. All of their grouching and complaining only serves to bring plague, depression and disaster on them.

The prophet Jeremiah, in essence, states that human complaints are not really justified in the eyes of Heaven, so to speak. The Talmud puts it pithily: "Is it not sufficient for you that you are alive and functioning?" But we often take life for granted and are underappreciative of this most basic and generous of all gifts.

It is within the nature of humans to pursue wealth at the expense of health, power and notoriety at the expense of family and harmony, and temporal pleasures at the expense of eternal values and reward. The story of the desert illustrates for us how a section of the Jewish people valued a meat meal over entry into the Land of Israel. There will always be a refrain repeated in the desert, that it is better for us to return to Egypt than to meet the challenges that will be placed before us in establishing a Jewish national state in the Land of Israel.

This type of attitude is unfortunately not lacking in the current Jewish world. And no matter how wealthy and successful the Jewish state is now and will be in the future, there will always be a longing for more, better and different. And this longing breeds the insidious feeling of dissatisfaction with what blessings one already possesses. The parsha comes to teach us this basic lesson of human nature, of how we must be aware of it in order to overcome and truly reach our proper goals in life. ©2015 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**T**here are two verses in this week's Parasha (Bamidbar 10:35-36) that are surrounded by an upside letter, the letter "nun." Rashi, based on the Talmud (Shabbos 117a) and Midrashim (e.g. Sifre), tells us that these "markings" are meant to indicate that this is not where this two-verse paragraph belongs. Rather, it was "moved" here in order to interrupt a sequence of troublesome narratives, which most understanding to be the nation being anxious to leave Mt. Sinai "as a child who runs from school" (when the school-day is over) and their complaints about traveling. Last year, Rabbi Yaakov Rabinowitz (AMvE"Sh) asked me why this instance of things being taught "out of order" is different than all others. After all, since "there is no chronological order" in the Torah, there should be no need to signify that these verses are not in order if such indications aren't needed (or used)

for any of the other instances that things are taught out of chronological order. Why are there upside down "nuns" here if no such marking is needed elsewhere?

Usually, there is something about the narrative that tips us off that things were taught out of order. In this case, however, the verses prior to these are about the nation traveling, so there would be no indication that this is not where the paragraph, which describes Moshe's request that G-d leave the Mishkan so that the nation can prepare for travel and his request that G-d return to the Mishkan after each trip, belongs. It is only because of these upside down letters that we know that this is not its proper place. [This has ramifications for how we understand what occurred, as if this was where it belonged, we might think that Moshe only made these requests the very first time that the nation traveled. Now that we know it really belongs earlier, we know that these requests were made for each and every trip (see Gur Aryeh).] It should be noted, though, that Rabbeinu Bachye implies that even without the upside down "nuns" we would have known that things were not taught in their proper order. Nevertheless, Rabbeinu Bachye himself, when explaining the opinion that the upside down "nuns" tell us that these two verses constitute its own book, says that according to that opinion "this section is written in its appropriate place, for it is written when discussing the travel." Since it seems to be written in the right place, we need the "nuns" to teach us otherwise.

Normally there is a thematic connection between one subject matter and the subject matter taught next to it. Therefore, without any indication otherwise, we would have thought that such connections also exist with the verses taught before and after this paragraph. These demarcations not only tell us that this paragraph doesn't really belong here; they also inform us that such connections are not to be made.

Rabbeinu Bachye makes a couple of suggestions as to why the letter "nun" was chosen to teach us that this paragraph belongs elsewhere, based on the letter "nun" having the numerical value of 50. There are numerous places in Sefer Bamidbar that discuss details of how the nation traveled, including when the Degalim were described (2:1-34), when the nation traveling based on G-d's divine cloud rising from the Mishkan and returning to it is discussed (9:15-23), when the first trip occurred (10:11-28), and right before the two verses under discussion (10:33-34). By inserting an upside down "nun," we know that it really belongs 50 paragraphs earlier than where it appears in the text, i.e. within the description of the Degalim when the Mishkan starts to travel (2:17). Another "50" reference is to Yovel, the 50th year of the Sh'mitta cycle, with the "Great Yovel" referring to a time after the world has run its course. Without getting into what this means exactly, for our purposes suffice it to say that

since at that time this paragraph will be moved back to where it really belongs (as I'll discuss shortly), a "nun" is used in order to allude to this time. Either way, if there is a message embedded in the "nuns" aside from just telling us that this paragraph belongs elsewhere, it is possible that even if the "nuns" weren't needed to tell us that things are out of order, they are there to teach us these messages.

Ramban says that if not for the interruption that this paragraph provides, there would have been three consecutive troublesome narratives (with the desire for meat being the third). In order to avoid the "chazaka" three in a row would have created, which would have set a precedent that would make it more difficult for the nation to avoid future troubles, these narratives are broken up. However, this problem only exists when the possibility of sin still exists, so, as the Talmud says (and as explained by Rabbeinu Bachye), in the future, when there is no more sinning, this paragraph will be moved to where it really belongs. The very fact that this paragraph really belongs elsewhere is enough to differentiate it from all other instances of things that are taught out of chronological order, as despite being taught out of order, they are still taught in "their place," i.e. exactly where they belong. Even more so, then, if this paragraph will eventually be moved from its current location to where it really belongs, it cannot be compared to any other instance of things that are taught out of order, and a special demarcation isolating which verses will eventually be moved to their rightful place is only necessary here.

In Avos D'Rav Noson (34:4), rather than saying that "in the future this paragraph will be uprooted from here and be written in its place," the wording is "in the future this paragraph will be uprooted from its place and be written in a different place." Based on this, Rabbi Menachem Kasher (Mishpatim, Appendix 33 chapter 7) suggests that instead of referring to it being moved in our future, it refers to the "future" from when it was written down by Moshe. Working within the opinion that the Torah was written one piece at a time, as it was taught to Moshe (as opposed to all at once shortly before Moshe's death), Rabbi Kasher is proposing that when Moshe was taught this paragraph he was told that eventually it will be placed later in the text. And that "eventually" refers to when our Parasha was written down. Not that it will move from where it is now, but that it was moved from where it was originally taught to where it is now. The marks (the "nuns") were made then, so that Moshe will know which part will be moved, and those marks were kept intact after they were moved. Obviously, if this is why the "nuns" are there, there is no comparison between this "out of order" section and any others, and there is no need to wonder why no such demarcation exists elsewhere. However, the wording of the texts (except for the Sifre) has the statement that "this section will, in the future, be

moved" being made by Rabbi Shimon; according to Rabbi Kasher, it would have been G-d telling Moshe what will happen in the future, not a Talmudic sage telling us what will happen.

The bottom line, though, is that since other "out of order" sections belong precisely where they are, whereas this one really belongs elsewhere, and the marks themselves teach us things that only apply here, and in this instance there aren't any subliminal connections between these verses and the ones before and after them, and there is nothing about the context that would tell us that this paragraph doesn't belong here, this paragraph has upside "nuns," while others don't. © 2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

### TorahWeb

"The Song of the Leviim in the Beis HaMikdash"- these words conclude our daily tefilah. This song began in this week's parshah with the inauguration of the Leviim. Many years later the joyous song of the Leviim would become associated with tragedy. "Al Naharos Bavel-By the rivers of Babylon", is the chapter of Tehillim most associated with the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. This chapter focuses of the cessation of the Leviim's song at the time of the churban. The enemy taunted the Leviim-"Shiru lanu mishir Tziyon-Sing us the songs of Zion". Responding with the words that would accompany the Jewish people throughout its long Exile, the Leviim swore "Im eshkech Yerushalayim-If I forget you Jerusalem". This tragic chapter of Tehillim focuses primarily on the end of the role of the Leviim as singers in the Beis HaMikdash.

Chazal highlight the tragedy of the Leviim as they relate to us the precise moment the enemy entered the Beis HaMikdash. It was as the Leviim were singing that the defilement, and subsequently the destruction, of the Beis HaMikdash occurred. Why does the end of the Leviim's song play such a prominent role in the churban?

In parshas Ki Savo we read about the terrible events of the churban and exile that will occur to the Jewish People. These curses are brought about by not serving Hashem, "BeSimcha uvtuv levav-with joy and a good heart. Service

of Hashem that is performed by rote without joy and enthusiasm can chas veshalom bring about churban. Chazal teach us the singing of the Leviim while the Kohanim offered korbanos is a fulfillment of "Simcha vtuv levav-joy and a good

heart". Song is the expression of the great joy that should accompany the service of the Beis Hamikdash in particular, and the service of Hashem in general. If this song is deficient it is indicative that the heart and soul of avodas Hashem is missing. The churban occurred as the Leviim were singing.

Apparently their song was no longer a genuine expression of enthusiasm about avodas Hashem. As the Jewish People wept by the rivers of Bavel the realization set in

that the true song of the Beis Hamikdash had ceased years before, eventually bringing down the Beis Hamikdash. What can we do to rectify the situation of the churban we are in now? Looking to the Leviim may give us the answer. Besides their role in the Beis Hamikdash, the Leviim were entrusted with another responsibility. The Leviim were not given land, rather they would be the spiritual leaders primarily by being the Torah scholars and teachers. In this role the Leviim also lead us in song. In parahas VaYelech we are commanded "Kisvu lachem es hashira hazos-write for yourselves this song." Chazal interpret this to be referring to the sefer Torah. Why is the Torah likened to a song? The study of Torah must be with joy and enthusiasm just as one sings. It is the role of the Leviim as the singers of the Jewish people to sing the song of Torah as well.

The Beis HaMikdash is gone and its song silenced. Yet, we can still sing the song of Torah. We are taught by Chazal that from the day of the churban Hashem now dwells in the world of Torah. We must not only learn Torah but sing its song with the enthusiasm and joy that accompanies its study. Through our dedication to this second song of the Leviim may we merit to once again be inspired by the song of the Leviim as they accompany the avodas hakarbanos. May Hashem grant us "V'hashev Kohanim laavodasam Ulvim Ishiram ulezimram-Return the Kohanim to their service and the Leviim to their song." ©2009 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky & the TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.

#### **RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

### **Fatherly Rebuke**

**T**his 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. ©2009 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

### AL SHEIM HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE Z"L

## Bais Hamussar

**B**eha'aloscha is the first parsha on the list of parshios that give an account of the "transgressions" committed by Bnei Yisrael in the desert. We read how Bnei Yisrael left Har Sinai like a child running away from school, and how they complained about the mann. The parsha ends with Miriam speaking derogatorily about Moshe Rabbeinu. Parshas Shelach recounts the sin of the meraglim and parshas Korach tells about the fiasco of Korach and his cohorts. Parshas Chukas contains an account of Moshe hitting the rock and parshas Balak concludes with Bnei Yisrael straying after the idols and daughters of Midyan. A superficial reading and understanding of these parshios could lead one to think that this remarkable generation wasn't so lofty after all.

Rav Wolbe writes (Daas Shlomo) that one who wishes to get a true picture of just how great these people were, must bear in mind three points. Firstly, the Kuzari (3:54-63) presents a most important principle. He asserts that the Torah only recounts well known events. The Torah does not tell of the great Torah knowledge of Yehoshua, Shmuel, Shimshon, and Gidoen. Rather it recounts the miracles of the splitting of the Yarden, the sun standing still, and the great strength of Shimshon. Sefer Shmuel recounts the wars fought by Dovid but it tells us nothing about his great piety, his awesome Torah erudition and his exceptional holiness. Except for a single story regarding the two women who argued over a baby, the Torah does not tell us about the great wisdom of Shlomo. Rather it mentions his fabulous wealth and his lavish meals. The Torah relates the famous stories while the rest of the details are meant to be filled in by Chazal. Learning The Written Torah without the aid of the Oral Torah is like trying to get a picture of someone's life by looking at a few postcards instead of watching an extended video documenting his life.

Secondly, all twenty four books of Tanach are

the word of Hashem, just recorded by humans by means of prophecy or ruach hakodesh. Thus, the gauge to measure those mentioned therein cannot be a human yardstick, for these people are being described by Hashem's exacting standards. The greater the person, the more demanding Hashem is in His dealings with them. Minute infractions indiscernible to the human eye are sometimes recorded as severe transgressions.

Lastly, we are literally spiritual light years away from the people discussed in Tanach. The Gemara (Eruvin 53a) in describing the difference between the Tanna'im and Amora'im writes that the hearts of the earlier generations were open like the entranceway to the Ulam (twenty cubits wide) while the hearts of the later generations are open like the eye of a needle! Moreover, Chazal declared "If the earlier generations were like angels then we are like humans; if they were like humans then we are like donkeys!" In other words, the difference between a few generations is compared to the difference between two entirely different species! Similar statements were made by Abaye and Rava who merited visits by Eliyahu Hanavi on a weekly and yearly basis respectively! We must multiply these differences a thousand fold to include the transformation that occurred from the times recorded in Tanach until the Tanna'im, and the many generations from the times of the Amora'im until the present day. We simply do not have the intellectual capability to comprehend the awesome stature of those mentioned in the Torah.

Let us not jump to conclusions regarding the misdeeds mentioned in the Torah. One Chassidic Rebbe pithily summed up this idea when he commented, "I wish my mitzvos were on the level of their aveiros!" Bearing this in mind will give us a fresh approach to the next few weeks of parshios. Instead of condemning their actions, we will be inspired by the immeasurable greatness attainable by man and hopefully be motivated to push ourselves to attain as much of that greatness as we possibly can! © *The AishDas Society*

