

## PARSHAH SUMMARY &amp; COMMENTARY

## Behaalotecha

Numbers 8:1-12:16

Torah Reading for Week of June 15-21, 2003

Our Parshah opens with G-d's instruction to Aaron to "raise light" in the lamps of the menorah in the Sanctuary, so that "the seven lamps should give light toward the face of the menorah."

*And this was the work of the menorah: it was of hammered gold, from its shaft, to its flowers, it was hammered work; according to the pattern which G-d had shown Moses, so he made the menorah.*

Moses then gathers all the people in front of the Sanctuary, where the tribe of Levi is initiated into the Temple service as assistants to the Kohanim (priests).

The Levites immerse in a pool of water, shave off all their hair, are sprinkled with the ashes of the Red Heifer, and bring offerings to G-d. The people lay their hands upon the Levites (as a person does when bringing an offering to G-d), and Aaron the High Priest lifts each of them up as an

"uplifting before G-d" (as the Kohen does with those portions of the offering that are given to him). For,

The Levites are given as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the Tent of Meeting, and to make atonement for the children of Israel...

"And after that, the Levites went in to do their service in the Tent of Meeting before Aaron and before his sons; as G-d had commanded Moses..."

## The Second Passover

On the day before the Exodus, while still in Egypt, every Israelite family had brought a lamb or kid as a Passover offering to G-d. Now it is a year later—in the month of Nissan of the year 2449 from creation (1312 BCE)—and G-d commands Moses:

The children of Israel shall keep the Passover at its appointed season.

In the fourteenth day of this month, at evening... according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies of it, shall you keep it.

But not all were able to do so:

## Commentary

SPEAK TO AARON AND SAY TO HIM: "WHEN YOU RAISE LIGHT IN THE LAMPS..." (NUMBERS 8:2)

Aaron did not bring an offering (for the Sanctuary's dedication — see previous Parshah) with the other princes of the tribes, and so he thought: Woe is me! Perhaps it is on my account that G-d does not accept the tribe of Levi? G-d therefore said to Moses: "Go and say to Aaron: Fear not, you have in store for you an honor greater than this... The offerings shall remain in force only as long as the Temple stands, but the lamps shall always give light..."

*(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)*

Were not the lamps of the menorah also extinguished with the destruction of the Holy Temple? But this alludes to the Chanukah lights, which were instituted in the time of the Second Temple by the Hashmoneans, descendants of Aaron, and which did not cease.

*(Nachmanides)*

When you raise light in the lamps... toward the face of the menorah (8:2)

It is written, "Nor does darkness obscure for You; the night shines as the day, darkness is as light" (Psalms 139:12). Yet to us He says: "When you raise light in the lamps"!

To what may the matter be compared? To the case of a king who had a friend. The king said to him: "I want you to know that I shall dine with

you. Go then and make preparations for me." His friend went and prepared a common couch, a common candelabra, and a common table. When the king arrived there came with him ministers who encompassed him on this side and that, and a golden candlestick preceded him. His friend, seeing all this pomp, felt ashamed and put away all that he had prepared for him, as it was all common. Said the king to him: "Did I not tell you that I would dine with you? Why did you not prepare anything for me?" His friend answered him: "Seeing all the pomp that accompanied you, I felt ashamed, and put away all that I had prepared for you, because they were common utensils." "By your life!" said the king to him, "I shall discard all the utensils that I have brought, and for love of you I shall use none but yours!" So in our case. The Holy One, blessed be He, is all light; as it says, "And the light dwells with Him" (Daniel 2:22). Yet He said to Israel: "Prepare for Me a candelabra and lamps."

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

When a person builds a house, he makes the windows narrow on the outside and wider on the inside, so that the light from the outside should optimally illuminate the interior. But when King Solomon built the Holy Temple in Jerusalem he made the windows narrow within and wide without, so that its light should emanate to the outside and illuminate the world.

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

## WHEN YOU RAISE LIGHT (8:2)

This is to teach us that the lamplighter must hold the flame to the wick

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There were certain persons who were contaminated by [contact with the dead body of a] human soul, that could not keep the Passover on that day; and they came before Moses and before Aaron on that day.

And those persons said to him: "We are contaminated... Why should we be deprived, that we may not offer the offering of G-d in its appointed season among the children of Israel?"

And Moses said to them: "Stand by, and I will hear what G-d will command concerning you."

G-d responded by instituting the law of *Pesach Sheini*, the "Second Passover":

And G-d spoke to Moses saying:

"...If any man of you, or of your future generations, shall

be impure by reason of contact with a dead body, or be on a journey afar off, he shall keep the Passover to G-d. On the fourteenth day of the second month at evening they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs..."

**Journeys and Encampments**

And on the day that the Sanctuary was erected, the cloud covered the Sanctuary, the Tent of the Testimony; and at evening there was upon the Sanctuary as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning.

So it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night.

And when the cloud was taken up from above the Tent, then after that the children of Israel journeyed. And in the place where the cloud came to rest, there the children of Israel encamped. At the commandment of G-d the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of G-d they encamped...

When the cloud tarried long upon the Sanctuary many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of G-d, and journeyed not. At times it was, that the cloud was a few days upon the Sanctuary... And at times it was, that the cloud abode from evening until morning, and that the

**Commentary**

until a flame arises of its own accord.

(Rashi)

The spiritual significance of the mitzvah of lighting the menorah is that one should be a "lamplighter" who ignites that latent potential within "the soul of man, a lamp of G-d" (Proverbs 20:27).

Here, too, the endeavor must be to kindle the lamp "so that a flame arises of its own accord." In teaching and influencing one's fellow, the objective should be to establish him or her as a self-sufficient luminary: to assist in developing his talents and abilities so that his lamp independently glows and, in turn, kindles the potential in others.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

**WHEN YOU RAISE LIGHT IN THE LAMPS (8:2)**

When the Kohen came to kindle the menorah's lamps each afternoon in the Holy Temple, he found them fully prepared for lighting: earlier in the day, the lamps had been cleaned and filled with oil, and fresh wicks had been inserted. All he had to do was bring near the flame he carried, so that its proximity to the waiting lamp would unleash the potential for illumination which the lamp already holds.

Therein lies an important lesson to the spiritual lamplighter: do not think that you are achieving anything that your fellow could not, in truth, achieve on his own; do not think that you are giving him something he does not already possess. The soul of your fellow is a ready lamp, filled with the purest oil and equipped with all that is required to

convert its fuel into a blazing flame. It only lacks the proximity of another lamp to ignite it. If your own soul is alight, its contact with another's soul will awaken its potential for light, so that it may illuminate its surroundings and kindle other souls, in turn.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

**AND AARON DID SO (8:3)**

Imagine standing in the Sanctuary, before the holy menorah, and to be capable of actually lighting the lamps — to place the wicks in position, and to fill the lamps without spilling the oil on the floor! This was truly an exceptional achievement on the part of Aaron.

(Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev)

**AND THIS WAS THE WORK OF THE MENORAH: IT WAS HAMMERED [OF A SINGLE PIECE OF] GOLD (8:4)**

We find that Moses experienced more difficulty in understanding the construction of the menorah than he did in that of all the other vessels of the Sanctuary. So G-d said to him: Take a talent of gold, cast it into the furnace and take it out again, and the menorah will assume shape of its own accord. Thus the verse says (Exodus 25:31): "Its cups, its knobs, and its flowers, shall come out of it"...

Moses smote [the piece of gold] with a hammer and the menorah took shape of its own accord. For this reason it says, "of hammered work it shall be made" (tei'aseh) — implying that it shall be made of its own accord.

(Midrash Rabbah)

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cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed...

Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the Sanctuary, remaining over it, the children of Israel remained encamped, and journeyed not; but when it was taken up, they journeyed.

At the commandment of G-d they remained encamped, and at the commandment of G-d they journeyed; they kept the charge of G-d, at the commandment of G-d by the hand of Moses.

## Trumpets

G-d instructs Moses to make two silver trumpets, which should be used "to summon the community, and to make journey the camps."

A straight long blast (*tekiah*) is to be used to summon the

people: if both trumpets are sounded, the entire people should gather before the entrance of the Sanctuary; one trumpet means that only the tribal heads were being summoned.

When the people break camp, the start of the journey is to be heralded with a series of short blasts (*teruah*). The first *teruah* signals the tribes camping to the east to begin moving; the next series of short blasts sets the southern camp in motion, and so on, according to the order instructed earlier (Numbers 2).

Trumpets are also to be sounded when going out to war, and when bringing the seasonal offerings in the Holy Temple.

## Onward From Sinai

For eleven months and twenty days, the people of Israel camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. There they received the Torah; there they worshipped the Golden Calf, repented their sin, and obtained G-d's forgiveness; there they constructed the Sanctuary and dedicated it as the "Tent of Meeting" and Divine dwelling in their midst. Then came the Divine command to move on.

And it came to pass on the twentieth day of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from off the Sanctuary of the Testimony.

## Commentary

The menorah represents the people of Israel — G-ds "light unto the nations." Its many components attest to the fact that the Jewish nation is comprised of different tribes and includes individuals from all walks of life.

But even as the menorah's form expresses the diversity within Israel, there are two laws which point to the menorah's integrity. One law concerns the making of the menorah, and the second law, the manner of its lighting.

An artifact of the menorah's complexity is usually fashioned by first molding each of its parts on their own and then welding them together. The menorah, however, was hammered out of a single piece of gold, originating as a single object and remaining a single object through the various stages of its construction to the finished product.

This represents the fact that while there are nations that are a coalition of variant groups, each formed by its own ancestry and experience but welded together by common interest and habitat, this is not the case with the Jewish people: all souls of Israel are of a single essence, and their division into distinct individuals is merely their investment into different bodies and physical lives.

The second law is that although the menorah sheds its light with seven lamps, they must all be turned toward the central stem, in keeping with G-d's instruction to Aaron that "the seven lamps shall give light toward the face of the menorah." This expresses the truth that although the soul of Israel shines not with a single light, but by means of a seven-lamp menorah representing the various prototypes of human character (the

seven sefirot), at the same time, all lamps of the menorah face the body from which they extend, emphasizing their singular origin and their singular goal.

In other words: we all come from the same place, and we are all oriented toward the same goal. The differences are only in order to better express our Source and to more completely achieve our goal. Which makes them not differences, but the ultimate expression of oneness.

*(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

**AND THIS WAS THE WORK OF THE MENORAH... FROM ITS SHAFT, TO ITS FLOWERS (8:4)**

The menorah also represents the Torah, the source of Divine light in the world. This is alluded to in the menorah's design, which is detailed in the 25th chapter of Exodus. The Menorah had seven branches, eleven knobs, nine flowers, twenty-two goblets and was seventeen handbreadths in height. These numbers represent the five books of the Written Torah: the first verse in the book of Genesis has seven words, the first verse of Exodus has 11 words, the first verse of Leviticus has nine words, the first verse of Numbers has 17 words, and the first verse of Deuteronomy—22 words.

*(Divrei Noam)*

**AND G-D SPOKE TO MOSES... IN THE FIRST MONTH OF THE SECOND YEAR AFTER THEY CAME OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT... (9:1)**

The events related in this chapter occurred in the first month of that year, while the events of the first chapters of this book (Numbers)

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And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the Sinai Desert; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran.

Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, was in the Israelite camp at the time (cf. Exodus 18). Before they go, Moses says to Jethro: "We are journeying to the place of which G-d said, 'I will give it to you.' Come you with us, and we will do you good; for G-d has spoken good concerning Israel."

But Jethro declines. "I will not go; but I will depart to my own land, and to my kindred."

And they departed from the mountain of G-d three days'

journey; and the Ark of the Covenant of G-d went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them.

## The Ark in Motion

And it came to pass, when the Ark went forth, that Moses said, "Rise up, G-d, and let Your enemies be scattered; and let those who hate You flee before You."

And when it rested, he said, "Return, G-d, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel."

(These two verses are bracketed in the Torah with two inverted *nun's*, signifying that they constitute "a book unto itself")

## Manna and Meat

The people complain, incurring the wrath of G-d, and a fire rages at "the edge of the camp." The people cry out to Moses, who prays for the fire to be quenched.

## Commentary

occurred in the second month. This teaches us that the Torah does not necessarily follow in chronological order.

Why, indeed, does not the Book of Numbers open with this chapter? Because it is a disgrace for Israel. For in the forty years that the Jewish people were in the desert, this was the only Passover offering they brought.

(Sifri; Rashi)

The reason that our ancestors brought no other Passover offering that G-d did not allow them to. G-d had instructed that the annual Passover offering should be observed only "When you come into the land that G-d shall give to you" (Exodus 12:25); the Passover observed in Egypt, and the one held in the desert on the following year were exceptions to this rule, specifically commanded by G-d. So why should the fact that they brought no other Passover offerings in the desert be regarded as a "disgrace"?

The answer lies in the story of the "Second Passover" itself. A group of Jews had found themselves in a state which, according to Torah law, absolved them from the duty to bring the Passover offering. Yet they refused to reconcile themselves to this. And their impassioned plea and demand, "Why should we be deprived?," swayed G-d to establish a new institution, the "Second Passover," to enable them, and all who will find themselves in a similar situation in future generations, to "to present G-d's offering in its time, amongst the children of Israel."

Therein lies the "disgrace" in those thirty-eight Passoverless years in the Desert. Why did the Jewish people reconcile themselves to the Divine decree? Why did they accept this void in their relationship with G-d? Why did they not petition for an opportunity to serve Him in the full and optimum manner that the mitzvot of the Torah describe?

For more than nineteen-hundred years now, our Passovers have been incomplete. We eat the matzah and the bitter herbs, we drink the four cups of wine, ask and answer the four questions, but the heart and

essence of Passover, the Passover offering, is absent from our seder table. For G-d has hidden His face from us, has removed the Holy Temple, the seat of His manifest presence on physical earth, from our midst.

The lesson of the "displaced" ninth chapter of Numbers is clear: G-d desires and expects of us that we refuse to reconcile ourselves to the decree of galut and its diminution of His manifest involvement in our lives. He desires and expects of us that we storm the gates of heaven with the plea and demand: "Why should we be deprived?!"

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

**THERE WERE CERTAIN PERSONS WHO WERE CONTAMINATED BY [CONTACT WITH THE DEAD BODY OF A] HUMAN SOUL (9:6)**

Who were they? Rabbi Ishmael says, they were the ones carrying Joseph's coffin. Rabbi Akiva says, they were Mishael and Eltzafan, who contaminated themselves for the bodies of Nadav and Avihu (cf. Leviticus 10).

Rabbi Yitzchak says: If they were Joseph's pallbearers, they had ample opportunity to purify themselves; if they were Mishael and Eltzafan, they had ample opportunity to purify themselves. So who were they? People who contaminated themselves for the sake of a met mitzvah (a "charity case" who has no one to attend to him).

(Sifri)

**IF ANY MAN OF YOU, OR OF YOUR FUTURE GENERATIONS, SHALL BE UNCLEAN... OR BE ON A JOURNEY AFAR OFF, HE SHALL KEEP THE PASSOVER TO G-D ON THE FOURTEENTH DAY OF THE SECOND MONTH... (9:10-11)**

The meaning of the "Second Passover" is that it is never too late; there is always a second chance.

(Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch)

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But soon they are complaining again.

And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a-lusting; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said: "Who shall give us meat to eat?"

*"We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt for nothing; 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, beside this manna, before our*

eyes..."

Even the long-suffering Moses can tolerate it no longer.

*Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent. And the anger of G-d burned greatly; Moses also was displeased.*

And Moses said to G-d: "Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You lay the burden of all this people upon me?"

"Have I conceived all this people? Have I begotten them, that You should say to me: Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries the suckling child, to the land which You have sworn to their fathers?"

"Whence should I have meat to give to all this people? For they weep to me, saying: Give us meat that we may eat. I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me..."

## Commentary

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

Why was the mitzvah of the "Second Passover" not commanded directly by G-d in the Torah from the very start, as were virtually all other mitzvot?

Because the Second Passover represents the power of teshuvah—the power to "return" and rectify past failings and transform them, retroactively, into merits. This cannot derive from Torah itself, since Torah, which defines what is desirable and undesirable in the eyes of G-d, cannot regard a failure to fulfill a Divine command as something "positive." The mitzvah of the Second Passover could come only as the Divine response to the profound yearning of a soul superceding "Torah," as it were, crying out for attachment to G-d from a place so deep within itself that it transcends failing and merit, and can therefore reach back to transform the failing into the merit.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

**AND AT TIMES IT WAS, THAT THE CLOUD ABODE FROM EVENING UNTIL MORNING... THEN THEY JOURNEYED (9:21)**

The Sanctuary was a formidable structure, consisting of hundreds of foundation sockets, wall sections, pillars, tapestries and furnishings; a work crew of several thousand Levites assembled the Sanctuary at each camp and dismantled and transported it when the Divine command would come to move on. Yet the "Tent of Meeting" was erected at every encampment—even if only for a single day!

This teaches us that each and every one of our "stations" in life is significant unto itself. A person may find him or herself in a certain place or in a certain situation for a very brief period, and it may seem to him that he is merely "on the way" to some other place. Yet there is always something in that place or situation to be sanctified—something that can serve as a "Tent of Meeting" between Heaven and earth.

**I WILL DEPART TO MY OWN LAND, AND TO MY KINDRED (10:30)**

This is in keeping with the common saying: Use your local grain for sowing, even if of a lesser quality.

(Midrash HaGadol)

Though Jethro returned to Midian, his children remained with the Jewish people, as related in the Book of Judges (Judges 1:16).

(Soferno)

**AND THEY DEPARTED FROM THE MOUNTAIN OF G-D (10:33)**

They ran from Mount Sinai like children let out from school.

(Jerusalem Talmud)

**AND IT CAME TO PASS WHEN THE ARK WENT FORTH... (10:35)**

For this section G-d placed symbols above and below... because it ranks as a separate Book.

(Talmud, Shabbat 115b)

"Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars" (Proverbs 9:1). Bar Kapara interpreted this verse as referring to the Torah and its seven books. But surely there are only five? Bar Kapara considered the portion from the beginning of the Book of Numbers until the verse, "And it came to pass, when the Ark went forth" as one book; the two verses "And it came to pass..." and "And when it rested..." as another book; and from there to the end of Numbers as yet another book. By this count, we have seven.

(Midrash Rabbah)

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## Delegation

If the burden is too heavy for you to bear alone, says G-d to Moses, "Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you."

*And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will emanate of the spirit which is upon you, and will bestow it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you bear it not yourself alone.*

As for the meat they're asking for:

And say to the people: Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the ears of G-d, saying, Who shall give us meat to eat? ... Therefore G-d will give you meat, and you shall eat.

Not one day shall you eat, nor two days, nor five days, nor

ten days, nor twenty days; but a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome to you; because you have despised G-d who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying: Why did we come out of Egypt?

Moses still has difficulty with the whole thing. "The people, among whom I am," he says to G-d, "are six hundred thousand footmen. And You have said: I will give them meat, that they may eat a whole month. Shall flocks and herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them?"

"Is G-d's hand short?" says G-d in reply. "You shall see now whether My word shall come to pass to you or not."

## Eldad, Meidad and Joshua

The seventy elders are selected, and G-d "emanates of the spirit" which He has bestowed upon Moses to them, and they receive the gift of prophesy.

Joshua, Moses' faithful disciple, is upset. When two of the elected men, Eldad and Meidad, prophesy in the camp, he urges Moses to imprison them.

"Are you jealous for me?" says Moses "Would that all G-d's people were prophets, and that G-d would set His spirit upon them!"

## "The Meat Yet Between Their Teeth"

## Commentary

AND THE FIRE OF G-D BURNED AMONG THEM, AND CONSUMED THOSE WHO WERE IN THE EDGE OF THE CAMP (11:1)

"The edge of the camp" are the lowly fringe, the "mixed multitude." Rabbi Shimon ben Menassia says: the officers and leaders.

*(Rashi; Midrash Tanchuma)*

AND THE MIXED MULTITUDE THAT WAS AMONG THEM FELL A LUSTING... "WHO SHALL GIVE US MEAT TO EAT?" (11:4)

Shall we say that they asked for the flesh of animals? But surely the manna changed in their mouth into any taste they desired; as it says, "And He gave them their request" (Psalms 106:15), "And He gave them that which they craved" (ibid. 78:29). Shall we say that they had no oxen or cattle? But surely, it is already written, "And a mixed multitude went up also with them; also flocks and herds" (Exodus 12:38). Shall we assume that they had eaten them up in the wilderness? But surely, it is written (on the eve of their entry into the Land of Israel forty years later), "Now the children of Reuben... had a very great multitude of cattle" (Numbers. 32:1). Hence, they were only looking for an excuse to complain.

Rabbi Shimon concluded that they did not lust for meat, but for sexual vice.

*(Rashi; Midrash Rabbah)*

## WE REMEMBER THE FISH WHICH WE ATE IN EGYPT (11:5)

Rav and Shmuel differed as to the meaning of this. One says it means fish. The other says it is a idiom for forbidden sexual relations... This is also the meaning of what is says further on, "And Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families"—they were weeping over the incestuous relations that were now forbidden them.

*(Talmud, Yoma 75a)*

## WE REMEMBER THE FISH WHICH WE ATE IN EGYPT (11:5)

Pharaoh did not even give them straw (cf. Exodus 5), and they said that they received free fish! If they would have known about the manna beforehand, they would have claimed to have already eaten it at Pharaoh's table...

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

## WE REMEMBER THE FISH WHICH WE ATE IN EGYPT FOR NOTHING (11:5)

"For nothing"—without the responsibility of the mitzvot.

*(Sifri)*

The Lubavitcher Rebbe illustrates the deeper significance of the "free fish" of Egypt with the following parable:

A wealthy nobleman was once touring his estate and came upon a peas-

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Moses retired into the camp, he and the elders of Israel.

And a wind went out from G-d, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, about a day's journey on this side, and about a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp and about two cubits high upon the face of the earth.

The people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails—he that gathered least gathered ten heaps; and they spread them all

abroad for themselves round about the camp..

The meat was yet between their teeth, before it be cut, that the wrath of G-d was inflamed against the people; and G-d smote the people with a very great plague.

*And he called the name of that place Kivrot-Hatta'avah (Graves of Lust), because there they buried the people that lusted.*

And the people journeyed from Kivrot-Hatta'avah to Hazeirot, and camped at Hazeirot.

**Miriam Criticizes Moses**

Moses' sister, Miriam, speaks negatively about her brother's marriage with the "Kushite woman" he wed. "Was it indeed only with Moses that G-d spoke?" she says to her other brother Aaron. "Has He not spoken also with us?"

**Commentary***(Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch)*

ant pitching hay. The nobleman was fascinated by the flowing motions of the peasant's arms and shoulders and the graceful sweep of the pitchfork through the air. He so greatly enjoyed the spectacle that he struck a deal with the peasant: for ten rubles a day, the peasant agreed to come to the mansion and enact his hay-pitching technique in the nobleman's drawing room.

The next day, the peasant arrived at the mansion, hardly concealing his glee at his new line of work. After swinging his empty pitchfork for over an hour, he collected his ten rubles—many times over his usual wage for a week of labor. But by the following day, his enthusiasm had waned. Several days later he announced to his master that he is quitting his new commission.

"But I don't understand," puzzled the nobleman. "Why choose to swing heavy loads in the winter cold and summer heat, when you can perform such an effortless task in the comfort of my home and earn many times your usual pay?"

"But master," said the peasant, "I don't see the work."

**BUT NOW OUR SOUL IS DRIED AWAY: THERE IS NOTHING AT ALL, BESIDE THIS MANNA, BEFORE OUR EYES (11:6)**

A person derives pleasure from material things only in comparing what he has to what his neighbors have. So although they could enjoy every taste in the world in the manna, they derived no pleasure from it, since everyone had it...

*(Rabbi Yonatan Eibshitz)*

**FROM WHERE SHOULD I HAVE MEAT TO GIVE TO THIS ENTIRE NATION? (11:13)**

Moses was unable to lower himself to the task of providing Israel with meat—his soul was far too lofty to deal with so mundane a need.

**GATHER TO ME SEVENTY MEN OF THE ELDERS OF ISRAEL, WHOM YOU KNOW TO BE... OFFICERS OVER THEM (11:16)**

While they were still in Egypt, they had had seventy elders; as it says (Exodus 3:16), "Go, and gather the elders of Israel together." But these new elders were those who were then the Israelite "officers" whom Pharaoh set over the children of Israel.

When the children of Israel failed to meet the quota of bricks set by Pharaoh, the taskmasters would beat the officers, as it is written (ibid. 5:14), "And the Israelite officers were beaten..." These officers allowed themselves to be beaten for the people's sake, and did not hand them over to the taskmasters, saying: It is better that we be beaten, and the rest of the people should not be harmed.

Therefore, when G-d said to Moses, "Gather to Me seventy men," and Moses said, "My Master, I do not know who is worthy and who is not worthy," G-d said: "Those whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them." Those officers who gave themselves over to be beaten over the brick quotas, they shall now be elevated to this greatness.

*(Midrash Tanchuma)*

**GATHER TO ME SEVENTY MEN OF THE ELDERS OF ISRAEL (11:16)**

Moses thought: What shall I do? If I bring five from each tribe, the total will not amount to seventy and there will only be sixty. If I bring six from each tribe, there will be two more than seventy. If I bring six from one tribe and five from another, I will introduce jealousy between one tribe and another.

What did he do? He took seventy-two ballots and wrote on seventy of them "elder" and two ballots he left blank. Then he mixed them up in an urn and proclaimed: "Come and draw your ballots." A man who drew out a ballot inscribed with the word "elder" knew that he had been appointed an elder. And one who drew out a blank knew that he had not been appointed, and the superintendent would say to him: "There is still

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## Behaalotecha

Numbers 8:1-12:16

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And G-d heard. Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than all the men that were upon the face of the earth.

G-d speaks suddenly to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, and summons them to the Sanctuary. There He appears in a pillar of cloud and speaks only to Aaron and Miriam:

*Hear now My words: If there be a prophet among you, I G-d make myself known to him in a vision, and speak to him in a dream.*

My servant Moses is not so, for he is the trusted one in all My house.

With him I speak mouth to mouth, manifestly, and not in riddles; and the similitude of G-d does he behold. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

When the cloud departs, Miriam is snow-white with leprosy (the punishment for *lashon ha-ra*, evil speech).

*And Moses cried to G-d, saying: "I beseech You, O G-d, heal her now!"*

G-d orders that Miriam be secluded outside of the camp for seven days, after which she will be healed. "And the people journeyed not until Miriam was brought in again."

And after that the people journeyed from Hazierot, and camped in the wilderness of Paran.

## Commentary

a ballot in the urn inscribed with the word 'elder'; had you been worthy of being appointed you would have drawn it."

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

## GATHER TO ME SEVENTY MEN OF THE ELDERS OF ISRAEL (11:16)

The seventy elders correspond to the seventy biblically-ordained holy days of the year: 52 Sabbaths, seven days of Passover, eight days of Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Shavuot.

*(Yalkut Shimoni)*

## GATHER TO ME SEVENTY MEN OF THE ELDERS OF ISRAEL... AND I WILL EMANATE OF THE SPIRIT WHICH IS UPON YOU, AND WILL BESTOW IT UPON THEM (11:16-17)

Should you object that while one sage permits, another prohibits; while one disqualifies, another declares fit; while one rules that a thing is unclean, another rules that it is clean; while Rabbi Eleazar condemns, Rabbi Joshua acquits; while Beth Shammai disqualify, Beth Hillel declare fit; to whom then shall we listen? Says G-d: Nevertheless, it is all given from one shepherd.

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

## AND I WILL EMANATE OF THE SPIRIT WHICH IS UPON YOU, AND WILL BESTOW IT UPON THEM (11:17)

Was Moses prophesy perhaps diminished? No. This is comparable to a burning candle from which many candles are lit, yet its own light is not diminished. So, too, Moses lost nothing that was his.

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

On the most basic level, this is the difference between physical and spiritual giving. In physical giving, the givers resources are depleted by his gift—he now has less money or energy than before. In spiritual giving, however, there is no loss. When a person teaches his fellow, his own knowledge is not diminished if anything, it is enhanced.

Upon deeper contemplation, however, it would seem that spiritual giving, too, carries a "price." If the disciple is of inferior knowledge and mental capability than the teacher, the time and effort expended in teaching him is invariably at the expense of the teachers own intellectual development; also, the need for the teacher to "coarsen" and simplify his ideas to fit the disciples mind will ultimately detract from the depth and abstraction of his own thoughts. By the same token, dealing with people of lower moral and spiritual level than oneself cannot but affect ones own spiritual state. The recipients of this "spiritual charity" will be elevated by it, but its giver will be diminished by the relationship, however subtly.

Indeed, we find an example of such spiritual descent in Moses bestowal of the leadership upon Joshua. In contrast to the appointment of the seventy elders, where he was told to "emanate" his spirit to them, Moses is here commanded to "Take Joshua the son of Nun, and lay your hand upon him... and give of your glory upon him" (Numbers 28:18-20). Here the Midrash comments, "Lay your hand upon him like one who kindles a candle from a candle; Give of your glory like one who pours from one vessel into another vessel."

In other words, there are two kinds of spiritual gifts: a gift that "costs" the giver nothing ("emanation", which is like "kindling a candle from a candle"), and a gift that involves a removal of something from the giver in order that the recipient should receive something ("pouring from one vessel into another").

There are times we indeed sacrifice something of ourselves for the benefit of a fellow. But there are also times when we commit ourselves to our fellow so absolutely—when the gift comes from a place so deep and so true within us—that we only grow from experience, no matter how much we give of ourselves.

*(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

## PARSHAH SUMMARY &amp; COMMENTARY

## Behaalotecha

Numbers 8:1-12:16

Torah Reading for Week of June 15-21, 2003

AND HE CALLED THE NAME OF THAT PLACE KIVROT-HATTA'AVAH, BECAUSE THERE THEY BURIED THE PEOPLE THAT LUSTED (11:34)

The literal meaning of Kivrot-Hatta'avah is "graves of lust": not only the "people that lusted" were buried there, but also the lust itself...

(Binah Le'ittim)

AND MIRIAM AND AARON SPOKE AGAINST MOSES ABOUT THE KUSHITE WOMAN WHOM HE HAD MARRIED... (12:1)

When the elders were appointed, the people of Israel lit candles and rejoiced for the seventy elders who had been elevated to greatness. When Miriam saw the candles, she said: "Fortunate are these men, and fortunate are their wives!" Said Tziporah to her: "Do not say, 'Fortunate are their wives,' say: 'Woe unto their wives!' For from the day that G-d spoke to Moses your brother, he has not had relations with me."

Immediately Miriam went to Aaron and they took to discussing the matter, as it says, "And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses about the woman"—about his separating himself from the woman. They said: "Moses is a prideful one. Did G-d speak only with him? He has already spoken with many prophets, ourselves included; did we separate from our spouses?"

Thus the verse attests, to refute them: "Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than all the men that were upon the face of the earth."

G-d appeared to them suddenly, when they had not yet purified themselves [through immersion in a pool of water] following marital relations, and they began calling, "Water! Water!" This was to teach them that Moses did right in separating from his wife, since the Divine presence revealed itself to him constantly, and there was no pre-set time for Divine communication.

G-d said to them: "The prophets of whom you spoke, in dreams and visions did I communicate with them. Not so is My manner with Moses My servant. And it was I who told him to separate from his wife." (Where did G-d say this? Following the revelation at Sinai [when all the people were commanded to separate from their wives for three days] G-d said to Moses: "Go and say to them: 'Return to your tents'; but you stay here with Me".)

(Sifri; Rashi)

THE KUSHITE WOMAN (12:1)

Was she then a Kushite? She was a Midianite! Rather, it means that her beauty was obvious to all, as the blackness of a Kushite is obvious to all.

(Sifri; Rashi)

IF THERE BE A PROPHET AMONG YOU, I... SPEAK TO HIM IN A DREAM. MY SERVANT MOSES IS NOT SO (12:6-7)

In sleep, when the soul frees itself, to a certain degree, from the confines of the body, it can begin to perceive the Divine essence that hides behind the material world. Moses, however, was able to see G-dliness even when awake—for him the material world did not conceal.

(Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov)

I BESEECH YOU, O G-D, HEAL HER NOW (12:13)

When Moses began to pray at the shore of the Red Sea, G-d said to him: "Moses! My children are in dire straits, and you stand and pray profusely? ... There is a time to pray at length, and there is a time to pray shortly..."

(Mechilta Beshalach)

Once a certain disciple went down [to lead the prayer] before the Ark in the presence of Rabbi Eliezer, and he span out the prayer to a great length. His disciples said to him: Master, how longwinded this fellow is! He replied to them: Is he drawing it out any more than our master Moses, of whom it is written (Deuteronomy 9:25): "The forty days and the forty nights that I threw myself down before G-d in supplication?"

Another time it happened that a certain disciple went down before the Ark in the presence of Rabbi Eliezer, and he cut the prayer very short. His disciples said to him: How concise this fellow is! He replied to them: Is he any more concise than our master Moses, who prayed, as it is written: "I beseech You, O G-d, heal her now"?

(Talmud, Berachot 34a)

LET HER BE SHUT OUT FROM THE CAMP SEVEN DAYS, AND AFTER THAT LET HER BE RECEIVED IN AGAIN (12:14)

There are prayers that are answered after a hundred years... There are prayers that are answered after ninety years... And there are prayers that are answered after seven days.

(Midrash Yalkut Hamachiri)

AND THE PEOPLE JOURNEYED NOT TILL MIRIAM WAS BROUGHT IN AGAIN (12:15)

Miriam waited a short while for Moses, as it is written (Exodus 2:4), "And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him"; therefore Israel was delayed for her seven days in the wilderness, as it is written, "And the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again."

(Talmud, Sotah 9b)

## PARSHAH SUMMARY &amp; COMMENTARY

## Behaalotecha

## From the Chassidic Masters

## RUSH AND RETURN

Though it occupies only three verses in the beginning of our Parshah, the mitzvah of lighting the menorah gives the whole of *Behaalotecha* (“When you raise light”) its name. As cited in our “[Parshah In-Depth](#)” section, the lamps of the menorah are seen as representing the souls of Israel, and the various laws governing the menorah’s construction and the lighting of its lamps are explained by the Chassidic masters as instructive of the nature and structure of the people of Israel, the manner in which the potential of the soul of man is to be ignited, the duties of the “[lamplighter](#)”, and numerous other insights into the [spiritual art](#) of lamplighting.

The foundation of the menorah/people lamp/soul equation is King Solomon’s declaration in the Book of Proverbs: “A lamp of G-d, the soul of man.” The founder of Chabad Chassidism, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, delves into this metaphor, finding in the components of the physical lamp a detailed anatomy of the human soul. The following is based on Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s analysis and subsequent discourses penned by the later rebbes of Chabad.

*The Flame: Antipodal Strivings*

The flame surges upwards, as if to tear free from the wick and lose itself in the great expanses of energy that gird the heavens. But even as it strains heavenward, it is already pulling back, tightening its grip on the wick and drinking thirstily of the oil in the lamp — oil that sustains its continued existence as an individual flame. And it is this tension of conflicting energies, this vacillation from being to dissolution and back again, that produces light.

The soul, too, yearns for transcendence, yearns to tear free of the entanglements of material life and achieve a self-nullifying reunion with its Creator and Source. At the same time, however, it is also driven by a will to be — a will to live a physical life and make its mark upon a physical world. In the “lamp of

G-d” that is man, these polar drives converge in a flame that illuminates its surroundings with a G-dly light.

*The Ingredients*

How is a flame generated and sustained? By means of a lamp, consisting of oil, a wick, and a vessel containing them so that the oil is fed through the wick to a burning flame.

Oil and wick are both combustible substances. But neither could produce light on its own with the efficiency and stability of the lamp. The wick, if ignited, would flare briefly and die, utterly consumed. As for the oil, one would find it extremely difficult to ignite at all. But when wick and oil are brought together in the lamp, they produce a controlled and steady light.

The soul of man is a lamp of G-d whose purpose in life is to illuminate the world with divine light. G-d provided us with the “fuel” that generates His light — the Torah and its commandments (mitzvot), which embody His wisdom and will and convey His luminous truth.

The divine oil requires a “wick” — a physical body — to channel its substance and convert it into an illuminating flame. The Torah is the divine wisdom; but for divine wisdom to be manifest in our world, there must be physical minds that study it and comprehend it, physical mouths that debate it and teach it, and physical media that publish it and disseminate it. The mitzvot are the divine will; but for the divine will to be manifest in our world, there must be physical hands that actualize it and physical materials (animal hide for *r tefillin*, wool for *tzitzit*, money for charity) with which it is actualized.

And just as the divine oil cannot produce light without a material wick, neither can a wick without oil. A life without Torah and mitzvot, however aflame with the desire to come close to G-d, is incapable of sustaining its flame. It might generate flashes of ecstatic spiritual experience, but lacking oil of genuine divine substance, these quickly die out and fail to introduce any enduring light into the world.

To realize its role as a “lamp of G-d,” a human life must be a lamp that combines a physical existence (the “wick”) with the divine ideas and deeds of Torah (the “oil”). When the wick is saturated with oil and feeds its spiritual yearnings with a steady supply of the same, the resultant flame is both luminous and

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sustainable, preserving the existence and productivity of the wick and illuminating the corner of the world in which it has been placed.

*Hues of Light*

The flame itself is a multi-colored affair, alluding to the many levels on which man relates to the Creator through his observance of the mitzvot. Generally speaking, there is the lower and darker area of the flame which adjoins the wick, and its upper and brighter part.

The darker segment of the flame represents those aspects of a person's service of G-d which are colored by their association with the physicality of the "wick"—that is, mitzvot which are motivated by self-interest. The higher and purer part of the flame represents a person's moments of self-transcendence, deeds which a person does—as Maimonides writes—"not for any reason in the world: not out of fear of evil or out of a desire to obtain the good; rather, he does the truth because it is true."

Both these aspects of a person's life are reflected in his relationship with G-d. The mitzvot come not only to bind his altruistic "G-dly soul" to the Almighty, but also to involve his ego-dominated "animal soul" in the fulfillment of the divine will. This is achieved when a person understands that he should "love the Lord your G-d... for He is your life" (Deuteronomy 30:20). By recognizing that G-d is the source and sustainer of his very being, the very same ego which earlier craved the most material of pleasures is now drawn to attach itself to the Almighty, out of the realization that there is no greater fulfillment of self possible.

*Rush and Return*

Thus the "wick" is both prison and liberator for the flame, both tether and lifeline. It holds the soul in its distinctiveness from the divine whole, in its apartness from its Creator. And yet, it is this distinctiveness and apartness, this incarnation in a physical life, which allows us to connect to G-d in the deepest and most meaningful way — by fulfilling His will.

So when divine command, physical body and human life come together as oil, wick and lamp, the result is a flame: a relationship with G-d that is characterized by two conflicting drives, by a yearning to come close coupled with a commitment to draw back. The materiality of life evokes in the soul a desire to tear free of it and fuse with the Divine. But the closer the soul is drawn to G-d, all the more does it recognize that it can fulfill His will only as a distinct and physical being. So while the corporeality of the wick triggers the flames upward surge, the divine will implicit in the oil sustains its commitment to existence and life.

Every mitzvah is oil for the soul: with every act that constitutes a fulfillment of the divine will, our lives are rendered into burning lamps, alight with flames that vacillate from heaven to earth and back again and illuminate the world in the process.

Therein lies the specialty of the mitzvah of kindling the lamps of the menorah in the Holy Temple. Every mitzvah generates light — whether it involves giving a coin to charity, binding *tefillin* on our arms and heads, or eating matzah on Passover. But this mitzvah (and the related mitzvot of kindling the Shabbat and Chanukah lights) not only transform us into metaphorical lamps, but also assume the actual form of a physical lamp — physical oil, a physical wick, and a physical flame that produces physical, tactual light.

*Based on the writings of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch (1773-1827), and the Lubavitcher Rebbe; adaptation by Yanki Tauber.*

## A LONG POLE

Here's the problem: you're here, and you want to be there ("there" being someplace better, loftier, more spiritual than "here"). But you're not there, and won't be there for a good while, perhaps ever.

So do you act as if you're already there? Or do you tell yourself that here's just fine, and who needs there anyway?

You can become a hypocrite, or you can come to terms with your limitations. But there's also a third way—the way of the Long Pole.

In the outer chamber of the *heichal* (Sanctuary) in

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the Holy Temple stood the menorah—a five-foot, seven branched candelabra of pure gold. Every morning, a priest filled the menorah's seven lamps with the purest olive oil; in the afternoon, he would climb a three-step foot-ladder to kindle the menorah's lamps. The seven flames burned through the night, symbolizing the Divine light which radiated from the Holy Temple to the world.

Actually, it did not have to be a priest (*kohen*) who lit the menorah—the law states that an ordinary layman can also perform this mitzvah. But there is also a law that restricts entry into the Sanctuary to priests only—ordinary Israelites could venture no further than the *azarah*, the Temple courtyard.

These two laws create a legal paradox: a layman can light the menorah; but the menorah's designated place is inside the Sanctuary, and a layman cannot enter the Sanctuary.

Technically, there are solutions: a layman can light the menorah by means of a long pole, or the menorah can be carried out to him by a *kohen* and then replaced in the Sanctuary. But the inconsistency remains: if the Torah believes that an ordinary person should be able to light the menorah, why doesn't it place the menorah in a part of the Temple accessible to ordinary people? And if the sanctity of the menorah is such that it requires the higher holiness of the Sanctuary, why does the Torah permit someone who cannot attain this level to light it?

This paradox, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, is intentionally set up by the Torah in order to convey to us a most profound lesson: the lesson of the long pole.

The lesson of the long pole says that we should aspire to spiritual heights that lie beyond our reach. Not that we should presume to be what we are not—that would be like an ordinary person entering the Sanctuary—but neither should we desist from our efforts to reach that place. Even when we know that we, ourselves, will never be “there”, we can still act

upon that place, influence it, even illuminate it.

At times, this means that someone from that higher place reaches down to us. At times, it means that we contrive a way to reach beyond what we are at the present time. In either case, we are what Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch calls a “lamplighter”: a person who carries a long pole with a flame at its end and goes from lamp to lamp to ignite them; no lamp is too lowly, and no lamp is too lofty, for the lamplighter and his pole.

*By Yanki Tauber, editor@chabadonline.com;  
based on the teachings of the  
Lubavitcher Rebbe, www.therebbe.org*