



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

## Behaalotecha 5780

### A Long Hot Summer

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The Table is set and history beckons! The Jews are primed to enter the land of Israel, construct a Temple, and usher in utopia for themselves and for all mankind. Our parsha contains the first hint of trouble; the desert wanderers complain about the hardships of their wilderness travel and, ultimately, about their Divinely-delivered Manna. Absurdly, they pine for the meager and skimpy fish they consumed as slaves in Egypt. What prompted this sudden disillusionment and what caused their ultimate national meltdown witnessed in subsequent parshiyot? At least part of this national moral unraveling was the new conditions they were facing. Since leaving Egypt their lives had been extremely eventful and action-packed. A week after their departure from Egypt they stood at the sea, gazing at a complete upheaval of nature. Six weeks later an entire nation amassed underneath the mountain of Sinai conversing directly with G-d. In the aftermath of the egel debacle a new national project surfaced - repentance and religious rehabilitation. Of course, after their penitence was accepted the grand mission of constructing the mishkan was launched. Life was indeed challenging but energizing and filled with ambitious projects and constant milestones. After all these milestones are achieved the nation faces a new world order and a vastly different reality - life without "projects". As challenging as the first year may have been it was laced with drama and concrete challenges. Having completed the cycle of the first year, the Jews now faced the prospect of a long summer and an extended journey through the desert to Israel. This condition of 'extended reality' can be overwhelming and the process can, at times, feel heavy. Without milestones sometimes life feels unclear. The past three months of our Corona experience have been challenging but also have been marked by important milestones. In Israel, we were conscious of the viral threat early as Purim, though most Jewish communities around

the world only awoke to corona awareness in the weeks between Purim and Pesach. Either way, we all experienced a dramatic and certainly different Pesach - completely unlike any previous experiences. As frustrating as Pesach may have felt, it also felt significant and even "momentous". Preparing for Pesach without our full families was upsetting but we all sensed something historical. With Shavuot looming, we counted down the sefirah, realizing, sooner than later, that our restricted Shavuot celebrations would, none the less, be noteworthy. In Israel, we marked Yom Haatz'maut without the public fanfare and ceremonies which are so characteristic of this national day. This past few months have been trying but also dramatic. At this stage we are entering a very different phase of this corona virus struggle - one that feels very similar to the challenge the Jews faced in this week's parsha. On the one hand restrictions are easing and, hopefully, the harsh quarantined experience of the past two months will no longer be necessary. In Israel we have already enjoyed two weeks of semi-normalcy as well as our return to work, school and social activity. However, our experience these past two weeks has demonstrated that corona and its restrictions will remain a part of our reality for the near future. Hopefully, we will not face the same severe restrictions, but by no means will we resume a fully normal routine. Now that it is June, the immediate future provides no milestones, holidays, or "mile markers". We are now facing several months of a

long summer without normal summer activities. This period will, in some ways, provide a stiffer challenge than the initial period of harsh quarantine. It will require stamina, patience and emotional strength. Our parsha's conclusion narrates two additional troubling episodes - the unlicensed prophecy of Eldad and Meidad and Miriam and Aharon's disparaging of Moshe. The first story describes two renegade prophets who had been excluded from the official group of seventy members of the High Court.

Despite their lack of authorization, they publicly offer their unlicensed prophecy. Firstly, their unsanctioned prophecy is an audacious challenge to Moshe's undisputed authority. Moshe's loyal disciple, Yehoshua, urges harsh reprisal, but Moshe refrains, acknowledging the spiritual underpinning of their behavior. Whatever their noble intentions, their prophecy challenges Moshe's absolute authority. Furthermore, their independent prophecy is a socially disrupting experience as, undoubtedly some segments of the population would be drawn specifically to these "non-establishment" prophets, as opposed to the 'establishment' prophets. This unregulated prophecy destabilizes Moshe's authority and is a socially divisive event. Miriam and Aharon, for their part, aren't malicious, but their libelous comments ultimately lead to the criminal slander of the land of Israel by the spies. Libel and defamation always create an environment of verbal hostility which, in part contributes to the verbal antagonism toward G-d's promised land by the spies. Of course, the critique of Moshe's behavior also throws his leadership into question. These two minor events are socially disruptive but also subversive of Moshe's authority. At this stage, the nation is vulnerable and future events will exploit these weaknesses.

The corona crisis has highlighted the necessity of unifying leadership and of social cohesion. Unified

societies possess the stamina to accept socio-economic restrictions and will fare better than impatient and fragmented societies. Furthermore, nations with a broader shared vision are more willing to endure hardships to preserve the joint process of nation building. At all levels-national, local and communal, societies with shared unified interest will fare better than fragmented societies. Furthermore, the social and economic stresses of managing the crisis can ignite latent social tensions. Managing the virus requires social cohesion but it is also true that the pressures of virus management can exacerbate latent hostilities and mistrusts. Thankfully Israeli society has so far demonstrated solidarity and general social patience, and with G-d's help it will continue to "successfully" navigate the crisis. Steady and unifying leadership are also vital for success against the virus. Inevitably, governmental decisions will inconvenience and limit freedoms. For those decisions to be palatable they must appear to be selfless, apolitical and in the service of a higher national goal. Success during this crisis isn't dependent upon brilliant leadership capable of uncovering miracle cures-such remedies don't exist. The policies and measures which will curb the contagion are obvious. We require leadership to inspire unified acceptance of these new measures which will so decidedly shape our new lifestyles.

## Lessons in Humility

Rabbi Dr. Dvir Ginsberg

Much of the weekly portion of Behaalotecha details many of the tragic errors committed by the Jewish nation, with the sin of lashon hara acting as the terrible conclusion to a sequence of sins.

The background of the story involves Moshe's separation from his wife, as noted in the Midrash. During the episode involving Eldad and Medad, there was a comment addressed to Moshe's wife. She expressed concern about any individual who prophesized, as this would lead to a separation of spouses. The Midrash explains that she was referencing her personal experience with Moshe, leading to the understanding that the two were separated.

The Torah then recounts the incident of lashon hara, derogatory speech against a person (Bamidbar 12:1-2):

*"Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses regarding the Cushite woman he had married, for he had married a Cushite*

*woman. They said, "Has the Lord spoken only to Moses? Hasn't He spoken to us too?" And the Lord heard."*

At this point, the Torah isolates one of the famous traits of Moshe (ibid 3):

*"Now this man Moses was exceedingly humble, more so than any person on the face of the earth"*

After this, God enters the picture, condemning the actions of Miriam and Aharon.

Why does the Torah interrupt the flow of the story to let us know of this trait?

Ramban offers the following:

*"[the purpose of the verse] is to tell us that God took up his cause because of his humility, for he would not react to a personal attack ever, even if he would know [about it]."*

He continues with the interpretation of the Ibn Ezra:

*"[Moshe] did not seek superiority over any person, nor was*

*he haughty whatsoever about his exalted status, let alone with respect to his brother...*"

Finally, Ramban cites the Sifrei:

*"Rabbi Natan said: Even in the presence of Moshe [Miriam and Aaron] spoke against him... yet Moshe restrained himself regarding the matter. That is, [Scripture] mentions his humility [to tell us] he suffered [their insult in silence] and did not respond to them, and God took up his cause."*

What is the significant disparity between these three opinions?

There is one other question that should be asked concerning the above: why didn't Moshe rebuke Miriam and Aharon? It is tempting to think the reason why would be due to his humility. However, there is a positive commandment to rebuke others when they commit any type of sin.

In this case, it was clear there was a transgression. While it is true Moshe was the locus of the sin, he was also someone on a very high level, who could separate the personal from the objective. Why not rebuke them?

In the first opinion, Ramban notes Moshe would not respond to a personal attack. Why is this such a significant point? One of the greatest challenges any person faces is the acknowledgment that he or she is flawed. Using a mirror to view the inner self brings forth a wave of discomfort and insecurity. As compensation, we tend to create an image of ourselves that we want the world to see. The image is one of being perfect, lacking blemishes or defects. This projection of self is what leads to a heightened sensitivity when the focus of lashon hara. The revelation of a potential flaw means there is a weakness in the persona, and this leads to the person feeling insulted and upset. The idea of Moshe's humility, in this context, was that he had no image of perfection he tried to project. He understood as clear as possible who he was and had no fear of any type of self-reflection. Thus, he would not "respond" to any personal attack.

Ramban then mentions the explanation of Ibn Ezra. The focus here is how Moshe perceived himself in relation to others. Moshe obviously knew of his hallowed stature. He understood he was in a unique position, certainly in a place much different than the rest of humanity. However, he also understood that above all, he was no different intrinsically than any other person. Moshe may have been on the highest possible level, but he was not a different type of human. The lashon hara directed towards him came from

a misunderstanding of his stature. It would be tempting to consider Moshe as some type of super-human, a qualitative distinction from the rest of humanity. To many, it was an accepted assumption (and arguably was the source of both the sin of the Golden Calf and the attack of Korach). Moshe, though, never saw himself as being anything other than a servant of God, like every other person.

What of the third opinion? It is interesting that within this understanding, Moshe is cognizant of the lashon hara, yet he "suffers" and does not respond. The idea of humility here could be tied to the above question of why Moshe did not rebuke his brother and sister. Aharon and Miriam were truly remarkable people, and Moshe must have had the greatest respect for them. After hearing what they had to say, it is possible that Moshe was profoundly effected by their attack. Could there be truth to their words? Maybe there was a flaw that Moshe was not aware of. Introspection was necessary at that moment, to determine if there was validity to the accusation. To offer any sense of admonishment in that state of mind would ensure a distortion in the necessary rebuke. A sense of glee or delight that might be attached to the rebuke would be an undermining of the very objective of the commandment. Moshe's humility was expressed in his willingness to turn inward and examine himself, removed from the temptation to admonish at all costs.

This would explain why Moshe did not rebuke Aharon and Miriam. According to the first way of learning, thought, we can assume there was a different reason. Successfully offering admonishment requires those on the receiving end to also be in the right state of mind. In this case, the attack on Moshe centered on his supposed "superiority" to his siblings. How could

Moshe even consider admonishing them, as they would likely see his words as validating their (erroneous) view. Of course, he is telling them they erred! They would see it as condescending, leading to an inability to engage in any sense of repentance.

These explanations help shed light on how humility, in the eyes of the Torah, is not simply an idea of a "low view" of the self. Humility reflects the highest level of honesty and truthfulness, a view of the self that is in line with reality, not what the person wants to be. Moshe's ability to see himself in such a way was a remarkable feature of his personality, and serves as a guide for all of us in how to see ourselves.

## Variety Effect

*Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman*

Research on the “variety effect” proves what most of us know after partaking of a smorgasbord. People tend to eat more when there are more options. When the color, flavor, or shape of a food is varied we ingest more than we do if there is just one choice. By satiating a range of sensory experiences, we are able to fulfill more desires with increased consumption. Perhaps unsurprisingly, variety related eating habits are linked to obesity.

After over a year of consuming the manna, Bnei Yisrael had enough. Yes, it looked nice and tasted good, but food falling from the Heavens was not enough to prevent complaining. They wanted meat. They remembered with fondness the fish they ate in Egypt *chinam* (for free), as well as the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. Yet upon analysis, we are left wondering. Are cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic really that superior to the manna? Was the food in Egypt really that free and easy to come by that it beat the convenience of food falling from the sky?

The Midrash, cited by Rashi, is convinced that there is a deeper motivation behind the complaint. Bnei Yisrael couldn't be longing for the free food in Egypt, because according to the Midrash, there was no free food in Egypt. The Egyptians made them work tirelessly to find their own straw in order to make their own bricks – the Egyptians weren't exactly in the business of handing out free food. Rather, underneath Bnei Yisrael's complaints, either consciously or subconsciously, was a more serious protest. They missed not the free food, but the freedom from restraints. In Egypt they were free from *mitzvot*, and now they were constrained with rules and regulations.

Unlike the Midrash, Ramban understands *chinam* at face value. In Egypt, he suggests, they did have ease

of access to food. If they worked by the river, they were allowed to catch and eat fish. If they worked in the fields, there was such an abundance, that the field owners allowed Bnei Yisrael to eat what they liked as they gathered the crops. Yes, they had to work, but they could eat whenever they wanted because it was so plentiful and available. Manna was also free financially, but it was not as free from restrictions. With the manna, Bnei Yisrael could only get a controlled portion within a specific schedule. The Meshech Chochma points out that they even had meat available to eat, but the only way to eat it was to bring it to the Ohel Moed. There was plenty of free food, but there were also restrictions.

Perhaps an additional part of the complaint is tied to the monotony of the manna. It was the same food, every day. The nostalgia of cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic is not about taste, but variety. On a similar level, the Netziv proposes that the foods they requested represent different courses. Instead of just having one course of manna, Bnei Yisrael wanted appetizers, dips, and dessert to go along with it.

G-d was trying to teach them controlled, scheduled, spiritually-motivated eating. Bnei Yisrael rebelled and complained because they desired the unbounded, unrestricted, smorgasbord variety of eating that they were used to from Egypt. In our own lives, whether in the context of food or otherwise, we may have a natural desire for variety and freedom from constraints. Yet, the message of the manna and the aftermath of the complaint is that it is beneficial to curb this craving. In so doing, may we merit living more psychologically, physically, and spiritually healthy lives.

## Guided by the Will of G-d

*Rabbi Elihu Abbe*

**A** mother and her young children were sitting around the table one afternoon when they heard a knock at the door. The mother opened the door to find a number of police officers. They explained to her that they were investigating persistent criminal activity in the alley behind the home, and that they had obtained a search

warrant to use the home later that night as a lookout point on the alley below. The mother, always conscious of opportunities to educate her children in Torah values, replied that she would be happy to permit them to use her home on one condition. She explained to them that a note from a rabbi would be much more meaningful



the conversation, and why they spoke about Moshe, are explained by the commentators. However, one thing is clear: Miriam and Aharon spoke lashon harah (slandorous speech) about Moshe. For this sin, at the end of the perek (chapter), Miriam is stricken with tzaraas and sent out of the camp to dwell in isolation, while Moshe prayed for her recovery and the entire nation waited for her healing, for seven days.

Her punishment was swift and harsh. Even though she meant for the good, nevertheless, the Torah teaches us that the slightest breach in lashon harah is forbidden. As Rashi teaches: ומה מרים שלא נתפונה לגנותו כף נענשה, קל וחמר למספר - Now if Miriam, who did not intend to speak of his disparagement, was thus punished, how much more so one who speaks of the disparagement of his fellow (he will surely be punished) (Rashi to Bamidbar 12:1).

As a result of this grave sin, one of the shesh zechiros (six remembrances a person is to remember daily, often recited at the end of tefillas shachris) is zechiras Miriam - remember Miriam. What are we to remember? זכור את - Remember אש-עשה ה' אלקיך למרים, בדרך, בצאתכם ממצרים - Remember what Hashem your G-d did to Miriam, on the way when you were leaving Egypt (Devarim 24:9).

If the tongue, perhaps, is the most oft utilized organ in the human body, it is also, sadly, the one we tend to think the least about. All too often, the tongue seems to move, speak and spew words of its own will and volition ...

Did I really just say that? we think; Was I really unable to hold back? we wonder; Did my words cause pain and embarrassment to my fellow; we ponder?

And yet, that soul searching may be the best case scenario! For even more often than that, we speak without even a moment's consideration, without a minute of regret, without a second of remorse or shame for what we have said.

To speak and regret is one thing. To speak and not even think is another entirely.

Dovid Ha'Melech teaches us (Tehillim 34:13-15): מי-האיש, החפץ חיים; אהב ימים, לראות טוב נצר לשונך - guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit; מדבר מרמה סור מרע, ועשה-טוב בקש שלום; ושפתיה, מדבר מרמה - turn away from bad and do good, seek peace and chase after it.

On this passage, R' S. R. Hirsch writes (Hirsch commentary to Tehillim), "It is significant that the instruction in the practical application of the fear of G-d

begins with the behest that we exercise control over our words, and, as we shall see, even over our thoughts. For speech and thought are activities which we constantly practice. Hence, there is no better task that we can set for ourselves, leading to the fear of G-d than to resolve before Him alone never to speak ill of one's fellow-men. The fulfillment of this one task requires constant self-observation and affords a unique opportunity for practice in attaining that control over oneself which is the essential basis of all G-d fearing, moral endeavor...

"Therefore, our training course in the fear of G-d must begin with practice in the control of the thought which, though still unuttered, is already being mulled over by the tongue. We must keep our tongue far away from anything that is רע - morally or socially evil, and sincerity shall be the stamp of our speech, of the words that we do utter. In instances where we really know of nothing good to say, we must practice the difficult art of keeping silent."

A few years ago, the following acronym for the word THINK occurred to me. Once memorized, it can be quick and easy to run through before speaking to - or of - another.

T.H.I.N.K. Is what I am about to say: Thoughtful. Helpful and Humble. Interesting, Important, Intelligent. Necessary. Kind?

While I do not always remember to run through the "THINK" checklist before I speak, sometimes I do. If it is all of the above, we can feel confident our speech is positive ... And if it none of the above, "we must practice the difficult art of keeping silent".

In our day and age of technology, the "spoken" word, when translated into the virtual word, has more power than ever. Our words can now reach across cities, countries, and continents, in literal mere seconds. We must be ever more vigilant to be sure that our speech is helpful, positive, and peace-seeking. In a time when typing words on our devices occurs at practically the speed of light, and pressing 'send' occurs faster than the speed of sound, we must remember well the sin of Miriam! If the tzadekes was stricken for speaking ill - albeit well-intentioned! - of her brother, how much more so, Chazal warn us, of man who speaks badly about - or to - his fellow.

May we find the courage to always see the good, speak good, and THINK before we utter, or type, the hundreds (nay, thousands) of words we create daily. ברכת בשורות טובות ושבת שלום.

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# Pesach Sheni: What Kind of a Second Chance?

Rabbi Avraham Gordimer

**T**he mitzvah of Pesach Sheni, introduced in our parshah, raises a few questions.

Firstly, there is no other mitzvah which the Torah provides a second chance to fulfill in the event that one did not perform the mitzvah in its required time. If a person misses Keri'as Shema (Recitation of the Shema), Teki'as Shofar (Blowing the Shofar), Achilas Matzah (Eating Matzah), or any other mitzvah within its appointed period, there is no opportunity to make it up later. What is it about the mitzvah of Korban Pesach, the Pesach Sacrifice, that is different, such that the Torah provides an opportunity - actually, an obligation - to make it up if missed?

Additionally, the mitzvah of Pesach Sheni appears in the Torah immediately subsequent to the investiture and assignment of the Levi'im for Mishkan service, and immediately prior to the Torah's breathtaking description of the Mishkan's trek through the Midbar (Desert), depicting the pillars of cloud and fire leading the way, which signaled Hashem's command to travel and encamp. Although the parshah could not commence with the topic of Pesach, as explained by Rashi (on Bamidbar 9:1), why does it appear specifically between the texts regarding Mishkan service of the Levi'im and the Mishkan's travels? In other words, is there any specific connection between Korban Pesach and the Mishkan?

Although Keri'as Shema, Teki'as Shofar and many other mitzvos bear foundational messages of emunah and commitment to Hashem, Korban Pesach is different. Korban Pesach is (almost) like no other mitzvah, for it constitutes an actual bris, a covenant, with Hashem. It was in the merit of Korban Pesach that Hashem redeemed us from Mitzrayim, and Korban Pesach represents Hashem's choosing us as a nation and bringing us near to Him for His avodah (service). Korban Pesach was literally our induction as the Am Ha-Nivchar, the Chosen People.

There is one other, similar mitzvah, which, as Chazal (the Sages) tell us, was also necessary as a merit to depart Mitzrayim on Pesach night (and which, exactly like Korban Pesach, incurs the punishment of Kares for intentional failure to perform it): Bris Milah. Parallel to Korban Pesach, which is a national covenant with Hashem, is Bris Milah a personal covenant with Hashem. Bris Milah thus

shares several identical aspects with Korban Pesach.

So crucial is the experience of Korban Pesach that Chazal (as cited by Rashi on Bamidbar 9:14) entertained (but rejected) the suggestion that a ger, a convert, might need to bring a Korban Pesach as soon as he converts – for a ger must establish a covenant with Hashem, as manifest through the requirement for him to perform Bris Milah, and Korban Pesach goes in tandem with Bris Milah as part of one's covenant with Hashem. Bris Milah and Korban Pesach are almost two sides of the same coin; Bris Milah represents the personal covenant, while Korban Pesach represents the national covenant.

While it is true that by offering Korban Pesach every year, one again commits to the national covenant with Hashem, there is much, much more going on here.

The Pesach Seder, of which Korban Pesach is the centerpiece, is not a mere occasion to recall events of thousands of years ago, or to perform mitzvos of recollection. On the contrary, the Seder is a metaphysical reenactment and a reexperiencing of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim, the Exodus from Egypt. As the Rambam writes in his Haggadah text, "In every generation one must view himself as if he went forth from Mitzrayim". And in all Haggadah texts, we continue, "For not only did He redeem our ancestors, but He redeemed us as well." Pesach night is a Lail Shimurim - a Guarded Night - and this status pertains today and forever, as Hashem extends a special veil of protection over the Seder night every year. According to some later opinions, Eliyahu Ha-Navi himself comes to every Seder. On Pesach night does Hashem literally outstretch His Presence over us and endow us with a spirit of redemption.

In short, Korban Pesach, which is the core and the heart of Seder night, is associated with a palpable reenactment and reexperiencing of the Geulah, of being welcomed into Hashem's open arms and becoming party to His covenant with our nation. It is this extremely unique, live quality of reenacting and reexperiencing the Geulah and reentering into Hashem's national bris that mandates a second chance, a Pesach Sheni. Pesach is unlike almost any other mitzvah in terms of these characteristics. Such an event is indispensable, and it is key to understanding what makes Pesach unique as the one mitzvah for which the Torah

provides a second opportunity.

Bris Milah, like Korban Pesach, is not a mere symbolic commitment to a (personal) covenant with Hashem, but it is an actual and live experience of induction into this covenant. Exactly as Korban Pesach is a reenactment of the entry to our national bris with Hashem on the original Pesach night thousands of years ago, so too is every male who undergoes a Bris Milah literally transformed as he undergoes a reenactment of the bris of Avrohom Avinu almost four millennia back in time. This is signified by the presence of Eliyahu Ha-Navi at every bris, who metaphysically welcomes and escorts the baby to the Presence of Hashem. Bris Milah is an actual encounter with the Shechinah.

We can now understand the adjacency in the Torah of Pesach Sheni to the Mishkan. The Ramban (in his introduction to Parshas Terumah) explains that the Mishkan was a living perpetuation of Matan Torah, the Giving of the Torah at Sinai, insofar as the Mishkan invoked the presence of the Shechinah in our midst and thereby served as the venue for ongoing communication between Hashem and Moshe Rabbeinu, continuing this special communication from Sinai. The Mishkan was not a mere reminder of Hashem's Presence, but, on the contrary, it enabled us to reexperience His Presence as originally encountered at Matan Torah.

This is precisely the contextual connection between the Mishkan and Korban Pesach, for just like we reexperience the Shechinah through the Mishkan, so to do we reexperience the closeness of Hashem's Presence and reenact our entry into a national bond with Hashem through Korban Pesach.

Reflective of the live encounters with the Shechinah afforded by Korban Pesach and Bris Milah, may the Shechinah soon again dwell in our midst on a perpetual basis in the rebuilt Beis Ha-Mikdash.