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the Rav on Parashas
Beha'alosecha

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Beha'alosecha

Rav Joseph b. Soloveitchik

(Lecture given by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik zt"l on June 10, 1974. Transcribed by Yitzchak Etshalom)

This paper will deal with a problem which is quite acute now - as it was 3500 years ago - the problem of leadership. The paper won't be restricted to the Parasha of Beha'alosecha, which is one of the most difficult Sidrot in the entire Chumash. The Parasha of Beha'alosecha is very puzzling. It is puzzling for two reasons. First, certain events described in the Parasha are incomprehensible. We simply cannot grasp the etiology of these events - nor their teleology.

For example, we do not understand the story about Miriam, her criticism and disapproval of Moshe. It is hard to grasp that Miriam, the devoted and loyal sister, who, as a little girl, stood alone on the shore of the Nile and watched the floating ark because she had faith and hope in the matter of her little brother (the baby in the ark) was concerned, while all adults, including his mother and father, resigned and abandoned the baby. "And his sister stood from afar, in order to know..."

It is quite puzzling that this sister should suddenly turn into the accuser and prosecuting attorney of her great brother. Equally incomprehensible is the strictness, sadness and speed with which the Almighty meted out her

punishment. Equally difficult to grasp is the connection between this episode and the tragedy which was recorded in the Torah earlier - the tragedy of "Kivrot haTa'avah" (the graves of the voluptuaries). This is one difficulty.

There is a second difficulty. Moshe went through many crises. He lived through many distressful experiences and moments. And worst of all, as you know, was the Egel (golden calf) experience, which threatened to terminate the very relationship between God and Israel. Yet, he never panicked, never complained, never acted out of black despair. On the contrary, steadfastly and heroically, he petitioned the Almighty for forgiveness; defending the people, arguing their case like an attorney in court. Our Rabbis describe this by way of a metaphor, commenting on the verse: Vay'chal Moshe. Vay'chal, in contradistinction to vay'vakesh or vayit'chanen Moshe, emphasizes the element of strength and boldness. There is bold prayer and there is humble prayer. Vay'chal has the connotation of bold prayer. In a strange, yet beautiful metaphor, Our Rabbis say:

"Moshe seized the corner of the mantle of the Almighty, and said: 'I will not let you loose unless you forgive the sin of the people!'"

Suddenly, in our Parasha, Moshe began to complain. When the multitude, began to rebel, Moshe, instead of defending the people, began to complain, almost accusing the people. He said things which he had never before uttered:

"So Moshe said to Hashem, 'Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me. If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once if I have found favor in your sight and do not let me see my misery!'"

These are words which were never uttered by Moshe. It is true that he uttered a similar phrase when he was sent to Pharaoh on his first errand and his mission ended with complete failure. He came back to God and said:

"Hashem, why have you mistreated

this people? Why did you ever send me?"

This was the question of a young, inexperienced man. But Moshe, the leader who took the people out of Egypt, never repeated the question. It is not Moshe-like to act like a frightened person and to speak out of the depths of resignation and to condemn the people. These are two examples of events which require interpretation to understand. We have to study Chumash the way we study Gemara, to analyze and conceptualize the Chumash and to find in every verse the meaning, the connotation and the principle.

However, the most difficult problem with Beha'alosecha is not limited to the substance of events as to the continuity of the Parasha. The lack of systematic development of the story which the Torah is trying to tell us is perplexing. The Torah is always careful about continuity and wholeness of the narrative. The Torah never tells us half a story. There is always development, transition, complete narration - when the Torah is finished with a story, the story is complete. As far as Beha'alosecha is concerned, we just don't know. We don't know how many stories there are in Beha'alosecha, how many stories are complete, how many are incomplete, we simply don't see the thread of continuity in Beha'alosecha.

Let us just simply review Beha'alosecha, the events which were recorded in the Parasha of Beha'alosecha. It commences with the Sanctification of the Levites (several verses were dedicated to the Menorah; Our Rabbis were right that Beha'alosecha et haNerot [the Mitzvah of the Menorah] actually belongs in Parashat Naso. That's what Rashi wanted to convey when he said: Aharon became upset) - "and you shall present them as an elevation offering".

Then the Torah tells us about Pesach Sheni - it is Pesach baShana haShenit (Pesach in the second year) and Pesach Sheni (the second Pesach). Halachically, Pesach Sheni refers to the Pesach which is offered in Iyyar, by the one who is far away and the one who is impure (at the time of the first Pesach). But here the story is of the Pesach baShana haShenit and the Torah recorded the incident with the ritually impure people within

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the framework of the Pesach baShana haShenit. They approached Moshe:

"Why must we be kept from presenting Hashem's offering at its appointed time among the Israelites?" Moshe inquired of the Almighty and the institution of Pesach Sheni was established.

Where is the transition from the Sanctification of the Levites to the Pesach baShana haShenit? We don't know. Two different stories? We have no continuous development.

Then, following the description of the Pesach baShana haShenit and Pesach Sheni, we have another description of the cloud, the pillar of cloud guiding the people on their journeys.

There is no transition from the story about the Pesach to the story about the pillar of cloud, and the Torah tells us in detail how the journeys of B'nei Yisrael are completely dependent upon the position of the pillar of cloud.

"Whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, then the Israelites would set out..."

Following the narrative about the cloud, the Torah relates to us the commandment pertaining to Hatzotzrot: the two trumpets - and their use for assembling the community and the journeying of the camps. And the Torah describes almost in detail the signal system connected with the Hatzotzrot; one blast, so one camp moves, another blast, a different camp moves, the T'ruah, the T'ki'ah. At the conclusion of the section dealing with the Hatzotzrot, the Torah reviews the previous theme; the journeying of the camps, and again tells us in detail the order in which the camps traveled, Yehuda at the head, followed by Yissakhar and so forth. Then, after the Torah describes the organization of the camps and how they moved and traveled, suddenly we hear a very strange conversation which, prima facie, is puzzling and enigmatic. A conversation between Moshe and his father-in-law. Moshe, humbly extending an invitation to his father-in-law:

"Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, 'We are setting out for the place of which Hashem said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us, and we will treat you well; for Hashem has promised good to Israel.' But he said to him, 'I will not go,

but I will go back to my own land and to my kindred.' Moses said, 'Do not leave us, for you know where we should camp in the wilderness, and you will serve as eyes for us. Moreover, if you go with us, whatever good Hashem does for us, the same we will do for you!'"

Moshe argued with his father-in-law; he wanted his father-in-law to leave Midian and to join B'nei Yisrael, but Yitro was stubborn.

Following this conversation, we are suddenly confronted with a Parasha consisting of two Pesukim:

"Vay'hi bin'soa ha'aron; Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say, Arise, Hashem, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you." And whenever it came to rest, he would say, Return, Hashem of the ten thousand thousands of Israel."

At the beginning of the Parasha there is an inverted Nun and at the end of the Parasha there is an inverted Nun, in order to emphasize that this parasha is out of context here. Indeed it is out of context. And the question is obvious: if it is out of context, why did the Torah insert the Parasha into a section within which it would always stand out as out of context? The Parasha could have been beautifully inserted at the end of Pekudei:

"For the cloud of Hashem was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey."

The two Pesukim would have been a most appropriate conclusion or sequel to that:

"Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say, 'Arise, Hashem, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you.' And whenever it came to rest, he would say, Return, Hashem of the ten thousand thousands of Israel."

And finally, following the Parasha of Vay'hi bin'soa ha'aron..., the Torah tells us the tragic story - which we will analyze - of the Kivrot haTa'avah - the people who desired. They didn't do anything else, no crime, no idolatry, no murder, no sexual promiscuity, no robbery, no burglary - nothing, they just

were overcome by a desire and they wept that's all - they didn't yell, they didn't throw stones at Moshe, like they did in other situations. Nothing, they didn't say anything, they weren't threatening anyone, just complaining. People of desire - this tragic story is told. The name Kivrot haTa'avah - could have been invented today, to characterize modern man. The grave of desire which man digs for himself, or I would rather say, the grave which the desire digs for man. The grave of the voluptuaries.

Finally, the conclusion of the Parasha is the story of Miriam.

We simply are perplexed. How many stories are in Beha'alosecha? One story or many stories? If there is one, there must be transition; if there is no transition, if there is no gradual and systematic development of a theme, then there is no unity. Whoever writes a composition paper, in first year English, knows that there must be unity. Unity is when a theme is developed. Prima facie, there is no development of anything and there is no literary unity. There are many stories. But each story per se is half a story, not a complete story. (Whatever I tell you tonight occurred to me during the Torah reading on Shabbat - it's completely new, so you won't find it anywhere - no one plagiarized me yet. I'm just reviewing my thoughts to you tonight, for the first time.) I had a feeling when the Ba'al Kriah (Torah reader) was reading the Parasha, as if we were jumping like a bee on a clear warm summer morning from flower to flower accumulating the sweet nectar. Is it possible that the principle of the unity of the Torah, the unity of the themes which the Torah develops was lost in Parashat Beha'alosecha? It is an impossibility.

Now let me move slowly - my job, you understand very well, is to restore the unity of the Parasha.

The Parasha is one story, one tragic story. A tragic story which changes Jewish history completely, from top to bottom. The inverted Nuns symbolize an inverted historical process here. An inverted Nun is not so bad. But when history is being inverted, not realized or stopped suddenly, this is very tragic. Our Rabbis speak about punishment in Beha'alosecha as the worst distressful events in Jewish History, "In order to

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separate between one punishment and another punishment."

Let us start with the Exodus. When the Almighty charged Moshe with the assignment of redeeming the Jews, liberating them from Egypt, he told him the following: (He told him many things, but the Hinuch, R. Aharon haLevi (?), said that the necessary prerequisite of the Exodus is the following sentence:)

"And it shall be your sign that it was I who sent you, when you will free the people from Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

This is a difficult sentence. In other words, the Almighty told Moshe that the Exodus drama will culminate in two events:

"you shall worship God on this mountain."

How many events does this encompass? It means that the Exodus will not be consummated until you worship God at this mountain. What does He mean by this? What did Moshe understand by these words?

The Hinuch says: He meant two things: Mattan Torah the giving of the Law, the Torah teaches Man how to worship God, the continuous worship of God; the Man who lives according to the principles and rules of the Torah is a steady worshipper of God. There is no neutral moment; worship is a continuous process.

However, he meant something else, namely the construction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). Certainly the purpose of the Mishkan is worship. As a matter of fact, the Torah was given at Mount Sinai and the Mishkan was constructed immediately after Moshe came down from the Mount, Betzalel started the work of constructing the Mishkan on the day after Moshe came down from Mount Sinai, assembled the people and told them that a Mishkan should be constructed. It's no wonder that following the Aseret haDibrot (Ten Statements, - "Ten Commandments") in Parashat Yitro, God mentioned to Moshe the construction of an altar:

"But if you make for me an altar of stone..."

If the Jews hadn't succumbed to the hysteria of the Erev Rav (multitudes), had they rejected the Gold Calf, the two objectives would have been realized

much sooner. Because of the Gold Calf, the time schedule was changed and the consummation of the "you shall worship God on this mountain" was delayed for 80 days. If the Gold Calf had not been made and the whole tragedy of the Gold Calf had been avoided, Moshe would have come down on Tamuz 17 and immediately they would have started to construct the Mishkan. Because of the Gold Calf, Moshe had to spend 80 more days on Mount Sinai in prayer. Moshe came down from Mount Sinai on the day following Yom HaKippurim - so the construction of the Mishkan was delayed for 80 days. However, on the day after Yom HaKippurim, after Moshe came down with the second set of Tablets and the message of forgiveness, he quickly assembled the congregation and told them about the immediate task to be discharged - the building of the Mishkan. The work of construction began immediately. How long did it take them to construct the Mishkan, to complete the work? The Mishkan was completed and put together on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, which was, according to Our Rabbis, the Shemini laMilu'im - (eighth day of the Milu'im - handing over the priesthood to Aharon) - the day on which the princes began to offer their gifts to the Mishkan. When those two objectives, Mattan Tora and the construction of the Mishkan, were achieved, the redemption found its realization. The "you shall worship God on this mountain" was translated into reality, into fact.

The people, therefore, had no business prolonging their stay in Midbar Sinai (the Wilderness of Sinai). They stayed in Midbar Sinai as long as it was necessary to receive the Torah - which had to happen twice, due to the Egel, and as long as it was necessary in order to complete the work on the Mishkan, because both are encompassed by the commandment: But the very moment that the second set of tablets were delivered to Yisrael and the Mishkan was constructed and completed, the vessels erected and the sacrifices offered, the task of Yisrael in Midbar Sinai was discharged and fulfilled. There was no purpose in extending the sojourn any longer.

The Torah in Naso tells us about the final act of the dedication of the Mishkan, namely, the sacrifices by the princes. The Torah did not forget to

mention a secondary matter, like the sanctification of the Levi'im. The Torah apprises us in Tzav about the sanctification of the Kohanim, which was of primary significance. In a word, with the dedication of the Mishkan by the princes and the election of the Levi'im, everything which was necessary in order to have the Mishkan serve the great purpose of worship was prepared and ready; the work was completed. When could B'nei Yisrael simply get up and leave Midbar Sinai? The Mishkan was completed on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the twelve princes offered their gifts, the Almighty said:

"They shall present their offerings, one leader each day, for the dedication of the altar...", meaning Rosh Chodesh Nissan plus 12 days. They were ready to march on the 13th of Nissan. However, the cloud did not move or rise, because the next day was Erev Pesach, the Korban Pesach, so the march was postponed until after Pesach. Everybody knew that the stay of the Jews in the wilderness of Sinai came to a close; the job was done; the Beit HaMiqdash built, the Torah given, now we have to resume our march. However, the march had to wait until after the Jews offered the Korban Pesach. The second Pesach they celebrated in Midbar Sinai:

"Hashem spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: Let the Israelites keep the passover at its appointed time." (The Almighty said:) "I will postpone the journey until after the Korban Pesach will be offered."

So the Torah told us about the Korban Pesach in Beha'alo-secha, because the Korban Pesach was the only obstacle to the resumption of the march. During the offering of the Pesach, the ritually impure men inquired about their status, Moshe Rabbenu asked the Almighty and the institution of Pesach Sheni was introduced for those who were unable to offer the Pesach in Nissan. It is perfect continuity: The sanctification of the Levi'im was the last act of "you shall worship God on this mountain." It was not as important as the sanctification of the Kohanim, which is why the Torah tells us about the sanctification of the Kohanim in Tzav and Tetzaveh. The sanctification of the Levi'im is not as important; you could operate the

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Mishkan without the Levi'im. Shira (the main function of the Levi'im) is not indispensable; the Levi'im are more or less a luxury. The Torah tells us that every detail was completed, we were ready to march, the Almighty told Moshe to offer the Pesach first in Midbar Sinai and after the Pesach was offered, the B'nei Yisrael were supposed to resume their march. In a word, I repeat, the two prerequisites for moving on were met: the Torah given and accepted and the Mishkan ready for worship. The great march was supposed to start; the march to Eretz Yisrael.

All 4 freedoms were attained, "I will take out...I will save...I will redeem...", and with Mattan Torah and the construction of the Mikdash, the "I will take..." was realized as well. The hour was struck for the fifth freedom to be realized and be translated into a reality, namely "I will bring (you into the land...)". Now, how long was the march supposed to last? Several days. That's why the Torah reveals to us the details of the march. First, who was the guide, the leader? If you march towards a certain destination, particularly in the desert, you need a leader. The answer is the pillar of cloud - as an instrument in the hands of the Almighty. The guide was the Almighty as the Torah told us in B'shallach:

"Hashem went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night."

Now the Torah tells us how the camps were arranged marching, which tribes formed the avant garde and which tribes formed the rear guard: M'asef lekhol haMachanot. The Torah speaks of Tziv'otam (hosts) of warriors: Kol Yotzei Tzava. The Torah also relates to us the story of the two Hatzotzrot in this context because it's very important, the story of the signal system. Since Moshe was the commander he instructed the various camps on their march to the promised land, so there was need for communication. And the means of communication were the two silver trumpets, the Hatzotzrot of silver.

Torah is not only important to explain intellectually in categories, but also in emotional categories. If you want to

understand the beauty and greatness of the Torah, the emotional mood which is created by the reading of the Torah is perhaps more important than the intellectual gesture. Read Beha'alosecha carefully;

"So they set out from the mount of Hashem three days' journey with the ark of the covenant of Hashem going before them three days' journey, to seek out a resting place for them."

and

"When both are blown, the whole congregation shall assemble before you at the entrance of the tent of meeting. But if only one is blown, then the leaders, the heads of the tribes of Israel, shall assemble before you. When you blow a T'ruah, the camps on the east side shall set out; when you blow a second T'ruah, the camps on the south side shall set out. A T'ruah is to be blown whenever they are to set out."

There is a mood of expectancy and tension. Expectancy permeates the pages of Beha'alosecha. There is a mood of mobilization and rigid order in the air. All conditions were met, the reward is about to be granted, finally the promise to Abraham is about to be fulfilled. The "I will bring them" will become the fifth freedom. The people are on their final triumphal march. In this mood, Moshe was excited. He was expecting great things. There is tension in the air and there is determination and boldness to break through if necessary.

Interesting is the conversation between Moshe and his father-in-law. What kind of mood on the part of Moshe is mirrored or reflected by this conversation? We get a glimpse into Moshe, into his mood, those days, after the second Passover as the people started to march.

In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle of the covenant. Then the Israelites set out by stages...

It was not one of the many journeys; it was the journey, the final journey.

What is the emotional climate of this conversation?

"Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel

the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place of which Hashem said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us, and we will treat you well; for Hashem has promised good to Israel."

It is a climate of serenity, of peace of mind, an unqualified assurance. Moshe spoke of the final journey to the promised land. No waiting anymore, no Ani Ma'amin - I believe in the coming of Mashiach, even if he may tarry, I will wait for him... There would be no need for it anymore. No delays, no procrastination, no if and no when: Im Shamo'a Tishm'u - If you will listen - It is now! It is going to happen right now, not tomorrow. It is present tense, not "We will set out" - rather, "We are setting out" ...for the place of which Hashem said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us, and we will treat you well; for Hashem has promised good to Israel."

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

Hashem, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh...

No problems, no questions, no doubts, nothing! It will be very simple.

I want to let you in on another secret. It was not an invitation which a son-in-law extended to his father-in-law. It was not an invitation extended by an individual to another human being to share the good things in life. It was more than that. It was an invitation extended by Moshe, as a representative of Klal Yisrael to all converts of all generations. The Midrash in Kohelet says: "All of the rivers flow into the sea and the sea is never filled" - these are the Gerim who come to Eretz Yisrael to convert.

It was extended to the entire non-Jewish world: Join us! Join us in the promised land - provided that the non-Jew is ready to subject himself to the same Divine discipline as we did. Any human being was offered the opportunity to join the march to the promised land, the march to the Messianic era. If that march had been realized, the coming of Mashiach would have taken place then and Moshe would have been the Melekh haMashiach. It was quite optional - the Jews could have reached it, they lost it so Moshe is not

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the Melekh haMashiach and the distance between them in time is long and far. The Torah was given to us. Eretz Yisrael was given to us, certainly. However, we were told to pass on God's word to mankind as such. We all know the famous verse in Shofarot of Rosh HaShana:

"All you inhabitants of the world, you who live on the earth, when a signal is raised on the mountains, look! When a trumpet is blown, listen!"

We are all invited - all the dwellers on this world.

We are setting out for the place of which Hashem said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us, and we will treat you well...

What does Moshe think? That Yitro, the non-Jew, is dependent upon us? Our Torah is commodious enough to encompass the entire world.

There is enough Hessed, goodness and happiness in the Torah to be transmitted to others and to be shared by others. Join our triumphal march, Moshe said to Yitro, towards our destiny. It may become your destiny as well. When I read this Parasha, it attracts me; there is something moving, touching. Sometimes I want to cry when I read this Parasha. The simplicity with which the great Moshe, the master of all wise men and the father of all prophets speaks. He uses the grammatical first person:

"We are setting out...come with us, and we will treat you well...whatever good Hashem does for us..."

What does it mean? Moshe was certain - there was not even a shadow of doubt in his mind - that he was going to enter the promised land. He and the entire congregation will be classified as both Yotz'ei Mitzrayim (departers from Egypt) and Ba'ei ha'Aretz (those who come into the Land). He was sure, he was convinced that he would see the beautiful land, the hills of Judea, the prairie land of the Sharon Valley, he was certain that he will climb the mount of Lebanon. Later he prayed, but his prayer did not come true:

"...Let me cross over to see the good land beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and the Lebanon."

But that time he felt no need for

prayer: there was no doubt about his destiny.

The whole operation, if successfully brought to a close would have lasted several days. And at that time there was no need for Meraglim, for scouts to explore the land, to see whether the land is good or bad, or to see whether the cities are surrounded by walls or they are open cities, what kind of population is there - strong, weak, a sickly population or a healthy population. There was no need for it, all those scouts and all the exploration and intelligence work is only necessary if a man has doubts. This was the pre-doubt period in Jewish history.

We are setting out for the place of which Hashem said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us, and we will treat you well...

Share with us! An open invitation to everybody. Yitro or no Yitro, father-in-law of Moshe or the stranger. The Torah tells us indeed,

And they journeyed from the mount of the Eternal three days journey, and the Ark of the Covenant went before them in the three days journey to seek out a Menucha (resting place) for them.

Where did it go? Where is Menucha for the Jews? What was the destination? Rashi, quoting Sifri, says:

"A distance of three days journey they miraculously traveled in one day, because the Almighty wanted to bring them into Eretz Yisrael."

My dear friends, tell me, at that time, before the great reversal took place, was the Parasha of Vay'hi bin'soa' ha'aron in its proper place or out of context? Before the Jews alienated God, before they fell from Him and they needed the Meraglim as scouts and they had doubts. Before, every Jew was convinced: This is the final consummation of all hope. It was beautiful, the Torah tells us:

"And they journeyed from the mount of the Eternal three days journey, and the Ark of the Covenant went before them in the three days journey to seek out a Menucha (resting place) for them, the cloud of Hashem being over them by day when they set out from the camp (meaning security on all sides)."

Vay'hi Binsoa' ha'aron - Whenever the ark set out (leading them right into Eretz Yisrael) Moses would say, "Arise,

Hashem, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you."

Who were the enemies? The last war they fought was the war against Amaleq and the next war was against Sichon and Og, 40 years later. Why was Moshe speaking about enemies and fiends and people who threatened them? Who did Moshe have in mind? We are traveling fast to Eretz Yisrael - there we will be confronted by somebody, if the great hope had been realized, there would have been no need to engage in battle for seven years.

"Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say, Arise, Hashem, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you." And whenever it came to rest, he would say, Return, Hashem of the ten thousand thousands of Israel."

It was not misplaced. It was the continuation of the great story of the final, triumphal Messianic march into Eretz Yisrael, which was supposed to take place approximately 3500 years ago.

It was certainly in its place and there was no need for an inverted Nun at the beginning and for an inverted Nun at the end, it would have been the climax of the whole story. Had this come true, nothing had happened, the whole Jewish history would have taken a different turn. According to our tradition, (Hazal said it many times) had Moshe entered Eretz Yisrael, it never would have been taken from us - because Moshe would have been crowned as Melekh haMashiach. The Messianic era would have commenced with the conquest of Eretz Yisrael by Moshe. Moshe believed with a great passion and love that the final march of redemption had begun - it was only a question of days.

Suddenly, something happened. Neither Moshe nor anybody else expected the event to transpire. What happened? In the story of the Gold Calf, we know what happened. Concerning the Meraglim (spies) we know what happened. About Pe'or in Midian, 40 years later, we know what happened. What happened here? [Seemingly] nothing in particular.

"And the multitude that was among them felt a lust, had a desire. And B'nei Yisrael wept again and they said: Who shall give us flesh to eat?"

And the Torah tells us that this

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seizure by desire was evil. It aroused the wrath of the Almighty and also Moshe resented it. *Uv'einei Moshe ra'* - In Moshe's eyes it was evil - first time in Jewish history. Moshe was not the defense attorney: it was evil. This interrupted the great march - it has brought the march to an end. The vision of Mashiach, of Eretz Yisrael, of the redemption of Yisrael, became a distant one, like a distant star on a mysterious horizon. It twinkled, but the road suddenly became almost endless. Why did Moshe feel discouraged? Why didn't he offer prayers for the people as was his practice in past situations?

Because the incident of Kivrot ha'Ta'avah differed greatly from that of the Gold Calf. The making of the Gold Calf was the result of great primitive fright. The people thought that Moshe was died, they were afraid of the desert, they did not know what the future held in store for them, they were simply overwhelmed by a feeling of loneliness and terror, consequently, they violated the precept of *Avodah Zarah*. There were mitigating circumstances - they wanted the Gold Calf to substitute for Moshe, as all the Rishonim (medieval commentators) say.

When you speak about *Avodah Zarah* (idolatry), you have to distinguish between *Avodah Zarah* as a ceremony/ritual and between the pagan way of life. In Hazal's opinion, an *Avodah Zarah*-worshipper will also adopt the pagan way of life. But in this day and age, we know that it's possible for people to live like pagans even though no idolatry is involved. Paganism is not the worship of an idol, it encompasses more - a certain style of life. What is the pagan way of life, in contradistinction to the Torah way of life? The pagan cries for variety for boundlessness for unlimited lust and insatiable desire, the demonic dream of total conquest, of drinking the cup of pleasure to its dregs. The pagan way of life is the very antithesis of *Yahadut*, Judaism, which demands limitedness of enjoyment and the ability to step backwards if necessary, the ability to withdraw - to retreat. The unlimited desire, which the Greeks call *hedone*, is the worst desire in Man. When Man reaches out for the unreachable, for the orgiastic and hypnotic, then they don't violate the prohibition of *Avodah Zarah*, but they adopt the pagan way of life; and the Torah hated the pagan way

of life more than it hated the idol. Because an idol cannot exist for a long time, it cannot last. Finally, an intelligent person realizes that it is just wood and metal; it has no life. *Avodah Zarah* per se is short-lived, however the pagan way of life has a tremendous attraction for people. The Torah describes so beautifully the way in which the pagan gathers, accumulates property - gathers the Slav, the quail, how he gathers property, means of gratification for his hungry senses.

"So the people worked all that day and night and all the next day, gathering the quails; the least anyone gathered was ten homers; and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp."

They were mad with desire, there was no controlling/limiting element in their desire for vastness, the imagination excited them and their good sense was surrounded with a nimbus which was irresistible, "the more, the better, and you start gathering new goods even before you have completed gathering the other goods." The pagan is impatient and insatiable. That's what the Torah describes in *Kivrot ha'Ta'avah*.

There's another story in the Torah which, in contradistinction to the unlimited desire of the pagan, the Torah describes the Jewish way of life. It's interesting - it's the *Manna*. And Moshe said to them: this is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat, gather as much of it as each of you requires to eat, an omer to a person, for as many as you as there are. But when they measure it, by the omer, he who gathered much had no excess and he who gathered little had no deficiency. This is the approach of *Yahadut*.

The great tragedy happened, the great triumphal final march suddenly came to a stop, the people who rejected the basic principle of economic limitedness and aesthetic enjoyment, these people were not worthy to enter the Land. Suddenly, *parashat Vay'hi binsoa' ha'aron* found itself dislocated. The distance to that land suddenly became very long. Of course, there was no edict yet concerning the 40 years, the time the people would have to spend in the desert, but Moshe felt intuitively that the great march had come to an end. Hopes he

had will be unfulfilled and visions he had will not be realized and his prayers will be rejected. He knew that.

I tell you frankly, I don't have to say, Moshe was the master of the prophets, God revealed everything to him. I remember from my own experience, during the illness of my wife, who was sick for four years. Of course, I am a realist, and it is very hard to fool me - not even doctors can fool me. But, somehow I was convinced that somehow she would manage to get out of it. And I lived with hope and tremendous unlimited faith. I remember, it was the last *Yom Kippur* before she died. It was *Kol Nidrei* and I was holding a *Sefer Torah* for *Kol Nidrei* and when the *Hazzan* finished *Kol Nidrei* and said *Shehech'yanu veqiy'manu vehigi'anu laz'man hazeh* I turned over the *Sefer Torah* to a *Talmid* of mine and told him to put it in the *Aron Kodesh*. He put it in the *Aron Kodesh*, apparently he didn't place it well, I don't know what, but the *Sefer Torah* slipped and fell, not on the floor, but in the *Aron Kodesh*. At that time I was filled - don't ask me how or why - I felt a *gefil* - nothing will help. And indeed it was.

When the *Am haMit'avim* (the people who had the craving) began to complain and to weep, Moshe knew: This is the end, he'll never see *Eretz Yisrael*, never! That's why he said:

"If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once...and do not let me see my misery."

And how beautifully our Rabbis said:

"*Eldad* and *Meidad* were having prophecy in the camp" What did they say? What was the excitement about? They said just one short sentence: Moshe's hopes: "We are setting out...come with us, and we will treat you well..." will never come true Moshe will die - he'll be buried in the sand dunes in the desert - he'll never see the beautiful land and the *Levanon* - "Moshe meit viY'hoshua makhnis; Moshe will die and *Yehoshua* will lead [the people] in to the Land."

And then *parashat Vay'hi binsoa' ha'aron* lost its place - it was dislocated and displaced. Do you know why it was dislocated and displaced? Because two little Nuns were inverted - the march was inverted. Instead of the march bringing them closer to *Eretz Yisrael*, the march took them away from *Eretz*

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Yisrael. Binsoa' ha'aron the Nun was inverted and with the inversion of the Nun, Jewish history became inverted - and it is still inverted. The Parasha is still "dislocated". We cannot say "we are setting forth" with the same assurance and certitude that Moshe said it to Yitro his father-in-law just 24 hours before the Mit'avim inverted the Jewish process of redemption.

Finally, is now the continuation of the Parasha - I didn't yet explain the problem of Miriam, which I will now explain. The Torah describes the Exodus, Mattan Torah in Parashat Yitro, the construction of the Mikdash in Parashat Teruma. Suddenly, something happened which interrupted the continuity - the Gold Calf, the construction was delayed for a certain number of days. Sefer Vayyikra (Leviticus) is devoted completely to the worship, to "you shall worship God on this mountain."

In Sefer Bamidbar (Numbers) the Torah tells us about the last act of dedication by the princes, and the lighting of the candles, and the sanctification of the Levi'im, so "you shall worship God on this mountain" was attained, the two objectives were reached, now the march began. The Torah tells us how the Jews were marching on the final triumphal march on the final triumphal journey to Eretz Yisrael, the pillar of cloud covered them, protected them, shielded them it was in front and was also the rear guard protecting them in back, and then how Moshe communicated with the camps, the Hatzotzrot (trumpets) of silver, and Moshe's conversation with Yitro, he already had Eretz Yisrael within his reach, he extended the generous invitation to mankind, to share in our Ge'ulah - our redemption, and everything was ready.

Vay'hi Bin'soa' ha'aron - it should take us just a few more days. During the last few days, something happened - disaster struck. That disaster inverted Jewish History and that disaster dislocated Parashat Vay'hi Bin'soa' ha'aron. And that disaster inverted the march - instead of marching to Eretz Yisrael, we began to march away from Eretz Yisrael. Moshe discovered something else - he realized something else. He knew pretty well that he was chosen as the teacher of Klal Yisrael. God did not

elect him as a diplomat, as a negotiator, but as the teacher or the Rebbe of the people, as their spiritual and moral leader. God Himself told him, when Moshe asked: "Who am I, that I should go to Phar'ao?" He said: "you shall worship God on this mountain".

Basically, "Moshe, had I been looking for a negotiator, I wouldn't have selected you. But I'm not looking for a negotiator - I can do the art of negotiating by myself. I need a teacher for my people - as a teacher, you yourself will agree that you are the best one - you are a teacher par excellence. And that's why I selected you: 'And it shall be your sign' - and that is the reason 'that it was I who sent you'; that I selected you and not somebody else (this is how the Sefer haHinukh understands it)."

There were many people in Egypt who were qualified to be negotiators; because the purpose of the Exodus is not political freedom, but the conversion of a slave society into a Kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation. And for that you are wonderful. Moshe knew this. However, he did not expect, until the Mit'avim, that he would assume the role of a teacher, but of a nursing mother/father - an Omein.

What is an Omein? - it is a nursing mother or father. Of course, a nursing mother teaches the baby. Perhaps the mother is the best and most important teacher in the life of a baby. But she does something else - the Rebbe teaches the talmidim. The nursing mother, in addition to teaching, carries the baby in her bosom or in her arms. "...as a nurse carries a sucking child." What does this mean? Usually the father doesn't do it, the mother does it. The father has no patience for that. It has more meaning than the literal meaning of the word. The teacher does teach his disciple, but the disciple very seldom becomes a part of him. When the mother teaches the baby, the baby becomes a part of her. The mother, when she rears the baby, has one calling, one purpose, to protect the baby. The Omein or the mother basically do not belong to themselves. Many may be very critical of my statement but this is true according to Yahadut. A mother has no life of her own. She belongs to the infant. At least as long as the infant is helpless and is exposed to the dangers of a hostile environment. She belongs to the infant.

Moshe discovered now that teaching

is not enough for a leader of Yisrael. A teacher, no matter how devoted, has a life of his own. That his job is nursing, carrying the baby in his arms, watching every step, guessing the baby's needs (a baby cannot say what she wants, you have to guess) feeling pain when the baby cries and being happy when the baby is cheerful. Teaching or instructing her good performances, but that is not everything. Moshe, who reconciled with his role as a teacher and leader of adults, began to doubt his ability to play the role of an Omen or mother nurse. Listen to his words: "Did I conceive all these people, did I bear them, that you say to me: Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries an infant?" Moshe discovered something tragic in a mother's life. That from now on, as an individual, he has no rights at all, no right to rejoice, whenever God will be good to him. As a private person, he is not entitled to enjoy life as an individual, to be happy in an ordinary way, like any other human being, because his children will never belong to Moshe. He lost his family. He became the mother nurse of K'lal Yisrael, no family of his own.

This is what our Rabbis say: "he separated himself from his wife." It isn't just his wife from whom he separated, it's the wife and children (two lovely boys), his sister, his brother. He could not share his joy with them, they could not share their joy with him, he is the father of Yisrael, the father of K'lal Yisrael, and that is what he means: the role of "as a nurse carries a sucking child" was imposed upon him during the rebellion of the Mit'onenim. He separated himself, not only from his mate, but also from his children. Where are Moshe's children? Do we ever come across Moshe's children? There was a census taken in the desert the beginning of the 40 years and at the end of the 40 years. Are Moshe's children mentioned? Not once.

This is the lineage of Aaron and Moses... These are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar;

Where are Moshe's children? Moshe didn't have children. And it is later, in T'nakh, the name of Moshe's child was mentioned, not as the son of Moshe, but the son of "Menasheh". Why was a little Nun added to the name? Not only in order to reflect unfavorably upon Moshe - this is ridiculous, Moshe was

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not responsible for what happened, but because Moshe did not have children. I always say that if Moshe had a child, then according to the law he would have been in a most awful dilemma. According to the law, it would have been required of him to give preference to his child, as far as the study of Torah is concerned, over the child of his next-door neighbor. This is a law which Moshe Rabbenu taught us: Your own son takes precedence (in teaching Torah) over the son of your fellow.

On the other hand, Moshe had no right to give any preference, or to give an additional second to his son, because he was the father of every child within the Jewish community. So Moshe lost his children. He became the Omein, the nursing mother, of K'lal Yisrael.

And that is exactly what God told him at the time of Mattan Torah: "You say to them, return to your tents, to your private lives, but you, stay here."

Moshe realized it during the incident of the Mit'onemim. And that is what Miriam, the true, loyal sister, resented. Does prophecy require of man, the alienation of his family? Does God require of the prophet that he should forget his sister and brother, his children and wife, and dedicate himself only to the people?

"...Has he not spoken through us also?"

And we live a beautiful life with our husbands and children and relatives. And it doesn't interfere with our devotion to the people. That's exactly what God resented and told her: There is a difference between you and Moshe. An ordinary prophet does not have to sacrifice his private interest, his selfish concern, his family, his father, mother children, brother, sister; he can be a prophet, communicate with God, and at the same time be a devoted father, a loving brother, and a helpful head of the family. "Not so my servant Moshe." He's consecrated fully and wholly to me. And that's how the Parasha of B'haalot'kha concludes its long story - it's one story, this story - of a great march which could have led us into the Messianic era,

On that day, God will be one and His Name one.

But which was interrupted by some multitude which was permissive, hedones. ■



Teaching with Enthusiasm

Rabbi Reuven Mann

Rabbi of Young Israel of Phoenix

This week's parsha, Behaalotcha, begins with the instructions regarding the lighting of the Menorah in the Mishkan. It then deals with the remaining issues relating to the Temple Service, such as the consecration of the Levites and the terms of the particular service they performed. The discussion pertaining to the Mishkan is then interrupted with the commandment to bring the Passover sacrifice on the fourteenth of Nissan which would be the first anniversary of the Exodus from Egypt. The question arises, why was it necessary for Hashem to make this command at this time? After all, the Korban Pesach is one of the 613 mitzvot and is binding on the Jews for all time, as long as the Beit Hamikdosh is in existence. Today, since we are in exile we content ourselves with a shankbone on the Seder plate which serves as a reminder of the Sacrifice which we intend to bring once again when Moshiach comes and the Temple Service is restored.

The Ramban explains why the commandment to bring the Korban Pesach was necessary at this point. It was, he explains, because they had been

commanded in Egypt to bring this Korban, annually, only after they entered the land of Israel. This would imply that until the conquest had been accomplished there was no obligation to bring the Passover Sacrifice. Thus, a special command from Hashem was necessary to enjoin them to offer the Pesach at this time. The Rabbis maintain that throughout the forty year stay in the wilderness the Jews did not bring the Passover Sacrifice. The command to do so in the second year of the Exodus constituted an exception to the general rule. We must ask, why did Hashem instruct them to bring this sacrifice in the wilderness in contradistinction to the general rule that it would not be brought again until they were settled in the Land?

The Ramban proffers an explanation for this special command to bring the Korban Pesach in the wilderness. It was, he says so that "a remembrance of their redemption and of the miracles that were done for them and their fathers, should be transmitted to them from the fathers who had witnessed it, to their children."

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At first glance, this explanation seems open to questions. If the Passover Sacrifice was only to be brought in Eretz Yisrael what would they lose by waiting until they arrived there? In the meantime they would receive the Torah which contained the entire story of the Exodus as well as the permanent mitzvot which were designed to commemorate and remember it. What would be missing if they refrained from offering the Pesach until they arrived in the Land? In my opinion, there is an important lesson we can learn from this. Every generation of Jews has an obligation to “receive” the Torah from its predecessors and pass it on to those who come after them. We cannot keep the Torah just for ourselves but must do all we can to see that it is preserved and perpetuated. However, in doing so we must realize that abstract teaching of ideas, while extremely important, is not always enough. We must also convey a sense of the deep conviction about the truths of Judaism that we, hopefully, have. Very often the teaching one receives is dry and lacks a passionate sense of excitement and enthusiasm for the significance of what is being taught. We learn not just from the words uttered by the teacher but from his emotional attitude toward the material he is teaching.

I believe that this is the meaning of the Ramban’s explanation. Hashem wanted the mitzvah of the Korban Pesach to be transmitted in the second year by the people who had experienced the miraculous redemption in Egypt, while it was still very fresh in their minds. The children would learn about the many halachot that pertained to the mitzvah. Of equal importance, they would witness the great passion and sense of gratitude to Hashem that would accompany its performance. The enthusiasm was so great that those who were impure and couldn’t bring it in its appointed time made a special request for an alternative date. Hashem granted their request and gave the mitzvah of Pesach Sheni (the second Pesach). Let us take this lesson to heart. We must cultivate an appreciation for Judaism and transmit our joy and enthusiasm to our children. This is the most effective manner of assuring the preservation of our holy Torah.

Shabbat Shalom ■



Rejoicing on Shabbat

Rabbi Bernie Fox

Head of School, Northwest Yeshiva H.S.

And Hashem spoke unto Moshe, saying: Make for you two trumpets of silver; of beaten work shall you make them. And they shall be unto you for the calling of the congregation, and for causing the camps to set forward. (Sefer BeMidbar 10:1-2)

1. The silver trumpets of the Mishcan

In Parshat Beha'alotecha Moshe is commanded to fabricate two trumpets of silver. The Torah outlines three basic functions served by these trumpets. First, they were to be used during the sojourn in the wilderness to manage the movements of the nations. For example, various series of sounds produced by these trumpets summoned the people to assemble. Other sounds directed the people to break camp and to travel forth to their next encampment. Second, these trumpets were sounded at times of danger and affliction. Maimonides associates the blasts of the trumpets with calling out to Hashem in anguish. This suggests that the sounds of the trumpets were an expression of prayerful petition. Third, the trumpets were sounded in the Mishcan – the Tabernacle – on festive occasions in accompaniment to the offering of the sacrifices.

The sounding of these trumpets on these occasions is one of the commandments of the Torah. After Bnai Yisrael settled the Land of Israel and constructed the Bait HaMikdash – the Sacred Temple, these trumpets continued to be employed. They were no longer used to signal the movements of the nation. However, they continued to be sounded at times of affliction and danger and also on festive occasions. On these festive occasions the sounding of the trumpets accompanied the offering of sacrifices.

Also on the day of your rejoicing, and to your appointed times, and on your new moons, you shall blow with trumpets over your burnt-offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace-offerings. And they shall be to you for a memorial before your G-d. I am Hashem your G-d. (Sefer BeMidbar 10:10)

2. The festive occasions on which the trumpets are sounded

The Torah describes a number of festive occasions upon which the trumpets are sounded in the Mishcan.

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The identities of some of the occasions noted in the passage are self-evident. The appearance of the new moon determines the initiation of the new month and Rosh Chodesh – the first day of each new month is celebrated with special sacrifices. The passage instructs us to sound the trumpets at the time of the offering of these sacrifices. The term “appointed times” generally refers to the festivals and holidays. On all of these occasions special sacrifices are offered and the passage instructs that the trumpets be sounded in accompaniment to these offerings. However, to what does the passage refer with the term “the day of your rejoicing”?

3. Shabbat as a “day of rejoicing”

The Sifrai offers two possibilities. The first possibility is that the reference is to Shabbat. In other words, according to this opinion Shabbat is a “day of rejoicing”. Although this characterization of Shabbat may seem reasonable and even appropriate, it is actually not consistent with normative halachah. In order to understand this inconsistency, some background information is needed.

Maimonides explains that on Shabbat there is a mitzvah of Oneg – enjoyment or delight. In other words, in observance of Shabbat a person is commanded to engage in activities that bring enjoyment or delight. Maimonides explains that this requirement is fulfilled primarily through indulging in fine foods and including within the observance of the day three meals.

Maimonides explains that the mitzvah of Oneg also applies to festivals – Yamim Tovim. However, in addition to the mitzvah of Oneg, Yamim Tovim also features a mitzvah of Simchah – happiness.

4. Simchah and Oneg

The mitzvah of Simchah does have some similarities to the mitzvah of Oneg; they do overlap. However, the mitzvah of Simchah on Yom Tov is a far more extensive obligation than the requirement of Oneg. Maimonides asserts that the mitzvah of Simchah is not composed solely of the performance of actions – as is the case of Oneg.

Simchah requires the achievement of an actual state of mind. Furthermore, the mitzvah of Oneg is entirely personal. It is expressed as a requirement for a person to engage in activities that are associated with enjoyment and delight. The mitzvah of Simchah requires a person to not only, himself, be happy. He must also endeavor to bring happiness to the other members of the household. For example, buying clothing and jewelry for one’s wife in honor of Yom Tov is an expression of the mitzvah of Simchah.

In summary, the mitzvot of Oneg and Simchah have some similarity. However, they are two distinct mitzvot. The mitzvah of Oneg applies to Shabbat and to Yom Tov. The mitzvah of Simchah is exclusive to Yamim Tovim; it does not apply to Shabbat.

5. The mitzvah of Simchah does not apply to Shabbat

Now, the difficulty with the Sifrai can be identified. According to the first opinion in the Sifrai, the term “day of rejoicing” refers to Shabbat. The actual term used in the passage for rejoicing is Simchah. Therefore, according to this opinion in the Sifrai, Shabbat is a day of Simchah. As explained above, this is not actually correct. It is a day on which there is a mitzvah of Oneg. It is not a day that is subject to the mitzvah of Simchah.

6. Every day is a “day of rejoicing”

Before attempting to reconcile this opinion with normative halachah, it will be helpful to consider the other opinion in the Sifrai. According to the second opinion, the term “day of rejoicing” refers to every day. According to this opinion, the Tamid sacrifices – the daily offerings – in the Mishcan are to be accompanied by the trumpet blasts. In other words, the Tamid introduces an element of happiness into every day. What is the nature of this association between the Tamid offerings and Simchah?

It seems that the Tamid offerings are associated with Simchah because the Kohanim – the priests – who perform the offerings are required to be in a state

of happiness. The service is only executed in the optimal manner when it is performed with happiness and joy. The Simchah in the performance of the service is an expression of ahavat Hashem – love of Hashem. In other words, the service should be an expression of the Kohens’s deep love of Hashem and this love should find expression in his state of happiness.

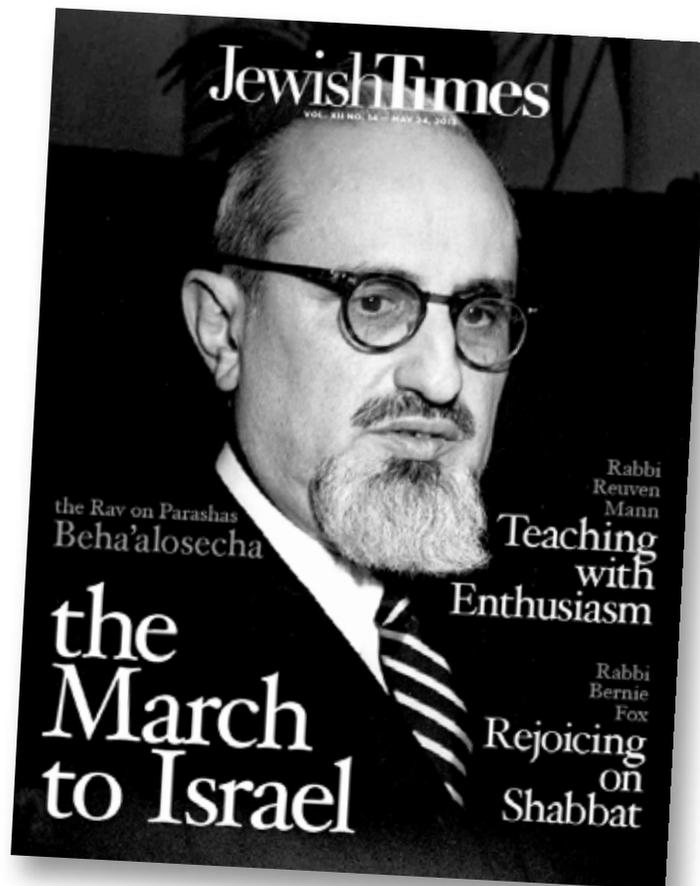
7. The ideal Shabbat and ideal Yom Tov

Maimonides’ description of the ideal Shabbat differs significantly from the description of the ideal Yom Tov. The ideal Yom Tov day is divided into two parts. The first half of the day is dominated by prayer and Torah study. The second half of the day is devoted to the Yom Tov meal. Shabbat is described as a day that is entirely devoted to spiritual pursuits with pauses within the day for the Shabbat meals. In other words, Shabbat is a day primarily devoted to the spiritual and to the service of Hashem.

Apparently, both opinions quoted in the Sifrai take a shared approach to interpreting the passage. Both understand the term “day of rejoicing” as referring to a rejoicing that is an expression of service to Hashem and love of Hashem. The second opinion interprets the passage to refer to every day as a “day of rejoicing”. Every day features the Tamid offerings and by virtue of the Tamid service an element of joy is introduced into the day. However, the first opinion understands the term “day of rejoicing” to refer specifically to Shabbat. This is because although every day is endowed with an element of joy, Shabbat’s very character is that of joy in service to and love of Hashem.

In fact, Simchah does apply to Shabbat. However, it applies in a different manner than it does to Yom Tov. On Yom Tov, the mitzvah of Simchah directs us to perform specific actions in order to foster rejoicing. Shabbat observance does not include a structured mitzvah of Simchah akin to Yom Tov. However, the very objective of Shabbat observance – dedication to the spiritual and service to Hashem – endows the day with a character of joy. ■

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