



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA ISRAEL REGION

BEHA'ALOTCHA

Parshat Beha'alotcha is one of the richest of the parshiot of the Torah. In it the preparation to march to the Land is completed; off we go, the march begins. It is the pivot from the sublime to the practical, from the ideal to the real, from theory to practice. It has more complaints than any other parsha – and all packed into the last 2 aliyas. There is complaining, disappointment, pettiness, disputes, frustrations. It is communal life in Technicolor.

And that is its profundity. You see, if we were to stop the Torah here, we would imagine Jewish life to be a fairytale: G-d promised the Land, sweeps us out of slavery, gives us the Torah, wants to dwell in our midst, creates a place of rendezvous of man and G-d, gives us days to meet with Him, and instructs us in choreographed detail how to march in life with Him. Beautiful.

Then we would look at our lives – disagreements, divided, distant, chaotic – where is He, where is the order, the choreography, the Mikdash? We could feel that the Torah is

untethered to reality, a fairytale, of living with G-d in a way we are unfamiliar. That it does not address real life.

But then there is Beha'alotcha and the rest of Bamidbar. As if G-d says: I have shown you the ideal. And I know full well your complexities. I expect some of you to be dissatisfied, bored, jealous, resentful. Skeptical, cautious, weak. Man is complicated. I, G-d says, know that perfectly well: I made you that way.

Your job as a people is to figure out a way to live reaching for the ideal while living all the complexity that man is: all the differences, the divisions, the struggles, the talents, the weaknesses and the aspirations.

Beha'alotcha assures us that the ideal is to aspire to, while the real is to manage.



1ST ALIYA (BAMIDBAR 8:1-14)

Aharon is instructed to light the Menorah. The instructions concerning how the Leviim are to be purified and inaugurated through immersion and offerings are given. In so doing the Leviim are to be separated to be Mine.

These are the last verses of communal, national preparation to march to the Land. The leviim are to serve the kohanim.



2ND ALIYA (8:15-26)

The leviim are to replace the first-born who are Mine after the plague of the first-born. The leviim are to assist the kohanim in maintaining the sanctity of the Mikdash. They are inaugurated and purified. They are to serve from ages 25-50, but not to do the offerings.

Just as for the kohanim and for the leaders,

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the ceremony of inauguration impresses on the Leviim that their special status is not mere privilege; it is service of the people, and service of G-d. A sense of entitlement or of privilege is the poison of communal leadership; a sense of service, its elixir.



3RD ALIYA (9:1-14)

Moshe instructs the people to do the Pesach in the first month of the second year. They do so, though some are unable due to their Tuma impurity. They query Moshe as to why they should be denied bringing the Pesach due to contact with the dead. Moshe defers to what G-d will tell him. He is instructed: all who are unable to do the Pesach in its proper time, due to Tuma or being distant from the Mikdash, may do it in the second month.

The chronology in the book of Bamidbar isn't smooth. We are in the second year since the Exodus. The book began on the 1st day of month 2. This story here of Pesach is the 14th of month 1. The leader's offerings in last week's parsha were the first days of month 1.

Moving around the events is deliberate. We want to begin the book with order and preparation of the leaders for the march to the Land. And now we want to move to a story of the Pesach where the leader, Moshe no less, is stumped.

The story of the offerings of the leaders was a wonderful display of what leadership need be; leaders are servants of G-d, not self-serving. So too the bringing of the Pesach. We are all, all of us, servants of G-d, not self-serving.

But the inquiry to Moshe from those who are impure stumps him and is dramatic foreshadowing. Even though everything has fallen into place perfectly – the camp is set, the Mishkan in the middle, the leaders altruistic, the people dedicated – but get ready.

Because life does not always go as expected; in fact, rarely does it go as expected. Be prepared for the unexpected. Because things unexpected are, well, to be expected. All the planning in the world cannot avoid the expected unexpected of life. Even the holiest, most self-effacing leader will not have all the answers all the time. He'll get stumped once in a while.

And that is a powerful lesson to all leaders; infallibility is fallacy. And certainty too. Be prepared for uncertainty, like how to accommodate the impure and their Pesach. Expect that things are going to happen that you just didn't expect. And you won't have all the answers.



4TH ALIYA (9:15-10:10)

The cloud descended on the Mishkan by day; by night it appeared as a fire. When it lifted, the people traveled; where it settled, the people settled. It could remain in place for a long time or just overnight, or a few days or a month. The people encamped and traveled by Divine signal. Moshe was instructed to make 2 silver trumpets. When both were sounded, the people were to gather; when just 1, the leaders would gather. A *teruah* would signal to travel; *tekiah*, to gather. In wartime, sound a *teruah*; on holidays and joyful occasions, sound a *tekiah*.

This aliya poetically describes Jewish travel: guided by the Divine, while called by the trumpets. It is the Divine-human partnership. He calls; we call (through the trumpets). So, while guided by G-d, it is we who manage the people. And that foreshadows all that is to come; the messy business of managing people.



5TH ALIYA (10:11-34)

On the 20th of the 2nd month the cloud lifted; the people traveled

from the desert of Sinai to the desert of Paran. The camp traveled just as had been instructed; each tribe in its designated position. Moshe asked his father-in-law Chovev (Yitro) to travel with them, for his insight would be valuable. He demurred, returning to his land. They traveled for 3 days.

The march to the Land of Israel begins. And juxtaposed is a dialogue between Moshe and his father-in-law Yitro. Moshe knows his own strengths and weaknesses. Moshe knows how to communicate with G-d; it's dealing with the people that he needs help with. And Yitro came to his aid way back in designing a court system.

Yitro is the master in managing the people. Yitro is just what we need now. Moshe desperately wants Yitro's guidance in managing the inevitable, the expected unexpected. Moshe knows the challenges of life that await him, urging Yitro to be his advisor.



6TH ALIYA (10:35-11:29)

Moshe would pray upon travel: G-d, disperse Your enemies. And upon rest: Return the myriads. The people complained, angering both G-d and Moshe, a fire burning on the camp's edge. They called to Moshe, Moshe prayed and the fire abated. A group amongst them cried for meat, recalling the fish and produce they ate freely of in Egypt: We are parched with just this Manna. G-d and Moshe were angry. Moshe complained: am I to hold them like a baby? Where am I to find meat to feed them all? I cannot bear them alone. G-d responded: gather 70 elders. I will give them some of your spirit and they will assist you. And I will provide meat. G-d's spirit flowed to the 70 elders; Eldad and Medad continued to prophecy.

Here begins the rest of the book of Bamidbar: 3 challenges or failures in one aliya.

The first complaint comes fast; and we aren't even told what they are complaining about. Because life will never be satisfying to everyone. The second complaint, the complaint for meat, is the dissatisfaction of the Manna. It is boredom. We want the spice of life; pleasure, color and variety. Of course, their desire for the good life in Egypt is an obvious distortion of reality: is the grass of Egypt really greener, was Egypt truly so pleasant? G-d will provide the meat.

And Moshe himself complains; I am not cut out for cuddling them like infants. Moshe is told that his prophecy will spill over to the 70 elders. But even that goes awry, as Eldad and Medad want to bask in the radiance of that prophecy.

Perhaps the clumping of these complaints together is to convey that dissatisfaction will come in all shapes and sizes. All of human history is the story of struggles. Human greatness inheres in how to manage the struggles; quash them with tyranny and violence, denigrate the protagonist, or manage them with ethics, trying to preserve human dignity.



7TH ALIYA (11:30-12:16)

A wind brought quail, covering the earth. The place was called Kivrot Hataava. Miriam and Aharon spoke ill of Moshe's wife; Moshe was the humblest of all people. G-d spoke to Moshe, Aharon and Miriam, calling to Aharon and Miriam. I speak to you in dreams: not so to Moshe. He, I speak face to face. Miriam became leprous. Moshe prayed for her healing.

The complaints continue, this time from an unexpected source; Aharon and Miriam. This challenge is brief but powerful.

The challenges, conflicts, and disagreements that arise in life are not to be seen

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as pettiness and weakness alone. Even the greatest of the great of our people can have disagreements with our leaders. That is a crucial perspective on all the challenges to come; human beings will never be free of disagreement or challenge. It is not just lust for meat. It is even the holiest of the holy who legitimately, but here incorrectly, question our most holy of leaders.

HAFTORAH: ZECHARIAH 2:14 - 4:7

The highlight of the haftorah describes the beautiful golden Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash. This parallels the Menorah mentioned at the opening of the parsha, which was lit daily by Aharon, the Kohen Gadol.

The vision comes to Zechariah prior to the building of the second Beit Hamikdash. We are able to get a sense from the wording in this passage of the great joy that will prevail with God's presence returning to Jerusalem.

The Almighty also speaks of the great reward that will be given to Yehoshua, the first Kohen Gadol to serve in the second Beit Hamikdash, if he and his descendants follow the directives of the Torah. The ultimate reward is, "Behold! I will bring My servant, the Shoot," an allusion to Mashiach, the Shoot of David.

The prophet then describes the actual

seven-branched Menorah that he is able to discern in a prophecy. Its deeper meaning is to be understood in the following way: "Not by military force and not by physical strength, but by My Spirit..." The light of the Menorah represents the power of the Mashiach to fulfill his task and bring goodness and light to the world. ■



STATS

36th of the 54 sedras; 3rd of 10 in Bamidbar.

Written on 240 lines, ranks 10.

16 Parshiyot; 11 open, 5 closed.

One of the parshiyot (a Stuma) is separated from the parshiyot before and after it by more than blank space (as is usual) - namely, backwards NUNS. Consequently, it is the "loneliest", most isolated of all parshiyot in the Torah.

136 pesukim, ranks 11th, 4th in Bamidbar.

1840 words, ranks 12th, 3rd in Bamidbar.

7055 letters, ranks 12th, 4th in Bamidbar.



MITZVOT

5 mitzvot; 3 positives, 2 prohibitions.

To illustrate the "lopsided" distribution of mitzvot in the Torah, Beha'alotcha has more mitzvot than 28 other sedras, and fewer mitzvot than 25 sedras. Only 5 mitzvot and it's in the top half.