**SALT – PARASHAT BEHAALOTEKHA**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

Rashi, in his opening comments to Parashat Behaalotekha, brings the explanation advanced by the *Midrash Tanchuma* for the connection between the opening verses of this *parasha* and the conclusion of the previous *parasha*, Parashat Naso. Parashat Behaalotekha begins with the *mitzva* of the kindling of the *menorah* in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, and Parashat Naso concludes with the special sacrifices offered by the *nesi’im* (the leaders of the tribes) in honor of the inauguration of the *Mishkan*. The Midrash explains that Aharon felt distressed over the fact he did not participate in the offering of these sacrifices. Whereas the leader of every other tribe brought a gift to the *Mishkan* and offered special sacrifices to mark this occasion, he – the leader of the tribe of Levi – did not. God sought to lift Aharon’s spirits by reminding him of the unique privilege he and his tribe were given, as they were the ones who kindled the lamps of the *menorah* each evening in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*.

Rav Shaul Yedidya of Modzitz, in *Yisa Berakha*, explains the Midrash’s comment to mean that Aharon was disturbed by his separation and distance from the other tribes, as reflected by the sacrifices brought in honor of the *Mishkan*’s inauguration. The entire nation joined together – through their representatives, the *nesi’im* – to mark this occasion, but Aharon was excluded, signifying a division of sorts between him and the rest of the nation. This distressed Aharon, because while he and his tribe were designated for a unique role, he felt passionate about the need to remain attached to and engaged with the people, and to never separate himself from them.

God responded to Aharon, in Rashi’s words, “Yours is greater than theirs, for you kindle…the *menorah*.” The Rebbe of Modzitz takes a symbolic approach to this response, explaining that the *menorah*, which was made from a single block of gold (“*miksha*” –Shemot 25:31), represents unity and togetherness. The Mishna in Avot (1:21) famously describes Aharon as a man who “loved peace, pursued peace, loved people and drew them close to the Torah.” Aharon embodied the ideal symbolized the *menorah*, the “light” which we shine when we join together in peace and harmony, avoiding snobbery, jealousy, competition and petty quarreling. God’s response to Aharon – “Yours is greater than theirs” – meant that his character, “loving peace, pursuing peace, loving people” – would go much further to bring *Am Yisrael* together than his participation in the sacrifices of the *nesi’im*. His exclusion from these sacrifices did not reflect his disconnection from the people, because he lived in a way which embodied the ideal of togetherness and unity, symbolized by the *menorah*.

Sunday

The Torah in Parashat Behaalotekha tells of *Benei Yisrael*’s preparations for their journey from Mount Sinai toward the Land of Israel. These preparations included the request made by Moshe to Chovav – commonly identified as Yitro, Moshe’s father-in-law – to join them on their journey, rather than return to his homeland. Moshe explained, “…for you know about our encampments in the desert, and you can serve for us as ‘eyes’” (10:31). At first glance, the phrase “*ve-hayita lanu le-einayim*” (“you shall serve for us as ‘eyes’”) means that Yitro would guide the nation along their journey through the wilderness. With his knowledge of the desert terrain where *Benei Yisrael* would be traveling, he would be able to direct the people along the safest and most expeditious route.

The difficulty with this interpretation, however, is that *Benei Yisrael* were led by God’s miraculous cloud, as the Torah discusses in great detail earlier (9:15-23), and as Moshe describes in Sefer Devarim (1:33). The people had no need for Yitro to guide and direct them through the wilderness, because they were guided by God’s cloud.

For this reason, the commentators offer different explanations for the phrase “*ve-hayita lanu le-einayim*.” The Ramban writes that Moshe refers to *Benei Yisrael*’s conquest of the Land of Israel, inviting Yitro to assist them by directing them as they set out to inhabit the land showing them which routes to take as they planned their military campaign.

Rashi suggests explaining “*ve-hayita lanu le-einayim*” more broadly, as referring to general advice. Moshe was telling Yitro, in Rashi’s words, “Each and every matter that will be concealed from our eyes – you will illuminate our eyes for us.” According to this interpretation, Moshe was telling Yitro that he could advise the people on matters regarding which they required guidance, not that he would chart their course through the wilderness.

Onkelos, as Rashi cites in his first approach to explaining this verse, understands this clause much differently. He translates it to mean, “and you have seen with your eyes” the miracles that God had performed for *Benei Yisrael*. According to this reading, Moshe was not inviting Yitro to serve any sort of role, but rather noting that Yitro had witnessed God’s unlimited power, and he could thus trust that he would benefit from joining *Benei Yisrael* (as Moshe stated in the next verse – “it shall be that this good which God will bestow upon us, we will bestow upon you”). This explanation understands Moshe’s remark as referring not Yitro’s future role, but rather to his past experiences since joining *Benei Yisrael*.

The Rashbam also understands “*ve-hayita lanu le-einayim*” as referring to the past, but in his view, Moshe speaks the advisory role that Yitro had served. As we read in Sefer Shemot (18:17-26), Yitro assisted Moshe by recommending that he establish a network of judges to serve underneath him, rather than personally handle all the people’s civil disputes. According to the Rashbam, Moshe was now telling Yitro that just as he had helped in the past through his sage advice, he could similarly help in the future as *Benei Yisrael* proceed to the land.

Rashi also offers an entirely different explanation, suggesting that Moshe was assuring Yitro that although he was a foreigner, he would be “beloved to us like the pupil of our eye.” Yitro might naturally have had misgivings about remaining with *Benei Yisrael*, wondering how he would be treated, as an outsider and former pagan priest. Moshe therefore sought to persuade Yitro to travel with *Benei Yisrael*, guaranteeing that he would be cherished by the people, and treated with great respect.

Monday

Yesterday, we discussed Moshe’s invitation to Chovav – commonly identified as his father-in-law, Yitro – to join *Benei Yisrael* along their journey from Mount Sinai to the Land of Israel. Moshe told his father-in-law that he should join them “…for you know about our encampments in the desert, and you can serve for us as ‘eyes’” (10:31). Today we will look at several additional interpretations of the expression “*ve-hayita lanu le-enayim*” (“you can serve for us as ‘eyes’”).

Chizkuni and Rabbeinu Yosef Bekhor Shor explain this phrase as referring to the impact that Yitro’s joining *Benei Yisrael* would have upon other nations. Moshe was telling Yitro that the “eyes” of the other nations would be drawn to *Benei Yisrael* as the news spread of the decision made by Yitro – a former pagan priest – to permanently join *Benei Yisrael*. Their interest would be piqued, such that others might consider following Yitro’s example and join his new nation.

An especially creative interpretation is offered by Seforno, who explains that Moshe requested that even if Yitro decided, due to his advanced age, not to travel with *Benei Yisrael*, at least his children would remain and join them. In this verse, Seforno writes, Moshe was telling Yitro that if even his children leave, then God’s Name would be defamed in the eyes of the other nations. “*Ve-hayita lanu le-einayim*,” according to this understanding, means that Yitro and his sons’ abandonment of *Benei Yisrael* would disgrace the nation’s reputation in the eyes of other peoples. They would assume that Yitro was unimpressed by *Benei Yisrael*, and not convinced of their belief, and this is why he and his family left.

Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains “*ve-hayita lanu le-einayim*” as saying that Yitro would serve as the nation’s “eyes” and guide every time they encamped in the wilderness. As we noted yesterday, this verse cannot, seemingly, mean that Moshe invited Yitro to direct the people and show them where to go, because they were led by God’s miraculous cloud. However, Rav Hirsch writes, Moshe was telling Yitro that with his knowledge of the desert through which *Benei Yisrael* would travel, he was in a position to assist them by informing them, in Rav Hirsch’s words, of “all the possible advantages to be had from that particular spot” where God would have the people encamp. Once the people encamped, Yitro would tell them all that they needed to know about their new location so they knew what arrangements needed to be made.

Finally, Rabbenu Bachya accepts the plain meaning of this phrase, explaining that indeed, Moshe referred to Yitro’s ability to serve as a guide, directing them through the wilderness. Although the nation was led by God’s cloud, Rabbenu Bachya writes, nevertheless, there were those who still felt anxious about traveling through the wilderness without anyone knowing the route. Not everyone had attained the level of faith where they felt fully confident relying solely on a miraculous cloud that guided them. Moshe wanted Yitro to remain as an important source of assurance for this element of the nation, so that their fears would be put to rest and they would feel safe and secure. A perceptive and sensitive leader, Moshe recognized the need to address the anxieties of those with weaker faith, and to help provide them with a greater sense of confidence that the nation was traveling in the right direction. Moshe therefore invited Yitro to serve as the nation’s guide, giving reassurance to those who could not yet fully trust the cloud that led them.

Tuesday

We read in Parashat Behaalotekha of a predicament that arose as *Benei Yisrael* observed the first celebration of Pesach, a year after the Exodus. There was a group of people that had come in contact with a human corpse, and were thus considered *tamei* (impure) and hence unable to participate in the *pesach* sacrifice on the 14th of Nissan. This group confronted Moshe and asked to be allowed to take part in the offering of the *korban pesach* along with the rest of the nation. God instructed Moshe that those who are impure at the time of the *pesach* sacrifice – the 14th of Nissan – do not offer the sacrifice that day, but instead bring the offering the next month, on the 15th of Iyar.

The Torah relates that after the group presented their request to Moshe, he said, “Wait as I hear what the Lord will command you” (9:8). Rashi comments, “Like a student who is assured to hear from his rabbi’s mouth. Fortunate is the human being who is assured this, that every time he wanted, he would speak with the *Shekhina*.” Moshe’s reply to the *temei’im* (impure individuals) – “Wait as I hear what the Lord will command you” – reflected Moshe’s confidence that he would promptly receive God’s guidance, a testament to his singular prophetic stature.

Rav Menachem of Amshinov (as cited by his grandson, Rav Yitzchak of Amshinov, in *Imrei Kodesh*), noted that Moshe’s response sounds uncharacteristically arrogant. Moshe made a point of informing the *temei’im* that he would receive a prompt reply, specifically drawing their attention to his unique stature, whereby he is guaranteed to receive God’s message right when he asked. We might wonder why Moshe, the humblest of all men (Bamidbar 12:3), would speak in such a way, emphasizing his certainty that his question would promptly be answered.

The Rebbe of Amshinov answers, quite simply, that when the need arises to help one’s fellow in distress, humility must be put to the side. Moshe saw that these *temei’im* felt distraught over being denied the opportunity to offer the sacrifice, and so he assured them that he would soon hear God’s response, and they would receive His clear instructions. Although this indeed came across as uncharacteristically boastful, nevertheless, Moshe was prepared to compromise his humility for the sake of assisting this group of people who faced a dilemma. The Rebbe of Amshinov suggests drawing an analogy to the Gemara’s teaching in Masekhet Sota (21b) labelling as a “*chasid shoteh*” (“foolish pious person”) a man who refuses to help a drowning woman because he deems this improper. When somebody needs help, we are to set aside personal stringencies and measures of piety. And thus Moshe announced his confidence in a prompt reply from God in order to encourage the *temei’im*, assuring them that God would immediately instruct them how to proceed.

Wednesday

The Torah in Parashat Behaalotekha tells of the arrangement in which *Benei Yisrael* traveled as they journeyed through the wilderness. We read that when the time came to travel, the three tribes that were encamped to the east (Yehuda, Yissakhar and Zevulun) would lead, and they were followed by two of three families of *Leviyim* – Gershon and Merari – who transported the *Mishkan*. Behind them were the next group of three tribes (Reuven, Shimon and Gad), who were followed by the third Levite family – the Kehat family – who transported the sacred articles of the *Mishkan*. The Kehatites traveled separately, behind the other two families of *Leviyim*, so that by the time the Kehatites reached the camping site, the other *Leviyim* will have completed the reassembly of the *Mishkan*, such that it would be ready for the sacred articles. The Torah writes: “Then the Kehatites, the transporters of the Sanctuary, would journey, and they [the families of Gershon and Merari] would erect the *Mishkan* before their arrival” (10:21).

The Gemara in Masekhet Eiruvin (2a) cites this verse as proof that the terms “*Mishkan*” and “*Mikdash*” (“Sanctuary) are sometimes used interchangeably. The Torah in this verse first uses the word “*Mikdash*,” and then the word “*Mishkan*,” indicating that the *Mishkan* is sometimes referred to by the term “*Mikdash*.” As the Gemara discusses, this allows for applying halakhic inferences from the laws of the *Mishkan* to the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. For example, the Gemara there notes the Torah’s instruction that a *shelamim* sacrifice must be slaughtered “*petach Ohel Mo’ed*” (“by the entrance” of the *Mishkan*), from which *Chazal* inferred that *shelamim* sacrifices are disqualified if they were slaughtered early in the morning, before the doors to the *Beit Ha-mikdash* were opened. Since the Torah required slaughtering this sacrifice when the entrance to the *Mishkan* was opened (“*petach*”), the Sages understood that in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, too, the door to the Temple must be opened at the time the sacrifice is slaughtered in the courtyard. This application to the *Beit Ha-mikdash* is allowed by the Torah’s use of the word “*Mikdash*” in reference to the *Mishkan*.

However, the Gemara refutes the inference from this verse in Parashat Behaalotekha, noting that the word “*Mikdash*” in this verse refers not to the structure of the *Mishkan*, but rather to the sacred articles (specifically, the ark) carried by the Kehatites. As such, this verse cannot form the basis of the interchangeability of the terms “*Mishkan*” and “*Mikdash*.” The Gemara concludes that this interchangeability is sourced in a difference verse – the famous verse in which God commands the construction of the *Mishkan*: “*Ve-asu li* ***Mikdash*** *ve-****shakhanti*** *be-tokham*” – “They shall make for Me a Sanctuary, and I shall reside among them” (Shemot 25:8).

Rav Shalom Teomim, in *Or Ha-Torah*, cites one of his mentors as explaining the significance of this concept, that the transient, mobile *Mishkan* is sometimes referred to as “*Mikdash*,” the same term used in reference to the permanent Temple in Jerusalem. Symbolically, he writes, this means that even during the journey, we can and must strive to experience the sanctity of the “*Mikdash*,” of the final destination. We might make the mistake of viewing our “journeys,” the activities we must do in order to facilitate religious engagement, as merely a means to an end, without inherent value and significance. The parity drawn between the *Mishkan* and the *Beit Ha-mikdash* shows that even during “travel,” while we prepare for our final destination, we should consider ourselves as though we are currently in the “*Beit Ha-mikdash*.” The process itself is inherently valuable, and no less an opportunity for sanctity and spiritual growth than the final destination. *Chazal* insisted that even the *Mishkan*, the forerunner to the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, which served temporarily until the Temple could be built, had the status of the final *Beit Ha-mikdash* – showing us that the journey itself is sacred, and an integral part of our service of God.

Thursday

Parashat Behaalotekha begins with the command that when the *menorah* in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* is kindled, the lamps must shine “*el mul penei ha-menorah*” – literally, “toward the face of the *menorah*” (8:2).

Rashi, based on the *Midrash Tanchuma*, explains this ambiguous phrase to mean that the wicks are to be turned toward the middle of the *menorah*. The *menorah* consisted of seven lamps – one protruding upward from the center, and six at the end of the branches that extended from the center of the *menorah*, three to each side. Rashi writes that the wicks of the six lamps on the sides should be turned toward the center lamp. This is done, Rashi explains, to avoid giving the impression that the light of the *menorah* was needed for illumination.

The Rashbam explains differently, interpreting the verse to mean that the wicks are to be turned outward, toward the *shulchan* (table), which was situated opposite the *menorah* (as the Torah instructs in Parashat Teruma – Shemot 26:35). This explanation is offered also by Netziv, in his *Ha’ameik Davar* commentary, where he writes that the word “*panim*” (or “*penei*” – “face”) refers to the front, the direction from which one arrives. Netziv references his comments to Parashat Teruma (Shemot 25:37) where he discusses this point at greater length. He cites there the verse in Parashat Tzav (Vayikra 6:7) where the Torah instructs bringing the *mincha* offering to “*penei ha-mizbei’ach*” – referring to the part of the altar where one first arrives when he ascends the ramp that leads to the top of the altar. Likewise, the prophet Yechezkel (44:4), in describing the third *Beit Ha-mikdash*, speaks of “*penei ha-bayit*” – the side of the building where the entrance is located, and where one thus finds himself right when he steps into the building. Similarly, Netziv writes, the expression “*penei ha-menorah*” refers to the front of the *menorah*, the side where one arrives when he approaches it, as opposed to the back of the *menorah*. The command to have the candles shine “*el mul penei ha-menorah*” thus means that the wicks should be turned frontward, and not towards the back of the *menorah*.

To explain Rashi’s comments, Netziv suggests that the wicks are turned diagonally; they are to face both frontward and toward the center, and are thus positioned in a diagonal.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, in his *Oznayim La-Torah*, offers an explanation for why, according to the Rashbam and Netziv, the light of the *menorah* is to shine specifically upon the *shulchan*. The light of the *menorah* is commonly seen as a symbol of the light of Torah scholarship, which must guide our path through life, much as a torch guides one as he walks during the night. And the *shulchan*, which contained loaves of bread, represents the nation’s material needs. The light of the *menorah* shines upon the *shulchan* to instruct that our pursuit of a livelihood must be conducted by the “light” of Torah, following the rules and guidelines which the Torah sets forth. As we tend to our personal and professional affairs, outside the synagogue and study hall, we must be guided by the Torah’s commands. Our religious responsibilities do not end when we leave our houses of prayer and study and go about our mundane affairs. To the contrary, all our affairs are to be conducted by the light of the Torah, in strict accordance with its values and laws.

Friday

The Torah in Parashat Behaalotekha (9:1-5) tells of *Benei Yisrael*’s offering of the *korban pesach* (paschal sacrifice) on the first anniversary of the Exodus from Egypt, on the 14th of Nissan, at Mount Sinai.

Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, in *Meshekh Chokhma* (9:7), notes that the 14th of Nissan that year fell on Shabbat. This clearly emerges from the Gemara’s remark in Masekhet Shabbat (87b) that the day the *Mishkan* was assembled was Sunday. The Torah in Parashat Pekudei (Shemot 40:17) states explicitly that the assembly of the *Mishkan* occurred on the first of Nissan, and thus, if this day was Sunday, then the 14th of the month fell on Shabbat. And so *Benei Yisrael* offered the *korban pesach* at Mount Sinai on Shabbat.

Rav Meir Simcha proceeds to raise a question concerning the Gemara’s famous account in Masekhet Pesachim (66a) of the time when, during the Second Commonwealth, the 14th of Nissan fell on Shabbat, and the religious leaders of the time (“*Benei Beteira*”) were uncertain whether the *korban pesach* should be sacrificed. They could not determine whether or not the sacrificing of this offering overrides the Shabbat prohibitions, until this matter was resolved by Hillel, who established that the sacrifice is offered even on Shabbat. Hillel reached this conclusion on the basis of God’s command here in Parashat Behaalotekha (9:2) that *Benei Yisrael* offer the sacrifice “*be-moado*” (“in its time”). This term is used also in reference to the daily *tamid* sacrifice (Bamidbar 28:2), which is offered even on Shabbat, and Hillel thus inferred that the *korban pesach*, too, must be offered even on Shabbat. Why, Rav Meir Simcha asked, would anyone have thought that the *korban pesach* should not be offered when the 14th of Nissan falls on Shabbat, if the first *korban pesach* offered after the Exodus was sacrificed on Shabbat? Why did this question arise, and remain unresolved until Hillel’s inference from the text?

Rav Meir Simcha answers that the *korban pesach* offered at Mount Sinai the year after the Exodus cannot serve as a halakhic precedent, because it was exceptional. He references *Tosafot*’s comments in Masekhet Kiddushin (37b, *s.v. ho’il*) implying that the majority of the males among *Benei Yisrael* were uncircumcised at this time. Normally, a person who is uncircumcised may not offer the *korban pesach* (Shemot 12:48), but God specifically commanded *Benei Yisrael* to offer the sacrifice despite the fact that many had not undergone *berit mila*. Rav Meir Simcha noted that if the *korban pesach* on that occasion overrode the general rule prohibiting an uncircumcised male from participating in the sacrificing, then *a fortiori* it overrode the Shabbat prohibitions. After all, when an infant’s eighth day falls on Shabbat, the obligation of circumcision overrides the Shabbat prohibitions, and the circumcision is performed – showing that the *mitzva* of *mila* supersedes the *mitzva* of Shabbat. It thus stands to reason that if the exceptional *korban pesach* brought at Mount Sinai overrode the requirement of circumcision, it certainly overrode the restrictions that apply on Shabbat. Therefore, this *korban pesach* could not serve as an instructive model for the *korban pesach* offered subsequently, under normal circumstances. One might have considered that just as the *mitzva* of *mila* generally overrides the obligation of *korban pesach* – and thus the *korban pesach* cannot be offered by somebody who has not undergone circumcision – the *mitzva* of Shabbat observance, too, perhaps overrides the obligation of *korban pesach*, such that it cannot be offered on Shabbat.

Therefore, this matter remained unresolved until Hillel taught based on an inference from the text that the *korban pesach* is offered on the 14th of Nissan even when it falls on Shabbat.