



Around the Shabbat Table

Shabbat Beha'alotecha 5762

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Introduction

This week's parasha includes several elements, which are central to religious observance even in present times. The first such element is the building and lighting of the menorah by Aaron and his sons. It became such a powerful symbol of Jewish life that our enemies sought to extinguish its flames and carry off the symbol.

Secondly, the *parasha* spelled out the ceremony for initiation of the Levites, and their duties in assisting the *Kohanim* (priests) in the *mishkan* (sanctuary). The leaders of each of the tribes of Israel made their offerings, and the *Kohanim* and Levites were initiated and inducted into the service of God. Among other practices, the blessing by the *Kohanim* has survived and can be heard at services around the world.

A third element is the celebration of the "second Pesach." This second Pesach was observed in the wilderness of Sinai by those who were unable to participate in the first Passover offering in Egypt. As with the original Pesach, matza and *maror* (bitter herbs) were central to its observance.

It is also in this week's portion that instructions were given for the creation and sounding of silver trumpets. The blasts which were to be used were taught to the *Kohanim*, who would use them for different purposes: to gather the leaders of the tribes and the entire nation, as an alarm, and as a signal to commence marching. We also know that the trumpet alarms were designed to frighten our enemies, and also served to remind the Israelites to have faith in God. The shofar blasts used nowadays on Rosh Hashana find their origin in this Torah portion.

Finally, this *parasha* teaches us about how the Israelites traveled from Egypt towards Moab and the Promised Land. A cloud that served as a symbol of God's

presence remained over the *mishkan* (sanctuary). When it was stationary, the Israelites remained encamped. When the cloud rose, the people traveled.



Although many familiar ideas surface in the parasha, the ideas that are most significant to us deal with Moshe (Moses) and the way in which he dealt with those who organized unrest and civil disobedience. The Israelites complained about food, water and other amenities that they did not have in their travels. Their complaints always seemed to include the claim that life had been better for them in Egypt, in slavery. Moshe held up steadfast, even against the *asafsoof* (fifth column). Finally, Moshe succumbed, complaining to God that he could no longer lead the people. Moshe did not ask for absolute power for himself, or for the destruction of enemies and rebels. He did, however, ask for help in leadership. God sent that help by directing Moshe to choose seventy elders, wise and experienced men and leaders, to teach and to help Moshe to inspire the people to do and act right. Moshe thus becomes a role model for a Jewish democracy.

Questions for Your Family's Discussion

When your family sits down together this Shabbat, here are some questions for you to wrestle with:

1. The concept of a "fifth column" - a group that tries to destabilize a government or society - surfaces often in history. How have leaders responded to such groups? How does Moshe respond to the challenge? How are Moshe's responses like or unlike others who have responded to "fifth columns?"
2. What caused the Israelites in the wilderness to long for the "good old days?" What would cause people in other times and places to feel that way?

Some Texts to Wrestle With

This week's *parasha* includes sections that are read (or sung) when the Torah is removed from the Ark and when it is returned:

And it came to pass, when the Ark moved forward, Moshe said:
Rise up, God, and let your enemies be scattered; And let those
that hate You flee before You. And when it [the Ark] rested, he
said: Return, God, to the many thousands of Israel.

(Numbers 10: 35-36)

Why do you think the editors of our prayer book chose to use these verses to
introduce and close our Torah service?

In the day of your gladness, and in your appointed seasons, and in
your new moons, you shall blow the trumpets...they shall be for
you as a memorial before your God.

(Numbers 9:10)

What purposes were served by sounding the trumpets (or shofar) at these
times? What holiday still utilizes the sounding of the shofar? Why has that
sounding remained in practice while the others mentioned have not?

Towards an Action Agenda

Learn more about different Jewish leaders at
http://judaism.about.com/library/glossary/blglossary_leaders.htm :

Learn about the sounds of the shofar and hear them at:
http://www.aish.com/holidays/The_High_Holidays/articles/Symbolism_of_the_Shofar.asp

Shabbat Shalom!

Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's
discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your
thoughts and ideas to RavADS@bjeny.org

If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan
at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site:
www.bjeny.org

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