

## **Beha'alotcha** (Numbers 8:1-12:16)

Beth El Torah Study Group, June 13, 2020 (Richard Skeen)

### **Who Gets the Prophet's Bullhorn? What the prophetic rebellions of Eldad/Meydad and Aaron/Miriam Say About Leadership, Humility and Prophecy**

*And it shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. Joel 3:1*

Our Story: The Israelites are ready to begin the short journey to Promised Land. An extra Book of Torah (?) suggest what could have been if they'd only not complained. Yitro declines showing the way. Fire and frustration throughout the camp.... We examine two prophetic challenges to Moses:

#### **I. First Prophetic Challenge - Numbers Chapter 11.**

Societal turmoil, bitter protests, "riffraff", fire breaks out, anxiety. People complain, G-d is angry, Moses "distressed".

Numbers 11:11 - And Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You dealt ill with Your servant, and why have I not enjoyed Your favor, that You have laid the burden of all this people upon me?"

11:14-15 I cannot carry all this people by myself, for it is too much for me. If You would deal thus with me, kill me rather, I beg You, and let me see no more of my wretchedness!"

(Note Chapter 10: 31, Moses asks Yitro to stay. "Please don't leave us, inasmuch as you know where we should camp in the wilderness and can be our guide." (See Parsha Yitro in S'hmot)

#### **Seventy Elders, Plus two...**

11:25 Then the LORD came down in a cloud and spoke to him; He drew upon the spirit that was on him and put it upon the seventy elders. And when the spirit rested upon them, they spoke in ecstasy, but did not continue.

וישארו שני־אנשים במחנה שם האחד אלדד ושם השני מידד ותנה עליהם הרוח והמה בכתבים ולא יצאו האהלה ויתנבאו במחנה

11:26 Two men, one named Eldad and the other Meydad, had remained in camp; yet the spirit rested upon them—they were among those recorded, but they had not gone out to the Tent—and they spoke in ecstasy in the camp.

11:27-28 A youth ran out and told Moses, saying, "Eldad and Meydad are acting the prophet in the camp! And Joshua son of Nun, Moses' attendant from his youth, spoke up and said, "My lord Moses, restrain them!"

ויאמר לו מִשֶׁה הֲמִקַּנָּא אֶתָּה לִי וְאִי יִתֵּן כָּל־עַם יְהוָה נְבִיאִים כִּי־יִתֵּן יְהוָה אֶת־רוּחוֹ עָלֵיהֶם:

11:29 But Moses said to him, "Are you wrought up on my account? **Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD put His spirit upon them!**"

## Commentary:

1. Ibn Ezra writes that Moses took six men from each tribe, a total of 72. Since G'd had told him to take 70 men, two of them were left out
2. Moses took 72 pieces of paper. On seventy of them he wrote the word "elder," whereas two pieces of paper he left blank. Every man drawing a slip of paper with the word "elder" knew he had been appointed. The two men who would draw blanks would have to conclude that they had not been found worthy. Seeing Eldod and Meydod were aware of this and were very humble, they remained in the camp without either returning to their private tents nor assembling around the Tabernacle before the drawing of these slips of paper to ensure that none of the participants would be embarrassed by drawing a blank (seeing now Moses only had to prepare 70 such slips)... Seeing that they were so modest and humble they were rewarded with a measure of Holy Spirit. - Tanchuma Behaalotcha 12
3. : ויאמר לו משה וגו'... 'ומי יתן כל עם ה' נביאים וגו' : "and Moses said to him **"I wish that all of the Lord's people were prophets**, etc." Moses meant that possibly what these two men had prophesied was true. The reason that he felt that way was that the prophetic insights granted to the seventy men were part of what had been his portion of Holy Spirit, whereas the two men had received Holy Spirit directly from the source. In the first chapter of tractate Sanhedrin 17 the conclusion of the Sages - after a lengthy discussion of this episode- is that if Eldod and Meydod had only predicted that Moses would die, the demand to lock up such a person would make sense... Daat Zkenemim
4. He wanted them to receive holy spirit from G-d directly, not only as a part of the holy spirit that had been bestowed upon him. He realized that the seventy men had received only part of the Holy spirit that he had been endowed with, and that this Holy spirit would vanish as soon as he would die. He therefore prayed that they would receive permanent Holy spirit. - CHizukini
5. Rashi: ולא יספו "And the Prophesied, but did not continue" (to prophesy) — they prophesied only that day alone. Thus is the phrase explained in Siphre. Onkelos, however, rendered renders it ולא פסקין "and they did not cease", meaning that the gift of prophecy never again departed from them (cf. [Sanhedrin 17a](#) and [Rashi on Deuteronomy 5:19](#))
6. *Bamidbar Rabbah* 15 states that when Moses evaluated the level of prophecy the elders attained, it turned out that the 2 elders Eldod and Meydod (numbers 71 and 72 respectively) had received a higher degree of prophetic spirit because their portion came from G'd directly, whereas the other seventy elders received their prophetic spirit only from Moses. This was why the seventy elders prophesied only briefly.
7. When Moses asks G-d (at the Burning Bush encounter) how the Israelites will trust he is a prophet: "And this shall be for you the sign that I have sent you" - your humility will be the sign. (Meshech Chochma, Shemot 3:11)
8. Moses told Joshua that he, personally, wished that G'd would grant every Israelite prophetic insights. The reason Moses said: "may G'd grant His spirit, etc," is that Moses viewed the 70 people who had received prophetic insights with him as the intermediary as being only the beginning. Now that G'd had shown that He had granted prophetic insights directly to two

more Israelites, he could only hope that G'd would grant such prophetic insights to everybody. None of such additional prophetic insights would be a denial or diminution of Moses' own stature as a prophet. - Or HaChaim

9. "would that the entire people of G'd be prophets!" It is possible that Moses alluded to the time of the Messiah when his wish would be realized. He wished for that time to occur soon so that the status of the people would be raised to the level of prophets. At such a time, the evil urge would disappear and jealousy would be unknown. In the words of [Yoel 3,1](#): "at that time I will pour My spirit over all flesh." It is also the time of which [Isaiah 11,9](#) spoke when he said: "and the whole earth will be filled with a measure of the knowledge of the Lord like the waters which cover the oceans." Even though these prophecies have not yet been fulfilled in our terrestrial universe, they will be fulfilled in due course in a world which will be more perfect. - Rabbeinu Bahayu
10. Moshe yearns for a perfect world in which everyman achieves prophetic spirit- "*mi yiten v'chol am Hashem nevi'im*"! Guided by this perspective and his evaluation of their sincerity, Moshe resists imposing any punitive or corrective measures. Witnessing deep religious passion in others can assist us in preserving our own religious temperature in the face of the modern deterrents. - Rabbi Moshe Taragin (on rabbi Norman Lamm's writing on this)

## II. **Prophetic Challenge #2: Miriam and Aaron Want Spotlight Too...**

12:1-2 "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses regarding the dark-skinned woman he had married." "Has Hashem spoken only through Moshe? Has He not spoken through us as well?"

12:3 "**This man Moses, was more humble** than any other man on the face of the earth"

12:4-5: Suddenly the LORD called to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the Tent of Meeting." So the three of them went out. The LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, stopped at the entrance of the Tent, and called out, "Aaron and Miriam!" The two came forward.

12: 6-8 And He said, "Hear these My words: When a prophet of Hashem rises among you, I make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moshe; he is trusted throughout My household. With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he beholds the likeness of Hashem. How then did you not shrink from speaking against My servant Moshe!"

### **What is the catalyst for critique? What is G-d's Reaction?**

11. And whence did Miriam know that Moses had separated himself from his wife? R. Nathan answered: "Miriam was beside Zipporah When it was told to Moses, 'Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp'. When Zipporah heard this, she exclaimed, Woe to the wives of these if they have anything to do with prophecy, for they will separate from their wives just as my husband has separated from me!" It was from this that Miriam knew about it, and she told it to Aaron. Now what was the case with Miriam who had no intention to disparage him? She was punished thus severely! How much the more will this be so in the case of one who intentionally speaks in disparagement of this fellow"! ([Sifrei Bamidbar 99](#)).
12. **The man Moses was a humble man, etc.** The reason the Torah chose this point to inform us about Moses' extreme humility is that it is best demonstrated here where Moses was under extreme provocation and did not even complain to G'd. Had he responded, he

would have revealed himself as not quite so humble. This, in spite of the fact that he could have given a convincing explanation for his conduct. The Torah goes out of its way to describe Moses' level of humility as "greater than that of any other human being on earth." The reason is that one could have argued that it is impossible for a person who considers himself as inferior to everybody else to at one and the same time be the greatest prophet. This is why G'd Himself had to answer Miriam and Aaron. (Or Chaim)

13. "and Moses was an exceedingly humble person." According to Nachmanides this line has been inserted here to explain why G'd Himself had to defend Moses' virtue. Moses, was unable, by definition, to defend his conduct without in the process losing his reputation as a truly humble and modest, unassuming person. [Imagine how he would have appeared in the eyes of both Miriam and Aaron if he had used the very arguments on his own behalf that G'd used on his behalf! - Tur HaAroch
14. "and the man called Moses was an extremely humble person." The Torah testifies that Moses had not married the Cushite queen from a sense of pride, but that circumstances had led to that marriage. [It might have been decreed by heaven before he had been born] Even at this point, he remained humble by not responding to unwarranted criticism of him, until G-d acted as his advocate. Daat Zkenim
15. And the Name who revealed himself to Moshe in the bush out of **love** and out of **mercy** and out of **modesty** and out of **honesty** and out of **humility** and out of **charity** and out of **trust**. (Otzar HaMidrahsim [Einstein], Midrash R. Akiva p. 414) [see note #7]
16. The end result of every quarrel - regret; the end result of humility - peace. (R. Shelomo Ibn Gvirol)
17. All positive qualities require intent, with the exception of the quality of humility, for humility with intent cannot longer be called humility.(Simcha Raz - Menachem Mendel of Kotsk)
18. Reb Zushe and his brother Reb Elimelech were discussing the quality of humility. Elimelech said: "A person must first contemplate the greatness of the Creator, and then he will attain true humility." But Zushe said: "Not so, one must first begin with true humility, and then he will attain recognition of the Creator." They asked their mentor, the Maggid of Mezeritz, to decide who was right. The Rebbe ruled: "Both are the words of the Living God, but inner *hessed* rests upon one who begins with his soul and not with the Creator." (M. M. Buber "The Hidden Light" P. 225)

Bialik on humility and trustworthiness :

May my lot be with you, meek of the world, silent souls,  
Who shape their lives in secret, modest in thought and action,  
Hidden dreamers, who speak little but increase glory;  
The pleasantness of your spirit ensconced within you like a pearl on the ocean floor,  
And your virtues, like forest seeds, multiply midst shadows.  
But your lives - your finest vision, and your glory - your very being; You are the trustworthy  
guards of God's image on earth!

