

# Shabbat Shalom Fax

Parshat Beha'alosecha

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**GOOD MORNING!** The past few months have been a time of tremendous upheaval. I had an interesting conversation with a colleague who pointed out that we are now living in an upside down world. The vast majority of the segment of society that identifies as "pro-choice" now wants to limit everyone's ability to freely choose to open businesses and attend social events.

**The vast majority** of the segment of society that identifies as "pro-life" wants to open EVERYTHING up and possibly endangering hundreds of thousands of people. Like most things in life, neither extreme makes any sense, however, I find this role reversal and the cognitive dissonance fascinating to observe.

**I am reminded** of a well-known incident in the Talmud (*Bava Basra* 10b). The Talmud relates that Rabbi Yosef the son of Rabbi Yehoshua got very ill and lost consciousness. While unconscious, he had an NDE (Near Death Experience) and his soul traveled to the heavenly realms. As he was trying to explain this experience, his father asked him what it was that he saw.

**"I saw** an inverted world," began Rabbi Yosef. "Those who are given the most honor in this world are considered the lowliest in the next world, while those who in this world are the lowliest are accorded the highest honor in the next world." The commentators explain that he was referring to those who, in this world, are accorded honor merely because they are wealthy and powerful, in the next world are considered the lowest segment of the population. Meanwhile, those who are poor and suffer in this world are considered the uppermost part of the society.

**The famous** medieval philosopher Rabbi Yehuda Loewe better known as "Maharal" explains this passage in the Talmud by pointing out that the world-to-come is a non-material world. Thus, those who are intimately connected to material pleasures and driven to merely acquire more and more material things and experience material pleasures are essentially ill equipped to handle a non-material world. While those who are far less connected to materiality (i.e. those that are poor and suffering) are far better equipped to manage and achieve in a non-material world.

**Reflecting** on this concept I was further struck by how inverted our very own world has become. Those who are famous generally considered the "crème de la crème" of our society – movie stars, sports heroes, rock stars, and many others with no visible talent other than a famous last name, have all been rendered impotent. Because of social distancing, they cannot make movies or TV shows and there are no sporting events or concerts. These "immortals" have shown to be very mortal (and mostly irrelevant) indeed.

**Those who** are generally not given the proper attention that they truly deserve – teachers, doctors, nurses, first responders, and other healthcare workers are finally being appreciated for their true value to society both for what they do and how indispensable they are to our very lives. While their value should have always been obvious, the natural "static" background noise of living in a world that is focused on fame and money drowned out the contributions and their value was seldom recognized.

**Moreover**, other common and integral parts of American society, which are often forgotten and lost in mainstream media, are being spotlighted and recognized for their hard work. A small business owner struggling to keep his doors open and pay his employees, warehouse and delivery workers working in crazy conditions and on tight schedules (cough, Amazon), parents trying to hang on to their jobs while juggling their children's education and the daily challenges of shopping and maintaining a functioning household – all now being hailed as everyday heroes.

**In some ways**, the horror of the COVID-19 has been a blessing to society in terms of a recalibration of what and who we should consider important in our lives. We are now living in an inverted world – one that would be unrecognizable a scant six months ago.

**Times of stress** create a real need for wise direction from our leaders. In many parts of the United States our leadership has really stepped up and taken on this responsibility, and unfortunately, in some parts less so. Of course, this week's Torah portion has a very instructive message on leadership.

**In this week's** Torah reading we find several instances of poor judgement and improper behavior by the Jewish nation. In frustration, Moses cries out to God:

*Did I conceive this entire nation, did I give birth to it that You say to me carry them in your bosom like a nursemaid carries an infant... (Numbers 11:12).*

**Moses describes** his responsibility of leadership as a nursemaid who cares for an infant. Anyone who has been in a leadership position will certainly sympathize with Moses' apt description of what it is often like dealing with a multitude of people who don't really want leadership and can't really see past their own needs (much like an infant who is painfully unaware that 3 AM is not an appropriate time to be looking for a meal).

**Rashi**, the most well-known commentator on the Bible, points out (ad loc) that God had previously outlined the extent of this leadership responsibility when He first appointed Moses: *"And He commanded them (Moses and Aharon) regarding Bnei Yisroel" (Exodus 1:3)*. Rashi continues, this refers to the responsibility to "lead them with the understanding that they will stone you and insult you."

**On the face** of it, this seems kind of shocking. What kind of leader tolerates physical and psychological punishment? Perhaps even more perplexing, how does this correlate to Moses' description of leadership as the obligation of parenting an infant?

**No one likes** the feeling of being indebted to others. Being on the receiving end of a largesse is discomfiting; therefore the natural response is to search for a motive behind the gift. Whenever someone feels obligated to someone else, there is a natural desire to try to lessen the feeling of obligation. One of the ways this is accomplished is by diminishing the value of that which was given that created the obligation.

**Children** are experts in this endeavor; every child “knows” that they were born because of their parents’ self-interest, and upon superficial examination they would seem to be right.

**A case** can certainly be made that having children is for our own self-interest. Whether it’s to work in the family business or continue the family legacy, or simply to escape our very own mortality by having descendants who will continue on long after we’re gone, it’s seemingly clear that having children can be motivated by self-interest.

**Even worse** – sometimes they’re right. We often criticize our children for things that they do because of how their actions affect or reflect on us. We want them to go into the family business, but they want to become artists; we want them to attend a prestigious college, but they don’t see any point in wasting four years of their lives for something they have no interest in doing; we want them to marry into a well-known family, but they want to marry their high school sweetheart.

**In many scenarios**, we expect things from our children that are really about what we want, not what they want. Obviously, as parents we hope that bringing children into this world isn’t primarily driven by our own selfish needs. We strive to be giving, altruistic, and love unconditionally. On the other hand, we must keep in mind that our children will always look for reasons as to why we do what we do. So how do we convey to them that our love for them transcends our own selfish and self-serving desires?

**The Torah** is teaching us an incredible lesson in both parenting and leadership, which is why Moses equates the two. Being a good parent comes with the understanding that you’re going to take abuse. There are going to be many sleepless nights, unreasonable carpool obligations, a constant worry for their physical and emotional well-being. In fact, that is the clearest way to send the message to your children that your parenting is for their sake and not your own: If you’re willing to put up with abuse, then obviously the relationship is not self-serving but rather it’s about what’s good for them.

**This same lesson** applies to leadership. Constituents are naturally going to look at everything their leaders do as being in their own self-serving interests. This is why God commanded Moses that he had to accept the position with the understanding that there would be physical and psychological abuse. The Jewish people’s abuse of Moses was legendary. In fact, some of it is so astonishing I will probably make it the subject of a future article.

**But Moses’** long suffering was eventually appreciated and he became widely beloved. Being tolerant of those abuses is the only way a leader can relay the message that he is acting in the interest of the constituency and not his own self-interest. Eventually, the Jewish people internalized that everything Moses did was driven by a deep love and commitment for them and their well-being.

**TORAH PORTION:** Beha’alosecha, Numbers 8:1 - 12:16


**Aharon** is commanded in the lighting of the Menorah, the Levites purify themselves for service in the Tabernacle (they trained from age 25-30 and served from age 30-50). The first Pesach is celebrated since leaving Egypt. The Almighty instructs the Jewish people to journey into the desert whenever the ever-present cloud lifts from above the Tabernacle and to camp where it rests. Moses is instructed to make two silver trumpets to be sounded before battle or to proclaim a *Yom Tov* (a holiday).

**The people** journey to the wilderness of Paran, during which time they rebelled twice against the Almighty’s leadership. The second time they complain about the boring taste of the *maneh* and the lack of meat in the desert. The Almighty sends a massive quantity of quail and those who rebelled died.

**Moses** asks his father-in-law, Yitro (Jethro) to travel with them in the desert, but Yitro returns to Midian.

**Miriam**, Moses’ sister, speaks *lashon hora* (defaming words) about Moses. She is struck with *tzora’as* (the mystical skin disease which indicated that a person spoke improperly about another person) and is exiled from the camp for one week.

**SHABBAT LIGHTING:** *Jerusalem* 7:10 Miami 7:54 Guatemala 6:13 Hong Kong 6:48 Honolulu 6:50 Jo’Burg 5:05

 LA 7:47 London 9:02 Melbourne 4:49 Mex. City 7:57 New York 8:09 Singapore 6:52 Toronto 8:41 Moscow 8:56

**“QUOTE OF THE WEEK”:** Strive not to be a success, but rather to be a value. — Albert Einstein

In Loving Memory of  
**Sora bas Avraham — Selma Daniels**



Shabbat Shalom,

*Yitzchak Zweig*

Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig

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