



# Shabbat Table Talk Page

## Overview

- **Parashah: Beha'alotekha (בְּהַעֲלֹתְךָ, "When you set up")**
- **Chapters: Numbers 8:1-12:16**



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

## Torah Synopsis

Last week's Torah portion (Naso) concluded with the Israelite camp arranged around the completed Mishkan (Tabernacle), furnished and supplied by donations from each of the twelve tribes. Moses was inside the Mishkan, listening to the Voice of the LORD "speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim."

In this week's Torah, the LORD first gives instructions about how Aaron was to light the lamps of the menorah within the sanctuary (inner chamber) of the Tabernacle. The wicks of the six outer lamps were to be positioned so that their lights projected towards the seventh (and central) shaft. A further description of the menorah was also given, stating that it was formed according to the pattern that God showed Moses upon the mountain.

Moses then gathered the Levites together to consecrate them for their service at the Tabernacle. In a ceremony that signified a sort of "rebirth," the Levites were first sprinkled with water mixed with the ashes of the red heifer (i.e., the "water of purification"). Then they shaved off all their hair and were immersed in a mikveh (a ritual bath containing flowing water). The congregation of Israel was then called to the gate of the Tabernacle and the firstborn among them performed "semikhah" by laying their hands on the heads of the Levites. Aaron then lifted each of them up as a "wave offering" (*tenufah*) before the LORD. Finally, the Levites laid their hands on the head of two bulls that Aaron slaughtered as a sin offering and a whole burnt offering given on their behalf. After all this, the Levites were ready to serve as mediators for the people.

On Nisan 1 of the year following the Exodus, while the Israelites were still camped at Sinai, God commanded the people to observe the Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of that month at twilight (i.e., the anniversary of the Exodus) and ordained it as a yearly celebration. However, a group of men were unable to do so because they were ritually unclean, so the LORD instituted a "second chance" to observe the seder exactly one month later, on the 14th day of the second month at twilight.

The portion then repeats the events that ended the Book of Exodus, describing how the Shekinah cloud covered the tent of meeting, and that whenever the cloud lifted, the people of Israel would set out, and wherever it settled, the people would set up camp. God further commanded Moses to make two silver trumpets that the priests would use to summon the camp to attention, to rally the troops in battle, and to announce appointed feasts and celebrations.



*(Synopsis continued...)*

The Israelites had been at Sinai for nearly a year before God commanded them to begin their journey through the desert back to the Promised Land. It was at Sinai that Moses had first set up the Tabernacle, dedicated the priesthood, and taught the people the commandments of the Torah. In the “second year, in the second month, on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the month” (i.e., Iyyar 20), the cloud lifted from over the Tabernacle and Moses dispatched the Ark of the Covenant to follow after it into the desert (Num. 10:33-6). Moses then directed the people to set out “by stages” toward the desert of Paran (in the Negev). First the eastern camp led by Judah set out, which was followed by the Levites who moved the Tabernacle. Then the southern camp of Rueben set out, followed by the Kohathites who carried the Tabernacle’s sacred furnishings (e.g., the menorah, the altar of incense, etc.). Then the western camp of Ephraim set out, followed by the northern camp of Dan which served as a “rear guard.”

When the Israelites began their journey away from Sinai, Moses’ father-in-law was invited to join them, though it is unclear if he actually went along or if he returned to Midian. The portion then describes that whenever the cloud lifted and the Israelites broke camp, Moses would say before the Ark of the Covenant, “Arise, O LORD, and let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you,” and whenever the trip was finished, Moses would inspect the reassembled Tabernacle and then pray, “Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel.”

After three days into their journey the people began to complain about their hardship, and God became angry and caused a fire to burn in the outskirts of the camp. In addition, the 70 elders of Israel were killed, and the fires raged until Moses interceded on behalf of the nation. This station of the journey was thereafter named “Taberah” (burning). After this, the “mixed multitude” began to lust after meat, and the Israelites began weeping for the cuisine they had enjoyed back in Egypt. Moses despaired for his life and told God the burden of the people was too much for him. God then instructed him to appoint 70 new elders that would be filled with the Holy Spirit so they could help bear the burden of leadership, and as for the people’s complaints about the lack of meat and the boring taste of “manna,” God promised to send so much meat that it would “come out of their nostrils.” God then caused an enormous flock of quails to begin falling from the sky around the camp, which the people began to gather and cook. However, while “the meat was yet between their teeth” the quail became a plague and many Israelites died. This station of the journey was thereafter named “the graves of craving” (Kivrot ha-ta’avah).

After this, the Israelites set out to a place they called Chazerot (“enclosures”), where Aaron and Miriam privately slandered Moses and his leadership. Miriam not only questioned Moses’ decision to leave his wife, but also questioned his unique role as the mediator of the covenant at Sinai. God then instructed Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to come to the Tabernacle, where He descended in a pillar of cloud. The LORD then called Aaron and Miriam forward and warned them that Moses was uniquely chosen to be the leader of Israel, since God spoke to him plainly and only Moses was permitted to behold the likeness (temunah) of the LORD Himself. When the pillar of cloud ascended, Miriam was left with *tzara’at* (“leprosy”), the punishment for *lashon hara* (evil speech). Despite Moses’ and Aaron’s intercession for her, however, the LORD banished Miriam from the camp for seven days, after which time she was brought back and the LORD directed the people further into the desert of Paran.



## Basic Questions

1. What does the word “beha'alotekha” (בְּהֵאֲלֹתְכָה) mean? <sup>1</sup>
2. What special mitzvah was given to Aaron in the Tabernacle? <sup>2</sup>
3. How was the menorah kindled within the Tabernacle? <sup>3</sup>
4. What miracle was associated with the menorah? <sup>4</sup>
5. Why were the Levites chosen to be serve at the Tabernacle? <sup>5</sup>
6. Are the Levites the priests of Israel? <sup>6</sup>
7. How were the Levites dedicated for service at the Tabernacle? <sup>7</sup>
8. At what age did the Levites begin their service at the Tabernacle? <sup>8</sup>
9. What were the “waters of purification” used to cleanse the Levites? <sup>9</sup>
10. Why were the Levites required to shave off all their hair and be immersed in water before they could serve at the Tabernacle? <sup>10</sup>
11. When did God tell Moses that the people were to observe Passover in the desert? <sup>11</sup>
12. Why did God allow for a “second chance” Passover celebration? <sup>12</sup>
13. Could a “stranger” (i.e., *ger*) observe the Passover? <sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To “raise up” or “offer” (from the verb *alah* (עָלָה), “to ascend”) used in reference to the flames of the menorah.

<sup>2</sup> He was given the honor of preparing and lighting the menorah every day.

<sup>3</sup> The menorah had seven “boat shaped” lamps, one for each branch, and each lamp was filled with the purest olive oil. The wicks were positioned by either bending them toward the center or by clamping them down between the bowl and the cover. Aaron lit the lamps daily, “from evening until morning,” from right to left (Exod. 27:21).

<sup>4</sup> Each lamp held about 9 ounces of the purest olive oil, sufficient to burn throughout the night. According to the Talmud (Shabbat 22b), while all the lamps received the same amount of olive oil, the “westernmost” lamp (according to Rashi, the center lamp, due to its orientation) never ran out of oil, even though it was kindled first in the sequence. When Aaron would rekindle the lamps every evening, he found the shamash still burning.

<sup>5</sup> Because the firstborn sons of the other tribes were responsible for the sin of the Golden Calf, and God then chose the Levites to serve in their place.

<sup>6</sup> Not necessarily. There were three clans of the Levites (Gershonites, Merarites, and Kohathites), but only those Kohathites who descended from Aaron were qualified to be priests. God gave the other Levites as a “gift” to Aaron and his sons for helping maintain the Tabernacle and to help offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. So, while all priests are Levites, not all Levites are priests.

<sup>7</sup> First they were sprinkled with the “water of purification.” Then they shaved off all their hair, were immersed in a mikveh, and donned clean garments. The people then “laid hands” on their heads (*semikhah*), and Aaron “waved” them before God like newborn children. Finally sacrifices were offered to purify them for service.

<sup>8</sup> At age 25. They could serve until age 50, after which they became guards and singers at the Tabernacle (8:23-26).

<sup>9</sup> Water mixed with the ashes of the red heifer (*parah adumah*) used to cleanse from contact with death.

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps to suggest “spiritual rebirth.”

<sup>11</sup> On the first day of the first month of the second year, two weeks before the anniversary of the Exodus (9:1).

<sup>12</sup> If someone was legitimately unable to observe Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month at twilight, he was given the opportunity to observe it a month later, on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the second month at twilight (*Pesach Sheni*).

<sup>13</sup> Yes. There was one ordinance for the stranger and for those born in the land (9:14).



14. Are the events recorded in this portion in chronological order? <sup>14</sup>
15. When did the Israelites leave Mount Sinai? <sup>15</sup>
16. Who was “Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite”? <sup>16</sup>
17. How did the people know when God wanted them to travel and when to stop? <sup>17</sup>
18. What protected the Israelites as they traveled, and what led the way? <sup>18</sup>
19. Before the Ark was dispatched by the Kohathites, what would Moses pray? <sup>19</sup>
20. What camp moved first when the Israelites traveled? <sup>20</sup>
21. Which two clans of the Levites were to carry the Tabernacle when it was moved? <sup>21</sup>
22. Which clan carried the furnishings of the Sanctuary? <sup>22</sup>
23. Why did God instruct Moses to make two silver trumpets? <sup>23</sup>
24. When the Cloud stopped moving above the Ark, Moses understood the people had reached a new camping location. What did Moses say when after the Tabernacle was reassembled? <sup>24</sup>
25. What happened three days after the camps first left Sinai? <sup>25</sup>
26. Who are the “erev rav”? <sup>26</sup>
27. Some of the people lusted after the “good life of Egypt,” especially for what? <sup>27</sup>
28. What is manna? <sup>28</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> No. The Book of Numbers begins with the statement that the LORD spoke to Moses “on the first day of the *second* month in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt,” but the events described in Numbers 9:1 are said to occur “in the *first* month of the second year” (cp. Num. 1:1-2; 9:1-5). Moreover, the events describing how the Shekhinah cloud covered the tent of meeting, etc., were also described at the end of the Book of Exodus.

<sup>15</sup> In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, about a year after they first arrived.

<sup>16</sup> He was either the son of Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, or Jethro himself. Note that Reuel means “friend of God.”

<sup>17</sup> When the cloud covered the tent, they camped; when it lifted, they traveled.

<sup>18</sup> The clouds of glory surrounded the camps and the Ark of the Covenant traveled three days ahead of them.

<sup>19</sup> “Arise, O LORD, and let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you” (10:35).

<sup>20</sup> The camp of Judah (which included the camps of Issachar and Zebulun).

<sup>21</sup> The Gershonites moved the tent and courtyard materials and the Merarites carried the wooden beams, etc. The two clans followed the path of Judah (which was led by the Ark of the Covenant). When they arrived at a new resting place, they set up the Tabernacle for the Kohathites to come and place the sacred furnishings.

<sup>22</sup> The Kohathites, who followed the second camp of Reuben and were therefore protected on all sides.

<sup>23</sup> The priests used them to summon the camps, to call leaders to the Tabernacle, to lead the charge in battles, and to convoke holy assemblies for the people.

<sup>24</sup> “Return, O LORD, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel” (10:36).

<sup>25</sup> The people complained and God sent a fire that killed many “at the edge of the camp.” It is likely that the original 70 elders were also killed, since Moses was instructed later to select 70 more. This place was called “Taberah.”

<sup>26</sup> The “mixed multitude” who left with the Israelites during the Exodus from Egypt.

<sup>27</sup> The cuisine of Egypt: “free fish,” cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic.

<sup>28</sup> “Bread from heaven” that looked like coriander seed and tasted in proportion to the measure of one’s faith.



29. When it became apparent that the complaints of the people were too much for Moses to handle alone, what did God do? <sup>29</sup>
30. When God told Moses to tell the people that tomorrow they would eat meat, Moses asked God how this was possible. What did God say in reply? <sup>30</sup>
31. How did God regard the tears of self-pity shed by the Israelites? <sup>31</sup>
32. Who were Eldad and Medad? <sup>32</sup>
33. What was the sin of Miriam that caused her to become a leper, exiled from the camp? <sup>33</sup>
34. If *both* Aaron and Miriam sinned, why was only Miriam punished? <sup>34</sup>

## Advanced Questions

35. God sees in the light and in the dark (Psalm 139:12). Why then did He command the menorah to be kindled in the Sanctuary? <sup>35</sup>
36. Why is the letter Nun upside down in the Sefer Torah where it surrounds the declarations Moses recited when the Ark of the Covenant would be dispatched and stopped? <sup>36</sup>
37. From where do we get the custom to say, “Im Yirtzeh HaShem” (if God wills)? <sup>37</sup>
38. Why does the term “the people of Israel” appear five times in Numbers 8:19? <sup>38</sup>
39. Which Israelites requested the “second chance” Passover? <sup>39</sup>
40. Did the Israelites really get “free fish” when they were in Egypt (Num. 11:5)? <sup>40</sup>
41. How does the Torah sum up the virtues and greatness of Moses? <sup>41</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> He told Moses to select 70 (new) elders of the people whom God would empower by the Holy Spirit to help him.

<sup>30</sup> He told Moses that his arm was not shortened, and that he would provide meat “until it came out of their nostrils.”

<sup>31</sup> He regarded the people’s complaint and desire to return to Egypt as a personal rejection of Him.

<sup>32</sup> Two of the 70 elders who remained in the camp and were not present at the Tabernacle when God poured out the Holy Spirit upon the new leaders. Joshua asked Moses to forbid them from prophecy, but Moses argued that it was a good thing that they prophesied and wished that all the people would do likewise.

<sup>33</sup> Lashon hara. She questioned Moses’ treatment of his wife and Moses’ role as Israel’s mediator of the covenant.

<sup>34</sup> The sages say it was Miriam who spoke the words, though Aaron consented by listening. Perhaps Aaron was not punished, just as he wasn’t punished for the sin of the Golden Calf, because he was a “peace maker” who always gave the benefit of the doubt to others....

<sup>35</sup> For the sake of the priests who were honored to “light up the palace of the Almighty.”

<sup>36</sup> The inverted Nun alludes that it should have been inserted some 50 verses earlier.

<sup>37</sup> In Num. 9:20 it says that Israelites traveled at the command (mouth) of God. When we plan to do something, we should always say, “If it pleases God,” or “If God wills,” or “with God’s help” (see James 4:13-16).

<sup>38</sup> To indicate how precious the people of Israel are to God.

<sup>39</sup> Those who were tamei (unclean) from carrying Joseph’s coffin up from Egypt.

<sup>40</sup> If they were not given straw to make bricks, would they have been given free fish?

<sup>41</sup> By stating that Moses was the most humble man on earth (Num. 12:3).

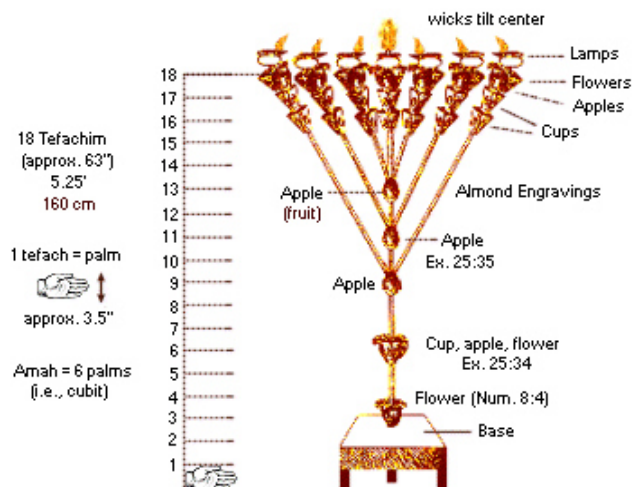


## Discussion Topics

1. It is clear that the Torah does not always follow chronological order. How important are logic and linear thinking when it comes to interpretation? Is there a place for “non-linear” ways of reading the Scriptures (e.g., gematria) or the use of imaginative retelling of the narratives (midrash)? What about the use of tradition? *Discuss...*
2. Moses’ response to the question about the validity of a “second chance” Passover teaches us that we should not be ashamed to say we don’t know the answer to some question. Do you have trouble admitting that you don’t have all the answers? *Discuss...*
3. How are we to understand Aaron? He was responsible for aiding the people in the sin of the Golden Calf and he participated in the slander of Moses with Miriam, and yet he seems to get a pass from God’s judgment. *Discuss...*
4. Because of the “sin of the spies,” God decreed that the Israelites would wander in the desert of Paran for 40 years, until the entire generation of adults who left Egypt died off. Do you think there is any connection between this judgment and the way Abraham abandoned Hagar and his firstborn son Ishmael in the desert of Paran? *Discuss...*
5. *Da Lifnei Mi Attah Omed*: “Know before Whom you are standing.” Contrast Moses’ attitude toward leadership and prophecy to that of Miriam and Aaron. Why does God value humility above other virtues of character? *Discuss...*
6. When the Israelites first left Egypt, they grumbled about the lack of food and God provided them with manna (Exod. 16:2-35). However, in the episode recounted in this portion, God judges the people for their ingratitude and faithlessness. Why the difference?
7. God described Moses as being “faithful in all my house” (Num. 12:7). The Book of Hebrews elaborates that “Moses was faithful as a *servant*, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Messiah is faithful over God’s house as a *son*” (Heb. 3:5-6). Discuss the analogy that Yeshua is greater than Moses “as the builder of a house is greater than the house itself.”

## For Next Week:

- Read **Shelach** (Numbers 13:1-15:41)
- Read the Haftarah (Joshua 2:1-2:24)
- Read the NT (Hebrews 3:7-4:1)





*Seder for Lighting the lamps of the Menorah...*

הַנֵּרוֹת	שִׁבְעָת	יֵאִירוּ	הַמְּנוֹרָה	פָּנָי	אֶל-מוֹל	אֶת-הַנֵּרוֹת	בְּהֵעֲלֹתָן
ha-ne-roht'	sheev-at'	ya-ee'-roo	ha-me-no-rah'	pe-nei'	el – mool'	et – ha-ner-oht'	be-ha-a-lo'-te-kha
ה- pfx "the" נר - n cpl "lamp" ות - cpl sfx	שִׁבְעַ - n card num "seven" ms cstr fr> שִׁבְעַ	אֹר - v "shine, give light" high impf 3mpl יִשְׁמְרוּ	ה- pfx "the" מְנוֹרָה - n fs "menorah, lampstand"	פָּנָה - n "front, face" יָ - pl cstr	אֶל - prep "to, toward" מוֹל - prep "front, opposite"	אֶת - d/o mark ה- pfx "the" נר - n cpl "lamp" ות - cpl sfx	ב - pfx "when" עָלָה - v "ascend, go up, raise" hiphil inf cstr ms הָ + תָּ + יָ
the lamps	seven [of]	shall shine	the face of the menorah	opposite to	[ ] the lamps	when you set up	

"When you set up the lamps, the seven lamps shall shine to the front of the menorah." (Num. 8:2b)

בְּהֵעֲלֹתָ אֶת-הַנֵּרוֹת אֶל-מוֹל  
פָּנֵי הַמְּנוֹרָה יֵאִירוּ שִׁבְעַת הַנֵּרוֹת

ὅταν ἐπιτιθῇς τοὺς λύχνους ἐκ μέρους κατὰ πρόσωπον τῆς λυχνίας  
φωτιοῦσιν οἱ ἑπτὰ λύχνοι (LXX)