

# BEHA'ALOSECHA

The Parsha begins with instructions for lighting the Menorah – the seven-branched golden candelabrum in the Tabernacle. All of the candles must be turned to face inwards, towards the Menorah's center; this indicates that the Menorah is kindled not to spread physical light, but to fulfill the Divine command.

The Tribe of Levi is to be consecrated for service in the Tabernacle. This privilege was originally reserved for the firstborn sons of every Jewish family, but they forfeited this right due to the sin of the Golden Calf. The Levites, who were not involved in the Golden Calf, are to be sanctified in their place.

The Jews observe the second Passover in history, one year after the Exodus. Individuals who could not partake in the offering of the Passover lamb, on account of ritual impurity, ask for a chance to be included as well. Moses brings their request to God, who concurs, instructing them about Pesach Sheni – the “Second Passover,” one month after Passover itself – a makeup for those who missed the first chance.

The Torah describes the formation of the Jewish camp in the desert. In the center was the Mishkan, over which hovered a cloud by day and a fire by night; when the cloud lifted, it was a sign that the Jews were to travel. Even in transit, the Jews maintained a distinctive formation, with four camps of three tribes each, and the Tabernacle in their midst.

The Jews bemoan the tribulations of travel and the lack of food in the desert. They are not satisfied with the miraculous Manna that falls from Heaven; they want meat. Moses declares that the burden of leading the people is too much for him.

God accepts Moses' request; He instructs Moses to choose seventy elders, who will receive the gift of prophecy and assist him in leading the People. The Jews receive the meat they requested, but it comes at a price: after consuming this delicacy, the people are struck by a plague.

Miriam and Aaron, Moses' sister and brother, speak critically of Moses: they disagree with his decision to abstain from marital relations. We are prophets too, they reason, and we have not taken such a step! God appears to Miriam and Aaron and rebukes them, pointing out that Moses' level of prophecy is unparalleled, beyond comparison with theirs; his constant readiness for Divine communication requires a unique degree of separation from the world. Miriam, the initiator of the conversation, is stricken with *tzara'as*; out of respect for her, the entire nation refrains from traveling onward until she is healed. This story is a powerful lesson about the gravity of negative speech: the righteous Miriam, a devoted and loving sister, spoke privately to her own brother Aaron, delivering well-intentioned, constructive criticism of Moses; still, she was not spared retribution for her error. This is certainly a cautionary tale to those who would engage in pointless, malicious gossip.