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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON BEHAALOSCHA - 5786

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In memory of **Chaim Yissachar z"l** ben Yechiel Zaydel Dov

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Table of Contents:

- R' Yessoscher Frand on Anivus Is the Way a Person Acts
- R' Daniel Feldman on Miriam's Lashon Hara
- R' Dovid Goldwasser on Knowing Who You Can Become
- R' Leib Bakst on Naaseh Vinishma
- Michal Horowitz on Turning No into Yes

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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <[ryfrand@torah.org](mailto:ryfrand@torah.org)> reply-to: [do-not-reply@torah.org](mailto:do-not-reply@torah.org) to: [ravfrand@torah.org](mailto:ravfrand@torah.org) date: Jun 4, 2026, 5:27 PM subject: Rav Frand - **Anivus Is About the Way a Person Acts, Not the Way He Thinks**

Parshas Behaaloscha Anivus Is About the Way a Person Acts, Not the Way He Thinks

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1384 Can You Be Mechalel Shabbos To Send A Kevital To A Rebbe? Good Shabbos!

Towards the end of the parsha, the pasuk says that Miriam and Aharon spoke about the Kushite woman that Moshe married. They were upset about the way Moshe conducted himself with his wife: "Was it only with Moshe that Hashem spoke? He also spoke with us!" (In other words, why is Moshe Rabbeinu any different? We have normal husband-wife relationships with our spouses, yet Moshe has nothing to do with his wife.) Then the pasuk says "And the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth!" (Bamidbar 12:3).

Finally, the Torah continues the narration: "Hashem spoke suddenly to Moshe and Aharon and Miriam..." (ibid. 12:4) The Ribono shel Olam chastises Aharon and Miriam, telling them that Moshe

Rabbeinu is not just another navi (prophet). He has a special relationship with the Ribono shel Olam. "I speak to him "peh el peh" (mouth to mouth – directly). Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu needs to be judged by a different standard. It is not possible to say, "Well, we are also nevi'im (prophets). We also have husbands and wives." No. Moshe Rabbeinu is different.

The pasuk "And the man Moshe was exceedingly humble..." seems somewhat incongruous. Why does the Torah need to state that here? This praise could have been mentioned later, when the Torah mentions all of Moshe's unique qualities, such as "peh el peh adaber bo" (mouth to mouth I speak with him), "umareh v'lo bchidos" (in a vision, not in riddles), and so forth. Why does the Torah, somewhat incongruously, stick in this pasuk at the very beginning of the parsha when Aharon and Miriam talk about Moshe?

The Netziv writes a very important idea in his Ha'amek Davar commentary: Don't think the reason the Torah writes this over here is because Moshe was somehow depressed or upset that his brother and sister were talking about him like that. This has nothing to do with any pain of Moshe Rabbeinu. Rather, Moshe was not at all perturbed by those comments because he was the most humble person in the world. He simply didn't care about his kavod. The Torah writes this because it is important to inform us of Moshe's unique stature as a navi.

The Netziv emphasizes that Moshe's unconcern for kavod was not because he did not recognize his great stature. Moshe was fully aware of who he was, but due to his anivus, he was not at all concerned about receiving honor for it.

The Netziv conveys this very important idea. I can assure everyone that Rav Chaim Kanievsky did not think of himself as an am haaretz (ignoramus). He knew very well that he knew the entire Torah and that he finished learning and reviewing the entire Torah on an annual basis. And yet, despite knowing full well who he was, he remained an anav, someone uninterested in kavod.

This is what the pasuk is saying: Don't think that this bothered Moshe Rabbeinu in the least. It didn't, because he was the most modest of men. And it was not because he did not recognize his unique status. He knew that he was Moshe Rabbeinu.

The Netziv references the famous Gemara at the end of Maseches Sotah. The Gemara says that when Rabbeinu Hakadosh died "batla anavah" (modesty ceased to exist). The Gemara states that Rav Yosef argued with that statement: "Don't say that after Rebbi died there were no more modest people, for there is always me!"

Normally, such a statement that "I am an anav" would seem to contradict itself. The Netziv explains that the definition of an anav is someone who recognizes that it is not "Kochi v'otzem yadi assa li es hachayil hazeh" (my strength and the power of my hand made me all this great valor). An anav is a person who is not makpid on his kavod.

Rav Chaim Kanievsky knew that he mastered the entire Torah. The Chofetz Chaim knew who he was and the Vilna Gaon knew who he was. Moshe Rabbeinu knew who he was and Rav Yosef knew who he was. Nevertheless, they could all state "I am an anav."

The Netziv mentions a famous Gemara at the end of Maseches Horiyos. The Talmud there discusses who it is better to appoint as a Rosh Yeshiva: A "Sinai" (someone with exhaustive knowledge of the Torah) or an "oker horim" (literally "someone who uproots

mountains,” meaning an individual with sharp, brilliant analytical skills).

The Gemara there states that Rav Yosef should really have been appointed as the Rosh Yeshiva because he was a “Sinai.” However, for whatever reason, they made his competitor – so to speak – Rabbah into the Rosh Yeshiva. In those days, there were certain privileges that came with the position of a Rosh Yeshiva. One of the perks of the job was that the local blood letter would come to the Rosh Yeshiva’s house (rather than expecting the Rosh Yeshiva to come to his office to procure his services).

(I remember that – at least in his later years – the Ner Yisrael Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yaakov Ruderman, zt”l, did not go to the barber. The barber came to his house.)

Rabbah was the Rosh Yeshiva, so the blood-letter came to his house. Rav Yosef could have very well said “I was really supposed to be the Rosh Yeshiva and I voluntarily gave it up in favor of Rabbah, but at least I should receive this ‘perk’ that I don’t need to go to the blood-letter. He should come to me!

However, the Gemara says that for all the years that Rabbah was the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yosef never called the blood-letter to come to his home. This was true anivus. In other words, anivus is about the way a person acts, not the way he thinks. A person can recognize his own greatness and that self-awareness need not indicate any shortcoming in anivus. However, someone who acts in a non-humble fashion is a baal gayvah.

On a related topic, going back to the beginning of the parsha, Rashi makes one of his most famous comments in all of Chumash: When the Torah gives the mitzva of lighting the candles to Aharon, the Torah says “Aaron did so; toward the face of the Menora he kindled its lamps, as Hashem had commanded Moshe.” (Bamidbar 8:3). Rashi tersely comments (based on the Sifrei): “This indicates the praise of Aharon, namely that he did not deviate.”

Everyone asks: If the Ribono shel Olam says that there is a certain way to light the Menora, of course Aharon lit it that way rather than make up his own procedure for lighting it! What is this praise “she’lo sheenah“?

The Sefas Emes famously interprets that Aharon Hakohen lit the Menora for forty years, every single day, thousands of times, exactly the same way he did it the first time, with the same excitement and the same enthusiasm.

I always cite the example of a bar mitzva bachur putting on his Tefillin in the morning. He does it so slowly and so methodically and so carefully. When we put on our Tefillin in the morning, we do it by rote. Aharon was not like that. He did it each morning for forty years with the same “bren” and “hislahavus.” This is the classic approach of the Sefas Emes (Siman 635).

The Sefas Emes shares another insight (Siman 634) that is also worth noting. “Melamed she’lo sheenah” does not mean that Aharon did not light the Menora any differently as time went on. Melamed she’lo sheenah means that Aharon himself did not change. He was still the same humble Aharon Hakohen. Despite the great honor of being chosen as the Kohen Gadol, lighting the Menora daily, and being the source of all wisdom in the world, he remained as humble as ever.

Most people who are in such a position, change. However, the praise here is that Aharon never changed. He was the same humble Aharon from start to finish. He was the same ohev Yisrael (lover of Israel).

He was the same ohev shalom (lover of peace) and rodef shalom (pursuer of peace). He never let this great honor go to his head. How often do we see people appointed to positions of power or authority who then become different people? Money does that to many people. So does prestige. Aharon realized that he was given a gift from Hashem, but he did not attribute it to “Kochi v’otzem yadi assa li es hachayil hazeh” (Devorim 8:17).

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This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Beha’aloscha is provided below:

015 Reinstating the S’micha 060 Waiting Between Meat and Milk: Adults and Children 104 The Seven-Branched Menorah 149 Bringing the Sefer Torah to a Temporary Minyan 196 Vegetarianism 242 Military Service and Potential Halachic Problems 286 When Do We Stand in Honor Of a Sefer Torah? 332 Tefilas Tashlumin: Making Up a Missed Davening 376 Davening For A Choleh 420 Fish and Meat 464 Honoring Levi’im 508 The City of Yericho 552 Kavod Sefer Torah Vs Kavod Talmid Chochom 596 Sitting on Top of Seforim Name? .... A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org, the Jewish Learning Revolution! Torah.org: The Judaism Site brings this and a host of other classes to you every week. Visit <http://torah.org> to get your own free copy of this mailing or subscribe to the series of your choice. Need to change or stop your subscription? Please visit our subscription center, <http://torah.org/subscribe/> --see the links on that page. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Torah.org. Both the author and Torah.org reserve certain rights. Email copyrights@torah.org for full information. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> [learn@torah.org](mailto:learn@torah.org) (410) 602-1350

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from: RaRIETS Kollel Elyon from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack <riets@substack.com>  
date: Jun 4, 2026, 12:53 PM  
subject: **Behaalotekha: Miriam's Lashon Hara, Israel, and Social Media by Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman**

The story of Miriam speaking to Aaron about their brother Moses is the Torah's central cautionary tale of lashon hara, and many understand this to be the reason for the dedicated commandment to remember the incident (Deut. 24:9; see Nachmanides ad loc.). If that is the case, a significant question emerges from one Midrashic opinion (Sifrei, Bamidbar 99) which maintains that Moses himself was present at the time. Apparently, this did not change the classification of the conversation as lashon hara.

The detail is significant because of a remarkable statement that appears in the Talmud (Arakhin 15b-16a): "any matter said in front of the subject is not lashon hara." The statement is hard to understand. While the disloyalty of speaking against another behind his back is clear, doing so in his presence would seem to compound the offense, since the subject is being disparaged and humiliated at once. There are indeed some authorities who assume that the statement is merely a minority view and not the accepted legal conclusion, an approach that appears to be the position of Maimonides (Hil.

Deiot 7:5, with Kessef Mishneh; see Resp. Mahari Bruna, 38). Accordingly, the Chafetz Chaim (Hilkhos Lashon Hara 3:1) rules that speaking lashon hara about another is a transgression, and doing so in the presence of the subject is significantly worse. Others, however, have taken the statement to be normative, and have offered conceptual readings that endeavor to explain how it could be that speech in front of the subject is excluded from lashon hara.

The medieval authority Rabbi Eliezer of Metz (Sefer Yereim 191), drawing on a verse in Jeremiah (6:28), "walking with slanders, they are bronze and iron," understands the imagery to mean that the speaker of lashon hara has two facades: one which is "bronze," glimmering and pleasant, and one which is "iron," the deadly material of the sword. In other words, the connotation is one who is two-faced, friendly in the presence of the subject but baring his weapons when the subject is absent. Thus, the speaker who openly disparages the subject to his face, while guilty of many things, is nonetheless not engaged in lashon hara.

The rabbinic philosopher Rabbi Judah Lowe (1520-1609), known as the Maharal of Prague, in his *Netivot Olam* (Netiv HaLashon, ch. 7), posited a theory along similar lines. The Maharal's language is somewhat difficult, but his position appears to be that Lashon hara does not apply when the subject is present because that prohibition is directed specifically to speech as a unique tool of harm that can be perpetrated from a distance. In the presence of the subject, there are other ways in which one can directly engage that target; the importance of speech as a weapon is less. Also of significance is the fact that the subject can respond to the allegations.

The Chafetz Chaim (Hil. Lashon Hara Klal 2, BMC 2) challenged the Maharal based on the paradigmatic case of Miriam's comments. If, according to that view in the *Sifrei*, Moses was present, then the central biblical example of lashon hara is itself a counter-example to the Maharal's principle. Addressing this dispute points to an essential understanding of what lashon hara is.

#### The Offense of Unfair Judgment

One way to address the question raised by the Miriam case is to note that the Maharal's theory rests on the expectation that the subject of the speech, if present, would defend himself, thereby neutralizing the threat. Moses, however, was a unique exception, since the Torah describes him in this very passage as exceedingly humble, with the implication that he would not respond even when his presence ordinarily would have made a response possible (see Harchavat Gevul Yaavetz, pp. 92-93). On this reading, Miriam's words constituted lashon hara despite Moses's presence because the usual mechanism of protection did not function in his particular case.

Others take a different path of explanation (see R. Yitzchak Hutner, *Pachad Yitzchak*, Shavuot, ma'amar 3, as well as *Iggerot*, p. 268, and *Sefer Zikaron LeMaran Baal HaPachad Yitzchak*, pp. 333-334; R. Moshe Miernik, in *Torat HaAdam LeAdam*, V, pp. 178-186, and see as well his essay in R. Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht, *Asufat Maarakhos, BeMidbar*, pp. 169-179; R. Moshe Schapiro, in *BeYad HaLashon*, pp. 373-379. A similar approach can be found in Zera Chaim, pp. 318-319, and a more expansive version of this approach, in the context of a broader analysis of the lashon hara prohibition, authored by R. Ephraim Natan Rothschild, appeared in the journal *Kol HaTorah*, LXIV, pp. 157-164. A critique of this approach, and an alternative, can be found in R. Avraham Gurewitz, *Ohr Avraham to Hilkhos Taaniyot, Kuntres Seder HaKinot*, #2).

They note that there are essentially two forms of lashon hara. One is the conveyance of a damaging factual statement about another, an exposure of harmful material. In this form, the presence of the subject would indeed neutralize the threat, since the subject can correct, contextualize, or otherwise respond to the factual claim. This may be the form the Maharal has in mind. The other, however, goes to the essence of what the prohibition is about, and is probably the reason that the first form is treated as severely as it is: the conveyance of unfavorable judgment. Factual episodes are merely vehicles by which such judgments travel. With this second form, the presence of the subject offers no real protection.

What Miriam said about her brother was not a misstatement of fact, and there does not appear to have been any factual matter for Moses to correct. The Torah does not explicitly say what Miriam said. The commentaries discuss the offense in terms of judgment, an assessment of Moses as comparable to others without regard for his unique status, or a failure to extend the benefit of the doubt to him. The offense lay in the interpretive frame Miriam imposed, not in any datum she conveyed.

When the judgment is the offense, the subject's presence offers no real defense, because there is nothing concrete to rebut. The subject can correct a misreported fact. He cannot easily correct an inference, a tone, a framing, an implication. An unfavorable judgment can be both false and unfalsifiable; the listeners have already been given the lens through which to view the subject, and no statement from the subject can make them unsee the image that framing has painted.

The contemporary case of Israel and its critics displays this in a particularly damaging fashion. Israel is, in a sense, perpetually "present" in the global conversation about its conduct. Every charge is heard, and every accusation can be engaged and contested by its spokespersons. By the Maharal's logic, this should be the most protected position imaginable. The reality is otherwise, because the disparagement is not at the level of fact, where defenses can engage, but at the level of subjective and often arbitrary or biased judgment, which is essentially immune to defenses. Each rebuttal is itself absorbed into the interpretive frame and read as further evidence of the trait being charged. This is the precise terrain on which lashon hara does its most lasting damage, and it is the terrain where no defense can help.

#### The Tosafists' Perception of Human Nature

A different reading of the talmudic rule, addressing it together with a closely parallel statement that what is spoken "in front of three," in other words in public, is not subject to the prohibition of lashon hara, was offered by the Tosafists (Bava Batra 39b s.v. *leit*, and *Arakhin* 15b s.v. *kol milta*). They limit both cases to a speaker whose statement is genuinely ambiguous, and could be heard as either positive or negative. The negative reading is plausible when the speaker is talking in private, where his words might be taken either way; in public, and especially in the subject's presence, it is unimaginable that the speaker would have intended his words to be heard as malicious, and the listeners will assume he meant the positive reading.

The Chafetz Chaim (Hil. Lashon Hara 2:2) formalizes this in two possible models. In one, the audience functions as a check on the speaker, who will hold himself to a positive message because of who is listening. In the other, the audience functions as a clarification of the speaker's intent, since the listeners will assume the positive reading from the fact that the speaker was willing to say it openly. Either way, the operative premise is the same: public speech, in the presence of the subject, is reliably more decent than private speech, because no one would be malicious in such a setting.

The Tosafists are predicating the rule on a feature of human nature, that the visibility of the subject and the presence of an audience exert moral pressure on the speaker, who will modulate his language accordingly. The whole rule rests on the assumption that this pressure is real.

What happens, however, when that pressure no longer exists?

#### The New World of Social Media

Social media has produced, on a vast and accelerating scale, a counterexample to the Tosafists' premise. The subjects of disparagement, in many cases, have full access to what is being said about them; they may also be tagged or addressed in the second person, which only intensifies the dynamic. The audiences are larger than any the Tosafists could have imagined. By every external metric the Tosafists' license should apply with maximal force; one would expect the language to be at its most measured. The opposite has happened. Psychologists refer to the "online disinhibition effect" to describe the observed reality that one who is operating behind the protection of a computer screen often becomes disconnected from ordinary inhibitions such as moral standards, sensitivity, and empathy towards others, and becomes capable of egregious interpersonal behavior that he would otherwise abhor (the term is associated with Dr. John Suler; for an extensive

treatment, see Elias Aboujaoude, *Virtually You: The Dangerous Powers of the E-Personality*, pp. 40-42).

Several factors converge. Being physically disconnected from the subject decreases the ability to empathize. The context deemphasizes personal identity, a phenomenon psychologist Philip Zimbardo identified decades ago and termed "deindividuation," in which the assimilation of a person into a larger crowd loosens his attachment to his personal standards. Anonymity, where it exists, insulates the speaker from external consequence and from internal self-recognition. Studies (described in detail by Francesca Gino in her *Sidetracked*, pp. 199-203) have shown that even minor cues of anonymity, such as a darkly lit room, can produce a marked increase in dishonest behavior, despite the fact that the participants are not actually less visible. The mere sense of being unseen alters conduct.

One example is particularly telling for the question of presence. The empirical evidence of online disinhibition can be observed in the comments sections of news sites when a tragedy is reported. The commenters are aware that the family members will usually see these comments, and yet allow themselves to write things that they would never express verbally to a mourner. The Tosafists' check fails completely. The presence of the subject, which was once understood to constrain the speaker, has become a feature of the spectacle rather than a brake on it.

Empathy itself appears to have eroded under these conditions. A 2010 University of Michigan study found that college students are forty percent less empathetic than their counterparts thirty years prior, a finding the authors associated in part with social media (cited in Susan Cain, *Quiet*, p. 141). Adam Smith observed two and a half centuries ago that a man who would not sleep at night over the loss of his little finger would "snore with the most profound security over the ruin of a hundred million of his brethren" so long as he never saw them (*Theory of Moral Sentiments*). The internet was once imagined as a corrective to this distance, allowing exposure to the suffering of strangers far away. Often, the actual effect has run in the other direction; the screen restores the invisibility that Smith identified as the enabling condition of moral indifference, even when the subject's name and face are technically visible on it.

The cultural changes of the internet have also weakened the process of repair that normally follows an offense. As Sherry Turkle observes in *Alone Together* (pp. 233-234), the conditions of online communication blur the line between confession and apology, allowing the speaker to discharge an obligation in a medium that can require very little of him. Forgiveness, she notes, follows from the experience of empathy, in which one sees that another has acknowledged having caused hurt. When the channel through which the acknowledgment travels strips out the cues by which empathy is experienced, the entire transaction is impoverished; both parties get used to getting less. This matters greatly for lashon hara, which presupposes not only a culture in which speech is bounded but also a culture in which the rupture caused by improper speech can be genuinely mended.

The medium also corrupts the message itself. In his book *Mindwise*, the psychologist Nicholas Epley describes a study in which communications through text were correctly understood only about half the time, in contrast with the same messages transmitted over the phone (pp. 108-109; a similar finding, also at fifty percent, from the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, is reported by John Freeman in *The Tyranny of E-mail*). What is most striking is that, regardless of the error rate, the speaker consistently felt he was transmitting the message clearly, and the listener equally frequently believed he was interpreting it correctly. The exchange becomes, in Epley's phrase, one in which both sides are "amazed that the other can be so stupid". The authors of *Cyberbullying: Bullying in the Digital Age* (pp. 87-88) note that this same dynamic plays a substantial role in the escalation of online cruelty: what may begin as innocent teasing over text or instant messaging can be read as something other than what was intended, and the absence of contextual cues, the wink or the smile that softens a remark, allows even a benign comment to be received as an attack.

This is *avak lashon hara*, the category that the Talmud (Bava Batra 165a) said is impossible to fully escape, scaled by orders of magnitude. Maimonides (*Mishneh Torah*, Hil. Deiot 7:4) defines *avak lashon hara* as positive statements that unwittingly yield negative interpretations, statements made with benevolent intent that are nonetheless heard as malicious. The whole question presupposes a communication environment in which the listener has some access to the speaker's tone and bearing. Strip those away, and even the most innocent statement is one click away from being read as the worst version of itself, and is then forwarded as such.

There is a further inversion of the Tosafists' premise to note. It might be assumed that the wider the audience, the more its presence would moderate the speech, since the listeners would calibrate their interpretation against one another and against the presence of the subject. Contemporary research on group polarization suggests the opposite. As William H. Davidow notes in *Overconnected*, the internet is unmatched as a vehicle for thought contagions, since "potential believers can find like-minded groups just by doing a simple Internet search," and the resulting clusters reinforce rather than challenge each other's interpretations (pp. 156-159). The likeminded group does not moderate; it amplifies whichever reading the group is already inclined toward, almost invariably the less generous one.

The responsibilities of the listener are correspondingly transformed. The prohibition of "accepting" *lashon hara* presupposes a recipient who exercises some judgment about what he hears. On the internet, clicking on a link, sharing a post, and forwarding a message function as endorsements and as further amplification. The line between merely receiving a message and actively participating in its spread has been blurred almost to vanishing. Every reader is, by the small motion of his thumb, also a publisher.

A final irony deserves attention. The premise of *lashon hara* is that even factually true information can present an incomplete or unjustly harmful picture; the prohibition therefore demands a balancing of context, intent, and proportion that goes beyond the question of whether a statement is technically accurate. The internet, however, has produced a parallel commitment to comprehensive factual recording, on the assumption that more information always serves truth. Technology critic Evgeny Morozov, in *To Save Everything, Click Here* (pp. 270-280), argues that the very thoroughness of online archiving can be at odds with the deeper truth a complete picture requires, since the act of preservation favors what is easily recorded and underrepresents what is not, producing a hyperaccurate record that is nonetheless misleading. The point is precisely the one *lashon hara* has always pressed: that an item of speech can be true in the narrow sense and unfair in the larger sense, and that the obligation runs to the larger sense.

#### The Contemporary Challenge

The world has changed. This is not a call to discard the benefits of the internet and social media, which include the rapid sharing of Torah, the extension of kindness across distances, and the protection of the innocent through the transmission of information that might otherwise be suppressed. It is, however, a recognition that the conditions presupposed by some of the halakhic categories no longer hold in the most common arenas of contemporary speech.

The Tosafists found in the presence of the subject and the publicity of the audience a guarded license, resting on assumptions about what people will and will not do when they can be seen and answered. The contemporary environment has tested those assumptions and revealed them to no longer be true. The presence that once operated as a check no longer operates as one. The audience that once moderated now amplifies, in the worst direction. The subject who once could rely on his presence to discipline the speech around him now finds his presence noted as a feature of the disparagement rather than a deterrent to it.

The eternal relevance of the categories of *lashon hara* requires an awareness of what has changed in the realities to which those categories apply. When the older intuition was that presence and publicity would restrain the speech, the newer reality is that they will often encourage it. Acting responsibly

under the current conditions means treating presence and publicity not as safe harbors but as the locations where the most damage may now be done. A single narrative detail in the story of Miriam, the question of whether Moses was present, yields insight into both the nature of the prohibition and the world in which its values are needed more than ever. The story shows that the heart of lashon hara is the conveying of unfair judgment, against which presence offers no certain protection; while our experiences show that previous assumptions of decency and discretion can no longer be taken for granted. The commandment to remember Miriam, therefore, is also a commandment to remember what lashon hara truly is, and to bring that awareness along as one navigates a new world. \_\_\_

from: Team TorahAnytime <info@torahanytime.com>

date: Jun 5, 2026, 12:07 AM

subject: TorahAnyTimes Parashat Be'ha'alotcha

**Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser**

**Knowing Who You Can Become**

In this week's Parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu cries out: "Where will I find meat to give to this entire nation?" (Bamidbar 11:13). At first glance, the Pasuk is difficult to understand. Moshe Rabbeinu had already been the messenger to perform countless miracles.

Through him, Hashem had split the sea, brought forth water from a rock, and sustained an entire nation in the wilderness. Why, then, was he troubled by the challenge of providing meat?

Rav Nosson Wachtfogel zt"l offers a profound explanation. Moshe certainly possessed the ability to bring about the miracle. That was not the issue. Rather, Moshe had reached such an exalted spiritual level that he no longer related to the desire for meat at all. He had become so elevated that the request itself was foreign to him. It existed outside his spiritual radar and reality. For that reason, Hashem established the Shiv'im Zekeinim, the seventy elders, to assist him. Leadership of the Jewish people required not only greatness, but connection. The leader needed to understand the people he served, and Moshe's extraordinary spiritual stature had carried him beyond the experience of the ordinary person.

Such is a powerful lesson: we view life through the prism of our spiritual standing. From where we stand, we see the landscape of the world and people around us. This idea appears elsewhere too in a fascinating passage in the Gemara (Yoma 69b). Moshe Rabbeinu described Hashem as, "HaKel HaGadol HaGibor Ve'HaNorah—The Great, Mighty and Awesome G-d." Yet generations later, the prophets struggled with those very words. Yirmiyah HaNavi looked around and saw foreign nations desecrating the Beis Hamikdash. "Nochrim m'karkerin b'heichalo—Strangers were frolicking in the Sanctuary." "Where," he asked, "is Hashem's awesomeness?" And so he omitted the word Norah.

Daniel witnessed the Jewish people subjugated and exiled. "Nochrim mishtabdim b'banav—Foreign powers ruled over Hashem's children." "Where," he asked, "is Hashem's might?" And so he omitted the word Gibor. Later came the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah, the Men of the Great Assembly, and they restored the original formulation: "HaKel HaGadol HaGibor Ve'HaNorah."

The Gemara says of them: "Hechziru atarah l'yoshnah—They restored the crown to its former glory." Why were they able to say what Yirmiyahu and Daniel could not? The answer, explained R' Wachtfogel, is that Hashem desires truth. Yirmiyah could not honestly perceive the Divine awesomeness amid the destruction he witnessed and Daniel could not honestly perceive the Divine might

amid the suffering and exile of his generation. They spoke according to the reality they experienced. The Anshei Knesses HaGedolah, however, perceived some else. They recognized that Hashem's greatness, might, and awesomeness were present even within the exile itself.

This is one of the foundations of spiritual growth: honesty. In this case, Yirmiyah and Daniel each spoke from where they genuinely stood and were honest with themselves. In life, underscore Chazal, a person must know truthfully what he is or is not doing. He must acknowledge when he has succeeded and when he has failed. Only then can he improve and climb higher. That is one part of the picture. But there is another side to this as well. While a person must honestly recognize his shortcomings, he must also honestly recognize his positive qualities.

When Rav Aharon Kotler zt"l, the great Rosh Yeshivah of Lakewood, passed away, many students became despondent. They feared that the yeshiva could not survive. What would become of the future? Around that time, a great talmid chacham related a remarkable dream. In the dream, Mashiach was sleeping. First, Chasam Sofer appeared and attempted to awaken him. Yet Mashiach remained asleep. Then Rav Aharon Kotler appeared and also tried to awaken Mashiach. Despite his greatness, Mashiach still did not awaken. Finally, a group of simple yeshiva bachurim entered. Together, they approached Mashiach—and he awoke.

Rav Nosson Wachtfogel explained the message. Never underestimate the power of an individual Jew. One cannot know whose mitzvah, whose act of chesed, whose sincere tefillah, or whose dedication to Torah may tip the scales and bring the final redemption. It may not be a rabbi or renowned scholar. It may be a young Jewish boy or girl in school, someone whom the world hardly notices.

Growth begins with honesty: honesty about where we are and honesty about what we can become. We must know our limitations. But we must also know the astonishing potential Hashem has placed within each and every one of us. For it may be that the person capable of bringing the geulah is far closer than we imagine. And that person is you.

Kol Eliyahu Sichos from **Rav A. Leib Baskt** zt"l

Behaaloscha – **Naaseh Vinishma**

Adopted into English

I.

The Gemara in Bava Basra 44b brings a statement in the name of Shmuel. One who sells a field to his friend without achrayus cannot testify for him about it, because he establishes it before his baal chov. This means we don't accept the seller's testimony against a claimant. He can't help keep the land in the buyer's hands. He sold it without achrayus and won't pay the buyer anything if the claimant seizes the field. Still, we consider him a biased witness. He wants the field to remain with the buyer so his baal chov can collect from it. The Gemara asks what the circumstances are. (i) If he has other unencumbered land, the baal chov will just take that. The seller has no gain or loss, so why is he biased?. (ii) If he has no other land, what difference does it make?. The baal chov can't collect from the seller anyway. Rather, he has no other land, but he says to himself, lo nicha d'lehevei loveh rasha v'lo yeshalem, meaning I don't want to be a wicked borrower who doesn't pay, as it says in Tehillim 37:21. He doesn't want the land to leave the buyer's hands. His baal chov would

find nothing to collect. He would become a loveh rasha v'lo yeshalem, so he is biased.

The Ri Migash asks about this. Why do we suspect him of false testimony just so he won't be a loveh rasha v'lo yeshalem?. An ed sheker is much worse than a loveh v'eino meshalem. The Torah itself calls an ed sheker a rasha. The answer is that he doesn't care about his duty to Heaven. He only cares about his duty to people. If people see he borrows and doesn't pay, they will call him a rasha. He doesn't care if he is a rasha of an ed sheker.

Human nature is that if someone promises to do something, he loathes breaking his word. He can't live with himself if he shows others he isn't trustworthy. Once he promises fully, he feels an extreme obligation. It's easier for him to violate a prohibition from the Ten Commandments, lo saaneh b'reacha ed sheker, meaning You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (Shemos 20:13), than to be a loveh rasha v'lo yeshalem. This shows how powerful this feeling of obligation is. A person might feel more obligated in a light matter he accepted upon himself than in a severe matter he didn't.

Chazal say in Avodah Zarah 2b that Hashem offered the Torah to every nation. They all asked, What is written in it?. When they heard what was written, they refused it. Hashem came to Yisrael, and they accepted it immediately without questions. They immediately said Naaseh V'Nishma. The nations later argue before Hashem. They say, Master of the Universe, klum kafisa aleinu har k'gigis, did You force a mountain over us like a barrel and we didn't accept it, like You did to Yisrael?. Rav Dimi bar Chama explains that Hashem kafa aleihem har k'gigis, meaning He forced the mountain over Yisrael like a barrel. Hashem told them, If you accept the Torah, good, and if not, there will be your burial.

Hashem specifically offered the Torah to every nation without forcing them. He wanted the merit to come through acceptance. Acceptance creates a natural obligation, just like the loveh rasha v'lo yeshalem. A person will be forced to fulfill his acceptance. He'll try all tactics to remain trustworthy. Since he accepted it willingly, he won't tolerate the disgrace of breaking his word. People would ask him, Who asked you to get involved? You accepted it yourself, so why didn't you fulfill it?. That is a disgrace. For this reason, after they willingly said Naaseh V'Nishma, Hashem kafa aleihem har k'gigis. This taught them they were already obligated to keep their word and fulfill the Torah.

The Gemara also says that in the future, the nations will ask for the Torah's reward. Hashem will ask where they fulfilled the seven mitzvos they accepted. The nations will ask where Yisrael fulfilled the Torah. Hashem will call witnesses for Yisrael. (i) Nimrod will testify that Avraham didn't serve Avodah Zarah. (ii) Lavan will testify that Yaakov didn't rob. (iii) Potiphar's wife will testify that Yosef didn't sin. (iv) Nebuchadnezzar will testify that Chanania, Mishael, and Azariah didn't bow to the idol. Yisrael stood faithfully to fulfill all seven mitzvos in the hardest situations. They did this even with mesiras nefesh, like Avraham Avinu in the fiery furnace.

The Gemara emphasizes that the seven mitzvos came to the nations through their own acceptance, yet they failed. Hashem showed them they are unfit for the Torah and its reward. They have a fundamental flaw. Even when they accept something, they lack a sense of obligation. Bnei Yisrael were careful with this trait. They felt that their acceptance removed their free choice. They were forced to fulfill them even with actual mesiras nefesh just to not violate their

acceptance. The Gemara brings testimonies from difficult situations to show they used this trait of not wanting to be a loveh rasha v'lo yeshalem.

II.

We find that Hashem acts this way with Bnei Yisrael. He doesn't give them free choice to go against His Torah. They are threatened with severe rebukes. It seems the choice to leave the Torah is completely taken away. Yechezkel 20:32-33 says Hashem will rule over them with a strong hand. Hashem does this out of His great mercy. It's a great favor to His children that He doesn't let them go out to a bad culture. This explains the verses in Yehoshua 24:14-25. Yehoshua tells the people to choose who to serve, they say they will serve Hashem, and Yehoshua makes a covenant with them. Do Bnei Yisrael really have permission to choose Avodah Zarah?. The explanation is that this strengthened their obligation and removed their free choice. They entered an extra covenant so they would be forced to keep their word despite any test. Rashi explains that Yehoshua saw they would complain in the days of Yechezkel, so he made it heavy on them. He removed their ability to say they only accepted the Torah in the days of Moshe to enter the land. This created a heavier obligation. If they don't keep their word, they are worse than someone who breaks the Ten Commandments. The main thing is to remove any possibility of doing bad. It isn't good to act with democracy and free choice. It's Hashem's kindness to put Bnei Yisrael in a state of no choice. A person has choice in his early days. But if he accepts being a Ben Torah and then wastes his days on making a living, he should be disgusted with himself. I don't know how a Ben Yisrael who acts secular can stand himself.

III.

Bnei Yisrael also complained about the Manna in this parsha. Bamidbar 11:4-6 says they cried for meat and remembered the fish and vegetables they ate in Egypt. They said their souls were dry with only the Manna to look at. They apparently desired physical things like onions and pickles. But it's hard to say the Manna was lacking, since Shemos 16:31 says it tasted like honey wafers. The Gra explains this using the Gemara in Yoma 75a. The Gemara says the Manna revealed people's secrets. If two people came to Moshe for a trial, the Manna's placement the next morning revealed the guilty party. (i) For the tzaddikim, it fell at their door. (ii) Average people went out to gather it. (iii) Reshaim had to wander far to find it. The Manna was a very restrictive food. Bnei Yisrael were forced to do good because the Manna's location revealed who was keeping the mitzvos properly. It placed a huge obligation on Yisrael. They likely feared sinning just to avoid the embarrassment of their bad deeds being exposed. Imagine a righteous woman who usually opened her door to find the Manna right there. One day she opens the door and there is no Manna. She would immediately ask her husband what terrible sin he committed last night. This is a huge embarrassment. Or imagine a famous tzaddik who fell into sin. The next day he had to go outside the camp to the area of the reshaim to get his food. The scoffers would mock him and ask if he was a fraud like them. This took away their free life. This explains their complaints. When they said they remembered the fish they ate for free, Chazal explain they meant free from mitzvos. The Manna forced them to keep the mitzvos strictly. They complained that the Manna was like a peddler telling all their sins. They wanted free choice. A person naturally wants to act on his own choice. The Gemara says a person prefers a

little of his own over a lot from his friend. No one likes being forced by someone else, even to do good. But Hashem didn't agree to this. Hashem sees that total free choice is a huge danger. A person can't rely on his own good choice. He needs pressure to push him to keep the mitzvos. It's like a mother leaving her kids at home. She hires a babysitter because the kids might hurt themselves. Hashem knows His creations need constant supervision to save them from their Yetzer Hara. Hashem didn't want to rely on their free choice. This is how yeshivas should be run. They give the bochurim dorms and three meals a day. If a bochur misses Shacharis, he should lose lunch. If he sleeps when he shouldn't, he should be kicked out of the dorm. Democracy isn't always good. Hashem acted this way in the midbar. Whoever stepped out of line lost his portion of the Manna and had to work hard to find it. This behavior is really for the benefit of the bochurim.

#### IV.

This explains the sin of the spies. Commentators wonder how they fell so hard when they just did their mission to tour the land. Rashi explains the core issue based on the Tanchuma. Hashem told Moshe He wasn't commanding him to send them. Yisrael asked to send them, Hashem said the land is good, and He gave them room to err. The whole mistake of the spies and Bnei Yisrael happened because they relied on their own free choice. Once you choose to act without Hashem's help and approval, you have room to make mistakes. Sukkah 52b says without Hashem's help, a person can't overcome his Yetzer Hara. Bnei Yisrael should have said they wouldn't go without Hashem's help. They fell into error because they wanted to go naturally instead of relying on miracles. We pray the Hashkiveinu blessing every evening for this reason. We ask Hashem to put us to sleep, like a baby who needs its mother to sing it to sleep. We ask Him to remove the Satan from before and behind us. We speak as frightened people. We are adults, but we recognize the danger of the Yetzer Hara at every step. We ask for Hashem's help constantly, like a baby needs a guard. Hashem taught this to the great Tanna Pelimo in Kiddushin 81a. Pelimo used to say every day, gira b'eina d'Satan, meaning an arrow in the eyes of the Satan. One day the Satan tricked him and pretended to die. Pelimo ran to hide in the bathroom. The Satan revealed himself and asked why Pelimo always cursed him. Pelimo said it was to push the Satan away. Pelimo's intention was good, but his mistake was thinking he could beat his Yetzer Hara alone. The Satan showed him that without Hashem's help, it's impossible. He told Pelimo to just say, Rachmana nigaar bei b'Satan, meaning let the Merciful One rebuke the Satan. We pray in the morning blessings not to be brought to sin or a test. The main thing is that Hashem saves us from tests, not that we try to fight the Satan ourselves. A person can't rely on his own strength. Rashi on Bereishis 28:13 says Hashem doesn't associate His name with the righteous during their lifetimes because He doesn't trust them. Berachos 29a says not to trust yourself until the day you die. Yochanan Kohen Gadol served for eighty years and then became a Tzeduki. Imagine him being honored with a mitzvah like acting as a Sandek after so many years. He would have to decline because he became a Tzeduki. Hashem taught all of this to Bnei Yisrael when He told Moshe, send for yourself.

#### Section 5

A person isn't trustworthy to rely on himself. He must always put himself in a situation that limits his free choice. This forces him to

follow the straight path after Hashem. This is the concept of aseh lecha rav, meaning Make for yourself a rav (Avos 1:16). Jews don't have a concept of I can already do it alone. We are always students who need a rav. We find this immediately when Hashem took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt. Shemos 13:17 says When Pharaoh let the people go, Hashem didn't lead them through the land of the Philistines, because it was near, for Hashem said perhaps the people will reconsider when they see war and return to Egypt. Hashem specifically led them on a crooked path through the midbar. This put Bnei Yisrael in a situation where they almost couldn't turn back. This is Hashem's greatest help, taking away the possibility to make a mistake. Because it is very hard to defeat the Yetzer, Hashem did several types of He led them around for Yisrael and the generation of the midbar. They were beloved before Hashem, and Yirmiyahu 2:2 says about them I remember the kindness of your youth. They merited this guidance. As we explained, through the Manna Hashem proved and taught them they have no other job besides being a mamleches kohanim v'goy kadosh, meaning a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Shemos 19:6). They had to fulfill everyone who is called by My name, I created him for My glory (Yeshaya 43:7).

We must know that the root of Bnei Yisrael is different from other creations. Scientists understand the laws and traits of the human species today through mummies they find from ancient generations. But Bnei Yisrael are different. They have hereditary traits from the generation that lived forty years in the midbar. They didn't have a natural economy or regular physical needs. They ate from the Manna and drank from the well. They didn't need bodily cleanliness or clothing cleanliness. They just lived with Hashem's providence over them. They all had one role, to serve the Creator. There is no room for a Ben Yisrael to think he will be a doctor or a lawyer and do as he pleases. Hashem didn't allow them to control their lives. He watches over them like a babysitter without letting them act as they want. That could bring them harm and make them fall into mistakes that can't be fixed. Yet we hear some Jews talking as if they already taught themselves the way. They found a private purpose for themselves according to their nature and desire. But Hashem didn't show this to His nation. He led an entire nation in the midbar with no occupation besides serving Hashem. He led them in a state of great restriction, where He almost didn't let them step out of line at all.

#### Section 6 (1)

The main thing is to recognize we can't rely on ourselves. Not like those we hear saying they can learn by themselves, make a shidduch with a rich mechutan, and he'll buy them a nice apartment and a car. They are like those who think they have a large army and an atomic bomb, so they can win without any help. A person has no power on his own. He always needs help and assistance. On the contrary, it's worth giving up a nice apartment outside the camp in a place with no peer pressure to live in a decent environment. Then he will be embarrassed in front of his neighbors to come home from work late close to Shabbos. Always aseh lecha rav u'kneh lecha chaver, meaning make for yourself a rav and acquire for yourself a friend (Avos 1:16) for excellent self-guarding so you won't step out of line. We must always pray to Hashem to help us. This only comes through prayer, because everything depends on Hashem. This is the success of Bnei Yisrael that brings them to eternal life. As Yeshaya 60:21 says, Your people are all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever.

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from: **Michal Horowitz** <michalchorowitz@gmail.com>

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subject: Beha'aloscha 5786: Turning "No" into "Yes"

At the beginning of Parshas Beha'aloscha, the Torah describes Aharon Ha'Kohen's fulfillment of the mitzvah to light the Menorah. The Torah states: וַיַּעַשׂ כִּן אֶהְרֶן - And Aharon did so; toward the face of the Menorah he lit its lamps, as Hashem commanded Moshe (Bamidbar 8:3).

Rashi comments: וְלֹא שָׁנָה - This tells us the praise of Aharon, that he did not deviate.

At first glance, this comment is difficult to understand. What is so remarkable about the fact that Aharon followed Hashem's instructions exactly as commanded? Would anyone expect Aharon Ha'Kohen, one of the greatest spiritual leaders in Jewish history, to alter the Divine command?

It is fair to say that every insight in my new book, *Abled*, is my favorite (just as those who learn with me know that every Dvar Torah is my favorite! Because it's true - they are all my favorite). Hence, the following insight is at the top of my list of "favorites," and it is recorded in the conclusion of *Abled*.

[When writing my book, I reached out to Rebbetzin Weinberger to confirm if the idea is Rabbi Weinberger's own chiddush, and she replied that indeed, it is. My thanks to Mr. Rob Levinson for sharing it with me.]

Rabbi Moshe Weinberger offers a beautiful and inspiring insight. He notes that the Torah does not simply say that Aharon performed the mitzvah. Rather, it states: וַיַּעַשׂ כִּן אֶהְרֶן - And Aharon did "kein." The word "kein" means "yes."

Building upon this idea, Rabbi Weinberger suggests a deeper reading of Rashi's words. The praise of Aharon was not only that he followed instructions precisely. Rather, throughout his life, he possessed the remarkable ability to transform "no" into "yes."

Every challenge that might have caused another person to become discouraged, Aharon faced with faith and determination. Every obstacle that appeared impossible became an opportunity for growth. Every situation that seemed to invite despair was met with hope.

In this sense, Rashi's comment takes on a deeper meaning. וְלֹא שָׁנָה - he changed every "no." וַיַּעַשׂ כִּן אֶהְרֶן - and transformed it into a "yes" (*Abled: Living With a Disability, A Torah View*, p.217 - [mosaicapress.com/Abled](http://mosaicapress.com/Abled)).

This idea resonates far beyond the life of Aharon Ha'Kohen.

Every person encounters moments of difficulty. We face disappointments, setbacks, unexpected challenges, and circumstances we never would have chosen. There are times when life presents us with realities that seem impossible to understand or overcome.

Our first reaction may be to say: "I cannot do this." "This is too difficult." "There is no way forward." Yet the example of Aharon teaches us that while we may not always be able to change the circumstances before us, we can choose how we respond to them.

Very often, the greatest spiritual growth occurs not when life proceeds according to our plans, but when we learn to navigate situations that require resilience, patience, faith, and perseverance.

I once read the following powerful idea: "G-d gives us challenges, and along the way we become people who can handle them." And one of the ways we do so is by changing what seems to be a "no" into "yes."

It is fitting to recall a lesson of my youth. I remember when growing up, I was often reminded by my parents that, "There's no such thing as I can't."

Additionally, there is another dimension to this idea. Saying "yes" does not mean denying that a challenge exists, nor does it mean pretending that something difficult is easy. Rather, it means refusing to allow the challenge to define us. Aharon teaches us that we can acknowledge hardship honestly while still choosing to move forward with faith, purpose, and hope.

And finally, the Menorah also required consistency. It was not enough to light it once. Day after day, Aharon returned to perform the same sacred task. True greatness is often built in exactly this way—not through dramatic moments alone, but through steady commitment and faithful service over time.

When challenges arise, we sometimes wait for a sudden breakthrough or a perfect solution. The Menorah reminds us that even a small flame, tended faithfully and consistently, can illuminate an entire room. Progress is often achieved one step at a time, one positive choice at a time, one act of faith at a time.

The difference between "I cannot" and "I will try," between "this is impossible" and "with Hashem's help I will do my best," can transform an entire situation.

Perhaps this is part of the enduring praise of Aharon Ha'Kohen. His greatness was not only in performing sacred service within the Mishkan. It was in approaching life itself with the power of "yes" - with faith, hope, and the willingness to continue despite difficulty.

May we merit to follow the example of Aharon Ha'Kohen. May we find the strength to face challenges with courage, to replace discouragement with determination, and to transform moments of difficulty into opportunities for growth.

And in this merit, may we bring more light, strength, and hope into our own lives and into the lives of those around us.

בברכת בשורות טובות ושבת שלום

Michal