

We are privileged this morning to have Marvin Kramer as our guest speaker, so before the sermon, I will give a brief Torah meditation based on this week's portion.

**Behaalotecha**      **In Your making Go Up**      **Trouble in Paradise**

**Torah:**      Numbers 8:21-12:16

**Haftarah:**      Zech. 2:10 (14)-4:7 (different versification, same content)

**Brit Chadashah:**      Revelation 11:1-19

Reading: Aaron pp. 101. 103 and Ps. 68. Jewish Hero: Jethro. Torah carrier: (Teresa). **Nosh**

How many of you noticed that I made a mistake on the calendar and listed today's portion in Numbers as beginning in 8:21, instead of 8:1? Do not be afraid to point these things out because mistakes are always correctable and these corrections help us to keep going in the right direction, without veering off course and causing trouble in Paradise.

The Torah portion deals first with the remaining details in getting the Tabernacle ready for it to be set up the first time and with the first consecration of the Levites. The first Passover after the Exodus is mentioned, along with the provision for a second Passover for anyone who was unable to celebrate Passover at its regular time. It goes on to mention the fiery cloud which would hover over the newly set up Tabernacle and rise up when it was time to move.

This first move occurred on 20th day of Iyar of the second year after the Exodus and the people had their first experience of marching behind the banners towards their first camping spot. This camping spot has two names to because of two punishments which the people suffered when they complained and grumbled about how things were being managed.

It is first called Tabeera, which means place of burning, because fire fell on the edges of the camp in response to the people's complaining. We are not told what they were complaining about, just that they were complaining. The fire stopped when Moses again interceded for the people. The people have apparently not learned their lesson and they immediately complain a second time about the lack of meat. Murmuring and complaining are dangerous errors.

The Scriptures mention that they had already been given quail while they camped around the mountain, but this provision had not yet materialized at their first camp. They were still receiving manna and their flocks and herds could also provide for their need of meat. However, they put their desires (lusts) before their commitment to the L-rd and to the Festival Cycle, which is supposed to be the central driving force of our lives. They were supposed to be getting ready to observe the first Shavuot in the wilderness and because of their complaining, Moses has his first ministry melt down since the incident of the golden calf.

Even after experiencing the wonder of the Exodus and the majesty of the giving of the Law from the smoking, fiery mountain which shook, the people seem focused on their guts instead of on their new status as the redeemed, victorious people of G-d, making a triumphant journey towards their new home. We need to guard ourselves against also giving the things of the L-rd anything less than first place in our lives by the complaints we fall prey to.

Instead of listening to Moses' admission of being overwhelmed, and asking the L-rd to kill him, the L-rd intervenes by providing for the first recorded outpouring of the Spirit mentioned in the

Bible. Seventy elders were supposed to receive the anointing of the Spirit which was on Moses, but two of them were late for service and began prophesying in the camp.

Joshua wanted to forbid them, but Moses said that Joshua should not be jealous for him and made a prophecy about the outpouring of the Spirit which would occur many centuries later when the Spirit fell on those in the Upper Room. Moses was more concerned about getting the job done than he was about protecting his leadership role. Along with him, I still say that leadership is both a privilege and a position, and is never merely a possession that needs to somehow be protected. We should never allow complaints to bring trouble into Paradise.

On the first Pentecost, the trembling mountain was enshrouded with lightening, as the mighty voice of G-d spoke out and gave us His ten Covenant Stipulations. These were followed by instructions about what both our covenant morality and our covenant spirituality should look like. Here, shortly after the first celebration of Passover in the wilderness, instead of a joyful celebration of the first Shavuot at their first camping spot away from the mountain, the people give themselves over to complaining. Carnal complaints still stall our progress in the L-rd.

During my message in Lethbridge I reminded the people that there is a big difference bringing up things which need to be changed and complaining, just because we do not get things our own way. It is funny and sad, how often people take minor concerns and blow them up into deal breakers. Voicing concerns in a way that offers constructive criticisms which are solution focused, is totally different from creating confusion whenever we don't get our own way or when things do not work out the way we want them to. Where is your focus?

After the giving of the Spirit on the Second Shavuot the L-rd deals with the lustful people who put their desire for meat before their primary need to put the L-rd first in all things. He sends them meat in the form of quail who land on the camp in a pile up to six feet high that extended for one day's journey on either side of the camp.

For two days the rebellious people gathered the quail in enormous quantities and then, the anger of the L-rd struck down the perpetrators of this rebellion with a great plague. The people went from gathering birds to burying their dead and they gave this unfortunate camp its second name: Kibroth-Haatavah which means the sepulchre of lust or coveting.

The portion ends with another unfortunate incident, when Moses takes an Ethiopian woman as his second wife. He has not violated any stipulations of the Torah, but his sister leads a group of people who feel that it is their job to interfere with how their leader is living his life, when it is none of their business to pass judgment on his decisions. She is struck with leprosy and in response to Aaron's intercession, she spends the required seven days outside of the camp until she is purified from this disease and the camp can move on.

Moses had to endure complaining (negative murmuring), lust and unwarranted criticism and must have had misgivings about this fractious group of people who seem determined to undermine the blessing of the L-rd by backbiting and infighting about things which really did not matter. May our community be spared from this insidious form of self destruction.

The Haftarah deals with the Word of the L-rd which was given to Zachariah about the restoration of exiled Israel and the arrival of the righteous Branch, which is also described as the seven eyed Stone which will take away the sin of the land which the people have burdened it with. It is a very clear reference to our beloved Messiah whose coming cannot be prevented by the

people's folly which caused them to be taken into exile. Our folly can never prevent or even slow down the fulfilment of His Promises which He makes in His Word.

The passage goes on to talk about a golden menorah placed between two olive trees, from whom flows the oil to keep the lamps of the menorah lit. The explanation of this vision is that it is not by power or by force that anything gets done in the L-rd – it is only by His Spirit.

It also mentions the chief Cornerstone which will be laid before the flattened mountain. This theme is taken up again in the New Testament portion where the olive trees are called two witnesses. In the New Testament passage there are two menorahs (Zechariah missed the second one) and they appear in the midst of the final tribulations which will precede the arrival of the Kingdom of G-d which shall rule over all the nations and generations of mankind.

Who are the two witnesses and why are they overcome by the enemy, even as they are rejected by the world? Good questions to bring to Yeshiva, but I will conclude my Torah Meditation with a little hint. The enemy hates Israel for two reasons – first, we gave the holy Word of G-d to the nations and second, we gave birth to the Messiah who won salvation for all the generations and nations of the world. He hates with equal vehemence all those among the Jews and the Gentiles who have the testimony of their faith in the Messiah.

Israel is often called the natural olive tree and the Gentiles are the wild olive tree which is grafted into the natural olive tree. Together we will give witness about G-d through His Word until the final darkness overwhelms the world for a second time, as our blood is mixed with the blood of the prophets who also died for their refusal to abandon the truth of the L-rd.

As our camp moves through this world towards our final home, lets bury our lusts, along with all the works of the flesh, before they bury us. Our lives can either reflect the wonder and glory of the presence of the L-rd in our midst, or we can dig ourselves into sepulchres (graves) because we have not crucified our flesh and have allowed it to crucify and bury us.

We have just celebrated Shavuot, which should have been a time of great joy as our people settled into their first camp away from the mountain and were just one camp away from their intended launching place into the Land of Canaan. Are you ready to launch in the L-rd?

All through their pilgrimage, the people never encounter an enemy who could do them any real harm, they just seemed to continually self destruct by abandoning the L-rd through making bad choices. May we never follow suit in also making these kinds of bad choices. We have His Word as our guide and His Spirit's empowering us to deal with anything which rises up to oppose His Kingdom in our lives. Don't let your paradise in Him be troubled!

Along the way, we will make many necessary modifications to how we do things and that means we will need to be firm and flexible. May how we live never bring any of the trouble into Paradise which stalled our people for an entire generation. His way is the Highway.