The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

Parshat HaShavua
Yeshivat Har Etzion

This parasha series is dedicated
in memory of Michael Jotkowitz, z"l.

PARASHAT BEHA'ALOTEKHA

In loving memory of Jamie Lehmann,z'l, whose yahrzeit is 14 of Sivan, by his loving family Yitzchok and Barbie Lehmann Siegel, Russie, Jackie and Bruria

Of Lusts and Laments

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I

By about midway through *Parashat Beha'alotekha*, Moshe had seen and heard enough. In response to the people's pining for the delicacies they enjoyed as Egyptian slaves (11:4-5) and upon hearing their crying at the doors of their tents (11:10), Moshe attempts to resign his commission. Turning to God, Moshe laments his unjust fate.

> Why have you done evil (*hareiota*) unto your servant? And Why have I not found favor in your eyes (*lo matzati chein be-einekha*) that you place the burden (*masa*) of this people upon me?
> Have I conceived this people? Have I birthed them, so that you may say to me carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries the suckling child, to the land which you have sworn to their fathers?
> From where should I get meat for this people? For they cry to me saying: Give us meat so that we may eat.
> I am not able to bear (*laseit*) this people alone, for it is too heavy for me. If so you deal with me: kill me, I beg you, if I have found favor in your eyes (*im matzati chein be-einekha*), and let me not see my evil fate (*be-ra'ati*). (11:11-15)

Moshe's poetry is almost perfectly formed. He begins by asking (a) why God HAS done him evil (*hare'iota*). Following this question, Moshe queries as to (b) why he HAS NOT found favor in God's eyes, and (c) why God HAS placed the burden (*masa*) of this people upon him. We may think of this as an a-b-c structure. In his conclusion, Moshe utilizes the exact same three terms and concepts, (a) evil, (b) favor in God's eyes, and (c) bearing or carrying. Yet this time he reverses their order and logical orientation. He in fact pleads for their conceptual opposites, reversing the negative-affirmative modifiers of each term. Moshe states that (c) he CANNOT bear (*laseit*) the burden alone. He then begs for death, if (b) he HAS found favor in God's eyes. Finally, Moshe returns to the stem and symbol of (a) *ra*, asking God that he NOT SEE any more of his wretched

and evil fate. This chiastic frame and the overall structure of Moshe's soliloquy can be diagrammed as follows:

A. 11:11	God has done evil to (*hareiota*) Moshe
B. 11:11	Moshe has not found favor in God's eyes
C. 11:11	Burden of the people (*masa*) upon Moshe
D. 11:12-13	Birth metaphor, Accusation of injustice, Reference to people's complaint for meat
C. 11:14	CANNOT bear burden (*laseit*) alone
B. 11:15	HAVE found favor – request for death
A. 11:15	NOT see evil fate (*bera'ati*)

In contrast to this well balanced structure, the tone of Moshe's speech is near frantic. In staccato bursts, he piles question-upon-question upon God: Why have you done me wrong? Have I conceived them? Have I birthed them? Without pausing for response he concludes there is only one way out. In the latter part of his speech, in the close of the chiastic frame, where Moshe seeks reversal and presents his plea, he requests his own death. He would rather die then deal with the people of Israel and their complaints.

While we may sympathize with Moshe, Moshe's lament requires some explanation. After all, the people have complained before. In point of fact, they have even complained for meat before. Shortly after crossing *Yam Suf*, on the way to Sinai, the people became discontent. They claimed that they would have been better off dying by the hand of God adjacent to the "fleshpots" of Egypt, their stomachs full, rather than starving to death in the desert. They claim that Moshe and Aharon have brought them to the desert to kill them (*Shemot* 16:2-3). Yet in this instance, Moshe does not turn to God in despair. He does not attempt to resign nor plead for his own death. Instead, he deals with their request, and in a reproof of the people, he informs them that in point of fact, their grumbling has been against God himself (16:7). Similarly, at Refidim, when the people subsequently complain to Moshe regarding their thirst (17: 1-3), Moshe rebukes the people, critiquing them for "striving" with him and "testing" God (17:2). This of course is the Moshe we are familiar with, loyal servant of God, steadfast leader and when occasion necessitates, critic of the people. He is a leader engaged with his flock.

Moshe manifests another dimension of his character and leadership during the aftermath of the sin of the Golden Calf (32:30-32). After offering a stringent reprove to the people, that they have sinned a great sin, he returns to his conversation with God. At that point, Moshe demands forgiveness for the Jewish people, and puts his relationship with God, and perhaps his very

existence, on the line. If God will not forgive the Children of Israel, Moshe demands that God "erase" him from his "book" (*mecheini na mi-sifrekha*). While the "book" referred to by Moshe may be just the Torah, the phrase also packs overtones of self negation and perhaps even death. Moshe places his very self on the line for the people.

In contrast to the Moshe of *Shemot*, *Parashat Beha'alotekha* paints an all together different picture. In *Beha'alotekha*, Moshe never speaks to the people, nor reproves them, rather he stands and watches. As the Torah pithily comments after reporting the people's crying at the doors of their tents: "*u-be'einei Moshe ra*" – and it was bad in the eye of Moshe (11:10). Rather than confront the people, Moshe turns to God and laments his fate. Similarly, once again in radical contrast to *Shemot*, in *Beha'alotekha*, Moshe invites death not on behalf of the Jewish people but to escape having anything to do with them(11:15).

As if this were not enough, the continuation of the narrative contains yet another surprise. Following, Moshe's lament (11:11-15), God presents Moshe with a plan. He will provide the people with a month's worth of meat, more meat than they have ever imagined, until it "comes out of their nostrils (11:20). Moshe's counter is shocking. He refers to the fact that the Children of Israel number over 6000,000 (11:21), and once again queries God: "Will you/Can you slaughter flocks and herds to suffice them? Or shall/can all of the fish of the sea be gathered to suffice them?" (11:22) While Moshe's comment can be read as "will you," an expression of amazement at God's plan (Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Ramban), it can also be translated and interpreted otherwise, as "can you." In line with this approach, Rashi cites the position of Rabbi Akiva, who interprets the verse in this fashion, as an expression of disbelief on Moshe's part and a querying of God's abilities. Moshe is clearly in crisis.

In sum, Moshe's lament, along with its frustration and despair and even its overtones of anger at the divine, present a different Moshe than the one we are accustomed to encountering. His disconnect from the people, his desire for death and his subsequent slide into questioning God's intentions and/or abilities seem wholly other than the Moshe of the latter part of *Sefer Shemot*, the paradigmatic steadfast leader and faithful divine servant. Something has happened and something has changed. But what is it? What has triggered Moshe's uncharacteristic response?

II

At the center of Moshe's plea for release from his burden lies the metaphor of the nursing mother (11:12). Moshe contrasts himself with a mother who has conceived, borne and nurses a small infant. While she may be justly expected to carry her infant along on a journey, Moshe has not conceived or borne the people of Israel. It is unjust for God to expect him to act the role of nursemaid or mother. In closing his metaphor with a reference to "the land you promised to the forefathers," Moshe hints that this job may belong to the forefathers, to whom God promised the land, or perhaps to God himself. It certainly does not belong to Moshe. He is neither the founder of the people or formulator of the divine plan.

While the image functions on this level, it also emphasizes the problem of carrying and burden. Picking up on the term *masa*, meaning burden, in his opening sentence (11:11), Moshe twice utilizes a variation on the same root in the main body of his lament. God has told him to "carry" (*laseit*) the people in his bosom, as one carries (*yisa*) a nursing infant (11:12). Carrying a nursing infant on a long journey is undoubtedly a difficult task. Carrying a whole people as burdensome as a nursing infant is undoubtedly an impossible task.

However, the metaphor also functions on a third level, picking up on previous terminology in the text. In describing the people's demand for meat, the Torah twice utilizes the term *bocheh*, meaning crying. After the instigation by the *asafsuf*, the mixed multitude, the Children of Israel "also cried" (11:4). Moshe hears the people "crying" at the doors of their tents (11:10). No wonder that Moshe compares the crying people, in full throated whine for meat and the other watery delicacies of Egypt (11:4-6), to a nursing infant, whining for its mother's breast. In point of fact, this terminology is unusual. The term most often used to describe the complaints of the Children of Israel is *va-yilonu*, meaning complain, murmur or grumble (*Shemot* 15:24, 16:2, 17:3, *Bamidbar* 16:11, 17:6). Apparently, there is something uniquely unjustified and immature about this particular complaint.

This point is further bolstered by a comparing the respective contexts of the complaints for meat in *Sefer Shemot* and *Sefer Bamidbar.* The Children of Israel first demand meat shortly after crossing Yam Suf and entering the wilderness (*Shemot* 15:22-16:3). While the people do refer to the "fleshpots" of Egypt, lament that they would have been better off dying back in Egypt with their bellies full (16:2-3), and accuse Moshe of bringing them to the desert to die, they do in fact face the hard facts of starvation. They are in the desert without food. In response, God provides the people *manna* in place of bread and provides the *slav*, to satiate their desire for meat (16:4-15).

In contrast, the complaint of *Beha'alotekha*, occurs more than a year later, when the Children of Israel depart from the locale of Sinai (10:11-12). God has provided for their needs for over a year and they are sustained by the daily ration of *manna*. In fact, the people's complaint seems to be about the quality of their sustenance. In pining for meat, the people deride the *manna*, claiming that their "souls are dry" (11:6), and contrast their current sustenance with the fish, cucumbers, melons and other "wet" or water associated foods of Egypt. By no accident, the Torah follows their complaint with a two verse description glorifying the taste, versatility and availability of *manna* (11:7-9) and terms the complaint as *ta'ava*, unjustified desire or lust (11:4). The lust for meat ends in death (11:33), and the place where this all occurred is named Kivrot Ha-ta'ava, literally, the graves of lust (11:34). Finally, God himself, in instructing Moshe as to his planned response accuses the people of having "despised" the divine presence amongst them and crying about having ever left Egypt at all (11:20).

To put this all together, the people's complaint for meat at Kivrot Ha-ta'ava seems uniquely problematic. It is the cry of a baby, unjustified by circumstances. It is the wail of an infant's id, an irrational desire for material gratification, unmitigated by reason, faith or gratitude to God. These immature material needs and desires of the people lead them to deride God's sustenance and to

reject the journey he commands. They cry for the comforts of Egypt. Undoubtedly, Moshe was disturbed.

Nevertheless, is this sufficient to explain his reaction? Is this all that lies behind the frustration and despair? Turning our attention to the larger context of the people's complaint may help to reveal another motif or two.

III

The latter half of *Parashat Beha'alotekha* tells us the story of the first journey of the camp of Israel from Sinai in the direction of the Promised Land. At a certain point in time the preparations were complete, the arrangements made, the cloud lifted from upon the Mishkan and the journey ensued (10:11-36). The story of Kivrot Ha-ta'ava, the story of the lust for meat (11:1-35), constitutes the textual continuation of that first journey.

In between these two stories, or perhaps more accurately, shortly before the end of the description of the journey's ensuing and the commencing of the Kivrot Ha-ta'ava narrative, the Torah tucks in the story of Moshe's invitation to Chovav at the moment of the journey's inception (10:29-32).

In this cryptic exchange, Moshe invites Chovav to join the Children of Israel in their journey (10:29). When Chovav refuses Moshe's entreaty and cites his desire to return to his land and birthplace (10:30), Moshe presses him, offering him "the good" that God will do unto Israel (10:32) as an incentive. In addition, he presents a set of murky rationales including the fact that "you have known our encampment in the desert" and "you have been for us as eyes" (10:31). In line with this overall lack of clarity, the story ends inconclusively. We remain in the dark as to whether Chovav agreed to forsake his land and birthplace in exchange for the promised "good" or continued to resist Moshe's entreaties. Did he opt to return home or to accompany the Children of Israel? For that matter, who is the previously unmentioned Chovav and why is his story important?

Most commentaries (Rashi, Rashbam, Ramban) identify Chovav as Yitro. After all, the Torah refers to him as "*choten Moshe*," the father in law of Moshe (10:29). Furthermore, as Ibn Ezra points out, this interpretation receives support from the fact that Chovav "knew the encampment in the desert"(10:31) and Yitro had found Israel encamped in the desert (*Shemot* 18:5). Finally, Moshe tells Chovav, "*Ve-hayita lanu le-einayim*," translated above as "you have been for us as eyes" (10:31). The Rashbam, in adopting the Yitro identification and interpreting "*ve-hayita*" as referring to some past service, interprets the term *le-einayim*, meaning as eyes, as a metaphor referring to perceptive advice.

On the Rashbam's account, the phrase in fact refers to the second half of the Yitro narrative (18:13-27) in which Yitro perceptively advises Moshe not to bear the heavy burden of judging the people by himself (18:18). As is well known, Yitro suggests the appointment of officers and judges who will help Moshe in this task. In Yitro's words "*ve-nasu itakh*," and they will carry/bear with

you (18:22). Hence the fact that both Chovev and Yitro are perceptive advisors further supports the Chovev-Yitro identification.

Granted that Chovev-Yitro refuses Moshe's invitation and returns to his birthplace (see *Shemot* 18:27), Moshe's lament at Kivrot Ha-ta'ava (11:11-15) appears in a whole new light. As we should remember, Moshe complains of the *masa*, the burden of the people (11:11), and draws an analogy between the task of leading the people to the promised land and the task of carrying an infant in one's bosom (*sa'eihu be-cheikekha*) like a nursing mother (*yisahu ha-omen*)(11:12). In addition, although not central to our analysis until this point, Moshe utilizes the stem n.s.a. meaning carry, a fourth time, at the beginning of the close of his chiastic frame, right after his reference to the people's demands for meat (11:13).

The exact sentence containing this usage is crucial. Moshe states that he "cannot do it alone (*lo ukhal anokhi LEVADI*)," claims he cannot "carry all the people (*laseit et kol ha-am*)" and concludes that "it is too heavy for me (*ki KAVED mimeni*)" (11:14). But this constitutes a near exact parallel to what Yitro had warned of. All the key terms in Moshe's statement are found in the Yitro narrative.

Yitro begins his remarks to Moshe with the observation that Moshe sits alone while all the people (*kol ha-am*) congregate about him (*Shemot* 18:14). In addition, Yitro's central warning to Moshe consists of the claim that "it is too heavy for you (*kaved mimkha*)" and that Moshe "cannot do it alone (*lo tukhal…levadekha*) (18:18). Finally, in the final point of parallel, as pointed out above, Yitro advises Moshe to have others help him "carry (*ve-nasu itakh*)" (18:22). Rearranging this logically yields a three pointed parallel. First, the burden upon Moshe OF ALL THE PEOPLE is TOO HEAVY (11:14, 18:14, 18). Second, Moshe cannot do it ALONE (11:14, 18:18). Finally, Moshe carries too much and requires others to help him CARRY (11:14, 18:22).

The point of the parallel is that the exact issues of heaviness, burden, leadership capability and aloneness that Yitro had raised now dominate Moshe's thinking. In this psychological vein, we might suggest that the loss of his father in-law, his perceptive political advisor and leadership mentor has borne a heavy toll on Moshe. Once again he feels himself incapable of leading the people. Faced with the difficult people, their unjustified demands and unjustifiable appetites, Moshe turns to his father in heaven, in complete despair.

IV

While the psychological and personal interpretation proposed above can certainly be argued for, it can also be argued against. Based upon *Shoftim* 4:11 and its reference to Chever, a descendant of Chovav, most commentators (Ibn Ezra, Ramban) maintain that Chovav did agree to Moshe's request to join the people on their journey to the Promised Land. If so, we cannot posit a reading that is predicated on Chovav-Yitro's departure. Moreover, as the Ibn Ezra cogently argues, Chovav is most probably not Yitro. The Torah identifies Chovav as the son of Reu'el and as the *choten* of Moshe. But according to *Sefer Shemot*, Re'uel is the father of the girls Moshe meets at the well in Midyan (*Shemot* 2:16-18). Consequently, Reu'el is Moshe's brother-in-law and *choten* should be understood as a general term for in-law or clansmen by marriage. It sometimes

connotes a father-in-law and sometimes a brother-in-law. Once again, if Chovav is not Yitro, we cannot posit a reading predicated on Yitro's departure.

Finally, in what might be considered a more personal and psychological counter to the psychological and personal reading, the interpretation above strikes me as simultaneously both partial and radical. While Moshe is certainly human and part of a network of relationships with others, the departure of his father-in-law, confidante and political advisor doesn't seem sufficient to provoke the despair and anguish manifested in Moshe's lament. Even taking into account the difficulties of leadership, the account renders Moshe a bit too dependent on Yitro. Simply put, the reading rings false to my ear. In my opinion, something else must also be going on. With this in mind, let us direct our attention back to the Chovav and Kivrot Ha-ta'ava narratives.

V

Throughout the dialogue between Moshe and Chovav (10:29-32), Moshe consistently speaks of the "good." Immediately after announcing to Chovav that "we are journeying to the place" that God has promised, Moshe invites Chovav to join the journey, promising that it will be good for Chovav, as God has spoken good concerning Israel (10:29). In fact, counting the three more times that Moshe uses the term "good" in trying to overcome Chovav's hesitancy (10:32), the term appears five times in the four short verses that make up the narrative (10:29-32). While things are clearly good and expected to get even better, it remains unclear what purpose, pedagogic or otherwise, is served by all this talk of "good." For that matter the referent of the good, what it refers to, also remains obscure.

But that may be part of the point of the passage. Whomever Chovav is, whether he is Yitro or someone else altogether, whatever objects or occurrences that Moshe predicts or promises to Chovav, one thing remains clear. God has promised good things for the future of Israel.

On the literary plane, the contrast between this central symbol and the terminology of the opening of the ensuing Kivrot Ha-ta'ava narrative could not be clearer. That segment opens with the opposite of good. We are informed by the Torah that the people were "*ke-mit'onenim ra be-oaznei hashem*"(11:1). Whether we translate this sentence as meaning "complaining of misery" or "complaining bitterly," things have certainly taken a turn for the worse. Even translating as some commentaries do, "complaining/murmuring and it was evil in the ears of God"(Rashi, Ramban), the contrast of *tov* in the Chovev narrative and *ra* in the complaint narrative is obvious. Moreover as the Rashbam and the Ramban both point out (11:1), even on this interpretation, they are complaining about the bad conditions, the pain and difficulty of the journey, the "*ra*" God has provided them. Where as God had spoken "*tov*" of Israel, and Moshe "*tov*" of the journey, the members of Israel, perceive and speak "*ra*" of the journey.

However, this is not just about journey conditions and process. During the Chovav narrative, Chovav speaks but once. In response to Moshe's first invitation to come along, Chovav demurs, stating that he prefers to go (*ailaikh*) to his own land (*artzi*) and birthplace (*moladeti*) (10:30). While the echo is not readily apparent in translation, the original text should certainly remind us of something. In his first refusal to come along, or "go," Chovav uses the exact same

terms as God does in commanding Avram – *Lekh lekha mei-artzekha u-mimoladetekha,* Go from your land and birthplace (*Bereishit* 12:1).

This parallel is far more than just a linguistic coincidence. Just as God commanded Avram to forsake his land and birthplace to journey to a new land, the Land of Canaan, so too Moshe entreats Chovav to forsake his land and birthplace to journey to a new land. As a matter of fact, it is the exact same land, the land promised to the forefathers. Not for naught does Moshe begin his entreaty with the statement that "we are traveling to the place of which God said: I will give to you." This is the journey to the land Avram traveled toward, to the land promised to the forefathers for their descendants (*Bereishit* 12:1,7).

Moreover, in another thematic parallel, God follows up his command to Avram with a list of benefits. God promises him that if he engages in the journey, he will become a great nation, he will be blessed, etc. etc. (*Bereishit* 12:2-3). In a broad thematic sense this resembles and connects to what Moshe promises Chovav. He promises Chovav that his journey will be good for him, that the good that God has promised Avram and Israel will also be his.

The point of the Chovav-*Lekh Lekha* overlap seems dual. On one plane, the inclusion of the invitation to Chovav in the text at this point, by paralleling the *Lekh Lekha* narrative, serves as a marker that we stand at a crucial historic juncture, the moment when the Children of Israel stand at the cusp of realizing the promise God made to Avram. They are about to enter the land, become a great nation, be blessed etc. etc. This is the "*tov*" of which Moshe speaks, the sense in which God "*diber tov*" regarding the Children of Israel (10:29).

On another plane, the inclusion of the Chovav narrative and its parallel to the *Lekh Lekha* story serves as a recreation of what might be thought of as the journey challenge. Just as Avram faced the test of perceiving the good promised by God and journeying to the promised place, so too, Chovav faces the test of perceiving the good promised by Moshe/God and journeying to a new land.

This latter reading of the Chovav-*Lekh Lekha* parallel, as a recreation of the journey challenge can be further strengthened by remembering that *Sefer Bereishit* presents its own echo of the journey challenge. In seeking a wife for his son Yitzchak, Avraham insists on a bride from his land (*eretz*) and birthplace (*moledet*) (*Bereishit* 24:4-7). While the father and brother of the chosen girl can say neither good (*tov*) nor bad (*ra*) about her leaving her land and birthplace to journey to a foreign land and join the heritage of Avraham (24:50), Rivka presents a different attitude. When it is decided to ask the young lady herself as to whether she will go (*ha-tailekhi*), she responds: *ailaikh,* I will go (24:58). In short, Rivka too faces the journey challenge of Avraham. Unlike her blood relatives, she is able to see the good implicit in the journey, the destination and the destiny. She responds that she will go and embarks on her journey to the Land of Israel. She is worthy of the heritage of Avraham.

Let us return to Chovav. As argued previously, based upon *Shoftim* 4:11 and its reference to Chever the descendant of Chovav, Chovav does in the end agree to Moshe's request. In

response to the fivefold *tov* presented by Moshe (10:29-32), Chovav joins the journey to the Promised Land. Whether Chovav is Yitro, someone who has already previously perceived all the good that God has done for Israel (*Shemot* 18:9), or whether he is just a different, less-significant clansmen, he is capable of proper perception. In light of the miracles of the Exodus, the wonders of Sinai and the material sustenance provided for the Children of Israel, the good that God has promised Israel cannot be doubted. They will soon inherit the Promised Land. Despite being an outsider, Chovav is capable of perceiving this good and meeting the journey challenge, of abandoning his land and birthplace to join a journey to the Promised Land. But what of the Children of Israel themselves?

This brings us full circle back to the interstices of the Chovav and *Kivrot Ha-ta'ava* narratives and the contrast in imagery discussed earlier. Unlike Chovav the outsider, the Children of Israel are apparently not able to perceive the "*tov*" and meet the journey challenge. Almost immediately upon breaking camp, they are *mitonenim ra* (11:1) they perceive things as bad, they see and speak "*ra*." They fail the challenge. In doing so, they demonstrate that in some sense they are not yet worthy of the inheritance of Avraham.

But there is even more to it than this. The Children of Israel stand on the cusp of entering the land, whether within a few days (Rashi 10:33) or perhaps a few weeks. As such, as the placement of the Chovev narrative with its parallel to the *Lekh Lekha* story emphasizes, this journey constitutes the fulfillment of God's promise to the forefathers, to bring their descendants to the Promised Land.

At this very juncture in history, the Children of Israel stand at the doors of their tents, organized by families (11:10), just as they had been organized by family and tribe for traveling to Israel (1:2, 2:2, 17). But instead of orienting themselves to the good land promised them by God (*Shemot* 3:5) they cry for Egypt and its tastes (11:5), as God himself puts it, they regret the fact that they ever left Egypt (11:20). They define Egypt as not just their physical birthplace but also their existential homeland. For these slave-born Children of Israel, Egypt, and its free meat, fish and watermelons are the true Promised Land. It is the only destiny they can envision. In doing so, they reject their destination and deny their identity as the inheritors of the divine promise. They negate the immediate fulfillment of the divine plan.

VI

To close the circle, let us return to Moshe and his lament. What accounts for his frustration and despair? What has triggered his crisis? While the outlines of the answer to these questions should already be clear, the full version of the contrast between the Chovav and Kivrot Ha-ta'ava narratives should help sharpen the picture.

The contrast between the two narratives, the opposition of the fivefold "*tov*" in the Chovav narrative (10:29-32) and "*ra*" at the opening of the Kivrot Ha-ta'ava narrative (11:1), picks up steam as we move further into the complaint narrative. As pointed out previously, Moshe views the situation of the people wailing for meat at the doors of their tents as "*ra*," evil or illegitimate

(11:10), and in what can now be seen as a consequence, twice accuses God of having done "*ra*" to him by saddling him with the leadership of the Children of Israel (11:11,15).

In short, the Chovav narrative outlines the "good journey," a journey founded in the promises of good made by God and embodied in the optimism, talk of good and vision of good that Moshe proposes to Chovav. The beginning of the Kivrot Ha-ta'ava narrative represents the reversal and collapse of these themes. The "good journey," the quick fulfillment of the redemption process and the divine promise quickly collapses into a cycle of complaint and punishment (11:1-4).

But this was not what Moshe had expected. Back at the burning bush, in first revealing himself to Moshe, God told Moshe that he intends to deliver Israel from the hand of Egypt, that he will take the Children of Israel up from Egypt to "a good land" (3:5) and that he is sending Moshe to Pharoah to accomplish these purposes (3:10). As we should remember, Moshe was reluctant.

> Who am I that I should go to Pharoah? And that I should bring the Children of Israel out of Egypt? (3:11)

In responding to God, Moshe questions his own abilities and worthiness. Moshe is humble and does not consider himself suitable either to confront Pharoah in the name of God nor to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt. In point of fact, the remainder of the dialogue at the burning bush consists of God's attempts to assuage Moshe's hesitations about these two parts of the mission (3:12-4:17).

What we should realize is that Moshe never questions the third part of God's statement. Confronting Pharoah might be difficult, persuading the people that he speaks in the name of God might be near impossible, but leading the people to a "good land" once God has freed them from Egypt never seems to be an issue. Undoubtedly, the newly-freed slaves will be eager to travel to the land of their forefathers, what God the redeemer has promised is a good land.

But such is not to be. It is exactly at this point, that Moshe's expectations come crashing down. While he did succeed in facing Pharoah, while the people did follow him out of Egypt, the journey to their forefather's land, turns out to be an altogether different story. Consequently, whereas before Moshe had spoken of and seen nothing but "*tov*," now Moshe sees nothing but "*ra*" (11:11,16). The "good journey," in which the people march quickly into the land, fails immediately and quickly metastasizes into an all too ominous pattern of failure, sin and punishment. So too Moshe's vision of good and talk of good, his confident optimism, quickly evaporates. Given the failure of his hopes and expectations he too sees nothing but "*ra*"(11:10,15). Frustrated and in despair, he turns to God and laments his fate.

VII

To conclude, I have tried to argue that the crisis reflected in Moshe's lament (11:11-15) emerges from the particular circumstances that Moshe faces. The uniquely unjustified complaint of lusting for meat, the inability of the people to rise to the challenge of *Lekh Lekha*, the failure to

envision a good journey and future in the land of Israel, the desire to return to Egypt and the subtext of rejecting the divinely planned journey all play a role. Perhaps, as discussed earlier, the personal also plays a role, and Moshe's loss of his trusted advisor contributes to the crisis. But in addition, as I have tried to argue, it is the collapse of the "good journey," the shattered expectation of "we are traveling to the place" (10:29), that plays the greatest role.

Finally, while here in *Parashat Beha'alotekha*, Moshe pleads for death rather than be forced to lead the people any longer, such is not to be. God does not grant his request. Moshe faces almost another forty years of leading the Children of Israel through the desert. In closing, it is worth noting Moshe's reaction some thirty-eight years later when finally informed of his impending death. Moshe turns to God and pleads once again, this time for the appointment of a new leader.

> …Who may lead them out and in…that the congregation of Israel not be as sheep without a shepherd" (27:17).

Thirty-eight years later after the events of Kivrot Ha-ta'ava, Moshe relates to the people as his flock and himself as their shepherd. In the end of the day, Moshe overcomes his despair and frustration. He continues on through the long years in the desert, building a people capable and worthy of entering the land.

Further Study

1) Reread 10:29-11:4. Is the placement of 10:33-36 problematic for the claims made about the relationship between the Chovav and Kivrot Ha-ta'ava narratives? (See Rashi 10:29 and 10:33)
2) Review *Shemot* 18:1-12 and look carefully at 18:8-10. Now see 18:13-27. Try to make an additional argument for identifying Yitro and Chovav not made in the *shiur* above. See *Bamidbar* 11:16-17. Now see 11:14 and *Shemot* 18:22. Who is it that takes Yitro's place?
3) See 11:13. Now read 11:16-35. Identify the dual solution presented. Follow through the appearance of the terms "*basar*" and "*ruach*." What is the relationship between them? See *Bamidbar* 27:15-18. Also see *Bereishit* 6:3 and Ramban 6:3.
4) Read 11:31-35. Now see 11:20. See Rashi 11:20. What is the problem that Rashi addresses? See 11:4. Try to formulate another solution.