

**Shabbat Torah Study (2026) – Parashat B’ha’alot’cha
Numbers 11:24-29**

וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל־הָעָם אֶת דְּבַר יְהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁבַעִים אִישׁ מִזִּקְנֵי הָעָם וַיַּעֲמֵד אֹתָם סְבִיבֹת הָאֹהֶל:
וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה אֶל־בְּעֻזְרָן וַיְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר מִרְהָרִיחַ אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו וַיִּתְּנוּ עַל־שְׁבַעִים אִישׁ הַזִּקְנָיִם וַיְהִי כְּנֹחַ עֲלֵיהֶם הָרוּחַ
וַיִּתְנַבְּאוּ וְלֹא יָסֹפוּ:
וַיִּשְׁאָרוּ שְׁנֵי־אֲנָשִׁים בְּמַחֲנֶה שֵׁם הָאֶחָד אֶלְדָּד וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִי מֵידָד וַתָּנַח עֲלֵיהֶם הָרוּחַ וְהִלְמָה בַּכַּתְּבִים וְלֹא יָצְאוּ
הָאֹהֶל וַיִּתְנַבְּאוּ בְּמַחֲנֶה:
וַיִּרְץ הַנֶּעֱר וַיִּגַּד לְמֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלְדָּד וּמֵידָד מִתְנַבְּאִים בְּמַחֲנֶה:
וַלְעָן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּרְנוֹן מִשְׁרַת מֹשֶׁה מִבְּחָרָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי מֹשֶׁה כָּלֵאָם:
וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מֹשֶׁה הַמְקַנָּא אֶתְּהָ לִּי וּמִי יִתֵּן כָּל־עַם יְהוָה נְבִיאִים כִּי־יִתֵּן יְהוָה אֶת־רוּחוֹ עֲלֵיהֶם:

²⁴Moses went out and reported God's words to the people. He gathered seventy of the people's elders and stationed them around the Tent. ²⁵Then, after coming down in a cloud and speaking to him, God drew upon the spirit that was on him and put it upon the seventy elders. And when the spirit rested upon them, they spoke in ecstasy, but did not continue. ²⁶Two of the men, one named Eldad and the other Meidad, had remained in camp; yet the spirit rested upon them - they were among those recorded, but they had not gone out to the Tent - and they spoke in ecstasy in the camp. ²⁷An assistant ran out and told Moses, saying, "Eldad and Meidad are acting the prophet in the camp!" ²⁸And Joshua son of Nun, Moses' attendant from his youth, spoke up and said, "My lord Moses, restrain them!" ²⁹But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous (wrought up) on my account? Would that all God's people were prophets, that God inspired them!"

BT Sanhedrin 17a-b

Who were Eldad and Meidad, these two men blessed with the spirit while remaining in the camp? The talmudic sages wonder the same thing. The question is answered by imagining how Moses ultimately could have chosen seventy elders from among the twelve tribes. "Moses said [to himself]: 'How shall I do it? If I choose six from each tribe, there will be two more [than the required seventy]; if I choose five, ten will then be wanting. If, on the other hand, I choose six out of one and five out of another, I will cause jealousy among the tribes.'" Of the rabbinic responses given, R. Shimon's holds sway. R. Shimon explained the verse as such: "Eldad and Meidad remained in the camp." For when the Blessed Holy One said to Moses, 'Gather for me seventy of Israel's elders, Eldad and Medad observed, 'We are not worthy of such greatness! Thereupon the Blessed Holy One said, 'Because you have humbled yourselves, I will add to your greatness yet more greatness! And how did God add to their greatness? In that all the other prophets prophesied and ceased, but [Eldad and Meidad's] prophesying did not cease."

Bamidbar Rabbah 15:19

Another matter, "Gather to Me seventy men" – when the Holy One blessed be He said to Moses: "Gather to Me seventy men" – Moses said: "What shall I do? If I bring five from each and every tribe, they will not total a sum of seventy, they will total sixty. If I bring six from this tribe and five from that tribe, I will introduce jealousy between one tribe and another.' What did he do? He took seventy-two notes and wrote "elder" [on seventy of] them, and [took] an additional two blank notes, and mixed them in a receptacle. He said: 'Come and take your note...

R. Shai Held - "It's Not about You" or, "What Moses Knew" Heart of Torah, vol 2

Fed up with the people's ceaseless grumbling and complaining, Moses lets God have it. "Why have you dealt ill with Your servant," he asks, "and why have I not enjoyed your favor, that you have laid the burden of all this people upon me?" Moses insists that the strain of leading the Israelites is too much for him and boldly (brazenly) insists he would rather God kill him than force him to endure his miserable task any longer.

God responds by granting Moses some of the relief he begs for, instructing him to gather seventy of Israel's elders and bring them to the Tent of Meeting, where God will "draw some of the spirit that is on Moses and put it on the leaders; "They shall share the burden of the people with you, and you shall not bear it alone" (*Num. 11:11-17*). From the way the story unfolds, we learn a tremendous amount about leadership, about humility, and about the crucial relationship between them.

Moses does as God told him, and as promised, God draws upon the spirit that was on Moses and places it upon the seventy elders. "And when the spirit was upon them, they spoke in ecstasy (i.e. prophesied) – יִתְנַבְּאוּ (*yit'nab'u*) but did not continue" (*Num. 11:25*). Bible scholar Jacob Milgrom explains: "The function of the elders' ecstasy is not to render them prophets - their ecstatic state is never again repeated - but to provide [one-time] divine validation for their selection as leaders."

But then something totally unexpected happens, and Moses's and Joshua's respective responses to the scene are highly instructive. Two men, Eldad and Meidad, who had remained in the camp (i.e. they were not among the 70 selected elders), nevertheless have the divine spirit rest upon them as well and they begin to speak in ecstasy (i.e. prophesy). A lad runs out and reports to Moses that Eldad and Meidad are speaking in ecstasy in the camp, to which Joshua reacts right away, urging Moses to restrain them. However, Moses takes a very different tack, correcting his zealous assistant: "Are you jealous on my behalf? Would that all of God's people were prophets, that God put the Divine spirit upon them!" (*Num. 11:26-29*).

Moses's response is striking on its most basic level, but the more closely we read, the more arresting it becomes. The report Moses receives is that the two men were speaking in ecstasy מִתְנַבְּאוּ (*mitnab'im*). But when he refuses to stop them, he expresses a wish that all Israel were prophets נְבִיאִים (*nevi'im*). Moses no longer speaks of a single moment but of what Martin Buber calls a "substantive state." Moses's dream is not that all Israel will have prophetic moments (in which they speak ecstatically) but that all Israel will be prophets. Whereas Joshua decries and wants Moses to denounce two people from experiencing even moments of prophecy, "Moses," as Milgrom notes, "conveys that not only is it a desire all of Israel qualify (through ecstasy) to become elders but that they ultimately attain a higher level - to be prophets like Moses himself." Moses dreams of a time when all Israel will be at the very same level as he.

Robert Alter suggests that Moses here "expresses the sense that holding a monopoly of power (equated with access to the divine spirit) is not at all what impels him as a leader. ... He points to an ideal of what we might call radical spiritual egalitarianism." Moreover, when God calls upon Moses to appoint the seventy elders to help him lead the people, God tells him [He] will "draw upon the spirit that is upon [him]" (*Num. 11:17*) and place it upon them. But note Moses's response – when he expresses the wish that all Israel

be prophets, he gives voice to the hope that God "would put *God's spirit* upon them" (11:29). In other words, Moses expresses the wish that all Israel be prophets without that prophecy having to be in any way dependent on, or derivative of, his own prophetic spirit. What matters to Moses is *God's* spirit, not his own mediation thereof.

As also evident in Num 11:29, Moses eschews jealousy, and he is unwilling to allow others to be jealous on his behalf. This stands in stark contrast to models of leadership with which many of us are only too familiar. How often do we encounter leaders – ourselves, perhaps? – who seem incapable of disentangling the mission to which they have dedicated themselves from their constant need for ego affirmation? The cause they serve, and the needs they have for attention, status, and praise, become sadly indistinguishable. The work these leaders do is important, but so, they strive to remind us in both explicit and implied ways, are they.

In this extraordinary scene, Moses represents the antithesis of this sentiment too often confronted in leaders across every realm of life, without question including spiritual leaders. The lesson Moses embodies is as simple to express as it can be difficult to actualize: Ultimately, his work is not about him or the service of his own ego. While Moses is assuredly capable of self-pity (see Num 11:11-15), it is equally clear in this chapter and elsewhere that his leadership is in service of God rather than his own high status.

R. Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-88) writes that "Moses's answer to Joshua remains for all teachers and leaders as a brilliant example they should keep before their eyes as the highest aim of their work – namely, to render themselves superfluous, that the people of all classes and ranks whom they touch reach such a spiritual level that they no longer require teachers and leaders" (*commentary to Num. 11:29*). Is this not an ideal worthy of pursuit: teachers and leaders who see the possibility of their own superfluosity not as an assault on their stature or significance but as a mark of people's spiritual achievement.

Moses's dream, as expressed in Numbers 11, is later transformed by the prophet Joel into a promise. "After that," Joel prophesies, "I will pour out My spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams, and your youth shall see visions. I will even pour out My spirit upon male and female slaves in those days" (*Joel 3:1-2*). Joel's startling promise "takes up the wishful longing of Moses... and stamps it as a definite part of [God's] program for the future." In the redeemed future, Israel will be utterly suffused with God's overflowing spirit.

Returning to the narrative... (see above *Talmudic account from R. Simeon concerning Eldad and Meidad*) - Based upon R. Shimon's interpretation, Eldad and Meidad are decidedly not out for their own glory, and God rewards them for their genuine modesty and self-effacement. But R. Shimon continues, further explaining the content of their prophecy: "They said, 'Moses shall die and Joshua shall bring Israel into the land'" (*ibid*). R. Shimon's description of the scene yields a remarkable triangle of selflessness. Eldad and Meidad do not pursue greatness or glory; on the contrary, they humbly renounce the status associated with being an elder, and the grandeur of having that status confirmed by being bestowed with God's spirit. Now consider Joshua, who wants to protect Moses's unique stature as Israel's leader and preeminent prophet. Implicit in R. Shimon's interpretation is that Joshua seeks to silence the very prophets who announce his own future greatness. Joshua, it subtly emerges, cares more deeply for Moses's honor than for his own. There is

no duplicity or undermining plot here, and certainly no attempt to foment rumors of Joshua's own impending ascent to leadership. On the contrary Joshua wants Moses to restrain those who promise *him* a glorious future. And then, of course, there is Moses, who will not try to imprison the spirit to maintain his own stature, and who reprimands Joshua, reminding him to avoid being jealous on his behalf. Imagine this scene and compare it with what we all too often confront: Four leaders, all of whom care far more deeply about the goal of serving God than they do about the seductions of power, glory, or ego affirmation.

Authentic leaders know deep down that their work is ultimately not about them - even if they sometimes fail to live up to this fundamental insight. Leaders who needily pursue personal glory and institutions that focus on their own self-perpetuation - sometimes even at the expense of the very values they purport to uphold - are sadly prevalent in our world. In contrast to this unfortunate stands Moses, the paradigmatic leader who internalizes and embodies the simple but profound truth: *It's not about you.*

Derashot HaRan 8:26 (*R. Nissim of Gerona, 14th c*)

According to the view of R. Shimon, Joshua erred regarding [Eldad's and Meidad's] intent. Asserting that they, in their humility, drew back, leading to the Blessed One's conferring prophesy upon them. However, Joshua [actually] thought they remained in the camp because they did not wish their spirit to be a derivation of Moses's spirit and desired to be heads in themselves. Because of this, [Joshua] said, "My lord, Moses, imprison them!" They deserve to be put into prison so that the leadership of Israel not suffer because of them...

Held (*ibid*)

Later in the Book of Numbers, Moses again conveys his rare capacity for self-transcendence. Informed of his impending death, Moses pleads with God to appoint a leader "who shall go out before [the people] and come in before them, and who shall take them out and bring them in, so that God's community will not be like sheep who have no shepherd." God commands Moses to take Joshua and "lay [his] hand upon him," investing him with some of Moses's own authority and grandeur, so that all Israel will follow him (*Num. 27:16-21*).

While many might have wanted to assert their irreplaceability in such a moment, Moses – despite whatever complex feelings he may have had - transfers his authority to Joshua willingly and openheartedly. "[Moses] laid his hands upon [Joshua] and commissioned him as God had spoken through Moses" (*Num. 27:22-23*).