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**Parshat HaShavua sheet**

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Parshat Beha'alotcha

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*Latest time for Kriyat Shema - 9:10*

**SWEET MEMORIES**

*By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky*

Sweet memories do not fade fast. And neither do pungent ones. That is why the Jewish nation complained bitterly about their miraculous fare, the manna. The manna was a miraculous treat sent daily from heaven to sustain a nation of more than two million people in a barren desert. It was shaped like coriander seed, shone like crystal, and had a miraculous property. It would assume the flavor of any cuisine that its consumer would think about! If a person wanted steak, it tasted like steak. If ice cream was on the menu of the mind, then ice cream it was. My teachers, though I can't imagine they had Midrashic sources, claimed that it could even taste like Cookie Dough Ice Cream! There was a small catch, however. Though the manna had the miraculous ability to transform into a palette of delicacies, merely on the whim of its consumer, it was not able to transform into every imaginable taste. It could not assume the taste of onions, garlic, and a variety of gourds. The divine ability was of course there, but Hashem's compassion overrode His culinary metamorphosis process. Onions and garlic are not the best foods for nursing mothers. And if a pregnant or nursing mother would think of the pungent flavors of those foods, it would, perhaps, maltreat the child.

And thus the men complained, "we remember the fish that we ate in Egypt – and the gourds and onions and garlic! But now there is nothing, we look forward to nothing but the manna!" (Numbers: 11:5-6).

Though the complaint seems slightly ludicrous, for many years I wondered: Supernatural Divinity was able to transform the dough-like fare into the most sumptuous of meals – all according to the whim and fancy of the individual taster. Why, then, didn't Divinity let the manna discern? Let a garlic taste manifest itself only for the men and women who it would not affect, and not for the women who were with child, whose babies would be harmed by the pungent effluvium?

*Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski in Not Just Stories tells the legend of Rabbi Moshe of Kobrin, whose disciple, Reb Yitzchak, was in dire straits. Impoverished, he had hardly any food to feed his children, and in addition he had two daughters to wed. Reb Yitzchak's wife pleaded with him to ask the Rebbe of Kobrin for a blessing, but alas, each time Reb Yitzchak crossed the saintly Rebbe's threshold, he forgot about his own necessities. Finally, Reb Yitzchak mustered the courage to ask for a blessing of wealth. Rabbi Moshe promised him the blessing of great wealth, but he made one provision. He gave Reb Yitzchak two gold coins and ordered him to buy the finest food and drink. "However," added the Rebbe, "your wife and children may not partake in any of this food. Not a morsel. Not under any circumstance. After you use the money," concluded the Rebbe, "return back here." The next days were torture. As his starving wife and children looked on, Reb Yitzchak only nibbled on the food he had bought. He was sick to his stomach. The fine delicacies had no flavor. He could not bear to see the pain of his starving family while he enjoyed the finest food. The pain added a gall-like flavor to the normally delicious food. Reb Yitzchak pleaded with the Almighty to take his soul so that he would not bear the pain. Reb Yitzchak quickly returned to the Rebbe. "Yitzchak," said the Rebbe. "I could have blessed you immediately, but are you ready to enjoy the abundance of wealth, while knowing that other Jews do not have? Your recent experience is a lesson for those who have, while others are deprived. Now, Yitzchak, are you ready for wealth?" Reb Yitzchak exclaimed, "Never!" and returned home. Eventually, the blessing rested upon Reb Yitzchak and his wife, but they never forgot the plight of others.*

Manna fell with inherent qualities; and it had the potential to explode with a bounty of delicious flavors. But it would not be fair to limit its pleasures only to a portion of the people. If expectant and nursing women could not partake in certain foods, their spouses and the entire nation had to share the restrictions too.

And though there may be no great pain in abstaining from onion and garlic for a while, it is important to find commonality even in life's little inconveniences. Because true sharing is feeling the pain of even the minutest discomforts. It is a lesson that Klal Yisrael had to learn as they trekked together in the desert, striving to become one large unit. They learned to unite by joining together while missing out on some of the spices of life. Because the nation that blands together – bands together!

## **The Pursuit for More**

*By Rabbi Berel Wein*

Without warning disaster strikes the people of Israel on their journey to the Land of Israel. Moshe boldly proclaimed that “we are traveling now on the way to the land of our destination.” The tribes have been numbered and counted, assigned flags and positions of march and they are accompanied on their journey by the Tabernacle of God placed in their midst. Everything is seemingly poised for their successful entry into the Land of Israel.

But one of the traits of human nature is the penchant for dismissing the good that we enjoy and the blessings that we have. Instead we long for and complain loudly about what we believe we don’t have. The search for perfection in human life is equivalent to drinking saltwater in an attempt to slake one’s thirst.

So we read in the parsha how the father-in-law of Moshe abandons the Jewish people in the desert to return home to Midian where, according to Rashi, he is convinced that he will be able to convert a pagan society into believing in one God. His absence is harmful to the Jewish people encamped in the desert and as is apparent from the later narratives in the Bible, his conversion attempts were in the main unsuccessful.

Though blessed with daily food – manna from heaven – the Jewish people complain about their diet – they express their ingratitude and demand meat and other foods. They were tired of having to eat directly from God’s hand, so to speak. All of their grouching and complaining only serves to bring plague, depression and disaster on them.

The prophet Jeremiah, in essence, states that human complaints are not really justified in the eyes of Heaven, so to speak. The Talmud puts it pithily: “Is it not sufficient for you that you are alive and functioning?” But we often take life for granted and are under appreciative of this most basic and generous of all gifts.

It is within the nature of humans to pursue wealth at the expense of health, power and notoriety at the expense of family and harmony, and temporal pleasures at the expense of eternal values and reward. The story of the desert illustrates for us how a section of the Jewish people valued a meat meal over entry into the Land of Israel. There will always be a refrain repeated in the desert, that it is better for us to return to Egypt than to meet the challenges that will be placed before us in establishing a Jewish national state in the Land of Israel.

This type of attitude is unfortunately not lacking in the current Jewish world. And no matter how wealthy and successful the Jewish state is now and will be in the future, there will always be a longing for more, better and different. And this longing breeds the insidious feeling of dissatisfaction with what blessings one already possesses. The parsha comes to teach us this basic lesson of human nature, of how we must be aware of it in order to overcome and truly reach our proper goals in life.

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## **Judaism Isn't a Zero Sum Game**

*By Sheldon Stern*

The Mishna in Avos (5:26) quotes Ben Heh Heh, "Lifum Tzara Agra." The reward for a Mitzvoh is commensurate with the efforts and travails entailed in performing it. My former Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Dr. Zelig Friedman cited Rav Yisroel Salanter who offered a critical addendum. Let's say there was a particular Mitzvoh than one had difficulty with, but ultimately it became second nature for him, he continues receiving the same reward as when it was a struggle. The question is, "How did the founder of the Modern Mussar Movement derive this? I think we can find support for his thesis in our Parsha.

In verse 10:29 Yisro rebuffs Moshe's entreaties and declares his intent to return to his homeland. In the Posuk, our leader's father-in-law is called Chovav as testament to his love for Yiddishkeit. But then we're told that he was a Midianite. This is problematic. There's a principle that we don't recall a Baal Tshuvah's or Ger's inglorious past. This said, why would the Torah mention Yisro's birthplace which reminds us of his earlier incarnation as an idolater? So we apply Rabbi Salanter's dictum. The Torah highlights that Yisro was from Midian to teach us that even after he became a true Eved Hashem, he was still viewed above as that heathen from Midian in order to exponentially increase his reward.

But this leads us to ask why we shouldn't bring up one's untoward origins. I'll explain this question with a story. I started practicing in 1986. My religious transformation began in 1988 and was "completed" by the end of 1989. I had a patient who was a Rabbi at MTJ (he's the person who brought the Potoker to my office.) At the time, my mother helped out at the office and one day she said to this Rabbi, "What do you think of my son, can you believe he's learning in Yeshiva?" The Rabbi responded that he was shocked. (I was very happy that my mother supported my efforts.) While I'm not the classic BT, since I attended Yeshiva in my formative years, my changes were quite dramatic, and I'm proud of what I've accomplished.

So why does the Halacha imply that being a Ger or Baal Tshuvah is some sort of Scarlet Letter that shouldn't be discussed in proper circles? As I did above, I've acknowledged Rabbi Dr. Friedman as a positive influence on numerous occasions. But there was another Rabbi Friedman, Moshe ZTL, who deserves honorable mention. He was also a Lower East Side expatriate, but we met for the first time in Brighton. He was an outstanding Talmid Chacham and, to be sure, exceedingly humble. One day his wife shared with me that he had been chosen, after graduating CUNY with a degree in physics, to participate in the Manhattan Project. Not too shabby. He asked his Rov, Rav Yitzchok Hutner for advice, and was told to pass on the offer and go into Chinuch. and so he became a leading figure in the then fledgling Torah U"Mesorah project. But what set Rabbi Friedman apart was his wry sense of humor. My favorite? "A rare book is one that's lent and returned." One day, on the way home from shul he shared the following with me, "A religious fanatic is someone who does one more Mitzvah than you do, while a goy is someone who does one Mitzvah less than you do."

What did Rabbi Friedman mean? Shlomo Hamelech said (Mishlei 12:15) "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes." You walk into shul at 9:10 on a Shabbos morning. Great, they didn't say Kaddish yet. But then someone walks in a minute later and what runs through your mind? "He can't show up on time on a Shabbos?" Of course, you won't say anything but that's what you're thinking. I'll prove it. The Gemara Berachos 34B says, "In the place that a Baal Tshuvah stands the truly righteous can't stand." One would think that this is a pretty straightforward paean in praise of BT's. Not so fast. I don't remember where and when this happened but I overheard two Yeshivish guys having a conversation. "You know the Gemara that says a regular frum Jew can't stand in the place where a BT stands, You know why? Because he can't stand the stench of a BT." And then the two had a good laugh. But clearly this wasn't the Pshat in the Gemara so why did they twist it to malign BT's? One reason is that many mistakenly believe that Judaism is a "Zero sum game." If G-d cherishes BT's then this detracts from the credit afforded FFB's. But nothing can be further from the truth. In 1798 Robert Malthus promulgated his theory on population control. He believed that there was a critical mass of people that the world could support and once it was reached you know the rest. His ideas are no longer discussed. Those who choose not to say that his ideas were debunked, say instead, that no one could've foreseen the advances in technology that allow for this exponential increase in organisms throughout the world. But we don't need science. When Hashem created the world He saw that it was good and so there's no limit to what earth can sustain. But a second explanation as to why we don't look favorably on others comes courtesy of Paul Simon's classic. "The Boxer" "All lies and jest, still a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest." So this was Rabbi Friedman's intent. People view others with a jaundiced eye because, as the expression goes, "Every knock is a boost." Therefore, if a person's previous indiscretions were cited, invariably it would be done pejoratively and so the Halacha insists that we avoid the subject.

A popular convention of the Gemara is to make a point in passing and then return to it in greater detail when the original subject is completed. To that point let's see whether Rabbi Friedman's assessment is accurate. As we discussed, Rabbi Friedman said that that Jews generally view other Jews negatively. That seems a bit harsh. We know that when Hashem went around with the Torah it was only our ancestors who accepted it. Isn't that a feather in their(and our) cap? So let's take a deeper dive into that incident. There's a Yiddish expression, "G-d made goyim because someone has to pay retail." I can see the smiles on your face because you know it's true. A guy has a clothing store and most of his clientele is Jewish. He routinely jacks up the price because he knows he'll have to go into "hondel" mode. When a goy walks in he just pays what he's asked assuming that's the actual cost. Because of this naiveté the goyim rejected the Torah. It was logical for them to ask what the Torah demands and when they were told they passed because they knew that certain aspects didn't jibe with their basic nature. What's interesting is that the Jew just said "Naaseh Vnishma." If, as we've just said a Jew likes to negotiate seemingly the correspondence should've gone something like this. Moshe Rabbeinu: I just met with Hashem and He's prepared a Torah with 613 beautiful Mitzvoths. The Jews: Tell Hashem we're ready to accept an even number. We can do 300. Why didn't that happen? Our indomitable leader knew the one thing that Jews can't resist "ah bahgin" or as the "Who" sang, "I call that a bargain, the best I ever had."

Moshe was the ultimate salesman. He convinced the people that the Torah was the greatest gift ever bestowed on man and so they took it sight unseen and without asking any questions. However, once they had it, the Jews' propensity for craftiness showed up. And that's why those two guys could mock a clear statement in the Gemara. And we see this all the time. One Shabbos, I heard two frum fellows discussing business during the Kiddush. I knew that one of them wouldn't accept Mussar but I told the other that this is Chillul Shabbos. He gave me a dirty look and then made up some nonsensical argument to justify his action. Chazal teach that it's better to serve Hashem with love than with fear. When we follow the Mitzvoths out of fear, it means that we don't really want to keep them but we feel that we have no other choice i.e. we're afraid of being punished. On the other hand, if we serve Hashem out of love, it's because we trust that the Mitzvoths were given in our best interest and so we'll desire to do them. The Gemara says, "Rachmana Liba Boi." The Gemara says that the Jews were coerced to accept the Torah at Sinai. And we know that when they repeated their commitment in the Purim story, they were again under duress. We must demonstrate to Hashem that keeping the Mitzvoths is a privilege. To borrow from Cheap Trick, Hashem "Wants you to want Him."

**“Speak to Aharon, and tell him: When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the lampstand” (8:2)**

The Midrash Tanchuma asks: Why does the section about the menorah follow the section about the offerings brought by the nesi'im? When Aharon saw all the other tribal leaders bringing offerings, he felt dejected because he had not been able to participate in the dedication alongside them. Hashem told Aharon: Yours is greater than theirs! You will light and prepare the candles every morning and evening. Hashem's response to Aharon teaches us that when we see a person feeling down, we should see what we can do to raise his spirits. When we are attentive to those who are feeling down, then we are emulating Hashem and becoming more like Him. Ramban cites another version of this Midrash which records a slightly different response from Hashem containing beautiful words of comfort so that Aharon should feel good about himself and not sad. In this Midrash, Hashem told Aharon: You are designated for something greater than this. The offerings apply as long as the Beis HaMikdash stands, but the lights of the menorah will always be in effect. (This is a reference to the miracle of Chanukah and the permanent annual commemoration through the lighting of the menorah.) All the blessings that I gave you with which to bless My children will also never stop.

**“Those men said to him: We are unclean because of the dead body of a man. Why are we kept back, that we may not offer the offering of Hashem in its appointed season among the Children of Israel?” (9:7)**

The people who came to Moshe to complain about their inability to bring the Korban Pesach said: “Why should we be diminished that we may not bring the offering of Hashem?” They did not merely say that they were losing out on an opportunity. They felt as if they were being diminished by not participating in this mitzvah. If we fail to take advantage of a mitzvah, we should feel that we are personally affected and reduced as a result of missing out. This is because a person is always either growing or falling – there is no such thing as standing still. The absence of a mitzvah is not just neutral. It is a loss that we should feel as strongly as the men in our parsha. Hashem heard the complaint and gave the men another chance to bring the Korban Pesach, a mitzvah that we now know as Pesach Sheni. This teaches us that we should try to give another opportunity to those who did not succeed on their first attempt. This is another way in which we can emulate Hashem.

**“They set forward from the mountain of Hashem three days' journey. The ark of the covenant of Hashem went before them three days' journey to seek out a resting place for them” (10:33)**

What is the connection between the Aron traveling at the head of the nation and Moshe's subsequent prayer for Hashem to destroy the nation's enemies? When the Torah is our guide for how to lead our lives, then Hashem will defeat our enemies for us. Rashi comments that the Aron which led the way was not the main Aron that was in the Mishkan, but a second Aron that was meant to lead the nation into battle. This Aron contained the broken pieces of the first luchos that Moshe had shattered. Why was this Aron at the forefront of the nation as they traveled? The broken luchos served as a reminder of the consequences of sin and the importance of remaining faithful to Hashem. The presence of this Aron in battle conveyed this lesson at the critical moments leading into battle so that the people would merit success.

**“Moshe went out and told the people what Hashem had said, and he assembled seventy men of the elders of the people, and stood them around the Tent” (11:24)**

Tzror HaMor writes that this story shows us how great Moshe Rabbeinu was. Typically, people do not want to share their leadership roles with others and are jealous when someone they view as an equal rises above them. Moshe understood that his job as leader of Klal Yisrael was not about himself. It was about helping the people serve Hashem. He requested that others be elevated to share his leadership role because he felt that this was the best thing for the nation. He did not think about himself at all and did not mind sharing his power with others for the greater good. It is important for community leaders to learn this lesson from Moshe Rabbeinu. In order to achieve great things on behalf of the community, people must be honest with themselves and put aside their personal agendas in order to allow others to contribute.

*By Rabbi Mayer Friedman*

## **A Tale Of Two Lessons In Hakaras HaTov**

*By Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

The parsha contains the pasuk: “The people complained, speaking evil in the ears of Hashem, and Hashem heard and His wrath flared, and a fire of Hashem burned against them, and it consumed at the edge of the camp.” [Bamidbar 11:1].

This Parsha contains the beginning of the unfortunate decline of the Jewish people during their sojourn in the Wilderness. Rashi describes the “disconnect” between the people and the Almighty. They complained: “How much we have struggled on this journey! It has been three days that we have not rested from the suffering of the way!” G-d was angry at them: “I had intended it for your benefit, so that you would enter the Land immediately.”

The Ramban takes note of a peculiar expression in the pasuk describing the complaints: “And the nation was ‘k-misonenim’ [they were LIKE complainers]”. Strangely, the Torah does not state that the people complained. It states that they were “like complainers”. What does that mean? The Ramban explains that the people spoke out of hurt and pain. In other words, there was a certain degree of legitimacy to their whining. When people are in pain, it is natural for them to complain. If someone is in the hospital, he is laid up, he is in pain, and he sometimes utters things that he really should not be saying: “Why is G-d doing this to me? I do not deserve the suffering I am experiencing!” People get upset and when they are in pain, they complain. This is somewhat of a mitigating factor. They are only “LIKE” complainers. We cannot really throw the book at them. They were doing what comes naturally for those who are in pain.

If that’s the case, asks the Ramban, why does Hashem get upset with them? The Ramban answers that they should have followed Him with a good spirit and attitude based on all the multitude of goodness and kindness He provided to them. When things are going so well and one has so much good fortune, it is simply inappropriate to complain! This is one of the great challenges of life. Most of us are extremely fortunate. We merit the uncontested bounty of the Almighty. Most of us have good health and families. We have so much good! But when things are not 100% right, we complain. The Ramban is saying that this is not right. We should be looking at the “big picture” before we start complaining. The big picture is that there is a bounty of blessing we are enjoying despite the bumps in the road or the pot holes in the road or the ditch in the road that we occasionally get stuck in. We still should not complain because the sum total of our life is still overwhelmingly tilted towards the side of joy, gladness, and abundance of that which is good. This is another example of a theme that is repeated so often in the Torah – the theme of “Hakaras haTov” [recognizing favors; showing gratitude].

The Apter Rav used to say that in every single parsha in the Torah, there is a hint (Remez) to the importance of Ahavas Yisrael [the mitzvah to love a fellow Jew]. The Apter Rav was once asked to point out the ‘Remez’ for Ahavas Yisrael in Parshas Balak. He quipped “That’s simple. The name of the parsha – Balak – is an acronym for the words V’Ahavta L’Reacha Kamocha [You should love your neighbor as yourself]”. The Chassidim questioned their master. “Rebbe, V’Ahavta begins with a Vov, while Balak begins with a Bais. Furthermore, Kamocha begins with a Kaf not a Kuf, which is the last letter of Balak!” The Apter Rav answered, “If you are so particular about the individual letters, you will never find Ahavas Yisrael!” I use this story by way of introduction to note that in almost every parsha in the Torah, we may find some type of hint to the concept of Hakaras HaTov. We just mentioned one such ‘remez’. However, there is a very novel interpretation given by the Moshav Zekeinim to an incident at the end of the parsha, which also highlights this concept of appreciating favors. “Miriam and Aaron spoke (ill) about Moshe regarding the Cushite woman he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman.” [Bamidbar 12:1] The Torah does not tell us explicitly what their problem was with this Cushite woman.

Rashi and most of the commentaries say that their problem was the fact that their brother Moshe neglected his wife. Because of his unique status of always being “on call” to speak to the Almighty, he could not live a normal life of husband and wife and had to physically separate from his wife, thereby neglecting her. Miriam and Aaron complained about Moshe, “Was it only with Moshe that Hashem spoke? Did He not speak with us as well?”

This is the classic, standard, interpretation of their complaint. The Moshav Zekeinim has a different interpretation. The Moshav Zekeinim says that their complaint was, on the contrary, that Moshe Rabbeinu should divorce this woman. Maybe, they reasoned, it was okay for Moshe to have married such a woman when he was a simple shepherd. However, now that he was the leader of the Jewish people, he was due for an “upgrade”. He deserved a wife more fitting of his station in life.

According to this approach, Moshe’s response to his sibling was that to divorce this wife now would be a violation of the principle of “Hakaras HaTov”. “This woman married me when I was a poor shepherd. I was a fugitive of justice, running away from the sword of Pharaoh and this woman married me and stuck with me. For me to dump her now that I have found a bit of success in my life would be a gross violation of the attribute of having appropriate gratitude (Hakaras haTov). Where is the loyalty toward the woman and the wife who was with me all these years?”

This interpretation, claims the Moshav Zekeinim, fits in well with the rebuke of the Almighty to the words of Miriam and Aaron: “B’chol Beisi Ne’eman Hu” [In all My House he is the most loyal one]. The trustworthiness of Moshe, his loyalty and faithfulness, extended not only to Hashem, it extended to his wife as well! He does not abandon the people around him.

## **Please Don't Interrupt Me**

*by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen*

Bamidbar, 12:6: "Please listen to My words..."

Rashi, 12:6: Dh: Shimu na: "The language of please, is always in a language of request.

Siftei Chachamim, 12:6, Os 80: "This means to say that even though God was angry with them...nonetheless the language of please is always in a language of request and he spoke with them gently, because had his words been in anger, they would not have been heard, and this is to teach a *kal v'chomer* argument (all the more so) to humans that they should speak gently."

The Torah portion ends with the episode of Miriam and Aaron questioning Moshe's actions with regard to his wife. After their discussion, God appears and rebukes them. He begins with an unusual wording: "Please listen to my words". Rashi, as explained by the Siftei Chachamim, notes the language of '*na*' – please – to show that even though God was very angry with Miriam and Aaron, nonetheless He spoke to them in a soft manner to teach how a person should rebuke his fellow.

The Bartenura in Pirkei Avot derives a different lesson from God's words: He writes that they are the source of a teaching in Pirkei Avot: The Mishna relates that there are seven characteristics of a wise person. One of them is, "*v'eino nichnas letoch divrei chaveiro*." This literally means that he does not enter into the words of his fellow. It means that when someone is speaking to the wise person, he does not interrupt the person in the middle, rather he waits for him to finish speaking. The Bartenura writes that we learn this from God saying to Miriam and Aaron, "Please listen to My word's", indicating that they should let God complete what He was saying and they should not interrupt Him in between. We learn from here that a person should likewise not interrupt his fellow until he has finished speaking.

The question is why is this so important? The Bartenura offers one explanation. If a person is speaking and gets interrupted, it will confuse and distract him and he will lose track of what he is saying. According to this interpretation, it is a *kal v'chomer* argument (all the more so) from God. God obviously never gets confused, and yet He asked Miriam and Aaron to let Him finish. This is to teach a lesson for the generations to not interrupt someone speaking so as not to confuse him.

The commentaries bring other explanations of the Mishna which can also be derived from God's words to Miriam and Aaron. Rabbeinu Yonah focuses on the fact that it is a good trait to refrain from interrupting one's fellow. According to this, God was conveying this point when he instructed Miriam and Aaron to listen to all His words before replying because that is *derech eretz* (correct behavior).

Another interpretation of the Mishna is that by not interrupting a person who is speaking, one will be able to properly understand what his fellow is saying. However, if one interrupts his fellow before he has finished, then he will not be able to comprehend his fellow's point. This interpretation focuses on the fact that one can only become wise if he properly listens to what other people say and a significant aspect of that is letting his fellow finish. Furthermore, sometimes a person may let his fellow finish his point, but will be thinking about his own response rather than giving full attention to what his fellow means. According to this explanation, God was teaching that Miriam and Aaron should give their full attention to what He was saying and not think about their response.

These various explanations all point to the fact that it is both a good trait and a key to wisdom to let one's fellow finish. There is often a particular tendency to want to argue with whatever one's fellow says. In consequence the 'listener' can never really understand and absorb what his fellow is telling him. This can even be the case when listening to one's teacher. In contrast, the ability to wholeheartedly listen and comprehend what others are saying is one of the keys to greatness. The Alter of Novardok expressed this point when extolling the greatness of Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzensky. "His wisdom and genius are so great and of so much depth and breadth, because when he was young, he was always to be found in the presence of the Gedolei Hador (Torah leaders). He never said to them, 'accept my opinion', rather he made himself into a 'vessel' which would listen and absorb all the opinions and explanations of all the Gedolim there. He absorbed into his very being all the wisdom that he heard and his daat (mind) became purified and elevated by the greatness of many generations that became embedded in his mind.<sup>1</sup>" When people discuss the greatness of Rabbi Grodzensky, they often focus on his incredible natural genius and ability to think of many things at the same time. We see from the words of the Alter that the key to his greatness was his willingness to take in everything that he heard.

May we merit to heed God's lesson and emulate Rabbi Grodnezsky and thereby attain wisdom.