

Torah Portion: Beha'alotecha

(Book of Numbers)

Rabbi Bradley Artson observed, “The human brain presents us with both a marvel and a mystery. Capable of mastering a remarkable range of complex tasks, of remembering obscure experiences or facts, that same organ will also forget an important appointment, an acquaintance’s name, or the contents of this morning’s breakfast.”

Does the above statement hit close to home? Effective learning often requires repetition. In the Torah portion *Be-ha'alotekha* from the Book of Numbers, “*Moses instructed the Israelites to offer the Passover sacrifice.*” (Num. 9:4). The ancient rabbis questioned the need for Moses to make this declaration. Hadn’t he already declared in the Book of Leviticus the obligation to celebrate Passover each year? The *Sifrei*, a book of Jewish *midrash* (legends) suggests, “. . . He heard the passage of the festival seasons at Mt. Sinai and stated it to Israel, and then went and repeated it to them when the time had actually arrived to keep the rules.” Artson comments, “Why does Moses repeat the same injunction twice? Because he knows just how forgetful people can be.”

We are now amidst the season of graduations. The etymology of “graduate” is Latin, meaning to “take a degree.” It is more commonly defined as the completion of a certain program of learning. In fact, the word “graduation” is a misnomer. The only moment of true completion in life is death! Until the final breath we should be moving forward, continuing and advancing in learning and deed. The lesson taught by Moses is learning didn’t stop for the Israelites at Mt. Sinai but continued from that moment on.

The greatest threat to this nation is not from outside our borders, but the attack on education and educators from within. The arts, sciences, and humanities are the bedrock of this proud country. In the hands of capable teaching professionals, the United States has boasted the finest university and public education system in the world. No more! Universities have become a political football, public education has been scorned by the very government who created it, and the most important element in learning-the teacher-exists near or below the poverty level. If making America great again is to be more than just a campaign slogan, then we, the people, need to proactively recognize the “darkness at the door”: ignorance!

Moses, like the founding fathers of this country, understood that the survival of the Israelite nation was dependent on an educated populace. The Jewish tradition refers to Moses as *Moshe Rabeinu*/Moses, our Teacher. It took him 40 years to educate, and graduate, a generation of Israelites equipped to meet the challenges of peoplehood and, in turn, pass on the learning to future generations.

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