

PARASHAT BEHA'ALOTECHA

Numbers 8:1–12:16

Parashat Beha'alotecha contains instructions for installing the *menorah* in the sanctuary and for consecrating the priests and Levites. It also describes the procedure to be followed by any Israelite who misses bringing the Pesach sacrifice, and it includes a description of the Israelites' journey through the desert. When the people complain about their diet of manna, Moses asks God, "Why have You laid the burden of all this people upon me?" He is counseled to appoint seventy experienced elders and officers to share leadership and the spirit of prophecy with him. Among the appointed are Eldad and Medad, who are filled with enthusiasm. Despite Joshua's complaint about them, Moses defends their right to act as prophets. Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses for his marriage to a Cushite woman. Miriam is punished with leprosy. Both Aaron and Moses plead on her behalf. After being excluded from the camp for seven days, she is cured.

OUR TARGUM

• 1 •

The commandment to install the seven-branched *menorah*, or "candelabrum," is repeated here. (See Exodus 25:37; 27:21.)

• 2 •

Moses calls the Levites to the sanctuary and consecrates them to help the priests with the sacrifices. They are selected from the Israelite community and take the place of the firstborn

who would otherwise be designated for the sanctuary work. The career of the Levites extends from the age of twenty-five to fifty, when they retire.

• 3 •

Moses tells the people what to do if they are defiled by touching a corpse, or if they are on a long journey at the time specified for the Pesach festival (the fourteenth day of Nisan at twilight). Since, in both situations, they are unable to offer the Pesach sacrifice, provision is made for them

to bring the sacrifice to the sanctuary a month later. At that time they are to eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, observing the event as if it were Pesach. Furthermore, Moses informs the people that strangers residing among the Israelites shall observe all the rituals and laws of Pesach without discrimination.

• 4 •

A cloud covers the sanctuary during the day, and a cloud of fire covers it at night. When the cloud lifts, the Israelites break camp and journey onward through the desert. God instructs Moses to create silver trumpets to be blown by Aaron's sons, the priests, on four occasions: (1) to signal

the beginning of a journey; (2) to gather the people; (3) to call them to battle; and (4) to announce the celebration of a sacrifice, a festival, or a joyous occasion.

• 5 •

On the twentieth day of the second month in the second year after the Exodus from Egypt, Moses and the people begin their journey through the desert toward the Land of Israel. The tribes carry their individual banners as they march in order. Moses invites Hobab, son of his father-in-law, Jethro, to join the journey, but Hobab declines. With the ark in front of them, the people set out, and Moses declares: "Advance, O



Adonai! "May Your enemies be scattered, / And may Your foes flee before You!"

·6·

Traveling through the desert, the people complain to Moses about the lack of meat, and they complain about their mundane diet of manna. God warns them to stop their ungrateful griping, but they persist in protesting. Overwhelmed by their criticism, Moses asks God: "Why have You dealt ill with Your servant? Why have I not enjoyed Your favor? Why have You laid the burden of all this people upon me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I bear them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries an infant,' to the land that You have promised on oath to their fathers? . . . I cannot carry all this people by myself, for it is too much for me. . . ."

God instructs Moses, as Jethro had counseled him earlier (see Exodus 18:13–27), to appoint elders and officers with whom to share leadership. God provides food enough for the people

and places the spirit of prophecy upon the seventy appointed leaders. Two of these, Eldad and Medad, continue to speak in the spirit of prophecy, seeming to challenge the authority of Moses and Aaron. Joshua, Moses' trusted attendant, reports the matter to Moses, who refuses to restrain them. He tells Joshua, "Would that all *Adonai's* people were prophets!"

·7·

Later Miriam and Aaron speak out publicly against Moses because of his marriage to a Cushite woman. They question their brother's integrity, saying, "Has God spoken only through Moses? Has not God spoken through us as well?"

God summons Miriam and Aaron and explains that, while *Adonai* speaks to other prophets through visions, *Adonai* speaks to Moses plainly, directly, and without riddles. For criticizing her brother, Miriam is punished with leprosy. When Moses and Aaron intervene on her behalf, God orders her excluded from the camp for seven days.

THEMES

Parashat Be-ha'alotecha contains two important themes:

1. Understanding and responding to complaints.
2. Understanding the motives of others before criticizing them.

PEREK ALEF: *Responding to Murmuring and Complaints*

Just after the people of Israel are liberated from Egyptian slavery, they approach Moses with complaints about conditions in the wilderness. (See Harvey J. Fields, *A Torah Commentary for Our Times*, Volume II, *Parashat Beshalach*, "Perek Bet," UAHC Press, New York, 1991, pp. 36–39.) Moses responds by requesting God to provide them with water and food. They are given manna each day with a double portion on Fridays so that they will not have to work at collecting it on the Sabbath. Fresh water is also supplied in abundance.

Now, two years later, after receiving the com-

mandments at Mount Sinai and building their sanctuary, the Israelites once again raise their voices with bitter complaints. They protest about their living conditions in the desert. As a result of their behavior, God punishes them with fire throughout the camp. Seeing this, Moses intervenes, and the fire ceases.

The complaints, however, are just beginning. Joining with the non-Israelites who have accompanied them out of Egypt, the people wax nostalgic, deceiving themselves about the conditions under which they had lived in Egypt. "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the free fish we used to eat in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. Now our stomachs are shriveled. There is noth-

ing at all! Nothing but this manna to look to.” (Numbers 11:4–6)

Interpreters of Torah ask two questions about the grievances and grumblings of the people: What caused them? What might have been an appropriate response by Moses?



Rashi

Rashi offers an excuse for the people. He suggests that they are exhausted from their first three-day journey. Upset, even angry, that Moses is pushing them along and not allowing them time to rest, they raise their voices in protest. Cranky and tired, they whine like children, recalling easier times when all their needs for food and comfort had been provided by others. (Commentary on Numbers 11:1)



Ramban (Nachmanides)

Nachmanides agrees with Rashi. He explains that the people have justifiable reasons for their complaints. Moses has taken them from the familiar surroundings of Mount Sinai, where they had camped for two years, to a desolate wilderness, where they are uncertain about the future. Frightening questions confront them: Are they safe from enemies? Will there be sufficient food and water? Who will provide it? Their anxiety is painful. It confuses them. All their murmurings, says Nachmanides, grow out of their mental anguish and self-pity. “They react like others under duress and compulsion.” (Commentary on Numbers 11:1)

Nachmanides, however, does not offer his explanation as an excuse or justification for the people’s reaction. Instead, he sees self-centered demands as a lack of faith. He condemns the Israelites for their refusal to trust in God. Rather than giving thanks for all they enjoy, they are ungrateful, even disloyal. Instead of trusting that they are in safe hands with Moses and God, they

gripe about food and offer false and exaggerated comparisons between their lives as slaves in Egypt and their existence as a free people. Fixed on nostalgic and erroneous perceptions of the past, they become mired in bitter criticisms, making them incapable of sharing a vision and strategy for their future. (Commentary on Numbers 11:4–6)



Hirsch

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch offers a different viewpoint. The Israelites, he argues, suffer not from nostalgia but from boredom. All their needs are met. They enjoy a near perfect situation in the wilderness. Each day they are given manna and plenty of fresh water. Nothing is lacking. Nonetheless, comments Hirsch, they “feel themselves buried alive.”

“The people,” he continues, “were as if in mourning over themselves. They look on themselves as already dead.” With all their needs met, their Torah given, their sanctuary complete, their lives “offer them no compensation, remain worthless and without meaning in their eyes.” Frustrated at having no new goal, challenge, or mission, they begin murmuring against Moses and God.

Hirsch imagines them saying to Moses, “It is not nourishment that we lack . . . what we lack are the tasty, stimulating foods that excite the appetite. We miss the change of diet so necessary for health. The complete monotony, the unvarying sameness of our food makes it unbearable.” The Israelites, Hirsch maintains, are desperately seeking a way out of boredom. They want excitement, stimulation, and variation of foods and experiences. Their complaints to Moses evolve from their need for new challenges, visions, and opportunities. (Commentary on Numbers 11:1–11)

They were confused . . .

The children of Israel witnessed the revelation at Sinai and had certainly become uplifted by

that event, but the inspiration soon wore off. After a while, instead of remaining transformed by that experience into a holy people, capable of becoming a light unto the nations, their memories are of Nile smorgasbords, big kiddushim, and fancy bar mitzvahs with open bars and Viennese tables. At Sinai the vision was sharp and vivid, but the desert muted these visions and replaced them with an obsession for the materialistic. The Jews felt bereft and empty, and so they complained, not even certain themselves of what they really wanted. (Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Jerusalem Post, May 27, 1990)



Peli

Pinchas Peli echoes Hirsch's viewpoint but turns it critically upon the Israelites. "Bored with the affluent life, they are seeking ever new thrills and new cravings to titillate and stimulate them. Too demoralized to look towards the future, they turn to the past. . . . Their memory is very selective indeed. They do not remember the torture and humiliation of slavery. They do not remember the joys and excitement of liberation. All they remember is the fish they ate in Egypt."

Peli's point is clear. Like Hirsch he believes that the complaints of the Israelites rise out of their dissatisfaction with the near perfect status quo of the community. What remains unclear is whether Peli and Hirsch mean to suggest that human beings simply cannot tolerate perfection. (See *Jerusalem Post*, June 15, 1985.)

Why did they complain?

The cry of the rebels was for meat and variety, not for food as such, for there was no hunger among the people. . . . Satiety, boredom, lack of challenge, and the inconveniences of nomad existence were seeds of discontent as potent as want and poverty. (W. Gunther Plaut, The Torah: A Modern Commentary, UAHC Press, New York, 1981, p. 1095)

Bad will be the day . . .

Bad will be the day for human beings when they become absolutely content with the life that they are living, with the thoughts that they are thinking, with the deeds that they are doing; when there is not forever beating at the doors of their souls some great desire to do something larger, which they know they were meant and made to do because they are still, in spite of all, the children of God. (Philip Brooks)

In contrast to those who explain the grievances of the Israelites as expressions of their anxiety or boredom, Samuel, who was the head of the academy of learning in Nahardea, Babylonia, during the third century, hints at another reason. He calls attention to the words used by the Israelites in their complaint. What did they mean, he asks, when they cried out, "We remember the free fish we ate in Egypt?"

In response, Samuel speculates that by "free fish" the Torah is hinting at forbidden sexual relations. In other words, the real complaint of the Israelites derives neither from their recollection of delicious foods nor from their boredom with manna. What they resent, according to Samuel, is the Torah's curtailment of various behavioral norms (e.g., the Torah forbids sexual relations out of wedlock, especially with members of the family, including sexual intercourse with parents, siblings, aunts or uncles, grandparents, stepparents, or in-laws). This kind of regulation that would radically change their behavior, explains Samuel, is the reason the people stood at the door of their tents murmuring against Moses and God.

Samuel's students amplify his observation, maintaining that the people resent the manna because it identifies those who have indulged in forbidden sex! How so? The manna, they claim, fell before the tents according to the needs of each family. If a man commits adultery and a child is born, then an extra portion of manna falls in front of *his* tent. At that point everyone knows that he has fathered a child out of wedlock. For this reason, the people rise against Moses. The law and manna change their way of

life, forcing upon them a new moral code. They bitterly resent being held accountable for their ethical actions. (*Yoma* 75a)

Rabbi Meir Simcha Ha-Cohen (1845–1926), author of the commentary *Meshekh Hochmah*, suggests that not only the moral laws of Torah cause the early Israelites to rebel. They also object to other restrictions, especially those that regulate what they may or may not eat. The laws of *kashrut* forbid the eating of pork and certain other meat products and define how animals are to be slaughtered. Ha-Cohen claims that the Israelites protest because they want to eat meat without restrictions as they did in Egypt. “Stop making matters difficult for us,” they gripe to Moses. “Let us eat whatever we desire.”

Rabbi Reuven P. Bulka agrees with Ha-Cohen’s observation, pointing out that “one of the essential ingredients of the Torah’s life-style is that it proposes self-control for fulfillment’s sake. Judaism is a disciplined life-style in which the discipline itself is seen as the necessary ingredient for bringing fulfillment.” Applying this view to our Torah portion, Bulka writes, “It is, perhaps, this element of control that was brought forth in the disciplined supply of food afforded by the manna. Rebellion against this became rebellion against the entire Jewish life-style. The rebels rejected control. Instead, they demanded a life of instant gratification.” (*Torah Therapy: Reflections on the Weekly Sedra and Special Occasions*, Ktav, New York, 1983, pp. 83–84)

Rabbi Jacob Weinstein views the matter differently. He rejects finding fault with the complaining Israelites. Instead, he argues for compassion and an appreciation of their difficult situation. The people are desperate, fearful, and uncertain about their future. What we have here, says Weinstein, is an indication of “how present difficulties cast a retroactive glow of delight over the past and suffuse old woes and mute old indignities.” To put it another way, our perspective of the past is influenced by our experience in the present. The Israelites did what many people in similar circumstances do. They idealized the past because they were so frightened about the uncertainties of the future. (*The Place of Understanding*, p. 103)

Rabbi Morris Adler strongly disagrees with Weinstein. He refuses to excuse the Israelites for their complaints. Instead, he believes that what we have in this Torah report is an example of how “memory can be a dangerous thing.” Human beings distort and change history to suit their prejudices. The Israelites “did not remember the lashes . . . the brutal hand of the oppressor. . . . They remembered the food they used to eat, the security they used to have . . . their memories became an accusation against Moses . . . a source of their resentment, and they brought tragedy upon themselves. They became the generation of the wilderness, destined to wander forty years, but never to arrive, never to inherit because they lacked the spirit.” (*The Voice Still Speaks*, p. 297)

Interpreters through the ages provide a number of explanations for the constant complaining of the Israelites. In doing so they expose some significant reasons for political and social protest in every age. The Torah text, however, also deals with the reaction of Moses to the protesting people. Hearing their complaints, Moses voices a few of his own. Feeling lonely, isolated, and besieged, he asks God: “Why have You dealt ill with Your servant, and why have I not enjoyed Your favor, that You have laid the burden of all this people upon me?” According to the Torah, God responds by telling him to appoint seventy elders and officers, people of experience, to share the burden of leadership with him.

Once before, Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, gave him similar advice. (See *A Torah Commentary for Our Times*, Volume II, *Parashat Yitro*, pp. 42–47.) Moses followed it and was helped in caring for the people. Now, perhaps, as rabbinic tradition suggests, those leaders are dead, having been put to death because of their involvement in the building of the golden calf. So Moses again bears the burden of leadership alone and discovers that it is too much for him. The complaints of the people make this clear. To lead them, he requires the wise counsel and assistance of those who can help him ease their anxieties and nurture their creative energies for the benefit of their community.

The Torah is suggesting a model for leader-

ship. The most productive way to handle complaints is not to whine before God nor to grumble that "the task is too much for me." Such negativity leads to certain defeat. Instead, Moses is told to face his troubles with others, to shape the future by gathering around him those with whom he can share the burdens of leadership and a vision for the future.

Rabbi Judah identifies the moment of complaining as one of the ten trials of the Israelites in the desert. In each trial, the survival of the people is at stake, and a lesson is learned. In this case, the trial teaches the moral of "collaboration." Trials are best confronted and creatively solved when they are shared. (*Eruvin* 15b)

PEREK BET: *Why Do Miriam and Aaron Protest against Moses?*

After the appointment of the seventy leaders, the people journey from Kibroth-hatta'avah to Hazeroth in the Sinai desert. We are told that, while camping at Hazeroth, "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married." They said, "Has *Adonai* spoken only through Moses? Has God not spoken through us as well?" (Numbers 12:1-2)

What prompts Moses' sister and brother to protest against him? Why does it appear to be a public matter rather than a private, "in-the-family" discussion?

Some commentators express surprise at this story, claiming that there is no apparent explanation for Miriam's and Aaron's criticism of Moses. Others argue that the explanation is clearly offered in the text. Are we not told, they point out, that Moses' sister and brother condemn him for his marriage to a Cushite woman and for acting as if God speaks exclusively through him? Those maintaining that there is no apparent explanation for Miriam's and Aaron's criticism respond that, while the Torah text provides a hint of an explanation, it does not offer any evidence that Moses claimed to speak "exclusively" for God. Neither are we given an identity for the Cushite woman he married.

Given this justified difference of opinion, how do we make sense of this Torah story? Why do

Miriam and Aaron speak against their brother? Why is Miriam more severely punished for doing so?

Seeking explanations for these complexities in this Torah story, the author of *Targum Onkelos* explains that Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses for having separated himself from his beautiful wife, Zipporah. Furthermore, since the Torah mentions Miriam before Aaron, this must mean that she took the lead and provoked Aaron against Moses. For that reason she deserves a more severe punishment.

Rashi agrees with this explanation but raises a question: Since there is no evidence in the text, how does Miriam know that Moses has separated from his wife, Zipporah?

Rashi answers his own question with a view expressed by Rabbi Nathan, a teacher who lived in Babylonia during the second century. Rabbi Nathan traces the roots of the confrontation involving Aaron, Miriam, and Moses to the story of Eldad and Medad. Miriam, he explains, happens to be standing next to Zipporah when she hears the report of the prophesying in the camp by Eldad and Medad. Because she is aware that Moses always separates himself from her when the word of God comes to him, Zipporah cries out, "Oh, their poor wives! Their husbands will abandon them just as Moses stays away from me."

Upon hearing Zipporah's remark, explains Rabbi Nathan, Miriam reports the matter to Aaron. Without investigating the truth of the accusation, Miriam and Aaron rush to judgment. They embarrass Moses, publicly confronting him with what they believe is the insensitive and unfair desertion of his wife.

Using Rabbi Nathan's creative addition to our Torah story, Rashi concludes that Miriam is punished for wrongfully accusing Moses of being insensitive to his wife and for speaking disrespectfully against her brother in public. (Commentary on Numbers 12:1)

Objecting strongly to these creative inventions and additions by Onkelos, Rabbi Nathan, and Rashi, interpreter Joseph ibn Kaspi charges them with subverting the meaning of the Torah text. "I am shocked," he says, "at these ancients, who are so much more perfect than I . . . and who

explain a Torah text by the very opposite of its written meaning or substitute a word or add phrases that change its meaning.”

Kaspi goes on to contend that this Torah text means only that Moses took another Cushite woman besides Zipporah as his wife. “He did so for reasons of his own, and it is not right for us to pry into his business or his motives. . . . It is [also] unacceptable to suggest, as do Onkelos, Rabbi Nathan, and Rashi, that Moses became a celibate. He was no Franciscan, Augustine, or Carmelite monk!”

RADAK

Kimchi also registers strong objections to those who invent additions to the Torah text. How does he account for the public criticism of Moses by Miriam and Aaron?

Kimchi claims that the words of the Torah text mean that Miriam and Aaron object to Moses' marriage to *another* Cushite woman. Kimchi explains that Moses is already married to Zipporah, who is a Cushite. Without seeking to understand his motives for marrying an additional woman, Miriam and Aaron criticize him. They leap to conclusions. They mistakenly assume, insists Kimchi, that, as prophets, they are the equals of Moses; they, therefore, believe they comprehend his reasons for marrying again. In truth, says Kimchi, they criticize him without justification and out of ignorance. Consequently, they are punished. (Commentary on Numbers 12:1ff.)

Given Kimchi's explanation, one wonders if he is not as guilty as Onkelos, Rabbi Nathan, and Rashi of inventing additions to the Torah text to explain the protest of Miriam and Aaron against Moses.

In contrast to Kimchi, Jacob ben Isaac Ashkenazi, author of *Tze'edah u-Re'edah*, a commentary for women, suggests two possible reasons for Miriam's and Aaron's condemnation of Moses. Ashkenazi speculates that their criticism, “He married a Cushite woman!” stems from their conviction that Moses considers himself superior to his people. Miriam and Aaron, suggests Ash-

kenazi, are upset that, rather than finding a wife among the Israelites, Moses seeks out and marries a Cushite. Ashkenazi, perhaps worried about some intermarriages in his own community, claims that Miriam and Aaron ask Moses accusingly, “Are none of your own people's women good enough for you?”

They object to his marrying a Cushite woman . . .

Philosopher Martin Buber holds that “the reason for the ‘talk against Moses’ is his wife.” Miriam “takes the lead” because “this is a family affair. . . . What the brother and sister reproach Moses with is conditioned not by a general tendency to keep the blood pure but by the concept that continuation of the gift of prophecy . . . would be unfavorably affected by the alien element.” (Moses, Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., New York, 1958, pp. 167–168)

In addition, writes Ashkenazi, there may be another explanation for Miriam's and Aaron's complaint against Moses. Perhaps, Ashkenazi speculates, they are outraged over Moses' treatment of Zipporah, his wife. They may have overheard him tell her, “I am occupied with important work on behalf of the community and have no time for you.” Consequently, they could conclude that Moses is neglecting her and even refusing to have sexual relations with her. The Torah's explanation, “because of the Cushite woman,” might therefore be understood as an expression of concern for Zipporah's well-being. This also, argues Ashkenazi, may account for the reason Miriam and Aaron decide to speak out publicly against their brother. (*Tze'edah u-Re'edah* on Numbers 12:1)

They slandered Moses . . .

One who slanders another in secret will not be forgiven. One who slanders a member of one's family will find no forgiveness. . . . We are told that Miriam and Aaron slandered Moses for marrying a Cushite woman. . . . Was she

not Zipporah . . . different from all other women by her dark skin, her kind words, and her good deeds? . . . And were not the Israelites also called by God Cushites, as in the phrase, "Are you not like the Cushites to Me, O children of Israel?" (Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer 53)



Leibowitz

After reviewing various explanations of the criticism of Moses by Miriam and Aaron, Nechama Leibowitz concludes that this Torah story is about the dangers of slander and gossip. She comments that "the desire to make the great person small, to blacken the reputation of the famous, to belittle the character of the good person, and minimize any symptom of human greatness is prevalent among the small-minded, those who prey on human weakness, those who themselves fail to achieve any heights of greatness or heroism."

Leibowitz suggests that this was precisely the human weakness of jealousy that filled Miriam and Aaron. It drove them to speak "against Moses." "Evidently," explains Leibowitz, "the Torah did not wish to prohibit merely explicit gossip about people in general and the spiritual leaders of our generation in particular. It wished to prohibit any kind of talk or gossip disparaging of others."

Citing Bachya ben Joseph ibn Pakuda, the author of the ethical text *Hovot ha-Levavot*, "Duties of the Heart," Leibowitz warns: "Should one of your friends be superior to you . . . in deeds . . . do not allow your evil inclination to say, 'Stir up the opinion of others against him. Find fault with him. Spread lies to diminish his good reputation.' Instead, say to your evil inclination, 'Remember what happened to Miriam and Aaron when they spoke against Moses.'" (*Studies in Bemidbar*, pp.132–133)

Because the story of Miriam and Aaron speak-

ing against Moses does not clearly spell out their motives, Torah interpreters become inventive in suggesting their own. Little wonder that this ancient story continues to excite debate. Is it jealousy or concern for Moses' role as a leader that leads his brother and sister to protest his marriage to the Cushite? No one can be sure. However, each of the differing explanations of our interpreters raises serious ethical questions about human behavior and the resolution of conflict. Once again, the Torah text invites controversy and focuses upon continuing moral issues.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Interpreters suggest several reasons for the Israelites' complaints about their situation. They fear the uncertainty of the future, are spoiled and resist change, are bored and lack challenge, are obsessed with materialistic desires and seek new thrills. They resent the restraints of ethical laws and idealize their bitter past. Which of these "reasons" provides the best explanation for their complaints to Moses and to God? How should human beings at various stages in their lives appropriately express such complaints? What is the most helpful way of dealing with such complaints? Why is it important for leaders to "share," as Moses did, the protestations of their constituents rather than bear the burden alone?
2. It is a serious matter to invent or read into the Torah text meanings that may have not been intended by the original author or authors. It is like lifting out of context what another person has said. Note how Joseph ibn Kaspi takes Onkelos, Rabbi Nathan, and Rashi to task for "subverting" the Torah text with additions and interpretations. Would you agree with him? Why? Which interpreter makes the most sense in explaining what led Miriam and Aaron to protest against Moses?

3. The author of Proverbs 10:18 claims that the person "who slanders another is a fool." Rabbinic tradition teaches that "a slanderer deserves to be stoned." (*Arakin* 15b) How would you define "slander"? Why do you think the

rabbis find slandering another person a serious sin? Why do you think Jewish tradition considers slander a capital offense? (See *Tosefta Peab* 1, 2.)