

Holy Meltdowns and Modern Messes

By Meg Goldenberg Marion with Jonah Marion

Before we begin, I need to take a moment. Yes, this sermon comes with a short *preramble*—because sometimes the world demands it.

What's happening in my hometown, Los Angeles, California, is beyond troubling. Peaceful protests over ICE raids were met with unnecessary outsized federal force called in by the administration without consulting the governor or the mayor. But what truly pushed me over the edge was seeing Senator Alex Padilla—California's first Latino U.S. Senator and Chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, and Border Safety —shoved, cuffed, and ignored after calmly identifying himself and asking a question.

No apology. No accountability. And no ceiling anymore on what qualifies as egregious.

Also, in case the world didn't feel tense enough: Israel bombed Iran.

So yes—let's pray. Fervently. For peace. And for a little less absurdity.

There. And with that, let's move on to tonight's Torah portion, Behaalotecha. It means 'when we raise' in reference to Aaron raising light in the lamps of the menorah. That's lovely, but the raising we'll address tonight is what happens when the people start complaining about the food and who's in charge – basically, everything, and don't miss the segue from immigration.

I searched far and wide for someone to do a special version of the Torah reading and found just the guy...my son, Jonah. 15 years and one day ago, I beamed at him on this very bimah as he and I became the first and, to this day, only mother son B'nai Mitzvah in our Temple's history. If you heard a challenge there, well...

Jonah: We like having been first but we don't want to be the only and would happily welcome others into this club with an ice cream party — we're not above bribery.

Meg: We learned a lot about each other throughout the process of studying Torah with our fantastic tutor Lynn Greenberg. My favorite part was, duh, breaking down the Torah portion.

Jonah: Ours was Korach, all about rebellion, and I was, after all, a teenager.

Meg: Ah, for the good old days. Naaah. Anyhow, here's a modern reading of this section. Jonah will be playing God, I'll be Moses and fill in the blanks.

The Great Manna Meltdown
(A dramatic, snarky dialogue based on Numbers 11–12)

ISRAELITES (in chorus): Ugh, *manna* again?! We had garlic in Egypt! Fish! Onions! Melons! Now our gullets are *dry!* Like the *desert!*

MOSES (to God): Why did I sign up for this? Did I *birth* them? Am I their *nanny*? If this is leadership, just smite me now.

GOD (rolling divine eyes): Okay, drama king. Here's what we'll do:

Step 1 — get 70 elders.

Step 2 — I'll give *them* a taste of your holy burnout.

Step 3 — Tell the people they're getting meat. LOTS of meat. Not for a day. Not for a week. *For a month.* Until it's pouring out of their nostrils. Bon appétit.

MOSES (skeptically): That's... six hundred thousand hangry people. You got, like, cosmic Costco?

GOD (mic drop): Watch Me.

Cue epic meat storm: Quailpocalypse. Birds raining from the sky. Waist-deep. Barbecue chaos.

ISRAELITES (stuffing faces): YAAAAASSS! Quail for days!

GOD (smoldering): Oh look, they're still chewing... *PLAGUE!*

SCENE CHANGE – Family Drama Tent Edition

MIRIAM & AARON (whispering): Did you hear Moses married that Cushite woman? Also... are we not *prophets*, too?

GOD (furious parent energy): EXCUSE YOU. When I talk to Moses, it's not in riddles. It's in *clear sentences*.

He sees My face. Do *you* see My face? No. Sit down.

God exits in divine cloud. Miriam instantly turns into a human snow cone.

AARON (panicking): Moses! Bro! She's flaking like a biscotti!

MOSES (sighs): Dear God, please fix this. Again.

GOD: She's grounded for a week. And next time? Keep My name out of your sibling gossip.

Everyone awkwardly waits for seven days while Miriam exfoliates outside the camp.

CHORUS NARRATOR: And then they marched on.

Probably still complaining.

CURTAIN.

Meg: There is much to say about this parasha, but we'll leave the heavy lifting to Sam Kaufmann in Torah Study tomorrow. One note, though:

The Women's Torah Commentary found divine irony in Miriam's punishment since Aaron and Miriam had complained about Moses' Cushite wife who was presumably black. Now Miriam herself was "stricken with snow-white scales." Perhaps the implication is: "She's too dark for you, is she? If you prefer whiteness, I'll make you whiter than ever."

Jonah: I'm an only child, but I know they shouldn't have spoken ill of their humble leader of a brother.

Meg: Exactly. So, let's try this. Take a deep breath. Now listen—really listen—even to those with whom you don't agree.

We're all made in God's image, and that image wears many faces. Even God gets emotional; so do we. Let's make space for that, especially when someone finally finds the courage to speak up.

You don't have to agree. But you do have to listen. And if someone attacks? Speak up—with strength and kindness.

We have two ears and one mouth for a reason. Let's use them in that proportion. It's tempting to stay in our bubbles. But the real work—the holy work—begins when we pop out of them.

For this Shabbat we need more than one Shalom. Let's do three. Shabbat Shalom, Shalom, Shalom.