

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Beshalach
February 4, 2023 *** 13 Shevat, 5783

Beshalach in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3262/jewish/Beshalach-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Beshalach," means "When he sent" and it is found in Exodus 13:17.

Soon after allowing the children of Israel to depart from Egypt, Pharaoh chases after them to force their return, and the Israelites find themselves trapped between Pharaoh's armies and the sea. G-d tells Moses to raise his staff over the water; the sea splits to allow the Israelites to pass through, and then closes over the pursuing Egyptians. Moses and the children of Israel sing a song of praise and gratitude to G-d.

In the desert the people suffer thirst and hunger, and repeatedly complain to Moses and Aaron. G-d miraculously sweetens the bitter waters of Marah, and later has Moses bring forth water from a rock by striking it with his staff. He causes manna to rain down from the heavens before dawn each morning, and quails to appear in the Israelite camp each evening.

The children of Israel are instructed to gather a double portion of manna on Friday, as none will descend on Shabbat, the divinely decreed day of rest. Some disobey and go to gather manna on the seventh day, but find nothing. Aaron preserves a small quantity of manna in a jar, as a testimony for future generations.

In Rephidim, the people are attacked by the Amalekites, who are defeated by Moses' prayers and an army raised by Joshua.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Judges 4:4 – 5:31

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/626290/jewish/Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's *haftarah* describes the fall of the Canaanite general Sisera and his armies, who were swept away by the Kishon River, and Deborah's ensuing song of thanks. This parallels this week's Torah portion which discusses the drowning of the Egyptian forces in the Red Sea and the subsequent songs led by Moses and Miriam.

Deborah the Prophetess was the leader and judge of the Israelites at a difficult time; the Israelites were being persecuted by King Jabin of Canaan and his general Sisera. Deborah summoned Barak son of Abinoam and transmitted to him G-d's instruction: "Go and gather your men toward Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and Zebulun. And I shall

draw to you, to the brook Kishon, Sisera, the chieftain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will give him into your hand." At Barak's request, Deborah accompanied him, and together they led the offensive.

Sisera was informed of the Israelites' mobilization and he gathered his forces and proceeded towards the Kishon River. Barak's army below and the heavens above waged battle against the Canaanites and utterly destroyed them. The river washed them all away; not one of the enemy survived.

The defeated general fled on foot and arrived at the tent of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite. She invited him in and offered to hide him. When he fell asleep, Jael took a tent-peg and knocked it through Sisera's temple.

The next chapter of the *haftorah* is the Song of Deborah, which describes the miraculous victory and thanks the One Above for His assistance.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Renewable Energy: Beshalach by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/beshallach/renewable-energy/>

The first translation of the Torah into another language – Greek – took place in around the second century BCE, in Egypt during the reign of Ptolemy II. It is known as the Septuagint, in Hebrew HaShivim, because it was done by a team of seventy scholars. The Talmud, however, says that at various points the Sages at work on the project deliberately mistranslated certain texts because they believed that a literal translation would simply be unintelligible to a Greek readership. One of these texts was the phrase, "On the seventh day God finished all the work He had made." Instead, the translators wrote, "On the sixth day God finished."^[1]

What was it that they thought the Greeks would not understand? How did the idea that God made the universe in six days make more sense than that He did so in seven? It seems puzzling, yet the answer is simple. The Greeks could not understand the seventh day, Shabbat, as itself part of the work of Creation. What is creative about resting? What do we achieve by not making, not working, not inventing? The idea seems to make no sense at all.

Indeed, we have the independent testimony of the Greek writers of that period, that one of the things they ridiculed in Judaism was Shabbat. One day in seven Jews do not work, they said, because they are lazy. The idea that the day itself might have independent value was apparently beyond their comprehension. Oddly enough, within a very short period of time the empire of Alexander the Great began to crumble, just as had the earlier city state of Athens that gave rise to some of the greatest thinkers and writers in history. Civilisations, like individuals,

can suffer from burnout. It's what happens when you don't have a day of rest written into your schedule. As Ahad HaAm said:

"More than the Jewish people has kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jewish people."

Rest one day in seven and you won't burn out.

Shabbat, which we encounter for the first time in this week's parsha, is one of the greatest institutions the world has ever known. It changed the way the world thought about time. Prior to Judaism, people measured time either by the sun – the solar calendar of 365 days aligning us with the seasons – or by the moon, that is, by months ("month" comes from the word "moon") of roughly thirty days. The idea of the seven-day week – which has no counterpart in nature – was born in the Torah and spread throughout the world via Christianity and Islam, both of which borrowed it from Judaism, marking the difference simply by having it on a different day. We have years because of the sun, months because of the moon, and weeks because of the Jews.

What Shabbat gave – and still gives – is the unique opportunity to create space within our lives, and within society as a whole, in which we are truly free. Free from the pressures of work; free from the demands of ruthless employers; free from the siren calls of a consumer society urging us to spend our way to happiness; free to be ourselves in the company of those we love. Somehow this one day has renewed its meaning in generation after generation, despite the most profound economic and industrial change. In Moses' day it meant freedom from slavery to Pharaoh. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century it meant freedom from sweatshop working conditions of long hours for little pay. In ours, it means freedom from emails, smartphones, and the demands of 24/7 availability. What our parsha tells us is that Shabbat was among the first commands the Israelites received on leaving Egypt. Having complained about the lack of food, God told them that He would send them manna from heaven, but they were not to gather it on the seventh day. Instead, a double portion would fall on the sixth. That is why to this day we have two challot on Shabbat, in memory of that time.

Not only was Shabbat culturally unprecedented. Conceptually, it was so as well. Throughout history people have dreamed of an ideal world. We call such visions, utopias, from the Greek *ou* meaning "no" and *topos* meaning "place."^[2] They are called that because no such dream has ever come true, except in one instance, namely Shabbat. Shabbat is "utopia now," because on it we create, for twenty-five hours a week, a world in which there are no hierarchies, no employers and employees, no buyers and sellers, no inequalities of wealth or power, no production, no traffic, no din of the factory or clamour of the marketplace. It is "the still point of the turning world," a pause between symphonic movements, a

break between the chapters of our days, an equivalent in time of the open countryside between towns where you can feel the breeze and hear the song of birds. Shabbat is utopia, not as it will be at the end of time but rather, as we rehearse for it now in the midst of time.

God wanted the Israelites to begin their one-day-in-seven rehearsal of freedom almost as soon as they left Egypt, because real freedom, of the seven-days-in-seven kind, takes time, centuries, millennia. The Torah regards slavery as wrong, [3] but it did not abolish it immediately because people were not yet ready for this. Neither Britain nor America abolished it until the nineteenth century, and even then not without a struggle. Yet the outcome was inevitable once Shabbat had been set in motion, because slaves who know freedom one day in seven will eventually rise against their chains.

The human spirit needs time to breathe, to inhale, to grow. The first rule in time management is to distinguish between matters that are important, and those that are merely urgent. Under pressure, the things that are important but not urgent tend to get crowded out. Yet these are often what matter most to our happiness and sense of a life well-lived. **Shabbat is time dedicated to the things that are important but not urgent**: family, friends, community, a sense of sanctity, prayer in which we thank God for the good things in our life, and Torah reading in which we retell the long, dramatic story of our people and our journey. Shabbat is when we celebrate shalom bayit – the peace that comes from love and lives in the home blessed by the Shechinah, the presence of God you can almost feel in the candlelight, the wine, and the special bread. This is a beauty created not by Michelangelo or Leonardo but by each of us: a serene island of time in the midst of the often-raging sea of a restless world.

I once took part, **together with the Dalai Lama**, in a seminar (organised by the Elijah Institute) in Amritsar, Northern India, the sacred city of the Sikhs. In the course of the talks, delivered to an audience of two thousand Sikh students, one of the Sikh leaders turned to the students and said: "What we need is what the Jews have: Shabbat!" Just imagine, he said, a day dedicated every week to family and home and relationships. He could see its beauty. We can live its reality. The ancient Greeks could not understand how a day of rest could be part of Creation. Yet it is so, for without rest for the body, peace for the mind, silence for the soul, and a renewal of our bonds of identity and love, the creative process eventually withers and dies. It suffers entropy, the principle that all systems lose energy over time.

The Jewish people did not lose energy over time, and remains as vital and creative as it ever was. The reason is Shabbat: humanity's greatest source of renewable energy, the day that gives us the strength to keep on creating.

[1] Megillah 9a. [2] The word was coined in 1516 by Sir Thomas More, who used it as the title of his book. [3] On the wrongness of slavery from a Torah perspective, see the important analysis in Rabbi N. L. Rabinovitch, Mesilot BiLevavam (Maaleh Adumim: Maaliyot, 2015), 38–45. The basis of the argument is the view, central to both the Written Torah and the Mishna, that all humans share the same ontological dignity as the image and likeness of God. This was in the sharpest possible contrast to the views, for instance, of Plato and Aristotle. Rabbi Rabinovitch analyses the views of the Sages, and of Maimonides and Me'iri, on the phrase "They shall be your slaves forever" (Lev. 25:46). Note also the quote he brings from Job 31:13–15, "If I have denied justice to any of my servants...when they had a grievance against me, what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account? Did not He who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same One form us both within our mothers?"

Embracing Our Inner Nachshon: Beshalach/Black History Month by Rabbi Larry Sernovitz

<https://truhah.org/resources/parshat-beshalach-larry-sernovitz-moraltorah2023/>
"As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them. Greatly frightened, the Israelites cried out to THE ETERNAL...Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us be, and we will serve the Egyptians, for it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness?' –Exodus 14:10, 12

The essence of faith is believing in things that we have never seen, even — perhaps especially — when the structures around us hem us in and seem immutable. Faith is about believing in a future that can be better than where we are at the moment.

In our parshah this week, Beshalach, we find Moses trying to fulfill his mission of instilling faith in a people that had no reason to believe things would ever get better. And, to be honest, I don't really blame them. After generations of oppression and seeing no end in sight, why would anything change? This generation of Israelite slaves had never seen freedom or even knew what it was. Sure, God had done some impressive magic tricks, but was that really going to lead to a radical reorientation of their world? Is it really hard to imagine that there were many Israelites who couldn't conceive of stepping outside the familiar? **Rashi, commenting on Exodus 13:18, says** that only one-fifth of the Israelites left Egypt. The remaining 80%, he writes, died in the plague of darkness — which we might interpret nonliterally as their being so steeped in Egyptian culture that they were unwilling — or unable — to join the Exodus.

A year ago on Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. weekend, my congregation gathered with the Cobb County SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Council). When I shared this Torah text, Dr. Ben Williams, President of the Cobb SCLC, responded and said the same thing happened with American slavery. The majority of the newly freed Black people stayed on the plantations because freedom was much

more challenging than staying where they were, continuing the life they always knew. Of course, the structures of society conspired to keep them in place, blocking opportunities to keep the former slaves “in their place.” And it required a herculean effort to imagine that so much could change.

Hearing Dr. Williams’ recounting of the history brought me back to the story of Nachshon. In **Talmud Sotah 37a**, we read two versions of the story. Let’s start with the more familiar one:

Rabbi Judah said to [Rabbi Meir] This is not what happened, rather, this [tribe] said, ‘I will not be the first to go down to the sea,’ and this one said, ‘I will not be the first to go down to the sea.’ Then Nachshon ben Aminadav sprang forward and went down first to the sea.

Rabbi Judah’s commentary is clear. It only takes one — one person who has the courage to be the disruptor. This is no easy task but as leaders, we ask ourselves: If not now, when?

But what was Rabbi Meir’s version that Rabbi Judah disagrees with? It’s a chilling inversion of the Nachshon story that we are less familiar with:

Rabbi Meir would say: When the Jewish people stood at the Red Sea, the tribes were arguing with one other. This one was saying: I am going into the sea first, and that one was saying: I am going into the sea first. In jumped the tribe of Benjamin and descended into the sea first... And the princes of the tribe of Judah were stoning them... (*Sotah 36b*)

Here, the commentary seems to be about the social forces that prevent people from moving into the unknown. Even when everyone wanted to — no easy feat — the jostling and social dynamics blocked their advance. When one tribe took the plunge, they were met with actual violence.

Our communities are looking to us for leadership. As reluctant as Moses was to accept his calling, he channeled the courage within and went forth no matter what the consequences would be. Today, so many of us forget that God has given us all we need to do what needs to be done. We are Israel. We are the ones who wrestle with God and humanity, and prevail.

Last fall, I was a participant in a race awareness weekend with fellow Metro Atlanta executives led by Al Vivian, the son of the civil rights icon C.T. Vivian. Our eyes were opened to the very real challenges and opportunities to lead with purpose and make an impact. Al likes to say, “I was raised in a household that taught you must contribute to society. We learned that things are not going to change if people don’t make them change.” This is our calling. If we are the leaders we say we are, then now is our time. Things can only change if we have the faith to believe in possibilities that we currently cannot imagine. Let us embrace our inner Nachshon and wade into the waters of justice, no matter what

the future may bring. Let us be mindful of the obstacles along the way and work to clear them from the path so others can follow. And, let us remember, God will be with us along the way. (*Rabbi Larry Sernovitz has been with Temple Kol Emeth in Marietta, Georgia, since 2020. In October of 2022, Rabbi Sernovitz was inducted into the Martin Luther King Jr. International Board of Preachers at Morehouse College.*)

God Is Not the Giving Tree by Bex Stern-Rosenblatt

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lj6xvIUjHZpOQiidwdKnvK2wyhRofe50/view>

Every year during the Passover Seder, we recite the Vehi Sheamda: "For not only one enemy has risen up against us to destroy us, but in every generation they rise up to destroy us. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, delivers us from their hands." It's a line that rings true. From the times of the Tanakh until this very day, we can identify attempts to destroy us in every generation. Yet, we survive. We are still here. A continuous propensity to be almost completely wiped out is not a characteristic a nation would likely choose for itself. As Tevye says in Fiddler on the Roof, "I know we are your chosen people. But, once in a while, can't you choose someone else?"

In the Exodus story, God does choose someone else. The Egyptians, by the time of our parashah, had already lived through the plagues. Ten times, they had been chosen to suffer. Five times, Pharaoh changed his mind, refusing to give in to the Israelites' demands. But the last five times, it was God who chose to make Pharaoh's heart heavy, not permitting him to follow his own instincts to send the Israelites out. Egypt suffered these ten times at the hands of the Israelites. Egypt lost its children at the hands of the Israelites. But it is still not enough. In our parashah, God taunts the Egyptians. The Israelites turn back towards Egypt, stopping in order to confuse the Egyptians, to convince them that the Israelites are lost. God stiffens Pharaoh's heart one last time so that Pharaoh and his army pursue the Israelites. We know the ending. Pharaoh and his army are drowned in the sea. God is honored, made kvd, through the deaths of the Egyptians, just as God had once made heavy, kvd, Pharaoh's heart. God chooses the Egyptians, makes them suffer through the plagues, and ends them with total destruction. When God chooses someone else, it does not work out well for them. God chooses us to save us from destruction and God chooses the Egyptians to destroy them. We find this sentiment in the dual purposes of the plagues - God explains that the plagues teach Egypt that God is God and teaches the Israelites the same thing. For the Egyptians, that knowledge is a threat. For the Israelites, that knowledge is deliverance.

The Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael (14:19:1), complicates this notion. Interpreting the formation that the Israelites and the pillar of cloud assume in order to survive the onslaught from the Egyptians as they cross the sea, the Mekhilta tells a series of

parables. It compares the angel of God and Israel to a man and his son, walking down a road on a journey. Just as in the Vehi Sheamda, multiple adversaries rise up to threaten the son. Each time, the man moves his son out of danger, shielding him with his own body, saving him from robbers, from wolves, and from the sun itself. It's a curious comparison. Unlike the case of God and Israel, the man has not brought these hardships on his son on purpose. But in both cases, safety for the dependent comes from a reliance on their progenitor to provide. The midrash goes on, beginning to describe some of Israel's complaints. Using proof texts from Hosea, Psalms, and Proverbs, the midrash describes how God provided for Israel, sacrificed for Israel, even when Israel asked too much, even when Israel complained and went astray. It tells the same story as Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*, the provider gives all that their selfish dependent asks for, even as it cuts into the very being of the provider.

God won't end up as a stump as does the giving tree. In order to be able to defend us in every generation, God needs to survive as well. The midrash concludes that when the angel of God came to defend us from the Egyptians, a decision had not yet been made as to whether the angel was there to defend us or to destroy us. In all other places that an angel of God appears, that angel is called an angel of HaShem. Here, it is called an angel of Elohim. The midrash explains that Elohim is associated with judgment and so the angel came here to judge us. We do not get an automatic pass in every generation. Just because God has saved us before, does not mean God will save us again. When we pass from reliance on God to complaint against God, even as God provides for our complaints, we call the covenant into question. God can choose to destroy us or to save us from destruction.

A Woman's Arsenal is in Her Home: Haftarah Judges 4:4 – 5:31 by Vered Hollander-Goldfarb

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lj6xvIUjHZpOQiidwdKnvK2wyhRofe50/view>

Home is a place in which we should feel safe. But in this week's haftarah, with its three female characters, home is a very dangerous place. Most of the haftarah takes place in the open: The northern Israelites are oppressed by the Canaanite king and his head of army Sisra. Devorah, a leader, assigns Barak, a man from the north, the task of battling the Canaanites. Barak will go only if Devorah agrees to be at his side despite her warning that a woman will win the war. As the Canaanites lose, Sisra flees to the tent of Yael the Kainite who is neutral, hiding there. Yael proceeds to kill Sisra with a tent peg and the war is decisively won. The event culminates with an epic poem by Devorah.

Dr Yair Lipshitz of Theater Arts at Tel Aviv University (929 Judges 5 Heb) observes

that in the Bible women are usually portrayed inside the home. This makes Devorah, a judge and a leader who is found under a tree in an open public space, somewhat unusual. Nonetheless, Devorah herself describes the other two women in their homes, and they act from there: Yael, the unexpected heroine who should not have been involved in the war at all due to the neutrality of her tribe, is a tent dweller, which makes her action possible. Sisra's mother (appearing towards the end of the epic poem), the mother of the leader of the enemy, is in her chambers in the palace surrounded by her ladies-in-waiting, adding a yet-unheard voice.

The story is one of war, not the place where the Tanakh usually places women. While none of these women wields a sword, all of them are involved in the war. Once I asked a group of teenagers who is the cruelest of these women. A heated discussion ensued. Devorah leads a battle, but Yael breaks the trust of a guest who took refuge in her tent. Sisra's mother personifies the worried mother whose son went to war, but also the crass female partner of the potential-winner that takes pride in the pain inflicted by her warrior on the women of the other side. If the subject was male warriors, we might not have had an equally passionate debate. Perhaps we react so fiercely to cruelty and killing when they appear in women because of what women have come to symbolize and the backdrop of the home against which they are portrayed. Yael and Sisra's mother are found at home. The home is regarded as safe. It is to protect the home that people go to war, and it is the haven they want to return to. A home is a woman's turf.

In this story the Tanakh questions the concept of the home as a place of safety. In that safe space the instruments that make the home an inviting place may turn into murderous weapons in the hands of a woman. In Judges 9:53 a woman uses a mill stone to smash a warrior's skull. Here Yael uses a tent peg, the very tool that keeps the tent safe and standing, to strike the blow that will decisively settle the war. Both Sisra's mother and Jezebel (I Kings 21 and II Kings 9:31) prove that a woman in the palace is no less vicious or political in her words and thoughts than the leader that she is associated with. She is also the one who has raised the next generation of leaders and warriors and perhaps placed them on the throne. Beware of biblical women.

Tu B'Shevat

Ecology and Spirituality in Jewish Tradition by David Sears

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/255521/jewish/Ecology-and-Spirituality-in-Jewish-Tradition.htm

Ecology is a highly practical branch of science. Nothing could be more "down to earth" than preservation of the planet. Yet there is a facet of ecological awareness that is often overlooked. This is its spiritual dimension. When we act

as self-absorbed individuals, with little regard for anyone or anything that exists outside ourselves, we immediately fall into moral and spiritual error. As the Yiddish saying goes, "A blind horse heads straight for the pit!" Thus, countless laws in the Torah adjure us to open our eyes and act responsibly and compassionately toward the world around us. Among other ecological mandates, it promulgates the laws of bal tashchit (neither to destroy wantonly, nor waste resources unnecessarily); the prohibition of cutting down fruit trees surrounding an enemy city in wartime; the laws of covering excrement, and removing debris from public places; and so forth. In doing so, the Torah indicates that although we may feel at odds with nature, having to struggle to survive, in truth the world comprises a potentially harmonious whole, in which each element is precious.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook (1865–1935), Ashkenazic chief rabbi of pre-state Israel and a leading 20th-century thinker, expresses this idea compellingly: "If you are amazed at how it is possible to speak, hear, smell, touch, see, understand and feel—tell your soul that all living things collectively confer upon you the fullness of your experience. Not the least speck of existence is superfluous; everything is needed, and everything serves its purpose. 'You' are present within everything that is beneath you, and your being is bound up with all that transcends you."¹

A spiritually attuned person will recognize that every creature is essentially bound up with every other creature, and that we share a collective destiny. Thus, our most fundamental attitude should be one of compassion, not acquisitiveness or aggression. This ethic applies toward all levels of creation. As master Kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Cordovero of Safed ("RaMaK," 1522–1570) adjures: "One's compassion should extend to all creatures, and one should neither despise nor destroy them; for the Supernal Wisdom [i.e., the divine wisdom that brings all existence into being] extends to all of creation—the "silent" or mineral level, plants, animals and humans. This is why our sages have warned us against treating food disrespectfully. Just as the Supernal Wisdom despises nothing, since everything is produced there—as it is written, 'You have formed them all with wisdom' (Psalms 104:24)—a person should show compassion to all of the works of the Holy One, blessed be He."²

RaMaK's words bespeak a G-d-centered view of the universe, as opposed to one that is man-centered or nature-centered. In the words of the Baal Shem Tov (Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, founder of Chassidism, 1698–1760), we must seek the welfare of all precisely because we are equally G-d's works, created to perform His will.

"Do not consider yourself superior to anyone else," the founder

of Chassidism states. “In truth, you are no different than any other creature, since all things were brought into being to serve G-d. Just as G-d bestows consciousness upon you, He bestows consciousness upon your fellow man. In what way is a human being superior to a worm? A worm serves the Creator with all of his intelligence and ability; and man, too, is compared to a worm, as the verse states, ‘I am a worm and not a man’ (Psalms 22:7). If G-d had not given you a human intellect, you would be able to serve Him only like a worm. In this sense, you are both equal in the eyes of Heaven. A person should consider himself, the worm and all creatures as friends in the universe, for we are all created beings whose abilities are G-d-given.”³

This kinship of all creation and shared mission of serving G-d, each creature in its own way, is often compared to a cosmic song. As we recite during the Sabbath prayers, “The soul of every living being shall bless Your Name . . . All hearts shall revere You, and every innermost part shall sing to Your Name.” Indeed, when the Talmud describes the mysteries of the maaseh merkavah (“workings of the [divine] chariot,” i.e., the mystical experience), it associates this prophetic wisdom with song. The sages relate how Rabbi Elazar ben Arach demonstrated his preparedness to engage in the study of these mysteries before his teacher, Rabbi Yochanan, at which point the trees of the field were encompassed by heavenly fire and broke into song, echoing the verses of Psalm 148: “Praise G-d from the Earth, sea giants and all watery depths . . . mountains and hills, fruitful trees and all cedars . . . Praise G-d!”⁴

If we listen closely, this song still may be heard. Rabbi Aryeh Levin (the “Tzaddik of Jerusalem,” 1885–1969) told how he once was walking in the fields with his mentor, Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook. In the course of their Torah discussion, Rabbi Levin picked a flower. At this, Rav Kook remarked, “All my days I have been careful never to pluck a blade of grass or a flower needlessly, when it had the ability to grow or blossom. You know the teaching of our sages that not a single blade of grass grows here on Earth that does not have an angel above it, commanding it to grow. Every sprout and leaf says something meaningful, every stone whispers some hidden message in the silence—every creation sings its song.”⁵

“These words of our great master,” Rabbi Levin concluded, “spoken from a pure and holy heart, engraved themselves deeply in my heart. From that day on, I began to feel a strong sense of compassion for all things.”

So may it be for us who hear this story today and contemplate its perennial truth.
*(Rabbi Dovid Sears is the author of *The Vision of Eden: Animal Welfare and Vegetarianism in Jewish Law and Mysticism* (*Orot 2003*) among other Judaica works. He directs The Breslov Center of New York)*

FOOTNOTES: 1.Orot ha-Kodesh, p. 361. 2.Tomer Devorah, ch. 2. 3.Tzavaat ha-Rivash 12.

4.Talmud, Chagigah 14a. 5.Based on Simcha Raz, A Tzaddik in Our Time, pp. 108–109.

(I found the more articles from Dovid Sears on the website Jewish Eco Seminars which *"engages and educated the Jewish community by revealing the powerful connection between modern Israel, ecological innovation and Jewish values"*. I encourage you to look at the website <https://www.jewishecoseminars.com//about-the-organization/>)

Yahrtzeits

Larry Ozarow remembers his father Boris Ozarow on Saturday February 4
Bob Woog remembers his mother Nina Frankel Woog on Monday February 6

Coming Up at Kol Rina

Janet Mandel on The Cone Sisters: Collecting the Modern Masters

(Sponsored by the Susan Marx Educational Fund)

Via Zoom, Thursday evenings, February 2 and February 9, 2023 at 7:30 pm

Claribel and Etta Cone amassed a remarkable collection of masterpiece paintings and sculpture from the 19th and 20th centuries that they bequeathed to the Baltimore Museum of Art. The breadth of their collection includes works by Matisse, Picasso, Cézanne, Gauguin, Pissarro, Renoir, Van Gogh, Courbet, and Delacroix, among others. The sisters also amassed an amazing array of textiles, jewelry, furniture and other decorative arts, as well as African art, Japanese prints, and antique ivories and bronzes. Two sessions will be needed to tell this story of great art in the context of the fascinating social history of these two Jewish sisters. Claribel and Etta Cone enriched the lives of us all with their legacy.

Janet Mandel is local art educator extraordinaire. She has presented her engaging and informative art talks widely throughout our area, and returns to Kol Rina by popular demand.

Use the following link to sign up on Eventbrite and obtain the Zoom link for the lectures:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-cone-sisters-collecting-the-modern-masters-tickets-520648452537>

