

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Beha'alotcha
June 10, 2023 *** 21 Sivan, 5783

[Beha'alotcha in a Nutshell](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2181/jewish/Behaalotecha-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2181/jewish/Behaalotecha-in-a-Nutshell.htm

Aaron is commanded to raise light in the lamps of the menorah, and the tribe of Levi is initiated into the service in the Sanctuary.

A "Second Passover" is instituted in response to the petition "Why should we be deprived?" by a group of Jews who were unable to bring the Passover offering in its appointed time because they were ritually impure. G-d instructs Moses on the procedures for Israel's journeys and encampments in the desert, and the people journey in formation from Mount Sinai, where they had been camped for nearly a year. The people are dissatisfied with their "bread from heaven" (the manna), and demand that Moses supply them with meat. Moses appoints 70 elders, to whom he imparts of his spirit, to assist him in the burden of governing the people. Miriam speaks negatively of Moses, and is punished with leprosy; Moses prays for her healing, and the entire community waits seven days for her recovery.

[Haftarah in a Nutshell: Zechariah 2:14-4:7.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/598114/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/598114/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This haftarah contains a vision of the golden Temple Menorah, whose daily kindling is discussed in the opening of this week's Torah reading.

This prophecy was communicated by Zechariah shortly before the building of the Second Temple. The haftarah opens with a vivid depiction of the joy that will prevail when G-d will return to Jerusalem: "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for, behold! I will come and dwell in your midst, says the L-rd."

The prophet then describes a scene in the Heavenly Court: Satan was seeking to incriminate Joshua, the first High Priest to serve in the Second Temple, because of the "soiled garments" (i.e. sins) he was wearing. G-d himself defends the High Priest: "And the Lord said to Satan: The Lord shall rebuke you, O Satan; the Lord who chose Jerusalem shall rebuke you. Is [Joshua] not a brand plucked from fire?" I.e., how dare Satan prosecute an individual who endured the hardships of exile? "And He raised His voice and said to those standing before him, saying, 'Take the filthy garments off him.' And He said to him, 'See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I have clad you with clean garments.'"

G-d then proceeds to outline the rewards awaiting Joshua if he and his descendents follow G-d's ways. The ultimate reward is, "Behold! I will bring My servant, the Shoot, " an allusion to Moshiach, the Shoot of David.

Zechariah then describes a vision of a golden seven-branched Menorah. An angel interprets the meaning of this vision: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel [descendent of King David, one of the protagonists in the building of the Second Temple], 'Not by military force and not by physical strength, but by My spirit,' says the Lord of Hosts." Meaning that Zerubbabel's descendent, Moshiach, will have no difficulty

in his task, it will be as simple as lighting a menorah.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

[From Despair to Hope: Beha'alotcha by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l](https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/behaalotecha/from-despair-to-hope/)

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/behaalotecha/from-despair-to-hope/>

There have been times when one passage in this week's parsha was, for me, little less than lifesaving. No leadership position is easy. Leading Jews is harder still. And spiritual leadership can be hardest of them all. Leaders have a public face that is usually calm, upbeat, optimistic, and relaxed. But behind the façade we can all experience storms of emotion as we realise how deep are the divisions between people, how intractable are the problems we face, and how thin the ice on which we stand. Perhaps we all experience such moments at some point in our lives, when we know where we are and where we want to be, but simply cannot see a route from here to there. That is the prelude to despair.

Whenever I felt that way, I would turn to the searing moment in our *parsha* when Moses reached his lowest ebb. The precipitating cause was seemingly slight. The people were engaged in their favourite activity: complaining about the food. With self-deceptive nostalgia, they spoke about the fish they ate in Egypt, and the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. Gone is their memory of slavery. All they can recall is the cuisine. At this, understandably, God was very angry ([Num. 11:10](#)). But Moses was more than angry. He suffered a complete emotional breakdown. He said this to God:

["Why have You brought this evil on Your servant? Why have I failed to find favour in Your eyes, that You have placed the burden of this whole people on me? Did I conceive this whole people? Did I give birth to it, that You should say to me, 'Carry it in your lap as a nurse carries a baby?' ... Where can I find meat to give to this whole people when they cry to me saying, 'Give us meat to eat?' I cannot carry this whole people on my own. It is too heavy for me. If this is what You are doing to me, then, if I have found favour in Your eyes, kill me now, and let me not look upon this my evil."](#)

[Num. 11:11-15](#)

This, for me, is the benchmark of despair. Whenever I felt unable to carry on, I would read this passage and think, "If I haven't yet reached this point, I'm okay." Somehow the knowledge that the greatest Jewish leader of all time had experienced this depth of darkness was empowering. It said that the feeling of failure does not necessarily mean that you have failed. All it means is that you have not yet succeeded. Still less does it mean that *you are* a failure. To the contrary, failure comes to those who take risks; and the willingness to take risks

is absolutely necessary if you seek, in however small a way, to change the world for the better.

What is striking about Tanach is the way it documents these dark nights of the soul in the lives of some of the greatest heroes of the spirit. Moses was not the only prophet to pray to die. Three others did so: Elijah ([1 Kings 19:4](#)), Jeremiah ([Jer. 20:7-18](#)) and Jonah ([Jon. 4:3](#)).^[1]

The Psalms, especially those attributed to King David, are shot through with moments of despair:

“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”

[Ps. 22:2](#)

“From the depths I cry to You.”

[Ps. 130:1](#)

“I am a helpless man abandoned among the dead ... You have laid me in the lowest pit, in the dark, in the depths.”

[Ps. 88:5-7](#)

What Tanach telling us in these stories is profoundly liberating. Judaism is not a recipe for blandness or bliss. It is not a guarantee that you will be spared heartache and pain. It is not what the Stoics sought, *apatheia*, a life undisturbed by passion. Nor is it a path to *nirvana*, stilling the fires of feeling by extinguishing the self. These things have a spiritual beauty of their own, and their counterparts can be found in the more mystical strands of Judaism. But they are not the world of the heroes and heroines of Tanach.

Why so? Because Judaism is a faith for those who seek to change the world. That is unusual in the history of faith. Most religions are about accepting the world the way it is. *Judaism is a protest against the world that is in the name of the world that ought to be.* To be a Jew is to seek to make a difference, to change lives for the better, to heal some of the scars of our fractured world. But *people don't like change.* That's why Moses, David, Elijah, and Jeremiah found life so hard.

We can say precisely what brought Moses to despair. He had faced a similar challenge before. Back in the book of Exodus the people had made the same complaint:

“If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this desert to starve this whole assembly to death.”

[Ex. 16:3](#)

Moses, on that occasion, experienced no crisis. The people were hungry and needed food. That was a legitimate request.

Since then, though, they had experienced the twin peaks of the revelation at Mount Sinai and the construction of the Tabernacle. They had come closer to God

than any nation had ever done before. Nor were they starving. Their complaint was not that they had no food. They had the manna. Their complaint was that it was boring: “Now we have lost our appetite (literally, “our soul is dried up”); we never see anything but this manna!” ([Num. 11:6](#)). They had reached the spiritual heights but they remained the same recalcitrant, ungrateful, small-minded people they had been before.[\[2\]](#)

That was what made Moses feel that his entire mission had failed and would continue to fail. His mission was to help the Israelites create a society that would be the opposite of Egypt, that would liberate instead of oppress; dignify not enslave. But the people had not changed. Worse: they had taken refuge in the most absurd nostalgia for the Egypt they had left: memories of fish, cucumbers, garlic and the rest. Moses had discovered it was easier to take the Israelites out of Egypt than to take Egypt out of the Israelites. If the people had not changed by now, it was a reasonable assumption that they never would. Moses was staring at his own defeat. There was no point in carrying on.

God then comforted him. First, He told him to gather seventy elders to share with him the burdens of leadership. Then He told him not to worry about the food. The people would soon have meat in plenty. It came in the form of a huge avalanche of quails.

What is most striking about this story is that thereafter Moses appears to be a changed man. Told by Joshua that there might be a challenge to his leadership, he replies: “Are you jealous on my behalf? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put His spirit on them” ([Num. 11:29](#)). In the next chapter, when his own brother and sister begin to criticise him, he reacts with total calm. When God punishes Miriam, Moses prays on her behalf. It is specifically at this point in the long biblical account of Moses’ life that the Torah says, “The man Moses was very humble, more so than any other man on earth” ([Num. 12:3](#)).

The Torah is giving us a remarkable account of the psychodynamics of emotional crisis. The first thing it is telling us is that it is important, in the midst of despair, not to be alone. God performs the role of comforter. It is He who lifts Moses from the pit of despair. He speaks directly to Moses’ concerns. He tells him he will not have to lead alone in the future. There will be others to help him. Then He tells him not to be anxious about the people’s complaint. They would soon have so much meat that it would make them ill, and they would not complain about the food again.

The essential principle here is what the Sages meant when they said, “A prisoner cannot release himself from prison” ([Brachot 5b](#)). It needs someone else to lift you from depression. That is why Judaism is so insistent on not leaving people

alone at times of maximum vulnerability. Hence the principles of visiting the sick, comforting mourners, including the lonely (“the stranger, the orphan and the widow”) in festive celebrations, and offering hospitality – an act said to be “greater than receiving the Shechinah.” Precisely because depression isolates you from others, remaining alone intensifies the despair. What the seventy elders actually did to help Moses is unclear. But simply *being there with him* was part of the cure.

The other thing it is telling us is that surviving despair is a character-transforming experience. It is when your self-esteem is ground to dust that you suddenly realise that *life is not about you*. It is about others, and ideals, and a sense of mission or vocation. What matters is the cause, not the person. That is what true humility is about. As the wise saying goes, popularly attributed to C. S. Lewis: *Humility is not about thinking less of yourself. It is about thinking of yourself less.*

When you have arrived at this point, even if you have done so through the most bruising experiences, you become stronger than you ever believed possible. You have learned not to put your self-image on the line. You have learned not to think in terms of self-image at all. That is what Rabbi Yochanan meant when he said, “Greatness is humility.”^[3] Greatness is a life turned outward, so that other people’s suffering matters to you more than your own. The mark of greatness is the combination of strength and gentleness that is among the most healing forces in human life.

Moses believed he was a failure. That is worth remembering every time we think we are failures. His journey from despair to self-effacing strength is one of the great psychological narratives in the Torah, a timeless tutorial in hope.

^[1] So, of course, did Job, but Job was not a prophet, nor – according to many commentators – was he even Jewish. The book of Job is about another subject altogether, namely: Why do bad things happen to good people? That is a question about God, not about humanity.

^[2] Note that the text attributes the complaint to the *asafsuf*, the rabble, the riffraff, which some commentators take to mean the “mixed multitude” who joined the Israelites on the Exodus. ^[3] *Pesikta Zutrata, Eikev.*

[At the Threshold: Beha'alotcha by Gordon Tucker](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/at-the-threshold/)

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/at-the-threshold/>

The ninth chapter of Numbers tells a tale that results in a rule and an institution. The first anniversary of the Exodus (on the 14th of the first month of Nisan) was approaching for the recently freed Israelites, and they were reminded that the Paschal sacrificial rites were meant to be annual observances. They were instructed by Moses to make the necessary preparations. But there were people who had recently contracted ritual impurity [tumah] by contact with the dead,

perhaps because they had buried deceased relatives. And they knew that this impurity, which was beyond their control, precluded them from participating in a rite that was, in effect, an annual renewal of membership in the community of Israel. Their plaint was brought to Moses, who understood the predicament of these well-meaning Israelites, but did not know how to resolve it, and thus brought the case to God.

God agreed that for such innocent victims of circumstance anxious to be part of the people Israel, another opportunity to make up for one's absence in Nisan was called for. Thus, the rule was promulgated that certain conditions would allow for a "make-up day" exactly a month later, in what we call Iyyar. But what situations would permit such a second chance (what came to be known as Pesah Sheni, a second Passover)?

Given the narrative, we expect that among the reasons the Torah gives for why a person might have legitimately missed the national ritual in Nisan is being in a state of tumah. But perhaps surprisingly, the rule also offers the second Passover to a person who was a long distance away from the Temple at the ritual's appointed time: "When any party—whether you or your posterity—who is (on 14 Nisan) defiled by a corpse *or is on a distant journey* would offer a passover sacrifice to the Lord, they shall offer it in the second month (Iyyar), on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight" ([Numbers 9:10-11](#)). This naturally raises the question of just what constitutes a "distant journey." How far away must a person be at the original time of the ritual to qualify for the "make-up day"? The Mishnah (in [Pesahim 9:2](#)) reports a rather remarkable statement from Rabbi Eliezer, which is in turn related to what was already a scribal tradition back then, to wit, the placement of a dot over the last letter in the word "Reḥokah," meaning "distant":

What is a "distant journey"? . . . Rabbi Eliezer says: From the very threshold of the Temple courtyard and beyond. And Rabbi Yosei said: This is why there is a dot over the heh (the final letter) in the word reḥokah; it is to say that it is not because he is actually distant; rather, it applies even from the threshold of the Temple courtyard and beyond.

Imagine: someone is literally just steps away from the Temple courtyard on the 14th of Nisan, and because that person is not inside, it is considered to be accidental and deserving of a second opportunity to enter and fulfill the rite. For years, I asked myself the obvious question: If a person was at the threshold of the Temple at the appointed time, why didn't they just go in? I came to understand it only when my Masorti colleagues in Israel described how many Israelis—people who would describe themselves as "secular"—would congregate in great numbers just outside their synagogues on Yom Kippur. Not going in; just being

there for reasons that somehow impelled them to draw near but could not quite get them to enter. These Jews, I realized, are part of the answer to the question of why someone would be at a threshold and not go in. They sense that there is something there—something more—that their lives need, but they are not quite sure they will fit in, that they will be welcomed, and understood, and respected. So they stand at the gateway.

It is hardly just an Israeli phenomenon. It is true throughout the Jewish world, and no doubt among other religious faiths as well. These people who are (figuratively) at the threshold are not necessarily accounted for in the various demographic reports from Pew and others. But they are there, and the message of Pesah Sheni is that we are forbidden to give up on them. It is we who have to seize the second chance to meet them, to respect them, to assure them that what is beyond the threshold is nurturance and spiritual growth, not judgment.

(Gordon Tucker is Vice Chancellor for Religious Life and Engagement at JTS)

[Beha'alotcha: Balancing Natural Forces by Dr. Jon Greenberg](https://www.growtorah.org/bamidbar/2022/06/17-behaalotcha-balancing-natural-forces)

<https://www.growtorah.org/bamidbar/2022/06/17-behaalotcha-balancing-natural-forces>

At the beginning of this week's parsha, Hashem commands Moshe to transmit the Divine instructions for lighting the menorah. The menorah is often mentioned in the Torah in conjunction with the shulchan, the table and shelves that held the lechem ha-panim, the show-bread. In the Mishkan, the menorah and shulchan were positioned opposite each other, with the menorah in the south and the shulchan in the north.[1] Their positions reflect certain agricultural realities. At a time when our ancestors lived in intimate contact with nature, north and south carried many agricultural connotations. The north wind brings cool, moist air and rain clouds, while the south wind (sharav or chamsin) is hot, dry, and dusty. Each one is important for different parts of the harvest. The ancient agriculturally-minded Jews were well aware of the functions of each. The Talmud states:

"The north wind is helpful to wheat when it has completed one third of its ripening, and damaging to olive trees in bloom. The south wind is damaging to wheat that is one-third ripe, and a benefit to olive trees when they are in bloom... A mnemonic to remember this is that the shulchan was placed in the north, and the menorah in the south, this increases its own and that increases its own (the north wind increases the bread on the shulchan and the south wind increases the oil in the menorah)."[2]

These winds occur during the late spring period between Pesach and Shavuot, known as sefirah. In Israel, the weather of the first weeks of sefirah is still dominated by the northern air masses that arrive during the winter. This cool,

moist northern air brings the rains of winter and early spring.[3] An ample supply of water is essential to the growth of any plant. Thus, the north wind helps the young growing wheat grains to expand. This growth enables the grains to fill with starch and protein later, as they mature. However, olive trees and other fruit trees flower during this period. Warm, dry conditions favor the pollination of olive flowers. Rain, during the first weeks after Pesach, while beneficial to wheat, would wash away the olive pollen and discourage pollinating bees from visiting the flowers. Conversely, rain during the final weeks of sefirah, close to Shavuot, promotes the growth of olive fruit, but it also encourages the growth of fungi that can damage the wheat crop. Wet conditions also delay the wheat harvest, leading to rotting of the grain or attacks by grain-eating insects and birds.[4]

The placement of the menorah and the shulchan together in the Mishkan symbolically reminds us that both natural forces, the rainy north wind and the dry south wind, are under the control of Hashem. We hope that He will bless us with a healthy balance between these forces. If we imagine that we can separate natural forces from each other or from their Divine source and that the weather is determined by chance or some other force that denies the presence of Hashem, then we are doomed to failure. However, if we understand and acknowledge our dependence on Hashem and that the natural force of wind emanates from and is controlled by Him, we can hope to merit the proper amounts of each wind, granting us a plentiful harvest.

How fitting that this lesson surfaces in another place in our Parsha. In the sixth aliyah, Benei Yisra'el complain about the food that they are receiving in the desert. Even a supernatural food that sustains an entire nation every day was not enough for them. However, a reading of Rashi reveals what may have been at the core of their complaints. Rashi comments on Benei Yisrael's claim that the fish they had in Mitzrayim was "free." [5] However, nothing the nation received in Mitzrayim was free, it was the result of horrific labor. Rashi concludes that it must be they were recalling that it was free from mitzvot.

Once we view the issue in the light, we can understand that, perhaps, Benei Yisra'el were fearful that their nourishment was dependent on their adherence to the mitzvot and to their relationship with Hashem. The generation in the midbar would have benefited from the lesson of the menorah and the shulchan. They failed to recognize that all food comes from one G-d, whether they acknowledged it or not.

Being aware of how plants grow is essential to understanding the mishkan, a microcosm of the world dedicated to Hashem. The Mishkan reminds us that it is not only the olive oil that brings us light, nor is it just the wheat that grows from the ground that satiates us. In truth, everything in our world stems from Hashem.

He gives us light through oil and satiation through bread. By paying more attention to the natural processes all around us, we will be able to trace our basic necessities back to the Ultimate Source and recognize that all of our needs come from Hashem. *(Dr. Greenberg received his bachelor's degree with honors in biology from Brown University and his Master's and Doctorate in agronomy from Cornell University. He has also studied with Rabbi Chaim Brovender at Israel's Yeshivat Hamivtar .He has taught at the Heschel School since 2008.)*

- [1] Shemot 26:35, 40:22-25 [2] Babylonian Talmud (200 C.E.--~500 C.E.) Bava Batra 147a
[3] Orni, Efraim and Elisha Efrat. 1971. Geography of Israel, Third Edition. Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia. Pp. 135ff. [4] HaReuveni, Nogah. 1980. Nature in Our Biblical Heritage. Neot Kedumim,.Kiryat Ono, Israel. Pp. 30-42, 59-60.
[5] Bamidbar 11:5

[A Mikdash with a Chance of Divine Presence by Vered Hollander-Goldfarb
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1G06lq2rUSHjnPApaSSziWYjbi5tNRonf/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1G06lq2rUSHjnPApaSSziWYjbi5tNRonf/view)

Imagine building a beautiful structure for a special tenant only to discover at the inauguration celebration that the tenant does not show up to dwell in that special space. That was probably Moshe's great fear on the day of the inauguration of the Mishkan (Tabernacle).

We may seem far away from the description of that day when Moshe finally put up the Mishkan at the closing of the book of Shemot. After the meticulous execution of the detailed instructions came the grand finale of combining all the parts to create the magnificent whole called the Mishkan. In reality, a book and a half later, we are still on that day.

All the work on the physical structure would have been worthless if God's presence would not have manifested itself in the Mishkan. Seeing the cloud descend over the Mishkan, witnessing Moshe speaking with God (as is described in the closing sentences of Shemot) convinced the people that they had done it right.

The inauguration was a complex ceremony, including many participants. We are finally coming to the end of the process in these parashot in Bemidbar. We ended last week with the representatives of the tribes contributing their share and are opening this parashah with Aaron lighting the Menorah.

The Torah may tell of the first time we inaugurated a dwelling place for God, but not the last. Shlomo (Solomon) goes through a lengthy prayer and celebration as he inaugurates the First Temple (I Kings chapter 8). In the days of the return from Babylon the first version of the Second Temple was being built.

These are the days of Zechariah, the prophet whose words we read in this week's haftarah. We know from the book of Ezra that Zechariah, together with Haggai, was an active advocate for the rebuilding of the Mikdash, which was moving along sluggishly, if at all.

Why were the people not rushing to build? After all, they were given permission by Cyrus to return to Judah to build a house for God. A peek in Haggai and Ezra suggests that the people feared failure.

The reality was harsh. The economic situation for large parts of the people involved was difficult, apparently exasperated by a drought. All this deepened a sense that unlike the Exodus from Egypt, this return to the land was no time of glory and miracles. This did not match their concept of redemption, and they were hesitant: perhaps they should not be building God's house because God is not there, He is not dwelling among them.

Fear and depression were probably the greatest obstacles to advancing the building. Zechariah in the opening words of this haftarah speaks to these misgivings: "*Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming, and I will dwell in your midst,' says the Lord.*" (Zec. 2:14) While sharing in the joy of Moshe and the people in the desert in these parashot, we get a reminder that great national moments are not guaranteed, but if we work at it, God might come and dwell in our midst. *(Vered Hollander-Goldfarb teaches Tanach and Medieval Commentators at the Conservative Yeshiva and is a regular contributor to Torah Sparks, FJC's weekly message on the weekly Torah portion.)*

Yahrtzeits

Cornelia and Francesca Peckman remember their grandmother Regina Rostoker on Sunday June 11th.

Alice Solomon remembers her sister Teddy (Theodora) Blitzler Fine on Sunday June 11th.

Fran Nelson remembers her father Lewis Rapaport on Tuesday June 13th.