Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Beha'alotcha
June 6, 2026 *** 21 Sivan, 5786

Beha'alotcha in a Nutshell

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

The name of the Parshah, "Behaalotecha," means "When you raise" and it is found in Numbers 8:2.

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/Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This haftorah 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 haftorah 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

Moses" Challenge by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l (5773)
https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/behaalotecha/moses-challenge/

It was the worst crisis in Moses' life. Incited by the 'mixed multitude', the Israelites complain about the food:

'If only we had meat to eat. We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost - also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna.' Num. 11:4-6

It was an appalling show of ingratitude, but not the first time the Israelites had behaved this way. Three earlier episodes are recorded in the book of Exodus (chapters 15-17) immediately after the crossing of the Red Sea. First at Marah they complained that the water was bitter. Then, in more aggressive terms, they protested at the lack of food ('If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat round pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death'). Later, at Refidim, they grumbled at the absence of water, prompting Moses to say to God, 'What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me!'

The episode in this week's Torah portion - at the place that became known as Kivrot Hataavah - was not, then, the first such challenge Moses had faced, but the fourth. Yet Moses' reaction this time is nothing less than complete despair:

'Why have You treated Your servant so badly?' asked Moshe of the Lord. 'Why have I found so little favour in Your sight that You lay all the burden of this people upon me? Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who gave birth to them all, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nursemaid carries a baby,' to the land that You swore to their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give all this people when they come wailing to me, "Give us meat to eat"? I cannot bear all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how You treat me, kill me now, if I find any favour in Your sight, and let me not see my own misery.'Num. 11:11-15

It is an extraordinary outburst. Moses prays to die. He is not the last prophet of Israel to do so. Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah did likewise - making us realise that even the greatest can have their moments of despair. Yet the case of Moses is particularly puzzling. He had faced, and overcome, such difficulties before. Each time, God had answered the people's requests. He had sent water, and manna, and quails. Moses knew this. Why then did the fourth outburst of the people ('If only we had meat to eat') induce in this, the strongest of men, what seems nothing less than a complete breakdown?

Equally strange is God's reaction:

'Gather for Me seventy of Israel's elders, whom you know to be the

people's elders and officers, and bring them to the Tent of Meeting. Let them stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the spirit that is on you and place it upon them; they will share the burden of the people with you, and you will not have to bear it alone. Num. 11:16-17

To be sure, this is a response to Moses' complaint, 'I cannot carry all these people by myself.' Yet both complaint and response are puzzling. In what way would the appointment of elders address the internal crisis Moses was undergoing? Did he need them to help him find meat? Clearly not. Either it would appear by a miracle or it would not appear at all. Did he need them to share the burdens of leadership? The answer is again, No. Already, not long before, on the advice of his father-in-law Yitro, he had created an infrastructure of delegation. Yitro had said this:

'What you are doing is not good. You will be worn away, and this people along with you. It is too heavy a burden for you. You cannot carry it alone. Now listen to me, let me advise you; and may God be with you. You speak for the people before God, and bring their concerns to Him. And you must acquaint them with His precepts and laws, and make known to them the path they are to walk and the way they must act. You, as well, must seek out among the people capable men – God-fearing, trustworthy men, who despise corruption; and appoint them over the people as leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.' Ex. 18:18-21

Moses acted on the suggestion. He therefore already had assistants, deputies, a leadership team. In what way would this new appointment of seventy elders make a difference?

Besides which, why the emphasis on spirit in God's reply: 'I will take of the spirit that is on you and put the spirit on them'? In what way did the elders need to become prophets in order to help Moses? Being a prophet does not help someone in carrying out administrative or other burdens of leadership. It helps only in knowing what guidance to give the people - and for this, one prophet, Moses, is sufficient. To put it more precisely, either the seventy elders would deliver the same message as Moses or they would not. If they did, they would be superfluous. If they did not, they would undermine his authority (precisely what Joshua feared in Num. 11:28.)

Aware of the multiple difficulties in the text, Ramban offers the following interpretation:

Moses thought that if they had many leaders, they would appease their wrath by speaking to their hearts when the people started complaining. Or it is possible that when the elders prophesied, and the spirit was on them, the people would know that the elders were established as prophets and would not all gather against Moses but would ask for their desires from them as well.

Both suggestions are insightful, but neither is without difficulty. The first - that the elders would become peacemakers among the people - did not call for a new leadership cadre. Moses already had the heads of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. The second - that their presence would diffuse the people's anger by giving them many people, not one, to complain to - is equally hard to understand. We recall that when the people had one other person to turn to with their concerns (Aaron), this led to the making of the Golden Calf. Why did God not 'take of the spirit' that was on Moses and place it on Aaron at that time? It would have prevented the single greatest catastrophe in the wilderness years? Besides which, we do not find that the seventy elders actually did anything at Kivrot Hataavah. The text even says, "When the spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again."[1] How then did this once-and-never-to-be-repeated flow of the prophetic spirit make a difference? The more we reflect on the passage, the more the difficulties multiply.

Yet something happened. Moses' despair disappeared. His attitude was transformed. Immediately thereafter, it is as if a new Moses stands before us, untroubled by even the most serious challenges to his leadership. When two of the elders, Eldad and Medad, prophesy not in the Tent of Meeting but in the camp, Joshua senses a threat to Moses' authority and says, 'Moses, my lord, stop them!' Moses replies, with surpassing generosity of spirit, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit on them.' In the next chapter, when his own brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, start complaining about him, he does nothing: 'Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.' Indeed, when God became angry at Miriam, Moses prayed on her

behalf. The despair has gone. The crisis has passed. These two challenges were far more serious than the request of the people for meat, yet Moses meets them with confidence and equanimity. Something has taken place between him and God and he has been transformed. What was it?

To understand the sequence of events we must first place them in their historical context. Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein, in his insightful book on Moses' leadership, Tzir veTzon (Alon Shvut, 5762) notes that there is a marked change of tone between the book of Exodus and the book of Numbers. The complaints do not change, but God's and Moses' responses do. In Exodus, God does not get angry with the people, or if He does, Moses' prayers are able to turn away wrath. In Numbers, the response - sometimes God's, sometimes Moses' - are more unforgiving. What has changed?

R. Lichtenstein - correctly in my view - suggests that the early volatility of the people is forgivable. To be sure, they should have had faith in God, but they had never been faced with the Red Sea, or the desert, or lack of food and water before. Their greatest offence - making the Golden Calf - leads to a long pause in the narrative, essentially from Exodus chapter 25 to Numbers chapter 11. During this period, in response to Moses' prayer for forgiveness, God instructs the people to build a Tabernacle which will ensure His constant presence among them.

Much of the second half of Exodus, the entire book of Leviticus, and the first ten chapters of Numbers are dedicated to the details of the Sanctuary, the service that was to take place there, and the reconstitution of Israel as a holy nation camped, tribe by tribe, around it. The whole of this sequence of 53 chapters, all of which is set in the desert at Sinai, is a kind of meta-historical moment, a break in the journey of the Israelites from place to place. Time and space stand still. Between the twin events of the Giving of the Torah and the construction of the Tabernacle, the Israelites are turned from an undisciplined mass of fugitive slaves into a nation whose constitution is the Torah, whose sovereign is God alone, and at whose centre (physically and metaphysically) is the Sanctuary (the Mishkan), the visible sign of God's Presence. The Israelites are no longer what they were before they came to Sinai. They are now "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Hence Moses' despair when they grumbled about the food. They had done so before. But they were different before. They had not yet gone through the transformative experiences that shaped them as a nation. What caused Moses' spirit to break was the fact that, no sooner had they left the Sinai desert to begin the journey again, they reverted to their old habits of complaint as if nothing had changed. If the revelation at Sinai, the experience of Divine anger at the Golden Calf, and the long labour of building the Tabernacle had not changed them, what would or could? Moses' despair is all too intelligible. For the first time since his mission began, he could see defeat staring him in the face. Nothing - or so it seemed - not miracles, deliverances, revelations, or creative labour, could change this people from a nation that focused on food into one that grasped the significance of the unique ethical-spiritual destiny to which they had been called. Perhaps God, from the perspective of eternity, could see some ray of hope in the future. Moses, as a human being, could not. 'I would rather die, he utters, 'than spend the rest of my life labouring in vain.'

We now reach the point of speculation. I may be wrong (and the Netziv puts it another way in his introduction to Haamek Davar, section 5) but I interpret the sequence of events as follows: There can come a time in the life of any truly transformative leader when the sun of hope is eclipsed by the clouds of doubt - not about God, but about people, above all about oneself. Am I really making a difference? Am I deceiving myself when I think I can change the world? I have tried, I have given the very best of my energies and inspiration, yet nothing seems to alter the depressing reality of human frailty and lack of vision. I have given the people the word of God Himself, yet they still complain, still they think only about the discomforts of today, not the vast possibilities of tomorrow. Such despair (lehavdil, Winston Churchill, who suffered from it, called it the 'black dog') can occur to the very greatest (to repeat, not only Moses but also Elijah, Jeremiah, and Jonah prayed to die). Moses was the very greatest. Therefore God gave him the greatest gift of all - one that no one else has ever been given.

God let Moses see the influence he had on others. For a brief moment God took 'the spirit that is on you and put it on them' so that Moses could see the difference he had made to one group, the seventy elders. Moses

needed nothing more. He did not need their help. He did not need them to continue to prophesy. All he needed was a transparent glimpse of how his spirit had communicated itself to them. Then he knew he had made a difference. Little could he have known that he - who encountered almost nothing from the Israelites in his lifetime but complaints, challenges, and rebellions - would have so decisive an influence that the people of Israel 3,300 years later would still be studying and living by the words he transmitted; that he had helped forge an identity that would prove more tenacious than any other in the history of humankind; that in the full perspective of hindsight he would prove to have been the greatest leader that ever lived. He did not know these things; he did not need to know these things. All he needed was to see that seventy elders had internalised his spirit and made his message their own. Then he knew that his life was not in vain. He had disciples. His vision was not his alone. He had planted it in others. Others, too, would continue his work after his lifetime. That was enough for him, as it must be for us. Once Moses knew this, he could face any challenge with equanimity (except, many years later, at Kadesh, but that is another story).

Understood thus, there is a message in Moses' crisis for all of us (that, surely, is why it is recounted in the Torah). I remember when my late father z"l died and we - my mother and brothers - were sitting shiva. Time and again people would come and tell us of kindnesses he had done for them, in some cases more than 50 years before. I have since discovered that many people who have sat shiva have had similar experiences. How moving, I thought, and at the same time how sad, that my father z"l was not there to hear their words. What comfort it would have brought him to know that despite the many hardships he faced, the good he did was not forgotten. And how tragic that we so often keep our sense of gratitude to ourselves, saying it aloud only when the person to whom we feel indebted has left this life, and we are comforting his or her mourners.

Perhaps that just is the human condition. We never really know how much we have given others - how much the kind word, the thoughtful deed, the comforting gesture, changes lives and is never forgotten. In this respect, if in no other, we are like Moses. He too was human; he had no privileged access into other people's minds; without a miracle, he could not have known the influence he had on those closest to him. All the

evidence seemed to suggest otherwise. The people, even after all God - and Moses - had done for them, were still ungrateful, querulous, quick to criticise and complain. But that was on the surface. For a moment God gave him a glimpse of what was beneath the surface. He showed him how Moses' spirit had entered others and lifted them, however briefly, to the level of prophetic vision.

God did this for no other person - not then, not now. But if it was enough for Moses, it is enough for us. The good we do lives after us. It is the greatest thing that does. We may leave a legacy of wealth, power, even fame, but these are questionable benefits and sometimes harm rather than help those we leave them to. What we leave to others is a trace of our influence for good. We may never see it, but it is there. That is the greatest blessing of leadership. It alone is the antidote to despair, the solid ground of hope. [1] This is the plain sense of Num. 11:25 according to most commentators, though the Targum reads it differently.

Independence Day: Beha'alotcha by Emmanuel Bloch
https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/independence-day/

In Escape from Freedom (1941), Erich Fromm argued that freedom is not merely liberation from external constraints ("freedom from") but also entails the capacity for self-realization and responsible action ("freedom to"). One of the most puzzling passages in Beha-alotekha reflects a similar insight.

In Numbers 11, the Israelites protest their steady diet of manna and forcefully demand meat (11:4–6). God's response unfolds in two seemingly unrelated steps. First, the appointment of a council of seventy elders (11:16–17), often understood as the precursor of the rabbinic Great Sanhedrin; and only afterward, the sending of a powerful wind to bring the quail that will feed the people (11:31). This sequence is surprising: how exactly does a new tribunal offer an adequate response to what appears to be a legitimate desire to diversify the menu?

The beginnings of an answer emerge from a careful reading of the verses. Actually, the text seems to point to a more complex motive on the part of the Israelites: rather than simply craving meat, they seem intent on

rejecting manna itself.

> “We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!” (Num. 11:4-6)

What, then, is the problem with manna? Moses’s anguished response (Num. 11:11–15) provides a hint. It suggests that the Israelites’ complaint is not directed at the manna as food, but at what it signifies: the rejection of manna emerges as a rejection of Moses himself.

> “(…) Moses was troubled. He asked the Lord, “Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? (…)I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me.” (Num. 11:10-15)

Rabbinic tradition, characteristically attentive to the silences and nuances of the biblical text, makes the connection between Moses and manna even more explicit: the manna descended daily through Moses’s merit (BT, Ta’anit 9a), and with his death on the seventh of Adar, it ceased at once (BT, Kiddushin 38a).

From this perspective, the Israelites’ request for meat (and rejection of manna) catalyzes a reconfiguration of authority, shifting leadership away from Moses alone toward a broader structure embodied in the Sanhedrin.

Yet another element invites closer attention. The same biblical text simultaneously casts Moses in strikingly paradoxical terms, portraying him as a nurturing figure: a kind of wet nurse, even a symbolic mother.

> Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors? (Num. 11:12)

In this portrayal, Moses becomes a provider of “milk”, the very antithesis of “meat.” The biblical text further develops this motif by introducing two additional figures whose very names evoke the imagery of “milk”: Eldad and Medad (Num. 11:26). Counted among the seventy elders of the Sanhedrin, they nevertheless remain in the camp rather than assembling with the others, as if resisting full incorporation into the emerging

structure of leadership.

In Hebrew, dad refers to the nipple, viz. the source through which a nursing infant receives milk. Thus, Eldad can be read as “toward the breast,” and Medad as “from the breast.” The symbolism is suggestive: it reinforces the depiction of Moses as the nurturing source sustaining Israel in its earliest stage of development. Even as the Israelites begin to move beyond a “Torah of milk,” Eldad and Medad, two otherwise minor figures, quietly echo the formative stage now being left behind.

Moses, then, is associated with manna and milk, which share important structural similarities. Both are forms of nourishment meant for those who have not yet reached maturity; both cater to the needs of those still in the process of becoming. An infant cannot yet digest solid food; its system is not ready. For a time, it must rely on a provisional, sustaining substitute. So too with the manna, the divine food provided in the desert during the infancy of the Jewish people.

Here again, the rabbis amplified some of these themes in the midrash: “Just as a baby tastes different flavors from the breast, so too with the manna, every time that the Jewish people ate, they found in it many flavors” (BT, Yoma 75a). At the same time, if some flavors were absent from the manna (cucumbers, melons, leeks, …), it is because these foods were deemed harmful to nursing mothers (Sifrei Bemidbar 87).

This implies that the relationship between Moses, the man of milk and manna, and the Hebrew people was one of radical asymmetry: the recipients, still immature, required what we might call a “Torah of milk,” a Torah of pure revelation. Just like manna, everything flowed from God; human beings were only receivers. At the earliest stage of their formation, the Jewish people needed a form of divine communication given directly, without the mediation of human effort or interpretation.

The demand for meat and the rejection of manna constitute, in effect, a declaration of independence. It is the people’s way of asserting that they will no longer remain in a purely passive relationship with the divine. They refuse to stand only as recipients of revelation and instead seek a different posture, in which they become active partners, shaping and engaging their relationship with the Transcendent rather than simply receiving it.

It is precisely in response to this deeper demand that God initiates a decisive shift: the gradual move away from Moses as the singular, all-encompassing leader toward a more layered and participatory form of leadership: the Sanhedrin. The demand for meat was, in fact, a bold claim to autonomy, a rejection of unceasing Revelation as a form of dependence, and a declaration of the people's desire to encounter and engage the Torah on their own terms.

As Immanuel Kant famously observed, "enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity." In Beha-alotekha, we encounter an analogous moment of transformation: a people in the act of growing up. Here, a nascent nation begins to assume a more defined identity, and with that maturation come far-reaching consequences, reshaping not only its inner spiritual posture but also its institutional life and structures of authority.

A Jewish Independence Day, as it were. *(Emmanuel Bloch PH.D is Adjunct Assistant Professor at JTS)*

Beha'alotcha: Let Your Freak Flag Fly by Cantor Sheri Allen
https://truah.org/resources/sheri-allen-behaalotecha-moraltorah_2026_/

From the moment he was born, our son Jeremy was not what you would call a stereotypical "boy." He loved wearing his pink footie PJ's and washing the floor with his toy mop. He loved watching me put on makeup, and he was obsessed with Disney princesses. When my parents bought him a red Superman cape, he pretended to be the Little Mermaid, with her long flowing red hair, and he adored playing Barbies and American Girl dolls with his sister.

We had no problem with any of this. In fact, we delighted in watching him confidently charting his own path, unabashedly expressing himself, and choosing his own adventures. As he grew, he never seemed interested in following the crowd or conforming to binary expectations. When my husband Richard remarked, "Jeremy, you march to the beat of your own drummer," he replied, "Daddy, I am my own drummer."

There's a lot of marching going on in Parshat Beha'alotecha, and no opportunity to step out of line. The Torah describes, in great detail, the

precise arrangement of each tribe as they set off into the wilderness. The 12 tribes were divided into four camps, each camp centered around the Tabernacle and lined up in a divinely dictated order, with Cloud of Glory leading the way to each new destination.

Although uniformity was essential, each tribe was still able to express its individuality. Numbers 2:2 states, "The Israelites shall camp each with his standard, under the banners (d'galim) of their ancestral house…" As described in Bamidbar Rabbah 2:4, these banners, sometimes translated as flags, served to highlight the uniqueness of each tribe:

> The Holy One blessed be He loved them with a great love, as he arranged them according to banners like the ministering angels, so that they would be distinguishable. From where is it derived that it was love for Israel? It is as Solomon says: "He brought me to the banquet house, and his banner of love is upon me. "(Song of Songs 2:4)

These flags were a literal sign of God's love for the people in all their array, adorned with stones and a bevy of colors:

> There were insignias for each and every prince: a banner with a color for each, and every banner like the color of the gems that were on Aaron's heart, from which the empire learned to make a banner, with colors for each and every banner. For each and every tribe, the prince's banner was like the color of his stone. Bamidbar Rabbah 2:7

Reuven's flag was red, Shimon's, green; Levi stepped it up a notch with a tri-color display of white, black, and red; Dan's was "like a sapphire," Naftali's, the color of red wine. In what can arguably be considered the first Pride flag in history, Benjamin's flag sported 12 colors, one for each tribe.

How beautifully appropriate, then, that we read about these multi-colored flags as we welcome in Pride Month. Today, in addition to the iconic rainbow-striped traditional flag, dozens more have been created over the years to represent different sexual orientations and gender identities. There is nothing more energizing and hopeful than walking with hundreds of others in a Pride parade and seeing the myriad of flags held high, a

brilliantly hued tribute to the resilience and courage of those who continue to fight for their right to exist.

All three of my adult children identify as LGBTQ+, and growing up queer and Jewish in Texas was not easy. And years later, it's not only become harder, but also dangerous. Especially for my transgender son, Preston, who no longer feels safe coming home to visit.

In 2025, seven anti-LGBTQ+ bills were passed by the Texas Legislature. Among them, SB8, the Bathroom bill, forces trans individuals to use bathrooms in state public facilities that align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

HB229 strictly defines male and female based on reproductive organs and codifies the 2024 DPS and DSHS policies prohibiting gender marker updates on Texas IDs, driver's licenses, and birth certificates.

SB 12 prohibits teachers and school staff from assisting students with social transitioning, without clearly defining what that means. And SB1188 requires that electronic health records (EHRs) record a person's sex assigned at birth as either "male" or "female," thus enforcing binary sex designations on all Texans, regardless of their gender identity or the status of their legal documents.

Additionally, Governor Greg Abbott recently issued a directive to ban symbols, flags, or other designs on roadways, including rainbow crosswalks, arguing that it promoted "political ideologies." Several cities have pushed back, however, boldly painting steps and walkways in rainbow colors. It inspired me to paint the walkway leading up to my home — and so far, I've only received compliments!

The aggressive, hostile, and systematic attacks on the LGBTQ+ community in Texas are blatant attempts to terrorize, shame, and dehumanize people who just want to live their lives. Many have already left the state.

But there are many others who have chosen to stay — who refuse to be intimidated or bullied, instead opting to use their voices and growing collective power to stand up to this baseless hatred. As a cisgender, straight woman, I do not encounter the same risks that they do, which makes me all the more determined and driven to stand with other affirming interfaith communities to speak out and take action against this

abuse.

Although our testimony and lobbying efforts against the passage of these egregious bills have mostly been ignored, we have come up with creative ways to circumvent them.

Our LGBTQ+ Equality Action Team of Justice Network Tarrant County hosted an interfaith concert, which raised $27,000 for NTTN — the North Texas TRANSportation Network, an organization that provides travel and relocation grants to North Texas families seeking out-of-state healthcare for trans and gender expansive youth.

After the anti-LGBTQ+ legislation was passed, we organized a community forum with panel discussions featuring staff from Keshet, Lambda Legal, and the HELP center for LGBTQ+ Health to educate the community about the ramifications of these new laws, and what people could do to stay as safe as possible.

We have created comprehensive guides that include healthcare, legislative, and community resources for the LGBTQ+ community, and we are currently advocating for the inclusion of single-stall/family restrooms in all public, government-owned buildings.

And of course, during the month of June we show up at Pride events with our swag and our flags, grateful to come together to celebrate, support, and amplify queer joy and the brilliant variations that live within all of us.

So, this year, whether you decide to march to the beat of a different drummer, or to simply be your own drummer, let your freak flag fly. Happy Pride! *(Cantor Sheri Allen is the Cantor and co-founder of Makom Shelanu Congregation, an inclusive, affirming synagogue in Ft. Worth, Texas. She is a member of the Cantors Assembly, serves on their Ethics Committee, and is the 2024 recipient of the Yehudah Mandel Humanitarian Award. Sheri is the co-chair of the LGBTQ+ rights committee of the Social Justice Commission of Conservative/Masorti Judaism.)*

Beha'alotcha: The Gift of Darkness by Sophie Stern Greenbaum
https://yeshivatmaharat.org/behaalotekha-the-gift-of-darkness/

The poet Mary Oliver once wrote:

> Someone I loved once gave me

a box full of darkness.
It took me years to understand
that this, too, was a gift.

It's hard to recognize the gift of darkness while it's in our hands. It's quite a poetic human condition: One moment we are experiencing the sheer joy of the gift of God's love and, in the very next moment, we are given a box of darkness. A total collapse, the overwhelm of suffering, moments where we are only left with questions of why?

But sometime later, sometimes years later, when we've survived, we can look back and realize that only from the place of darkness did something grow. We can see that an awakening occurred. Not because the darkness was good, but because what emerged within the darkness was good.

In Parshat Beha'alotekha we have two powerful examples of boxes full of darkness. First, we see Moshe, our fearless leader, collapse under pressure. He cries out "I cannot carry all these people by myself, for it is too much for me" (Bamidbar 11:14). A man facing extreme burnout, vulnerability and a burden too heavy to carry.

And the gift that emerges? God responds by creating community. Seventy elders get called up who will diversify the leadership and create a shared role to help Moshe carry the weight.

Soon after, the Torah tells us that Miriam is afflicted with tzara'at, a disease of the skin, and quarantined and shut out of camp for days. She becomes a woman in a place of illness, loneliness and isolation.

And what comes from this isolation? "The people did not move on…"

The entire nation stops. They wait for her and her darkness becomes a shared pause. A nation standing still to not leave behind one person.

In the beginning of the parsha, God tells Moshe that Aaron needs to "make the lights go up" (Bamidbar 8:2). Rashi explains this: "one must kindle them (the lights) until the light ascends of its own accord." The Lubavitcher Rebbe takes this teaching even deeper and says that each soul is like a candle, and it is our job to be lamplighters (chabad.org). When the light is dim in a person, we need to be like Aaron and hold a light for this person, closely and patiently until their own light catches fire

and begins to rise on its own. Sometimes, in the darkness, we cannot see that a sanctuary is still surrounding us. But the ultimate truth that the parsha comes to teach is that the darkness is not the end.

Moshe's darkness served as an invitation for the community to carry the load. And Miriam's darkness caused the nation to pause. Both times, their flames were ignited when they themselves no longer saw the spark.

Sometimes in life we are the lamp, and sometimes the lamplighter. And the Rebbe reminds us that no matter how dim the light is, the spark isn't gone. It is only our duty to remember, when we are in the dark, that it is not ours alone to carry. There is a lamplighter somewhere in the world meant for us. And conversely, when we see someone in the dark, our duty is to be like Aaron and hold the flame close, lovingly and steady until they can rise again on their own.

May we all be blessed that the boxes of darkness in our lives are revealed as gifts, speedily and in good time. And may we each merit to be and receive lamplighters along the way. (*Sophie Stern Greenbaum is from Los Angeles CA . She teaches monthly Rosh Chodesh groups as well as Judaic studies at a local hebrew school. Along with her studies, Sophie works for the Jewish Federation of Los Angeles helping young Jewish families build community.)*

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Yahrtzeits

Cornelia and Francesca Peckman remember their grandmother Regina Rostoker on Sunday June 7th
Alice Solomon remembers her sister Theda Ruth Blitzer Fine Sun. June 7th
Fran Nelson remembers her father Lewis Rapaport on Tuesday June 9th