

**Parashat B'Ha'alotcha: Bearing the Burden Together**

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Shabbat Shalom, Friends,

Parashat B'Ha'alotcha is full of pearls of wisdom and opportunities for growth. It is so hard to choose between them!

Last week, in Parashat Nasso, we dealt with the way in which we carry our lot in life. This week the theme continues, but when the burden becomes too heavy for an individual, help is offered.

After weeks of preparation – taking a census of the fighting force and recruiting the Levites to bear the Mishkan and set it up – the long journey in the wilderness begins. Very quickly, however, the initial excitement makes way for complaints. How familiar! How very like us…

"And the people were as murmurers, speaking evil in the ears of the LORD; and when the LORD heard it, His anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and devoured in the uttermost part of the camp.  And the people cried to Moses; and Moses prayed to the LORD, and the fire abated… And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting; and the children of Israel also wept on their part, and said: 'Would that we were given flesh to eat! **…** our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all; we have nothing save this manna to look to.' **…** And Moses heard the people weeping, family by family, every man at the door of his tent; and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly… "(Numbers 11:1-10)

The People demand meat. For a moment it seems that their lust for meat will destroy the entire Exodus and the journey to the Promised Land. God loses patience, and Moshe breaks down. (In Hebrew, the words "meat" and "break" share the same letters.)

"…and Moses was displeased. And Moses said to the LORD: 'Why have You dealt ill with Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You lay the burden of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? Have I brought them forth, that You should say to me: Carry them in your bosom, as a nursing-father carries the sucking child, to the land which You did swear to their fathers? From where should I have flesh to give to all this people? For they trouble me with their weeping, saying: Give us flesh, that we may eat.  I am not able to bear all this people myself alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if You deal thus with me, kill me, I pray Thee, out of hand, if I have found favor in Your sight; and let me not look upon my wretchedness.'  " (Numbers 11:10-15)

Moshe has had enough. Even though he is frustrated with the people and with his task, Moshe is directing his anger towards God. God should bear the burden of the People. To make matters worse, God continuously makes sublime promises (liberty, milk and honey…), that only exacerbate the frustration. The people’s frustration is directed towards Moshe, who can’t do anything about it.

I am deeply moved by Moshe's plea, as he can no longer bear the burden God has placed on his shoulders, "And if You deal thus with me, kill me… and let me not look upon my wretchedness." Moshe certainly knows how to express his feelings. Three times in this parasha he cries out in prayer – once to stop the Divine fire that God sends forth, a second time here, to be relieved of his burden and a third time as he begs for Miriam’s healing from leprosy.

Moshe's plea is always heard! God does not relieve him of his burden, but he does temporarily inspire 70 elders with the Divine wisdom required to help Moshe with his leadership tasks.

There is something exciting and strengthening about Moshe's plea and God's response. Moshe did not ask for the burden to begin with and never wanted it. But when he realized it was his fate and destiny, he accepted it. Not happily, not proudly, but with surrender. Furthermore, in times of great difficulty Moshe does not hesitate to call out. When he feels he can bear it no longer, he even asks to be released of the burden

God, on the other hand, does not absolve anyone of life’s burdens. Only death releases (and we don't even know that for sure…) But God is able to ease the burden, by offering us partners with whom to share the load. Just as God supplied the infant Moshe with a sister to watch over him until he reached safety, with an adoptive mother who takes him from the river, with a wonderful father-in-law to help him after he runs away from home, with an articulate brother who helps him with his great mission to Pharaoh, so God now supplies the 70 elders to assist Moshe.

Perhaps this is what Moshe's plight means. What he is really saying is, "I can't do it on my own, I need partners!" this plight God can hear. This kind of plea is greater than both “I-give-up” and “I-can-do-it-alone” attitudes.

Biologically, human beings are wired to need social interaction. We are born helpless, dependent on family to love us and raise us. From birth on we continuously look for comradery and partnerships. This dependency is one of the ways in which God intervenes in His Creation.

Moshe in our parasha is a powerful example of a person who knows how to cry out, thus he is a model for effective prayer. Both require humility, and humility is Moshe’s essence. A person who is unable to admit when things are hard, who is unwilling to pray, is, in a way, in denial of human mortality and vulnerability. He believes he can manage on his own. On the other hand, he who complains incessantly most likely has not really found strength within himself. As Rabbi Hillel teaches, "if I am not for myself, who will be there for me?" He or she who IS able to cry out for help in times of need might not be absolved of the burden, but is guaranteed to find partners to share the burden with, because "if I am (only) for myself, what am I (really)?"

This week the journey from Mount Sinai towards the Promised Land begins. It is arduous and dangerous. Complaining won't help, but crying out from the depth of one’s hardship will. Whether quietly whispered in the shower or yelled loudly in the thick of the forest, we can call out to God to ease our burden.

"When you're down and troubled

And you need a helping hand

And nothing, nothing is going right

Close your eyes and think of me,

And soon I will be there

To brighten up even your darkest night.

"You just call out my name

And you know wherever I am

I'll come running…" Carole King

Shabbat Shalom,

Elisha