

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 215

**Beha'alotcha** | The Way of Ascent - The Power of the Moment



# MESILOT

## *Pathways to the Soul*

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha  
of **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l**

From the weekly lessons of his son  
**Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita**

פרשת בהעלותך | אנגלית

# ...PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL...

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## **Parshat Beha'alotcha**

### **Ashamed to be Jewish?**

Jacob is a person whose life is more or less orderly. He has set times of prayer thrice daily, fixed times for meals, and scheduled times for all of his other affairs.

But as happens to almost everyone, Jacob sometimes encounters events that disrupt his regular routine, and one such occasion soon occurred.

It was late morning, and Jacob was sitting in a cafe, occupied with his business affairs. Suddenly, a reminder alert sounded on his phone, and he stretched out his hand to pick it up.

A muted call of surprise escaped his mouth: "Oh no, I have totally forgotten. In another two hours, I have a very important meeting, and of all days — today I do not have a car."

He jumped up in a panic and ran to the nearest bus stop. By

Divine Providence, he reached the stop just as his bus was arriving. He breathed a sigh of relief, "Thank G-d, I caught the bus, and with G-d's help, I'll arrive at the meeting in half an hour."

The meeting dragged on and on, and only in the late afternoon did it finally come to an end.

Jacob left and once again walked to the bus stop, but this time, he had to wait a bit. The bus stop was crowded with passengers, and he stood off to the side. Suddenly, he jumped when he realized in alarm: "Mincha! I haven't prayed Mincha."

Glancing at his watch, he saw there were only a few minutes left to sunset.

"I have no choice, I must pray Mincha right here at the bus stop," the thought flashed through his mind.

## Parshat Beha'alotcha - The Torah-Raising Chant

He began to pray and suddenly felt a sensation of embarrassment. "Am I going to pray in front of all these people? What will they think of me?"

"But on the other hand, I have no choice. How can I conceive of skipping Mincha?"

He stood to the side and quickly recited the blessings one after another, and after barely a minute and a half, he finished the Amidah prayer.

On the bus ride home, he berated himself mercilessly.

"Aren't you ashamed? How could you be embarrassed by your practice of Judaism?" His thoughts continued to storm: "I have surely sunken to the lowest spiritual depths."

His conscience gave him no rest, and he got up and went to see his rabbi from his yeshiva days. The rabbi greeted him warmly, and after hearing Jacob's story, he sat with him and felt compelled to share with him the insights that are recorded below.

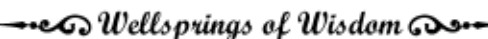
## The Torah-Raising Chant

In Tractate Soferim,<sup>1</sup> we find the following:

"Before reading from the Torah, one must lift the Torah scroll and show the written text to the people standing to his right and left; and then turn it to face those before and behind him, for it is a mitzvah for both men and women to see

the writing, and to bow and say: "And this is the Torah which Moses set before the Children of Israel" (Deuteronomy 4:44), and "The Torah of G-d is perfect, restoring the soul" (Psalms 19:8).

In the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim, 134:2), it is written to recite both verses:



1. Chapter 14, Mishnah 14.

**Parshat Beha'alotcha - The All-Encompassing Clouds of Glory**

"It is a mitzvah for all — men and women — to see the text, to bow and say: 'And this is the Torah, etc.' 'The Torah of G-d, etc.'"

In the Siddur of the Shelah, yet a different text is recorded, which reads:

“And this is the Torah which Moses set before the Children of Israel, by the word of G-d through Moses.”

The Shelah's version is made up of two separate verses: the previous verse, "And this is the Torah" (Deuteronomy 4:44), whereas "by the word of G-d through Moses" is from Parshat Beha'alotcha (Numbers 9:23).

In the view of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, of blessed memory, this version is a distortion,<sup>2</sup> because “by the word of G-d through Moses” is only half a

verse, and one is not allowed to quote only half a verse.

Instead, one must cite the entire verse, and accordingly, one should say:

"And this is the Torah which Moses set before the Children of Israel", and continue, "By the word of G-d they would encamp, and by the word of G-d they would travel; they kept the guard of G-d, by the word of G-d through Moses".

Based on Rabbi Chaim Volozhin's version, the question arises:

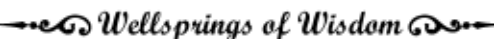
What is the connection between the beginning of the verse — “By the word of G-d they would encamp, and by the word of G-d they would travel” — and the lifting of the Torah scroll?

To answer this, we must begin at the very beginning.

**The All-Encompassing Clouds of Glory**

After the long and difficult years of slavery, the time of

redemption had finally arrived. The moment had come to leave



2. 'Siddur Ha'Gra (p. 140, Likutei Dinim Uvi'urim, 4).

## Parshat Beha'alotcha - The All-Encompassing Clouds of Glory

the iron furnace — that is, the land of Egypt.

Thus, the Zohar (Beha'alotcha 149a) states:

“Rabbi Abba opened and said: At the hour that the time of redemption arrived and the moment came for the nation of Israel to leave Egypt, the Holy One, blessed be He, drew them near with love, affection, and a shining countenance.

And out of the intense love with which He loved them, He called them: “My son, My firstborn, Israel” (Exodus 4:22).

That love continued to blaze, and through its power, G-d killed the angel of Egypt in the heavens above — he who was the “firstborn of Pharaoh” and head of the forces of Egypt's impurity — as well as the firstborns of the land of Egypt below, thereby culling and removing the powers of sorcery both above and below, powers which were binding the downtrodden Israelites.

G-d continued to annul and negate the strength of the Sitra

Achra (the “other side,” i.e., forces of impurity) that clung to their souls above. Whatever the Egyptians had done by means of their impure forces to prevent the Jewish people from escaping their grip - G-d immediately canceled.

Then the Jewish people merited to be called by the name “Bnei Yisrael” (Children of Israel), and they became free; G-d allowed none to rule over them except for Himself, the Holy and Blessed One.”

And so on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, all the people of Israel assembled in Raamses in Egypt, and at midday, they began to leave Egypt, beginning their journey toward Mount Sinai.

Their first stop was at Sukkot, where the nation of Israel received a wondrous Divine gift: the close accompaniment of seven Clouds of Glory.

Six of these seven clouds surrounded them above, below, and on all four sides. The cloud above protected them from sun and rain. The cloud beneath

**Parshat Beha'alotcha - The Clouds Stuck Through Thick and Thin**

shielded them from thorns and from creeping creatures such as snakes and scorpions. The four surrounding clouds protected them from any dangerous force — human or animal.

The seventh cloud went ahead of the Israelite camp to lead the way and smooth the path. This cloud lowered mountains and raised up valleys so that the path before the Children of Israel was straight and level.

**The Clouds Stuck Through Thick and Thin**

This intense force of love continued to reveal itself, and in the span of fifty days (from the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan to the 6<sup>th</sup> of Sivan), G-d elevated them from the deep and terrible impurity of Egypt, step by step until they merited to witness the sublime and holy experience at Mount Sinai.

By receiving the Torah, they merited uniting with and

becoming bound to G-d, and they were transformed into a dwelling place for His glorious Presence.

At Mount Sinai, the Holy One, blessed be He, chose the people of Israel to be His nation and inheritance, and by virtue of this choice, the Jewish people became connected to the very essence of G-d — with a bond that can never be undone for all of eternity.<sup>3</sup>

 *Wellsprings of Wisdom* 

**3.** Let us elaborate a bit further:

In a talk delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe (Likkutei Sichot, vol. 31, p. 11), he said the following:

"When a person is choosing between two items or realities, he weighs which one will bring him more benefit or which suits him better. Once he decides, we commonly say, 'he chose this one.'"

But, in fact, that description isn't quite accurate. He did not really choose — he was forced, so to speak. Because if there is a difference between the two, and one is clearly better for him, then, of course, he's compelled to take the one that's better.

A true and free choice exists only when there is no rational reason to pick one over the other and when there is no difference between the two. If he then takes one of them, that means he has

## Parshat Beha'alotcha - The Clouds Stuck Through Thick and Thin

But at that very moment, when the Jewish people reached the pinnacle of their greatness, envy entered the hearts of the nations of the world — an envy that bred hatred, and from that time and onward, ever since the

Revelation at Sinai, the nations of the world have despised us.

In the words of the Talmud (Shabbat 89a): “Why is it called Mount Sinai? Because from there, hatred (sin’ah) descended upon the nations (against the Jewish people).”<sup>4</sup>

### Wellsprings of Wisdom

chosen it. Such a choice arises from the essence of the soul itself, which kindles the desire and longing to select this particular option.

Likewise, in our case: At G-d's very Essence, all creatures are equal: "You give life to them all, and the heavenly host bows down before You."

Since, from His perspective everything is on the same plane, if G-d specifically chooses something, it is a true act of choice. Thus, when G-d chose — among all the nations — the Jewish people, even though to Him they are all — so to speak — equal, it demonstrates that His choice proceeds from His very Essence.

For further clarification:

When love derives from the fact that something has importance or when one senses its goodness, then we are no longer dealing with the Divine Essence as is, but rather with a level at which the object holds some significance.

By contrast, choice means that at the very level of the Divine Essence — where nothing else has any standing,

and only His Essence exists — He, on His own accord, chose the Children of Israel and bound Himself to them.

Hence, this choice enhanced His love for the Jewish people in two ways:

It is a wholly unlimited love, one that is neither contingent on nor measured by any quality of the beloved.

It is also a far deeper kind of love — before the Giving of the Torah, G-d's bond with the Jewish people stemmed from the value they possessed, so to speak. After the Giving of the Torah, however, through His choice, he created a bond that stems from His very own dimension, precisely as He is in His Essence.

And because this love is intrinsic — a love that depends on nothing — G-d will never abandon us.

Even if a Jew sins or transgresses abundantly, G-d will continue loving him with a true and abiding love. As we say: “Blessed are You, G-d, who loves His people Israel forever.”

4. This hatred has been evident throughout the generations.

Parshat Beha'alotcha - The Clouds Stuck Through Thick and Thin

Afterward, merely forty days after the Revelation at Sinai, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, the people bowed to the Golden Calf, as it says in the verse: “They arose early on the next day, and they offered burnt-offerings and brought peace-offerings; the people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to revel” (Exodus 32:6).

However, although they sinned most severely, G-d

did not remove the Clouds of Glory from them. As it is written in Nehemiah (9:18–19):

“Even though they made themselves a molten calf and said, ‘This is your G-d which brought you up from Egypt,’ and they committed great provocations, You in Your abundant mercy did not abandon them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud did not turn away from

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As the Rambam writes in his famous Iggeret Teiman:

“Know that this is the true Torah of G-d, given to us through the master of all prophets. By means of this Torah, the Creator distinguished us from the other peoples of the world, as it says:

“Only with your forefathers did G-d delight, to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, you, from among all the nations, as it is this day” (Deuteronomy 10:15).

This was not because we were deserving of it but due to the kindness and goodness of the Creator, who bestowed goodness upon us on account of the earlier good deeds of our forefathers, who knew the Creator and served Him.

And because the Creator singled us out with His commandments and statutes, making our distinction evident over others through His comprehensive laws and judgments, with all their details and structure, all of the idolaters envied us tremendously for our religion.

Their kings oppressed us for it, fomenting enmity and hatred, robbery and wrongdoing. Their desire is to battle with G-d and contend with Him.

From the time we were given this Torah until this very day, you will not find a single foreign king — whether he rose to power by force, compulsion, or strength — whose initial plan and final aim were not to undermine our Torah and obliterate our faith through compulsion, conquest, or violence, just as Amalek, Sisera, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Titus, Hadrian, and many others did.”

## Parshat Beha'alotcha - A Year Minus Ten Days

them by day to lead them on the path, nor did the pillar of fire by night failed to illuminate before them the way in which they would go.”

Although we are aware of G-d's great and boundless mercies, we still must understand: Being that they had sinned so great — why were the Clouds of Glory not removed from them ?

### A Year Minus Ten Days

We continue on and review the sequence of the prior events:

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of Sivan, the nation of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai, and on the 6<sup>th</sup> of Sivan, they received the Torah.

Afterward, Moses ascended to receive (and bring down) the Torah and remained there for forty days.

On the fortieth day, the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, the people worshipped the calf. That same day, Moses shattered the tablets and judged the sinners.

The following day, he ascended Mount Sinai once again for another forty days, pleading that G-d sweeten the judgments and annul the dire decree.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of Elul, Moses went up yet a third time, once again

for forty days, and on Yom Kippur (the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei), he brought down the second set of Tablets.

The next day, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei, he assembled the Jewish nation and informed them of the command to build the Mishkan (Tabernacle), and about half a year later, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Nissan, the Mishkan was erected.

At the foot of Mount Sinai, the Mishkan was inaugurated, and the cloud rested upon it as it is written at the end of Parshat Pekudei:

“Moses was unable to enter the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud rested upon it, and the glory of G-d filled the Mishkan” (Exodus 40:35).

A month later, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Iyar, Moses counted the Children

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of Israel and arranged them by their flags, as recounted in Parshat Bamidbar. Rashi explains that the catalyst for counting them was because G-d desired His presence to dwell among them.

To quote Rashi: "When He came to rest His Presence upon them, He counted them. On the first of Nissan, the Mishkan was erected, and on the first of Iyar, He counted them."

Twenty days after that, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of Iyar, the Children of Israel departed from Mount Sinai, as it is written:

"It came to pass in the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth of the month, that the cloud was lifted from over the Tabernacle of the Testimony. The Children of Israel traveled on their journeys from the wilderness of Sinai, and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran" (Numbers 10:11-12).

Hence, the nation of Israel stayed at the foot of Mount Sinai for one year minus ten days, ten days before the first of Sivan.

Looking at Rashi's words — "When He came to cause His Presence to rest upon them, He counted them. On the first of Nissan, the Mishkan was erected, and on the first of Iyar, He counted them" — two questions arise:

Firstly, as we noted, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Nissan, the cloud already rested on the Mishkan ("for the cloud rested upon it"), which suggests the Shechinah was already dwelling among the Jewish people then. So why does Rashi say that the Shechinah only rested upon them a month later, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Iyar, when he counted them, "when He came to rest His Presence upon them, He counted them"?

Secondly, what is the connection between the census of the Jewish people and the dwelling of the Shechinah upon them?

**The Counting of the Jewish People**

We find in the 'Kli Yakar',  
a commentary by Rabbi

Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz  
of blessed memory,

## Parshat Beha'alotcha - The Counting of the Jewish People

the following explanation  
(Numbers 1:1):

Indeed, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Nissan, the Shechinah rested on the Mishkan, yet it still did not rest upon the people of Israel themselves.

G-d wanted to show and demonstrate to the entire world that the nation of Israel themselves constitute G-d's permanent dwelling.

To show that, G-d waited thirty days, for a dwelling only attains "permanent" status after thirty days.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, after a month had passed from His initial dwelling upon the Mishkan, He rested His Presence upon His nation.

Furthermore, it was decreed by G-d that for the Shechinah to dwell, there must be at least

22,000 Jewish people present, and if even one fewer than that number were present, the Shechinah would not be able to rest.

Now, the Kabbalists taught that there are 28 camps (divisions) of the Divine Presence,<sup>6</sup> and in the wilderness, these 28 'camps' rested upon the seven Clouds of Glory which surrounded the Israelites — four camps of Shechinah upon each of the seven abovementioned clouds.

Since each camp of the Shechinah requires 22,000 men to be present, it was required to have the number of 28 times 22,000 Jewish men of age, for a total of 616,000 people.

And that was approximately the number of Jewish people at

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5. This distinction also has practical ramifications for various laws in Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 314–315; (Refer as well to Pri Megadim, Eshel Avraham on 315:1).

6. As the Raavad writes in his commentary on Sefer Yetzirah 1:2. See there for his extended discourse.

7. The Torah says, "These are the numbers of the Children of Israel by their fathers' houses — all those counted of the camps to their hosts, six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty" (Numbers 2:32).

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that time, as reflected in the census taken then,<sup>7</sup> and this great spiritual power is what enabled all of the 28 camps of the Shechinah to rest upon the people.

Thus, it follows, then, that

the clouds of glory were an inextricable part and element to the mystery of the dwelling of the Shechinah.

Before we continue, let us bring another important introduction.

**Encampment by The Word of G-d**

In our Parshah, Beha'alotcha, the Torah describes the journeys of the Children of Israel in the wilderness.

It details how they followed the pillar of cloud, which represented G-d's will, never deviating from its directions to the right or to the left.

Over nine verses (Numbers 9:15-23), the Torah elaborates on the Jewish people's travels under

the cloud's guidance, emphasizing their devotion: "Sometimes the cloud would remain over the Tabernacle for a number of days; by the word of G-d they would encamp, and by the word of G-d they would travel. Sometimes the cloud would remain from evening until morning, and the cloud would lift in the morning and they would travel. Whether by day or by night, when the cloud lifted, they

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And regarding the tribe of Levi, it says, "All who were counted of the Levites whom Moses and Aharon counted by the word of G-d, by their families — all males from one month of age and older — came to be twenty-two thousand" (Numbers 3:39).

Thus, the total was 625,550.

This number is 9,550 more than the required 616,000, but as the Kli Yakar (there) writes,

"Nonetheless, we must (have a larger amount and) not be overly exacting in this number, for death takes its toll and decimates these numbers, and those coming of age twenty might not fill the missing numbers fast enough."

would travel. Whether for two days, or a month, or a long time — while the cloud stayed over the Tabernacle resting upon it, the Children of Israel remained encamped and would not travel; and when it lifted, they would travel” (Numbers 9:20–22).

The Jewish people journeyed in the desert, and whenever the cloud indicated that it was time to make camp, they would stop and set up. But they never knew how long they would remain encamped — sometimes just for one night, sometimes for several days, or even decades.

It was a daily test. Picture it: these were large families with many children. They were also tending large flocks and herds, along with an enormous amount of precious metals and goods they had brought with them from Egypt and from the spoils at the sea.

When they stopped to camp, they had no idea how long the stop would last; should they unpack their trunks and arrange their belongings in closets or not?

The greatest challenge of all was the uncertainty: How long will we be here? Uncertainty can be the hardest test of all.

Nevertheless, the nation of Israel followed G-d with complete self-nullification — an act of surrender that is forever etched in history. As the prophet says:

“Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem: Thus says G-d: ‘I recall the kindness of your youth, the love of your bridal days, as you followed Me in the wilderness — in a land not sown’” (Jeremiah 2:2).

Now we return to our question: Why, after the sin of the Golden Calf, did G-d not remove from the Jewish people his protective and honorary Clouds of Glory?

## Every Step Guided by G-d

We bring the words of Rabbi Yerucham of Mir:<sup>8</sup>

We are commanded in the Torah: “After G-d your G-d you shall walk, and you shall fear Him, and you shall keep His commandments, and you shall listen to His voice, and you shall serve Him, and cleave to Him” (Deuteronomy 13:5).

The Sifrei on the verse expounds: “After G-d your L-rd you shall walk — this refers to the Cloud,” and this constitutes a positive commandment,

One might ask: How can this be a commandment for all generations, being that the Cloud of Glory was only extant in the wilderness? How is it relevant beyond that time?

Rather, here we see that our common assumption that the Cloud of Glory in the wilderness was merely there to show them the way, without which they

would have been unable to find their path — is, in fact, a misunderstanding, and in fact, a simplistic way to see it.

Instead, the Cloud embodied the exalted spiritual state of the generation in the wilderness, who lived by their faith.

Their approach, echoing the verse “After G-d your G-d you shall walk” describes a lofty spiritual level in which all of a person’s steps, even their mundane ones, are entirely guided from Heaven, with no personal agenda whatsoever.

Such was the generation of the wilderness: everything was ruled by faith; they entered the sea at G-d’s command and traveled through the desert as He willed — and as a result of this great spiritual level, they merited the Cloud of G-d’s presence.

That level did not depart from them even after the severest sin

**Parshat Beha'alotcha - True Love for the Jewish People**

of the Golden Calf; then, too, the Cloud didn't depart from them.

We, on the other hand, are not on this level — it was unique to that generation who lived with the sole motivation to follow G-d's direction; only they were capable of being sheltered by the Cloud and receiving its divine presence.

This spiritual state remains an ideal for all time; we have been commanded to aspire to that level, and although it is very high, it is still a positive commandment, and just like the commandments to have awe and love of G-d, so too, this is indeed a mitzvah for every generation.

An example of this sacrifice and utter nullification we find in our forefather, Avraham. He was 75 years old when he was

commanded: "Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from the house of your father, to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1).

The Ibn Ezra comments (ibid. 20:13) that Avraham traveled from place to place without knowing where he was going until he reached the Land of Canaan, at which point G-d said to him, "This is the land I had in mind."

Let us imagine the extraordinary sight: Avraham heading out on a journey with no idea where he was going. He had no personal objective — only to go wherever Heaven would guide him. He took a step forward yet had no clue whether he should turn north or south — only wherever G-d would direct.

**True Love for the Jewish People**

From what we have said thus far, it becomes clear that the verses describing the journeys of the Jewish people are unique lessons in their greatness. To quote Rabbi Ovadiah Sforno

(Numbers 9:17): "The Torah relates the merits of the Jewish people, and how they followed Him in the wilderness."

These verses reveal the intense submission of the Jewish

people before the Holy One, blessed be He — an effacement that arises from the very essence and depths of a Jewish soul.

To summarize the points above:

At Mount Sinai, G-d's love for the Jewish people was revealed. Then, during their travels, the Jewish people's love for G-d was even further revealed.

For this reason, as well, our Parshah includes a most wondrous verse: "For G-d has spoken good of Israel" (Numbers 10:29), in which G-d reciprocates this love in speech, which is the foundation of expression of love.

This teaches us an invaluable life lesson: A Jew must become accustomed to speaking only good things about Jewish people !

In a talk delivered by Rav Yitzchak Ginsburgh, he noted the following:<sup>9</sup>

The holy Zohar states<sup>10</sup> that 'in the Divine configuration

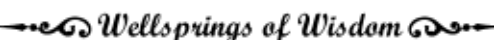
called 'Atik Yomin' - the inner dimension of the highest level of Keter - there is no "left side"', it is all belonging to the 'right side', the side of kindness and love.

The meaning of this is that to truly 'move' and influence someone from their present state, there is little benefit in employing the "left side" — harshness and criticism; rather, only the "right side" — kindness and love — can achieve it.

Sometimes, in order to prevent immediate harm, rebuke or criticism is necessary — and it should be conveyed discreetly and sensitively. However, genuine change can only happen by reinforcing the positive aspects of one's character.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov's teaching on this matter is well-known:

The verse says, "In yet a little while, there will be no wicked



9. 'Ve'abita' 5783, Behar-Bechukotai.

10. 'Idra Rabba' (Parshat Naso 129a).

one; you will look carefully at his place and he will not be there" (Psalms 37:10) - To move a "wicked" person from his place ("you will look carefully for his place and he will not be there"), one must find "a little bit" of good within him ("he is truly not a 'wicked one'").

That is because focusing on the good in the other person strengthens that goodness, makes it more central to their personality, and elevates him to a different plane.

Indeed, to bring out the good in others and make our society more elevated and upright, it is not enough simply to think well of others; we must express these thoughts in words.

We must speak of our friend's virtues — whether in his presence or not — and shine a light on the positive things we see in others. This is how Maimonides describes "the speech of the wise man" (Hilchot De'ot 5:7): "He judges every person favorably, speaks of his friend's praise, and never of his faults at all."

A truly wise person knows how to discern the good

intentions of every individual, interpret their deeds favorably, and express praise in such a way that no negativity emerges — even not implicitly or indirectly.

Maimonides goes on to say (ibid. 6:3) that praising another person is, in fact, the very first expression of the "great principle in the Torah" — the mitzvah to love our fellow Jew:

"It is a mitzvah for everyone to love each and every Jew like himself, as it is said: 'Love your fellow as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18). Therefore one must speak of his praise, etc."

What, then, is the difference between the duty incumbent upon every person to praise his fellow and the more special quality of the sage, the wise person, who praises his fellow?

While anyone can offer generic compliments without getting into specifics, or even exaggerate, and focus on the main goal which is to create a positive, respectful, and loving atmosphere, and this way, one can praise even someone

**Parshat Beha'alotcha - Do Not Distress G-d Who Loves You**

whose merits are not at all known, while also avoiding any “risk” of subtle or backhanded criticism that might emerge from overly precise praise.

A genuine Torah scholar, however - Maimonides says - possesses a broadened mind and can identify precisely those accurate points of virtue and strength in another person. He praises them in a way that reveals and magnifies their advantages and the few positive character traits that are latent within them, thus cementing them further into their character.

Even with care and attention to not sway or bend the truth, he finds a way to describe this person such that it remains

entirely positive — “speaks of his friend’s praise, and never of his faults at all.”

Such well-crafted praise not only fosters a positive atmosphere but can create a profound and lasting spiritual transformation.

Nonetheless, we should remember the saying attributed to the Baal HaTanya, that the final Redemption will come through *chesed* (loving-kindness) — even if it is not “true” or “accurate” *chesed*.

In other words, even an imprecise show of loving kindness can bring about the Redemption. The main thing is to increase love among the Jewish people.

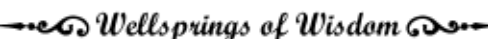
**Do Not Distress G-d Who Loves You**

In a talk delivered by my father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel, he taught:<sup>11</sup>

Every day, before we recite Shema at Shacharit, we recite the blessing *Ahavat Olam* (Everlasting Love).

The blessing begins: “With an eternal love have You loved us, G-d our L-rd.”

Now, if a person would pause to truly reflect on these words every day and learn to say them



11. ‘B’tzur Yarum’ (vol. 13, p. 114).

with genuine awareness, he would be overcome with awe and love. After all, do you realize who loves you? G-d Himself loves you!

This is not a five-minute infatuation, nor a "love at first sight" that can end up turning into a sense of dislike and contempt later on.

It is an eternal love — a love that endures for all eternity, never ceasing for even a moment. Even if, G-d forbid, one descends into the lowest depths, G-d still loves you. As recorded in the opinion of Rabbi Meir, which is the accepted halachah, a Jew always retains the status of being G-d's children. Even if a Jew sins and even serves idols, he is still called a son of the Holy One, blessed be He (Kiddushin 36a).

So, if you now know that G-d loves you so mightily, how could you possibly do something harmful to the One who loves you so much? Even if you cannot reciprocate in kind, at least do not repay Him with wrongdoing.

The explanation why G-d loves the Jewish people even more than the angels — such that even a simple Jew, distant from Torah and mitzvot, is preferred and cherished far above a mighty, holy, and pure angel — is because the Jew faces constant challenges.

And even if one falls into sin, the pangs of conscience he feels afterward serve to atone for his wrongdoing. An angel, by contrast, has no evil inclination and no trials or temptations — after all, as we have mentioned, angels have no free will.

A Jew, however, experiences a test each time he seeks to perform a mitzvah, for instance, maintaining pure thoughts, guarding one's eyes from forbidden sights, safeguarding family purity, and so on — there are many obstacles throughout one's life.

When, despite all this, he overcomes and keeps himself free of sin, he receives an immense reward, because "according to the effort is the reward."

**Parshat Beha'alotcha - The Kindling the Menorah**

Just as a Jew has many responsibilities toward G-d, in return, he is granted many merits and gifts.

A Jew possesses numerous merits, but one of the greatest merits is described at the beginning of our Torah

portion in G-d's words to Moses:

“Speak to Aharon and say to him: ‘When you raise up the lamps, towards the face of the Menorah the seven lamps shall shine’” (Numbers 8:2), and as we shall explain shortly.

**The Kindling the Menorah**

On the first of Nissan in the year 2449 to Creation, the Mishkan was erected. It was divided into three sections: the Courtyard, the Tent of Meeting, and the inner ‘Holy of Holies’.

In the courtyard stood the copper altar and the washbasin.

In the Tent of Meeting were the Golden Altar, the Table, and the Menorah.

In the Holy of Holies were placed the Ark, its cover (Kaporet), and the Cherubim above the cover.

The Menorah stood on the southern side of the Tent of Meeting, while the Table stood on the northern side, and the golden altar was placed in

the middle, a bit further to the east. The Ark in the Holy of Holies stood centered on the western side of the Mishkan.

In our Parshah, Aharon the Kohen is commanded to kindle the lamps, as it says:

“Speak to Aharon and say to him: ‘When you raise up (beha'alotcha) the lamps, toward the face of the Menorah the seven lamps shall shine’” (Numbers 8:2).

Rashi first explains the straightforward interpretation:

“‘When you raise up (beha'alotcha) the lamps’ means ‘when you kindle the lamps,’ and because fire naturally rises, the

**Parshat Beha'alotcha - The Kindling the Menorah**

Torah uses the term 'raise up' to describe lighting the lamps."

Additionally, Rashi adds, since the verse does not use the usual verbs for creating fire (such as "when you kindle" or "when you ignite") but specifically says "beha'alotcha — 'when you raise up,'" our Sages derived that one must kindle each lamp until the flame rises and burns on its own. That is, one does not move on to the next lamp immediately after it has merely caught fire but rather stays with each lamp and continues fueling it so that the flame grows to a steady height and remains alight without assistance; only then does one proceed to the next lamp (Shabbat 21a).

Through this act of illuminating, Aharon gained incredibly lofty spiritual attainments. To quote my father, Rabbi Yoram Abergel:<sup>12</sup>

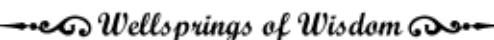
"From the lighting of the Menorah, the Jewish people received enlightenment from the

'Fiftieth Gate' of holiness, which is usually unattainable.

The light that emanated from the Temple Menorah was so immense that merely looking upon it infused the onlooker with tremendous holiness. When the Kohen lit the seven branches of the Menorah, he would be granted Divine inspiration to see the spiritual condition of every Jew. Then, by kindling the Menorah's lights thereafter, he would also kindle a spiritual light in the souls of the Jewish people — who are themselves called a lamp, as it says, "The soul of man is the lamp of G-d" (Proverbs 20:27) — and thereby bring about G-d's forgiveness for all their sins.

Each day that Aharon lit the Menorah, he ascended to a higher level still. And that power — this daily ascent — is the greatest privilege.

And today, this privilege has been given to the entire Jewish people."



12. 'Imrei Noam' (Tetzaveh, Ma'amar 1).

## Always Move Forward

All of Creation can be divided into three broad categories:

The souls of the Jewish people, the celestial angels, and all other creatures on Earth.

These categories each comprise an untold number of beings, yet nearly every single one of them never can depart from the "mold" of natural characteristics which they were all endowed with by the Creator — all that is, except for the Jewish people.

The Jewish people are the only beings granted both the privilege and the capacity and obligation to break free of their "template" and keep progressing onward and upward to G-d, Who is infinite.

Thus, the souls of the Jewish people are called "walkers," whereas angels are called "standers," as it is said:

"And I shall grant you walkers among these standers" (Zechariah 3:7).

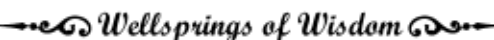
To further elaborate,<sup>13</sup> the difference between a "walker" and a "stander" is not merely to say that angels remain on one level and never progress at all, while a Jewish soul can ascend from one level to another.

After all, angels (as well as souls before descending into this world) constantly serve G-d in awe and reverence and subsequently rise in their grasp of the divine.

However, the angels' ascent is always from one comparable level to another, never breaching their essential limits. In that sense, their "progress" can be considered more like "standing still."

By contrast, when a Jew's soul descends into this world and they serve G-d properly, it now rises up in leaps and bounds — jumping from one level to another that is incomparably higher.

This is called a "boundless progression," as can often be



13. Rabbi Shneur Zalman Gopin, in commentary on 'Hemshech 5666' (Part 1, p.251).

## Parshat Beha'alotcha - Utilize and Spend Your Life Wisely

seen palpably with those who return to Judaism and make a radical leap from one spiritual state to an entirely new one, as well as in a Jew's daily service, prayer, and Torah study.

Indeed, with every properly focused prayer, a Jew transitions

from a materially minded self to a more spiritually refined state.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, genuine Torah study demands effort and readiness to abandon previous understandings in order to rise from level to level in comprehension of the Torah.

### Utilize and Spend Your Life Wisely

It is well known that the souls of the Jewish people were created even before the world itself. At the time of Creation, every soul received its own distinct role and mission to fulfill. In that same moment, the soul was granted the capacity for spiritual advancement — and was told that this capacity would be revealed only during its sojourn in this physical world.

From that time on, all souls wait eagerly for their turn to descend here, fully aware that coming to this world is challenging, weighty, and decisive.

A person's eternal destiny hinges on how they conduct themselves in this world.

Consider this real-life story:

A man was blessed beyond measure with many sons and daughters.

With G-d's kindness, he married off all of them, except for his youngest daughter, who remained single.

Despite every valiant effort, nothing worked. Her parents' sorrow deepened with the passing time.

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### Wellsprings of Wisdom

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**14.** In Hayom Yom (29 Iyar) it states: "The soul ascends three times daily during the three prayers —

especially the souls of the righteous, for 'they go from strength to strength.'"

**Parshat Beha'alotcha - Utilize and Spend Your Life Wisely**

Each passing day that their daughter was still 'in the nest' intensified their pain. They prayed relentlessly: When will the right match appear?

Two years passed in anguish. Then, at last, the moment arrived. G-d sent an extraordinary young man, a match so perfect it felt destined.

But nonetheless, after but a short period of time, the parents already turned to their daughter and invited her to return for Shabbat.

Likewise, a soul, before descending to this world, dwells in its heavenly home. It may reside there, but it yearns for true ownership over its actions, which begins only when it embarks on its own journey — just as a daughter who finally builds her own home through marriage.

The soul above is like that older daughter, and everyone waits anxiously for the time she will finally leave her parents' home.

When the soul does come to complete its mission down in this

world and return to its heavenly abode, it is akin to a married daughter coming to her parents with children in tow. For an entire week in advance, the grandparents are overjoyed and hardly able to sleep, knowing the grandchildren are arriving for Shabbat. Their whole week feels like a holiday, just waiting for them to come.

In this world, there is an advantage: one can achieve things here that are unobtainable anywhere else. Yet, there are many illusions and distractions that can cause a person to miss the target.

In Hayom Yom (3 Elul) it states:

“One who believes in Divine Providence knows that ‘A man’s steps are established by G-d.’

Every soul has its particular mission and some specific spark in some specific place that it alone must refine.

Sometimes, the matter awaits its rectification for hundreds of years, and even from Creation's very

## Parshat Beha'alotcha - When Intellect Is a "Divine Illumination"

dawn — waiting for that particular soul to come and correct it.

And that same soul, from the time it was emanated and created, has also awaited, with keen anticipation, for its chance to descend and fulfill that assignment."

Before coming here, each soul has existed for 'millennia' in G-d's presence, longing for the day it descends to this world — the soul knows how precious this world is.

Only here can one increase Torah study and good deeds,

gathering an endless treasure of spiritual pearls and jewels, each person according to the level of purity he achieves.

Ultimately, with its "hands full" of pearls and gems gathered in this world, the soul returns after a long life to its Father in Heaven, fulfilling the words of our Sages (Pesachim 50a): "Fortunate is the one who arrives here with his learning in hand."

We have all been granted this wondrous gift — the ability to keep ascending spiritually — and we must be sure not to squander it.

## When Intellect Is a "Divine Illumination"

Let us finally return to clarify the connection between the verse, "By the word of G-d they would encamp, and by the word of G-d they would travel; they kept the guard of G-d, by the word of G-d through Moses" (Numbers 9:23), and the lifting of the Torah scroll.

Based on all that we have explained above, we can now

understand a most wondrous connection:

The verse, "By the word of G-d they would encamp, and by the word of G-d they would travel; they kept the guard of G-d, by the word of G-d through Moses" (Numbers 9:23), reflects the lofty level in which all a person's ways — even the most mundane — are guided solely from Heaven, without any personal

**Parshat Beha'alotcha - When Intellect Is a "Divine Illumination"**

agenda at all, in true simplicity and wholehearted faith.

Therefore, we recite this verse precisely when lifting the Torah scroll (the hagbah) — to teach us the path we must follow.

Even when we engage our mind with the Torah, we must take care that our intellect will properly serve as a throne and dwelling place for the Divine Presence, and this verse demonstrates to us what intellect actually is.

In the words of Rabbi Yerucham of Mir, which we began with above:

"We don't truly know what 'intellect' is at all. We are accustomed that whenever a doubt arises, we 'let the intellect decide' and do as reason dictates. But in reality, we don't fully and truly understand the reason for the intellect's rulings.

For true intellect is a 'Divine illumination.' Intellect reveals G-d's will to us, and it is meant to guide us toward His will — that is the very essence of intellect.

But when does it actually function in that capacity? Only when it is in a state of perfect purity — clean, refined, and free of any trace of bias or personal desire.

If even a small measure of ill will or evil inclination enters, the intellect follows that improper desire and one is shown as his heart desires and wants, as the Sages say: 'In the direction a person wants to go, he is lead' — and thus his intellect no longer reveals G-d's will.

Thus, in order for 'the intellect to properly guide us,' it must be crystal-clear, and one's heart must be free from even the slightest trace of lowly desire or negative character traits. Otherwise, it loses its status as lofty intellect that the Creator gave us to discern and know His will.

When one's intellect is thus rectified — whole and perfect, free of even the slightest bias, serving purely as a "Divine illumination" — then whatever first enters his mind is truly the will of G-d, a clear truth without doubt.

## Parshat Beha'alotcha - Summary and Practical Conclusions

Such a person in this way realizes in himself the verse 'By the word of G-d they encamped, and by the word of G-d they traveled,' living a life by the word of G-d, and eventually possessing the highest of worlds."

To return to the story with Jacob that we opened with: when a Jew realizes that G-d loves us so much and truly desires us, how could Jacob ever feel embarrassed about proudly displaying his Judaism?

## Summary and Practical Conclusions

1. The entirety of Creation can be generally divided into three broad categories (in descending order): The souls of the Jewish people, the angels, and all other living beings on Earth.

These three categories together comprise billions of creatures, yet none so deeply leave an impact upon the world as do the Jewish people. As well, almost none of them can ever leave the "mold" in which they were created and the category they were formed to do — except for the Jewish people. The Jewish people, alone, are the only created entity that is granted the privilege and the power to break free from its predetermined limits and to advance further and higher.

2. The Jewish people possess the capacity to transform their very essence from a material form into a spiritual one.

They accomplish this through heartfelt prayer, Torah study, and fulfilling

mitzvot. Through these efforts, the Jewish people ascend from level to level until they become a "chariot" for the Divine Presence.

3. One must recognize that this capacity to grow spiritually every single day is the greatest privilege there can be in all of Creation.

This privilege has been given to every member of the Jewish nation and must, therefore, not be squandered. Each Jew ought to make the most of this opportunity and keep moving ever forward at all times.

4. Before descending to this world, each soul spends 'thousands of years' with G-d, waiting impatiently for the time when it will come down to Earth.

The soul knows full well how precious this world is and that only here can one increase in Torah and good deeds, drawing forth an infinite treasury of spiritual pearls and gems — each person according to his level.

**Parshat Beha'alotcha - Summary and Practical Conclusions**

Once, the soul's "hands" are full of the pearls and jewels that they have gathered in this world, and after a long and good life, it must return to its Father in Heaven.

As our Sages say (Pesachim 50a): "Happy is the one who arrives here with his learning in hand."

5. The souls of the Jewish people were created before the very Creation of the world.

Already at that time, every single soul was assigned its own unique mission to fulfill, and it was then granted the

power to progress. This potential would be manifested and developed only during its stay on Earth.

From that moment on, each soul waits for the day it will descend here, knowing that its arrival below is essential, crucial, and fateful — its eternal destiny depends on how well it carries out its mission in this material world.

Being that that is the case, why delay?! Every moment gone to waste is a terrible and irreversible loss. Seize the day!

**Shabbat Shalom!**



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18th of Sivan ,5785



City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
New York	8:10 pm	9:19 pm	9:41 pm
Miami	7:55 pm	8:52 pm	9:25 pm
Los Angeles	7:48 pm	8:50 pm	9:18 pm
Montreal	8:26 pm	9:42 pm	9:57 pm
Toronto	8:42 pm	9:55 pm	10:13 pm
London	9:00 pm	10:33 pm	10:31 pm
Jerusalem	7:30 pm	8:21 pm	9:17 pm
Tel Aviv	7:28 pm	8:19 pm	9:14 pm
Haifa	7:29 pm	8:23 pm	9:19 pm
Be'er Sheva	7:25 pm	8:20 pm	9:14 pm

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**HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l**

*A 'Master of Prayer' is far  
greater than a 'Master of  
Torah.'*

*For Torah descends from  
above to below, while  
prayer ascends from man  
to above; we can observe  
clearly that it is much  
harder to raise something  
up than it is to lower it  
downward.*



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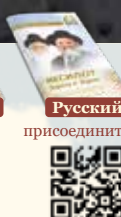
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