

Stollen Moments – Beha'alotecha – June 10, 2023

PARASHA SUMMARY FROM WWW. REFORMJUDAISM.ORG

- God speaks to Moses, describing the menorah for the Tent of Meeting. The Levites are appointed to serve as assistants under Aaron and his sons. (8:1-26)
- Those who are unable to celebrate Passover during Nisan are given a time in the month of Sivan to observe a "second Passover." (9:1-14)
- A cloud by day and fire by night show God's Presence over the Tabernacle. When the cloud lifts from the Tabernacle, the people leave Sinai, setting out on their journey, tribe by tribe. (9:15-10:36)
- The Israelites complain about the lack of meat, and Moses becomes frustrated. God tells him to appoint a council of elders. God provides the people with meat and strikes them with a very severe plague. (11:1-34)
- Miriam and Aaron talk about the "Cushite woman" whom Moses has married. In addition, they complain that God speaks not only through Moses but also through them. Miriam is struck with leprosy, and Moses begs God to heal her. After her recovery, the people resume their journey. (12:1-16)

Numbers 11

1 The people took to complaining bitterly before the Lord. The Lord heard and was incensed: a fire of the Lord broke out against them, ravaging the outskirts of the camp. 2 The people cried out to Moses. Moses prayed to the Lord, and the fire died down. 3 That place was named Taberah, because a fire of the Lord had broken out against them.

4 The riffraff in their midst felt a gluttonous craving; and then the Israelites wept and said, "If only we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. 6 Now our gullets are shriveled. There is nothing at all! Nothing but this manna to look to!"

7 Now the manna was like coriander seed, and in color it was like bdellium. 8 The people would go about and gather it, grind it between millstones or pound it in a mortar, boil it in a pot, and make it into cakes. It tasted like rich cream. 9 When the dew fell on the camp at night, the manna would fall upon it.

10 Moses heard the people weeping, every clan apart, each person at the entrance of his tent. The Lord was very angry, and Moses was distressed. 11 And Moses said to the Lord, "Why have You dealt ill with Your servant, and why have I not enjoyed Your favor, that You have laid the burden of all this people upon me? 12 Did I conceive all this people, did I bear them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries an infant,' to the land that You have promised on oath to their fathers? 13 Where am I to get meat to give to all this people, when they whine before me and say, 'Give us meat to eat!' 14 I cannot carry all this people by myself, for it is too much for me. 15 If You would deal thus with me, kill me rather, I beg You, and let me see no more of my wretchedness!"

16 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Gather for Me seventy of Israel's elders of whom you have experience as elders and officers of the people, and bring them to the Tent of Meeting and let them take their place there with you. 17 I will come down and speak with you there, and I will draw upon the spirit that is on you and put it upon them; they shall share the burden of the people with you, and you shall not bear it alone. 18 And say to the people: Purify yourselves for tomorrow and you shall eat meat, for you have kept whining before the Lord and saying, 'If

only we had meat to eat! Indeed, we were better off in Egypt!’ The Lord will give you meat and you shall eat. 19 You shall eat not one day, not two, not even five days or ten or twenty, 20 but a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you. For you have rejected the Lord who is among you, by whining before Him and saying, ‘Oh, why did we ever leave Egypt!’”

21 But Moses said, “The people who are with me number six hundred thousand men; yet You say, ‘I will give them enough meat to eat for a whole month.’ 22 Could enough flocks and herds be slaughtered to suffice them? Or could all the fish of the sea be gathered for them to suffice them?” 23 And the Lord answered Moses, “Is there a limit to the Lord’s power? You shall soon see whether what I have said happens to you or not!”

24 Moses went out and reported the words of the Lord to the people. He gathered seventy of the people’s elders and stationed them around the Tent. 25 Then the Lord came down in a cloud and spoke to him; He drew upon the spirit that was on him and put it upon the seventy elders. And when the spirit rested upon them, they spoke in ecstasy, but did not continue.

26 Two men, one named Eldad and the other Medad, had remained in camp; yet the spirit rested upon them — they were among those recorded, but they had not gone out to the Tent — and they spoke in ecstasy in the camp. 27 A youth ran out and told Moses, saying, “Eldad and Medad are acting the prophet in the camp!” 28 And Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ attendant from his youth, spoke up and said, “My lord Moses, restrain them!” 29 But Moses said to him, “Are you wrought up on my account? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord put His spirit upon them!” 30 Moses then reentered the camp together with the elders of Israel.

31 A wind from the Lord started up, swept quail from the sea and strewed them over the camp, about a day’s journey on this side and about a day’s journey on that side, all around the camp, and some two cubits deep on the ground. 32 The people set to gathering quail all that day and night and all the next day — even he who gathered least had ten homers — and they spread them out all around the camp. 33 The meat was still between their teeth, nor yet chewed, when the anger of the Lord blazed forth against the people and the Lord struck the people with a very severe plague. 34 That place was named Kibroth-hattaavah, because the people who had the craving were buried there. 35 Then the people set out from Kibroth-hattaavah for Hazereth.

Questions for Discussion:

- What do you make of the comment that the riffraff/mixed multitude was the diversity of people in the desert, both Israelite and Egyptian?
- The people complained about the lack of food. Read the comments below about the manna and consider their meaning in the context of the complaints.
- Moses gathered elders to help advise him. Do you think that helped him? Did it make a difference to the people who were complaining? How about to the elders themselves?

Rashi on Numbers 11:4

קִרְפֹּאִי AND THE THRONG — This was the mixed multitude that had gathered themselves unto them when they left Egypt (the word is from the root קִרַּא, “to gather”) (Sifrei Bamidbar 86).

Yoma 75a:10-20

“We remember...the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic” (Numbers 11:5). Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi debate the verse’s meaning. One said: They tasted the flavor of all types of food in the manna, but they cried because they could not taste the tastes of these five foods that they mentioned. And one said: They tasted the flavor of all types of food, as well as their textures. The sensation was so strong that it seemed to them like they were eating those very foods. However, with the foods they listed, the people tasted only their flavor but not their texture. With regard to the manna, the Torah further states: “And it was white [lavan] like coriander seed; and its flavor was like wafers made of honey” (Exodus 16:31). The Gemara questions this, since coriander is brown, not white. Rabbi Asi said: The manna was round like coriander seed but white like a pearl. This was also taught in a baraita: Coriander [gad] is so named because it is similar to flax seeds on their stalks, which are bound [agud] in a bundle.

Others say: It was called coriander [gad] because it is similar to a tale [haggada], which draws a person’s heart toward it, just like water, which is essential for life, draws one. It was taught in another baraita: Why is it called gad? Because it told [maggid] the Jewish people the answer to issues of uncertainty, such as the paternity of a baby. If a woman remarries within two months after her divorce or the death of her husband and gives birth seven months after her remarriage, it is unclear if the baby gestated for seven months and is the son of the second husband or for nine months and is the son of the first husband. The manna would tell them if the baby was born after nine months and belongs to the first husband, or if the baby was born after seven months and belongs to the second husband. Since the manna was collected by each family based on the number of its biological members, the manna established the baby’s paternity.

The manna was called white because it whitened Israel’s sins. The people feared that if they sinned the manna would not continue to fall. Consequently, they devoted themselves to introspection and repentance. Similarly, it was taught in a baraita: Rabbi Yosei says: Just like the prophet would tell the Jewish people what was in the holes and what was in the cracks of their souls, highlighting the sins of the people, so too, the manna clarified for Israel what was in the holes and what was in the cracks. How so? If two people came before Moses for a judgment, one saying: You stole my slave, and the other one saying: I did not steal him, rather you sold him to me, Moses would say to them: In the morning there will be a judgment. How was the matter resolved? If on the following day the slave found his omer of manna in his first master’s house, it would be clear that he was stolen, because the manna still came to the first owner. And if on the following day he found his omer of manna in his second master’s house, it would be clear that he had been sold. Similarly, if a man and a woman came to Moses for a judgment, he saying: She sinned against me, and therefore I may divorce her and am not obligated to pay her divorce settlement, and she saying: He sinned against me and therefore I am entitled to the full settlement from the marriage contract, Moses would say to them: In the morning there will be a judgment. The following day, if her omer of manna was found in her husband’s house, it would be clear that she sinned against him. The fact that her nourishment was given to his household signifies the fact that he has respected her appropriately and is worthy of nourishing her. If her omer of manna was found in her father’s house, it would be clear that he sinned against her. Her nourishment has not been given to his household, signifying that he has been disrespectful to her and is not worthy of nourishing her.

The Gemara continues to discuss the manna: It is written: “And when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it” (Numbers 11:9). And it is written: “And the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day” (Exodus 16:4). And it is written: “The people went about and gathered it”

(Numbers 11:8). How can these texts be reconciled? For the righteous, the manna fell at the opening of their homes. They expended no effort at all. The average people went out of the camp and gathered what fell there. The wicked had to go about farther to gather. With regard to the manna, it is written “bread” (Exodus 16:4); and it is written “cakes” (Numbers 11:8); and it is also written “and ground it in mills,” (Numbers 11:8), implying that it was neither bread nor a cake. How can these texts be reconciled? For the righteous, it fell as baked bread; for average people, it fell as unbaked cakes; for the wicked it came in an unprocessed form and consequently they ground it in a mill. The verse states: “Or beat it in a mortar” (Numbers 11:8). Rabbi Yehuda said that Rav said, and some say it was Rabbi Ḥama, son of Rabbi Ḥanina: This teaches that women’s perfumes fell for the Jewish people with the manna because they are an item that is beaten in a mortar. The verse continues: “And cooked it in a pot” (Numbers 11:8). Rabbi Ḥama said: This teaches that cooking spices fell for the Jewish people with the manna.

With regard to donations for the Tabernacle, the verse states: “And they brought yet to him free-will offerings every morning” (Exodus 36:3). The Gemara asks: What is the meaning of “every morning”? Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥmani said that Rabbi Yonatan said: They brought donations from that which fell every morning with the manna. This teaches that pearls and precious stones fell for the Israelites with the manna. It states: “And the rulers [nesi'im] brought the onyx [shoham] stones” (Exodus 35:27). A tanna taught that the word nesi'im means actual clouds brought them. As it states: “As clouds [nesi'im] and wind without rain so is he that boasts himself of a false gift” (Proverbs 25:14). We learn from this that the precious stones fell from the clouds with the manna. It was also said with regard to the manna: “And its taste was as the taste of a cake [shad] baked with oil [hashamen]” (Numbers 11:8). Rabbi Abbahu said: Shad means breast. Just as a baby tastes different flavors from the breast, since the taste of the milk changes somewhat depending on what foods his mother eats, so too with the manna, every time that the Jewish people ate the manna, they found in it many different flavors, based on their preferences.

Yoma 76a:2-4

The students of Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai asked him: Why didn't the manna fall for the Jewish people just once a year to take care of all their needs, instead of coming down every day? He said to them: I will give you a parable: To what does this matter compare? To a king of flesh and blood who has only one son. He granted him an allowance for food once a year and the son greeted his father only once a year, when it was time for him to receive his allowance. So he arose and granted him his food every day, and his son visited him every day. So too, in the case of the Jewish people, someone who had four or five children would be worried and say: Perhaps the manna will not fall tomorrow and we will all die of starvation. Consequently, everyone directed their hearts to their Father in heaven every day. The manna that fell each day was sufficient only for that day, so that all of the Jewish people would pray to God for food for the next day. Alternatively, they received manna daily so that they would be able to eat it while it was hot and fresh. Alternatively, they received manna daily due to the hardship of carrying on the journey. They did not stay in the same place all those years, and it would have been difficult for them to carry the manna from one place to another. Therefore, the manna fell wherever they went.