

29 – Beha’alotcha – Outline

Beha’alotcha Summary

- this portion has a tipping point in the middle of it where the narrative changes abruptly
 - 1st part of Numbers: Israel is formed into an army
 - 2nd part of Numbers: Israel sets out
- “Beha’alotcha” = “when you raise up,” speaking of how to properly set up the menorah
 - other topics:
 - elevation of the non-priestly Levites so they can begin serving
 - celebrating the first Passover and the allowance for a 2nd-month Passover, if needed
 - setting out from Sinai on the 20th of the second month
 - complaining and the burning of the outskirts of the camp
 - more complaining, for meat; Moses appeals to God for help and 70 elders are appointed; God sends quail, and a plague
 - Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses

Placing Beha’alotcha

- How we respond to being elevated
 - we’ve been tracking the idea of “being elevated” through the second half of Leviticus and in the first part of Numbers
 - Leviticus – the “holiness plan,” the blueprint
 - Numbers—beginning to see the plan manifest tangibly in the body of Israel
 - 2 portions in a row named for the idea of elevation: “Naso” and “Beha’alotcha”
 - in the calendar, we have just come through the summit of Shavuot
 - summits are exhilarating but not places to linger
 - summits are spiritual – lots of light, little physical growth
 - valleys are physical – lots of physical growth, less light
 - in the winter, we talked about less light and the manifestation of salvation outwardly, physically, especially in the second half of the cycle, i.e. physical growth (winter is the rainy season in Israel, when the land turns green, in contrast to Ohio, when everything goes dormant)
 - pay attention when reading the Bible to the geography of where things are happening – high places (spiritual) or valleys and plains (physical)
 - the two verses marked by inverted nuns may be the equivalent of the “summit”
 - the silver trumpets that follow before they depart Sinai could be placed there as a call to battle, the battle they now enter into as they set forth from Sinai

- 2 ways to go down the mountain:
 - carefully, watching each step
 - casually, which can easily lead to stumbling and falling
 - in the second half of this portion, Israel stumbles, and they continue to do so in the coming portions
 - haftarah reading in Zechariah also has a stumble, of sorts
 - High Priest Joshua is brought to court and appears to have stumbled, wearing filthy clothing, but God rebukes Satan and has clean clothes brought for him – it’s the *appearance* of having stumbled, since we know that the High Priest Joshua represents Yeshua (this is made clear in the text, where Yeshua is called “the Branch”)
- Is it inevitable that we descend the mountain by stumbling?
 - there’s another way to get to the ground level: on your knees, by humbling yourself; in our elevation, we should:
 - give glory to God
 - be open to correction, taking correction gracefully and thankfully
 - be a leader who listens deeply
 - be a “teen” who doesn’t think he knows everything
 - be a bat mitzvah who seeks out wise counsel and follows it
 - focus on what you don’t know
 - focus on knowing ourselves as small and lowly
 - understand that our talents come from God and if He gave them to someone else, they’d probably do better with them
- We should cultivate humility now
 - this is what God is speaking to us right now through this portion
 - we should also be brave to stand up again when we fall
 - the generally accepted message of Pesach Sheni (the second-month Passover) is that it’s never too late
- How to Handle the Mid-journey “Doldrums”
 - Israel has already been in the wilderness for a year, surviving off the uplift and adrenaline of the exodus, but now they’re starting to realize their new reality and they’re looking back at Egypt with rose-colored glasses
 - we all know what Wednesday is like – hump day, slump day
 - every journey with the Lord starts with an uplift, a moment of inspiration
 - in the calendar, the uplift of Passover carries us all the way up the mountain of Shavuot
 - but then God removes that initial energy and says, “Now walk on your own,” and it suddenly feels different, and we are afraid this or that path leads off a cliff, and we find ourselves in the midst of a primarily EMOTIONAL battleground
 - in the calendar, we’re approaching the summer solstice, the mid-point of the six “light” months of the year

- in the spiritual journey of the year, we add one month to make seven months, Nissan through the end of Tishrei
 - the middle of the 7-month journey is near to the 17th of Tammuz, the beginning of the 3 Weeks of mourning, the most difficult time in the whole year
- R'Tzvi Freeman speaks of the “doldrums” in his prose poem “The Dream:” (https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/5942979/jewish/For-Your-Nasso-Study-Group-PDF.htm)

The Dream

You start with a dream. The dream becomes a plan. The plan becomes a lot of dirty work. The dirty work becomes a house. If you are successful, it is the house of your dreams.

Dream, plan, dirty work, success. Why is this the fundamental story of all human endeavor?

Because it is the story of the universe.

Those who can feel the dream, those who can read the plan, they see we are now at the finishing touches.

- R'Freeman outlines the pattern of the universe – dream (inspiration), plan, dirty work, success
 - the “dirty work” comes near the middle; it’s tough
- 2 middle points in the year
 - 2 seven-month journeys in the year; they follow the axiom that “the end is enwedged in the beginning, and the beginning is enwedged in the end,” the idea that the end and the beginning overlap
 - journey 1: months 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
 - journey 2: months 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 1
 - the 1st and 7th months are counted in both journeys, making 14 steps in the year
 - because the endings and beginnings overlap
 - the middle of this second journey is near to another fast, the 10th of Tevet – truly the middle is rough
 - a clue from the agricultural calendar: months 1 and 7 are great harvest times (grain in month 1, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, dates in month 7)
 - seeds are the end of one journey – the cutting of a stalk of grain to eat the seeds, for example
 - seeds are also the beginning of the next journey, as some of the seed is withheld to plant the next crop
 - the beginning and ending are really the same thing, in a way
- practical suggestions for dealing with the mid-point blues
 - understand that the “dirty work” is part of the pattern; don’t panic
 - make a special effort to reaffirm your commitment to God’s path for you, and dogmatically stay on the path

- be a little “nutty”
 - daily we affirm our path by reciting the Shema, where we say, “talk of them when we sit in our houses, when we walk on the way, when we lie down, and when we rise up”
 - looks nutty to the world, but this is how you stay on the path of truth
 - don’t be too concerned with the goal; just focus on the next step
 - look for the joy in the journey at this point
 - pay attention to what the difficulty of the journey is bringing out of you that needs to be corrected
 - repentance is the goal of this first 7-month journey, the repentance of Elul and the 10 Days of Awe
 - exposing the sin might feel like a step backward, but if we recognize that God is doing a work leading to our repentance, we can actually see it as a step forward

Chutzpah from Humility

- in Torah scrolls, Numbers 10:35-36 is separated from the rest of the text by two backwards letter nuns: “And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, ‘Arise, O LORD, and let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You.’ And when it rested, he said, ‘Return, O LORD, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel!’”
- a suggestion for what these nuns are doing there:
 - nun is the letter of humility, a bent man
 - a backward nun is standing up, boldness, chutzpah
 - kosher chutzpah comes out of humility
 - Moses is the most humble of men, but in this passage, he calls forth God and speaks to him with a great boldness, a chutzpah; it’s a chutzpah that can only come from a foundation of humility
 - the chutzpah of the world is not based on humility and leads to death
 - kosher boldness wields great power
 - Yeshua is portrayed as both the Lion and the Lamb, and we need to be able to project both when appropriate

On the Light from Below

- there’s an important principle that is starting here with the lighting of the Tabernacle menorah: God wants us to learn to reflect His light, creating light from below
 - flames give light
 - light can come from one of two places: above (as in the sun, moon, stars) or below; the light from below is usually light that man has a part in making: light from a candle or fire in a fireplace or menorah
 - light from below usually comes from growing things, like an olive
 - it’s like God has stored light (energy) in the olive oil

- God says, “Ok, the light started with Me, but it’s down there with you now. Liberate it. You make light now like I make light.”
- in this portion, Israel is still early in learning how to reflect God’s light
 - the menorah is a teaching tool – He teaches us how to arrange it, where to put the menorah, how to tend to it; then He says, “Now light it.”
 - later, when we have grown up, we will use our own initiative to craft and light a menorah based on God’s pattern
 - directly across the calendar from this Torah portion brings us very near to Hanukkah, where we have created our own version of the menorah, and where we light them in the darkness of winter and place them in our windows – the reflected light
- the few verses relating to the menorah in this portion emphasize that the menorah is hammered work
 - this work of reflecting God’s light does not come easily; the final form might be smooth and graceful and beautiful, but the process is hammer blows
 - the menorah has to GROW from a solid chunk of gold; it is an almond tree growing by being hammered out; growing is a tough business

Yeshua

- no one exemplifies this whole teaching of the menorah better than Yeshua
 - who is more balanced than Him?
 - who gives more light than Him?
 - who teaches us more about reflecting God’s light than Yeshua?
 - who suffered more severe blows than Yeshua?
 - many have suffered severe blows, but none were innocent like Him, and none had such love for their oppressors as He did
 - why did Yeshua have to suffer like that? Did He need to grow into the form of the menorah?
 - yes: there was no other way to bring forth the fullness of His light than for Him to give everything He had to give
 - Yeshua’s example teaches us that you can’t hold back and still give forth the fullness of your light
 - we give everything and trust God to take that offering and make it a vast beacon of light like Yeshua’s

29 – Beha’alotcha – Transcript (not exact)

Hello and welcome to Beth Tikkun and this series called Spiritual Seasons, where we are exploring the Torah portions in the light of the yearly calendar and God’s overall pattern of salvation. This week, we are in parsha Beha’alotcha, Numbers 8 through 12.

Beha'alotcha Summary

This portion has a tipping point in the middle of it where the narrative changes abruptly. We see here the first part of Numbers end and the second part begin. The first part of the book of Bamidbar details how Israel is formed into an organized and empowered army while camped at the base of Mt. Sinai. In the second part, this newly formed army begins to move through the world, heading toward the Promised Land...and stumbling from the very beginning.

“Beha'alotcha” means “when you raise up.” It refers to the first topic, which is clarification about how to light the menorah. Apparently the text is saying that Aaron is to face the six side lamps toward the middle stem of the menorah, which is called here the “face” of the menorah. This passage also seems to be the actual command for Aaron to go ahead and light the menorah, as the passage says, “And Aaron did so: he set up its lamps in front of the lampstand, as the LORD commanded Moses” (Numbers 8:3).

The next topic is the elevation of the rest of the Levites who are not priests – the Kohathites, Gershonites, and Merarites. Previously God had explained their areas of service to them, but they hadn't yet been elevated to service so that they could begin their work, and there was no need since they hadn't moved yet from Mt. Sinai. But they are about to set out now, and the Levites will be responsible for the transporting the Tabernacle. In this portion, they are cleansed and offered as a wave offering to the Lord because He took the firstborn of Israel for Himself on the day that He struck the firstborns in Egypt. Now the rest of the Levites can begin their service.

Next comes the celebration of the first Passover outside of Egypt and the institution of the second Passover in the second month for those who were not able to participate in the Passover in the first month. Next we have a description of how the people followed the cloud while in the wilderness; they followed the command of the Lord to move and to stop. Next is the command to make silver trumpets for summoning the congregation and for setting out from camp in an orderly way. The trumpets are also to be used when going to war and on the mo'edim. God says the purpose of the trumpets is so that they will be remembered before Him. In a way, these trumpets are more for the people than for God, since the commandment to blow them at critical moments reminds the people that their salvation is found only in God. Perhaps the trumpets are placed here in the text as a call to battle just before they depart Sinai, implying that as they leave, they go to battle.

At this point the people set out from Sinai on the 20th day of the second month in the second year out of Egypt, the 20th of Iyar. This section of the text includes the unusual two verses that are separated from the rest of the Torah by two inverted nuns, one before and one after.

Right away there's trouble – the people complain, and the Lord gets angry such that fire consumes parts of the outskirts of the camp. They complain again that they want meat and miss the foods they ate in Egypt. Moses doesn't know what to do with them and says to God that they are too much for him to handle. God takes from the anointing on Moses and raises up seventy elders to help him, including two who didn't go to the Tabernacle to be anointed but

who prophesied while in the camp anyway like the other 68 did when the Spirit was put upon them. God sends quail, which the people begin to gorge themselves upon, but this time God sends a plague to go with it, and there they buried the many who had “the craving.”

Lastly, in chapter 12, Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses because of his wife. Miriam is struck with leprosy and is put outside the camp for seven days, after which she was apparently healed so that she could be brought back into the camp.

So, there’s certainly a lot going on in this portion!

Placing Beha’alotcha

In placing Beha’alotcha in larger movements in the calendar and in the flow of the Torah portions, I want to focus on two ideas: 1) how we are to respond to being elevated and 2) the special challenge of the middle of a journey.

Let’s start with how we respond to being elevated. First of all, we’ve been talking about elevation now for quite some time both in the flow of the portions and in the calendar. The second half of Leviticus is giving us a picture of holiness, like the climbing of a holiness mountain. It helps us see how we’re falling short, and it also inspires us and informs about what the life of holiness is to look like. In a way, it’s like we’re given the “plan” or the blueprint of holiness here.

Blueprints are good and necessary and even fascinating to look at. But blueprints aren’t the house. As the book of Bamidbar starts, we begin to see the building of the house according to the Leviticus blueprint. It starts with a census and physical changes in the nation, bringing order to chaos, the arrangement of the camp. And so the lifting up in the physical realm begins. Last week’s portion, Naso, means “to elevate,” “to lift up.” We saw more of the manifesting of holiness in the concrete world in Naso as Israel puts the unclean out of the camp, for example. We also saw the people bringing their Tabernacle inauguration offerings through the 12 princes of the tribes. All of these are the beginnings of holiness manifesting in the people as preparations for the next stage, which is the journey to the Promised Land.

And in the calendar, we have been paralleling Israel. We arrived at the foot of Mt. Sinai at Shavuot, which we just recently celebrated, the receiving the Torah once again as Israel did at Sinai. And so at this time in the year, we are also being raised to a higher level. Shavuot is a time the Sages liken to a bar or bat mitzvah, a mile marker that says, “Ok, you’re growing up. You’re taking on more responsibility. Let this day be a line in the sand for you. Your childhood is behind you now.” And we now start out into a new wilderness journey as Israel does in this portion.

As if to emphasize this process of God lifting us up and empowering us and commissioning us, we have two portions in a row named for the idea of elevation, Naso about the lifting of the head for the census and Beha’alotcha, which, again, means “In Your Raising Up,” talking about the lighting of the menorah. The elevation here in the first half of this portion is more than

stepping up to light the menorah. We see here the actual installation of the non-priest Levites for service and the beginning of their service, and we also see here the first time the people actually do a seder in remembrance of the coming out of Egypt. The very first Passover was the actual experience of coming out of Egypt. It is here in the second year that they do their very first seders as free people looking back on their slavery. Again, they are being raised up. The two verses separated by the inverted nuns come very near to marking the actual summit, the soaring high point describing how Moses would ask God to go out to protect Israel and come back in to His resting place with His bride.

Now, there's not a lot of space to move around at the top of a mountain. And you can't stay there for very long. It's exhilarating, but the summit of the mountain is not where most life happens. Summits are SPIRITUAL places with a lot of light. Valleys are PHYSICAL places with a lot of growth and shade. Let me repeat that: summits are spiritual places with a lot of light but not a lot of physical growth. Valleys are physical places with less light and a lot of growth. This is a pattern we've looked at in the year with the light of summer vs. the darkness and physical growth of the winter (in contrast to Ohio, Israel turns green in the winter). We are not made to live at the summit, but God has put into us the thrill of being up there for a short time. Rather, we're made to internalize that perspective from above and DESCEND with it, to bring that vision down with us. Going down is inevitable, and we're not given long up there. We must begin to descend quickly.

There are two ways to go down the mountain – either carefully, watching each step, or casually, which can easily lead to stumbling and falling. And so we come to the second half of parsha Beha'alotcha. Israel stumbles and rolls and tumbles, and rolls again. And we'll see in the coming portions that the rolling keeps going. The people set out from Sinai and grumble, and the dying begins. Then they want meat, and the dying continues. Then Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses, and the entire nation's progress toward Canaan is delayed for seven days.

We also see a stumble in the haftarah reading in Zechariah, at least the appearance of a stumble. We read there of how Joshua the High Priest is brought to the heavenly court and brought before Satan the accuser. And Joshua's clothing is filthy. Stained clothing is the result of stumbling, sin. But God rebukes Satan and commands that clean clothing be given to Joshua. And of course we know that Joshua the High Priest is a picture of Yeshua. The text in Zechariah even SAYS that Joshua the High Priest is a symbol of the Branch that God will bring, or the Sprout, the Tzemach. Though Yeshua didn't stumble, He had the APPEARANCE of one who stumbled because He took the sins of the world upon Himself. Yet God finds no fault in Him and removes the filthy clothing and gives Him pure clothing.

So, is it just inevitable that we descend the mountain by stumbling? Well, this is what usually happens, but I don't think it needs to be. There's another way to get back down to the ground below the mountain – on our knees, humbling ourselves. Our first main point here is that when God raises us up, WE WILL CERTAINLY COME BACK DOWN, BUT WE CAN DO THAT OURSELVES BY HUMBLING OURSELVES, by giving the glory to God, by being especially open to correction in suggestion and guidance in that moment of elevation. We can become a leader who listens

deeply. We can become a teenager who doesn't think he knows everything. We can become a bat mitzvah who seeks out wise counsel and follows it. This is how we come back down off the mountain safely.

So let me challenge you now in this part of the calendar to cultivate humility and speak it out with others, to lower yourself down. We have heard the sentiment many times that when you are raised up, beware the fall that looms; humble yourself. But THIS IS WHAT GOD IS SPEAKING TO US RIGHT NOW via parsha Beha'alotcha. This is the message of this moment. As He has raised you up, lower yourself down; don't be like Israel who suddenly judged Egypt to be better than freedom. The teen who is filled with pride is destined to fall badly. The teen who is filled with respect and humility will grow into his elevated position with no shame. As we read these Torah portions where Israel struggles, as we approach the next milestone in the calendar, which is the 3 Weeks of mourning, when God turns His back, so to say, as we approach the dry summer in Israel when the heavens and the earth are separated from each other, focus on WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW rather than what you think you know. Focus on knowing yourself as lowly. Focus on what others have that you don't, and praise them. Focus on the idea that whatever talents you have come from God, and if He had given them to someone else, they'd do better with them than you're doing with them. Focus on taking correction gracefully and thankfully.

And let me add here that we should also focus now on being brave to stand up again when we fall. When we fall, there is a great gravity that springs up that makes us want to wallow there in that hole. But we have an encouragement here in Beha'alotcha in this regard as we read about second chances with Pesach Sheni, the second opportunity to do Pesach if a person was rendered unclean and, therefore, unable to participate in the bringing of the lamb because ritual impurity prevents one from bringing a sacrifice. The generally accepted message of Pesach Sheni is that it's never too late. So you were defiled and you couldn't draw near to God. God says, "Ok, I see your desire; you get another chance."

The second point I'd like to make here beyond what our focus should be as we are elevated is that the middle of a journey is tough, and we need to be expecting to hit that wall of the middle and power through, step-by-step. For Israel, they've already been in the wilderness for a whole year. They made it through the year off of the inspiration and adrenaline of the exodus. But now they've been camping for a year in the desert, and they're beginning to realize what this new life is about for them. And it looks tough. And in looking back, for some reason we see the good and not the bad, so Egypt is looking better and better. If we're expecting the wall, we won't be too dejected when we run into it. Instead, when we find ourselves exhausted and not wanting to move, we say to ourselves, "Ah, it's this point again. I know this point." And we press in with the Lord's help.

We all know what it's like to feel dejected and exhausted as the new normal begins to materialize and the old life is still fresh in the rearview mirror. If you've been blessed to have a 5-day work week or a 5-day school week, you know that when you come to Wednesday, it just feels like you've already come far, but you look ahead and you see that you still have a long way

to go before you can rest again. Wednesday is called “hump day,” or some say “slump day” because we can deflate and actually accomplish very little on Wednesdays. If you look online, you’ll see articles that describe how to make sure you’re being productive on Wednesday.

Every journey with the Lord starts with an uplift, a moment of inspiration. We are carried far by that uplift. In the calendar, we’re carried all the way to Shavuot by the uplift of Passover. It’s like Passover gives us the energy we need to start climbing, and so we climb. Shavuot is what we find at the top, the mountaintop experience for us. But there we are standing at the top, and it’s just at that moment that God withdraws that extra energy of childhood, and He says, “Ok, now come down; come down on your own.” This is His design. But we’re not fully aware that suddenly we are being asked to use our legs in a way that we haven’t had to use them before. And we start to move, and something’s different. We feel wobbly, and we’re looking down, and it seems like there’s such a long way to go, and this isn’t easy, and what if I fall, and what if that path leads to a cliff or that path or that path? The journey up here was already pretty exhausting, but now things seem harder and longer and more dangerous. And we have a particularly emotional reaction to this moment, standing there contemplating where we are and what it took to get there and how far we still have to go. This is a chiefly emotional battleground at this point, and it’s something that couples experience when the initial romance fades. We actually experience this moment on many levels and in many ways in life.

Understand that in the calendar, we are now entering into one of these middle periods that is a bit of a slog. We’re starting to sense it in the Torah portions now. We’re literally approaching the summer solstice in a couple of weeks, which is a kind of mid-point on the bright side of the year. And not long after the summer solstice, we come to another kind of midpoint in the spiritual journey, the 3 Weeks. If we say that our first journey in the year is actually 7 months, including the 7th month, our midpoint for that journey gets pushed forward a couple weeks, right to the 17th of Tammuz, which is a special fast day. There is no more difficult point in the calendar than the 3 Weeks that begin at the 17th of Tammuz, right in the middle of the seven-month journey of Nissan through Tishrei. So we see this difficult middle period clearly in the calendar.

I’d like to read now a little prose poem written by R’Tzvi Freeman that includes the idea of this difficult middle period. In this quick poem, R’Freeman quickly lays out a pattern in the universe in just a few words. Listen for what comes in the middle of that pattern. The poem is called “The Dream:” (https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/5942979/jewish/For-Your-Nasso-Study-Group-PDF.htm)

The Dream

You start with a dream. The dream becomes a plan. The plan becomes a lot of dirty work. The dirty work becomes a house. If you are successful, it is the house of your dreams.

Dream, plan, dirty work, success. Why is this the fundamental story of all human endeavor?

Because it is the story of the universe.

Those who can feel the dream, those who can read the plan, they see we are now at the finishing touches.

I really like this poem. It's just a few sentences, but it captures a lot. He's pointing to a pattern in which we are inspired, we're elevated, and this elevation is followed by what he calls "dirty work." And the dirty work leads to the goal, eventually, which is the building of a house. And he's also saying in these few lines that if you're a little sensitive to the story of the universe, the pattern of the universe, you can sense that the time is late, which is a topic for another time.

We actually have two middle points like this in the yearly calendar, one near the 3 Weeks that follow the summer solstice, and one a couple of weeks after the winter solstice. I want to just dip into that idea briefly now, partly because I just find it fascinating but also because it helps give a fundamental structure to approaching the yearly calendar. As I was thinking about this topic of this difficult middle phase, I began to see better than ever what the Sages mean when they say, "The end is enwedged in the beginning, and the beginning is enwedged in the end." Just keep that saying in mind, this idea that the beginning and the end overlap.

We have two journeys in the year, and they're both 7 months. Well, you say, we only have 12 months, so how can we have two 7-month journeys in the year? If we count the first month twice and the 7th month twice, we have 14 steps. The first journey is months 1 through the end of 7. The second journey in the year starts again with the beginning of the 7th month and finishes at the end of the first month. So that second journey includes months 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 1. So again, we count both 1 and 7 twice. Passover both starts one journey and finishes another. The fall mo'edim end one journey and begin another. The endings and beginnings overlap. And so this is how the year is composed of two journeys of seven months. By the way, in the same way that we find a fast period near the middle of the first journey, we find the 10th of Tevet fast near the middle of the second journey. It's truly difficult to be in the middle.

Now we often look to the natural and agricultural calendars for help understanding the spiritual calendar. And what do we find agriculturally going on in the 1st and the 7th months? These are both big harvest times, the beginning of the grain harvest in the first month, and the grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates in the fall. Harvest is the collecting of seeds, essentially, whether they be naked or flesh-covered seeds. So, do we think of the harvest as the end or the beginning? It's both, isn't it. You cut the mature plant, and take the seeds to eat, and that's an ending of a journey. But you also set aside some of those seeds for planting the next crop, so what you have in your hands is also the beginning of the next journey. They overlap. We can almost say the ending and the beginning are the same thing.

Let's turn now to some practical suggestions for how we deal with the difficult middle phase of a journey. I'm sure you can all come up with many suggestions. What do *YOU* do when the journey ahead seems impossible and you're already feeling tired? Let me give just a few suggestions here.

First, understand that the “dirty work” is part of the pattern of God’s yearly curriculum for us. It’s built in. So don’t panic when the path ahead suddenly seems overwhelming. This kind of understanding of the God’s design for the calendar really steps in to help us in moments like these.

Second, make a special effort now to reaffirm your commitment to whatever the path is that God has chosen for you. And simply be dogmatic to stay on the path. Become a little bit nutty about staying on that path. You know, every day we experience this same pattern of salvation, and what we speak out every day to strengthen us in the journey of that day is “Shema Israel.” The Shema is how we reaffirm our chosen path. And as we say the Shema, we read the commands to keep God’s ways on our heart and to talk of them when we sit in our houses, when we walk on the way, when we lie down, and when we rise up. It sounds a little nutty, really, or it may look that way to the world, anyway. But that kind of single-mindedness for the truth and for the path of life is what it looks like to press in, in faith.

Third, don’t be too concerned with what’s down the road. Just focus on the next step. The next step is doable. The next million steps is overwhelming.

Fourth, look for the joy in the journey at this point. There is always joy.

And fifth, pay attention to what the difficulty of the journey is bringing out of you that needs to be corrected. God is in the process of bringing into the light what needs to see the sun. The goal of this first 7-month journey is repentance, the repentance of Elul and of the repentance of the 10 Days of Awe. The unmasking of the sin that remains in us is what all this great light of the summer is about. That illuminating of the darkness is a critical step in humbling us and in our reaching out to Him for help and His eventual pouring out of His grace on us, His pitying us, His deeper work in us. Understand that God is the prime mover in bringing correction, but we need to pay attention as He shines the light of truth on what still needs correcting in us. God saves by pouring out His grace on us, but our part is particularly the repentance. By understanding that God is now drawing out of us the sin that must be dealt with, we can look at our stumbles as steps forward in the illumination process, rather than merely as failures.

Chutzpah from Humility

After these more general discussions about how this portion fits into the bigger picture and what it’s speaking to us in general, let’s spend a little time now with a couple of specific topics from the portion, starting with the famous inverted letter nuns that separate the last two verses of chapter 10 from the rest of the text. In hand-written Torah scrolls, there are two backward nuns that mysteriously come before and after these verses, which read: “And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, ‘Arise, O LORD, and let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You.’ And when it rested, he said, ‘Return, O LORD, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel’” (Numbers 10:35-36).

Many reasons are given for what these inverted nuns are doing here. Let me throw in another reading that is an extension from our conversation about cultivating humility especially in this

season. The nun is said to be a bent over person, a person who is humble. It's the letter of faithful humility. What does it mean, then, to have a backward nun? Let me suggest that an inverted nun is a kind of chutzpah, a boldness, a standing up. It's a chutzpah that has as its basis humility. The backwards nun is made from a nun, and real chutzpah begins with humility. When we are humble, God lifts us up. When we are humble, there is a purity in our thoughts and words that allows us to claim authority that we couldn't otherwise because our motives are clean. Again, the point here is that humility becomes the basis for a kosher chutzpah, and in that kosher boldness there is great power. Yeshua is called the Lamb, but He's also called the Lion. There is a power in a worldly boldness that is not founded on humility, but that kind of chutzpah leads to death. There is also power in a godly boldness that starts with humility, and that chutzpah leads to life.

What does this idea have to do with these two verses? Well, first of all, they're spoken by Moses, of whom it is said that he was the most humble of all men. And what is he saying? Well, what he's saying takes chutzpah! He's daring to send forth the God of the Universe to deal with His enemies, who are also Israel's enemies, and he's then inviting God to return. Here is a tiny man, a human being, addressing the Creator. His words are not a request, like "Please Lord, go out to scatter Your enemies." Listen to the boldness again in these verses: "And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, 'Arise, O LORD, and let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You.' And when it rested, he said, 'Return, O LORD, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel'" (Numbers 10:35-36).

There is no condemnation here in the Torah for Moses saying this. On the contrary, we recite these lines when the ark is opened during a Torah service. Moses can speak this way because we know that beneath the words is a pure heart, a humble heart. So there is a close connection between humility and boldness. We are meant to be a bold people, a people who stands up to claim the vast authority God has given us. But that boldness and that claim of authority must rest on the foundation of humility.

On the Light from Below

The last specific topic we have time for today is the first topic in the portion, the lighting of the menorah, the topic that provides the name for this portion: "When you cause the lights to go up..." There's an important principle that is starting here with the lighting of the Tabernacle menorah. There is a kindling of a kind of light here that is more than meets the eye.

Flames give light, and light is truth. Light defeats evil because evil requires darkness, the cover of lies. When evil is exposed by the truth, it loses its appeal. It becomes unattractive because it's obvious that it leads to death.

Light can come from one of two places: it can come from above or below. In the physical world, the light from above comes from the sun, moon, and stars. This is light that God has made for us. And the light from below is light that mankind has a hand in producing, the light from a candle or a fire or a menorah, light that often comes from mankind growing something like an olive and pressing it to extract the oil, which contains a lot of energy in it, a lot of light in it. God

wants us to GROW UP TO BE ABLE TO REFLECT HIS LIGHT, the reflection below of His light from above. The light from above is used to grow the olive below. It's like the light from above is hidden in the flesh of the physical olive, and God says, "Ok, the light started with Me, but it's down there with you now. Liberate it. You make light now like I make light."

Here in our portion, Israel is still very early in learning how to reflect God's light. With the menorah, God has designed a teaching tool for us, and through it He teaches us how to bring forth the light. He instructs us where to put the menorah, how to arrange the lamps, how we need to daily tend to it. And after all that teaching, at a certain point in time, He says, "Now light it. Begin." Again, this is God in a teaching role.

Later, when we have grown up, we use our own initiative to craft and light a menorah without God directing us to do so, without His direct leading. And amazingly, we actually see this in the calendar almost exactly six months opposite the reading of this portion. Opposite us now on the calendar is what? It's Hanukkah! Hanukkah is mankind taking what God has taught us about bringing forth the light from below, taking the design of the menorah, and making it our own, augmenting God's design from our own free will and our own life experience. We take the lesson and apply it. And in the darkness of mid-winter, we light the menorahs that we designed according to God's pattern. And we put them in our windows for the world to see. We burn the oil God has hidden in the olive to make light.

It's absolutely breathtaking, really.

One last point here, this section about lighting the menorah is only given a few verses in this portion. But among these few verses is a repetition of the detail that the menorah is hammered work. We are told "And this was the workmanship of the menorah, HAMMERED work of gold. From its base to its flowers, it was HAMMERED work; according to the pattern that the LORD had shown Moses, so he made the menorah" (Numbers 8:4). Why this emphasis here on the hammering? I think it's partly to say that this work of reflecting God's light does not come easily. The final form of the menorah might be grace and beauty and a NATURAL form. But not all that is smooth and natural starts that way. Certainly nothing in life that is worth anything starts out fully formed. It has to GROW, and GROWING IS A TOUGH BUSINESS. This menorah that is made to resemble an almond tree, with a trunk, branches, buds, and flowers that yield light, has to grow. Now catch this, the menorah has to start as a solid lump of gold and be hammered and hammered, and over time and with many blows, the menorah grows as a branch forms, and another branch to balance the first, and more branches, and buds form, and flowers bloom. Learning to reflect His light takes time, the blow of the Smith's hammer, a process of growing into the balanced and natural shape of the menorah. And WE are the menorah, and we are given a difficult growing process. But the end result is smooth and natural and beautiful and bright.

Yeshua

And there is no one who exemplifies this whole teaching of the menorah better than Yeshua. Who is more balanced than Yeshua? Who gives more light than Yeshua? Who teaches us more

about reflecting God's light than Yeshua? And Who suffered more severe blows than Yeshua? It's not that there haven't been many people in the world who have suffered terrible blows. But none of them were innocent like Him. None of them were filled like love for His persecutors like He was filled with love for them.

Why did Yeshua have to suffer like that? Was it that He needed to grow into the form of the menorah? I think the answer there is "Yes." There was no other way to bring forth the fullness of His light than for Him to give everything He had to give. Yeshua's example teaches us that you can't hold back and still give forth the fullness of your light. It wasn't possible for Yeshua to hold back and bring forth the fullness of His light, and it's not possible for us to do that either. In order to shine with all the brilliance God has put into us, we have to give everything like He did. And we trust God to take that offering and make it a vast beacon of light like Yeshua's to illuminate the darkness of the world around us.

Well that's all for today. Thank you for listening. There is a link to an outline below. May God bless us to be a people who take much joy in the climb and also in the descent, but may our descent be one of humbling ourselves and not uncontrolled falling. May we be a people who come to the difficult parts of the journey with knowledge of what's coming and with the faith to keep moving forward, one step at a time. May we be a people with the holy chutzpah that grows out of humility. And may we grow into a people who take His light from above and reflect it below into a dark world, as we rise up to be the people He has made us to be. Shalom.