

## Parashat Behaalotekha: Ye of Imperfect Faith

Rabbi Joshua Rabin, Astoria Center of Israel, Astoria, New York<sup>1</sup>

### Bemidbar 11:21-22

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה שְׁש־מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף רַגְלֵי הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אִנִּי  
בְּקִרְבּוֹ וְאַתָּה אֹמֶרֶת בֶּשֶׂר אֶתָּן לָהֶם וְאָכְלוּ חֹדֶשׁ יָמִים:  
הֲצֵאן וּבָקֵר יִשְׁחַט לָהֶם וּמִצָּא לָהֶם אִם אֶת־כָּל־דִּגְי הַיָּם  
יֵאָסֹף לָהֶם וּמִצָּא לָהֶם:

But Moses said, "The people who are with me number six hundred thousand foot soldiers [alone]; yet You say, 'I will give them enough meat to eat for a whole month.' 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?"

### 1. Did Moshe Posses Perfect Faith?

### Toseftah Sotah 6:4

דָּרַשׁ ר"ע (בַּמִּדְבָּר י"א:כ"ב) הֲצֵאן וּבָקֵר יִשְׁחַט לָהֶם  
[וּמִצָּא לָהֶם] וְכִי מִסְפִּיק לָהֶם [אִם] אֶת כָּל דִּגְי הַיָּם [וְגו']  
וְכִי הוּא מִסְפִּיק לָהֶם כְּגוֹן שִׁנְא' (וַיִּקְרָא י"ב:ח') וְאִם לֹא  
תִמָּצֵא יֵדָה דִּי שָׁה וְכִי אֵיזָה קִשָּׁה זֹה אוֹ (בַּמִּדְבָּר כ"א)  
שָׁמְעוּ נָא הַמּוֹרִים הָיוּ אוֹמְרִים זֹה קִשָּׁה [יִתֵּר] מִשְׁמַעוּ נָא  
הַמּוֹרִים אֲלֵא שְׁמַחֲלֵל שֵׁם שְׁמִים בִּסְתֵּר מַחֲסִין עָלָיו  
בְּגִלּוֹי נִפְרָעֵן מִמֶּנּוּ [זֶה] שֶׁבִּסְתֵּר חֹסֶה עָלָיו הַמָּקוֹם

Rabbi Akiva expounded (Num. 11:22), "Are there flocks and herds to be slaughtered for them, *u'matza* (וּמִצָּא) for them?" [What is the meaning of "*u'matza*"?] Would it really suffice for them? "Or are there all the fish of the sea [to be gathered for them *u'matza* for them]?" [Here too, *u'matza* means,] would it really suffice for them? For example, as it says (Lev. 12:8), "And if her means do not suffice (*tim'tzah*) for a sheep[, she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons]." And what was worse, this (i.e., "Are there [enough] flocks?") or (Num. 20:10), "Hear now, you rebels!" Certainly this utterance was worse than "Hear now, you rebels!" Rather, when one desecrates the Name of the Heavens privately, they spare him, but [when one desecrates God] in public, they exact punishment upon him. This (i.e., the first episode), which was in private, the Place spared him.

רַשֵּׁב"א אוֹמֵר אִף [זֶה] שֶׁבִּסְתֵּר לֹא חֹסֶה עָלָיו הַמָּקוֹם  
שִׁנְא' (בַּמִּדְבָּר י"א:כ"ג) עֲתָה תִּרְאֶה הִיקָרָךְ דְּבָרִי אִם  
לֹא וְאִנִּי אוֹמֵר ח"ו שֶׁתַּעֲלֶה עַל דַּעְתּוֹ שֶׁל צַדִּיק זֶה  
שִׁיֵּאמֵר אֵין הַמָּקוֹם מִסְפִּיק לָנוּ וְלִבְהִמְתֵּנוּ אֶפְשָׁר לָמִי  
שִׁנְאָמֵר בּוֹ (בַּמִּדְבָּר י"ב:ו'-ז') לֹא כֵן עֲבָדִי מֹשֶׁה וְגו'  
תַּעֲלֶה עַל דַּעְתּוֹ שִׁיֵּאמֵר אֵין הַמָּקוֹם מִסְפִּיק לָנוּ  
וְלִבְהִמְתֵּנוּ וְהִלֵּא כִּשְׁהָיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם [נִילוֹס] נִהָר  
[מִסְפִּיק לָהֶם דְּגִים וְלִמְצָרִים בְּהֵמַת מִצְרַיִם מִסְפִּיקָתָן]  
לָהֶם וְלִמְצָרִים אֲלֵא לַעֲנִין שִׁנְא' (בַּמִּדְבָּר י"א:י"ט) לֹא  
יוֹם אֶחָד תֵּאָכְלוּ וְגו' עַד חֹדֶשׁ יָמִים אָמַר מֹשֶׁה לִּפְנֵי  
הַקֹּב"ה [רַבש"ע] כֹּה הִגִּיד לָהֶם שֶׁתִּתֵּן לָהֶם וְתִמְיָתָם

Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says, even this [episode] which occurred in private, the Place did not spare him, as it is said (Num. 11:23), "Now you will see whether my word comes to pass, or not." And I say, God forbid that it would enter the mind of that righteous man, that he would say, "The Place does not suffice for us and for our livestock." Is it possible for he about whom it is said (Num. 12:6-7), "Not so my servant, Moses[, in all my house he is trusted]," that it would enter his mind to say, "The Place does not suffice for us and for our livestock"? And moreover, when the Children of Israel were in Egypt, did the Nile River really have [enough] fish to suffice both for them and for the Egyptians (see Num. 11:5), and were there really [enough] livestock in Egypt to suffice both for them and for the Egyptians?

<sup>1</sup> All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>אומרים לאדם טל כפר וירד לשאול אומרים לחמור טל כפר שיעורין ונחתה את ראשך [יהיו] אומרים עלי [ולך אין בשרם] מוצאת אמר לו וכי הגיו להם שיאמרו אין המקום מספיק לנו ולבהמתנו אלא יאבד הן ואלף כיוצא בהן ולא תהא ידי קצרה לפני אפלו שעה אחת שנאמר (שם) ויאמר ה' אל משה היד ה' תקצר וגו'</p>                                           | <p>Rather, this only refers to the matter, as it is said (Num. 11:19-20), "Not [just] for one day will you eat it, etc., but [rather] for a month of days...." Said Moses before the Holy One Blessed be He, "Master of the Universe, is it fitting that you give [all this] to them and then kill them? Do we say to a person, 'Take this loaf of bread and descend to <i>Sheol</i>?' Do we say to a donkey, 'Take this <i>kor</i> of barley and then we will chop off your head?' For they should not say about me and about you, "The meat did not suffice (<i>motzeit</i>)."' He said to him, "And is it fitting for them to say, 'The Place does not have enough to give us and our livestock?' Rather, those [who said this] should perish and a thousand more like them. But do not shorten your hand before me for even an hour, as it is said (Num. 11:23), "And God said to Moses, is the hand of God too short, etc.?"</p> |
| <p>ר"ג בנו של ר' יהודה הנשיא אומר אי אפשר לעמד על [תפלתם] אם תתן להם בשר [בהמה] גסה יאמרו בשר בהמה דקה בקשנו תתן בשר בהמה דקה יאמרו בשר חיה ועוף אנו מבקשים אם תתן בשר חיה ועופות יאמרו בשר דגים וחסידים אנו מבקשים שנאמר (שם) הצאן ובקר ישחט להם ושיבתו רוח הקדש (שם) עתה תראה היקרה דברי אם לא ורואה אני את דברי מדברי ר"ע.</p> | <p>Rabban Gamaliel, the son of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi says, "It is impossible to stand against their frivolous ways. If you give them the meat of large livestock, they will say, 'We asked for the meat of small livestock!' If you give them the meat of small livestock, they will say 'We asked for the meat of wild animals and poultry!' If you give them the the meat of a wild animals and poultry, they will say, We asked for the flesh of fish and locusts!" As it is said, "Are there flocks and herds to be slaughtered for them?" Whereupon the Holy Spirit answered him, "Now you will see whether my word comes to pass, or not." And I prefer my words to the words of Rabbi Akiva.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

#### Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah: As Refracted Through the Generations*, 184-187

In the school of Rabbi Akiva they believed that *lal* is in the hands of Heaven. The Torah in all of its details, is heavenly, and the prophet is nought but a vessel to receive its inspiration...In the school of Rabbi Akiva it was taught that the Israelites were deficient in faith, and that even at moments beyond conception, such as the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, or the standing at Mount Sinai, they did not have full-hearted faith...

Rabbi Akiva was a man of various temperaments. He extolled the potential of humanity, while judging actual human achievement harshly...Rabbi Akiva even went so far as to say that Moses himself did not possess perfect faith. At times he [Rabbi Akiva] spoke as if he [Moses] did not believe that God could provide the people in the wilderness with their needs.

## 2. Must You Posses Perfect Faith?

#### James Fowler, *Stages of Faith*

Doubt and struggle aren't necessarily [an indication of] rejecting one's faith, but perhaps longing for a more intimate relationship with the Holy.

#### Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*

It takes courage to acknowledge doubt and to wrestle with your beliefs. It's much easier to settle for a fierce unquestioned belief...[Doubt presents the opportunity] to step into a larger faith, a more adequate faith, and a more spacious and profound way of seeing.