

## At the Command of the Lord

In this week's reading is from *Parsahat Behaalotcha (Bamidbar / Numbers 8:1-12:15)* there is a continuation from the previous Torah portion on the construction of the Tabernacle. Following the completion of the Tabernacle and its dedication, the glory of the Lord, represented as a cloud, descended upon the Tabernacle. The cloud covered the Tabernacle by day, and fire by night. The Torah states, על-פי יהוה יסעו בני ישראל ועל-  
:9:18 *At the command of the Lord the sons of Israel would set out, and at the command of the Lord they would camp; as long as the cloud settled over the tabernacle, they remained camped. (NASB)* Note how the MT is written saying, על-פי יהוה: “*At the command of the Lord...*” translated literally to say, “*upon the lips/mouth of the Lord,*” which is paralleled to the cloud moving and the people responding. According to the Torah, the Lord led the sons of Israel through the wilderness by His word. The Lord led and guided the people, when they were to move and when they were to remain still. It is at this point in the Scriptures when Israel leaves the wilderness of Sinai. Studying the overall narrative, the people appear to be contented while they remained at Sinai, however, when they are told to move, being led by the Lord, by his word (על-פי יהוה) they begin to complain, *11:1 Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the Lord; and when the Lord heard it, His anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. (NASB)* The people complain about the Manna that God provided and longed for the fish, cucumbers, melons and leeks that were available in the land of Egypt. Note that Egypt, following Israel's deliverance, has become a picture of sin, disobedience, and idolatry, according to the Scriptures. The people longed not just for food but also for the things of Egypt. Moshe pleads on behalf of the people before the Lord (*11:10-11*). The Lord then sends meat and provides so much meat that they become sick (loathsome) of the meat. While Moshe was speaking with the Lord, he had doubts as well and the Lord said “*Is the hand of the Lord short*” (הֲיָד יְהוָה תִּקְצָר)? All that Moshe had witnessed of the Lord delivering Israel from Egypt, and yet he doubted the Lord was able to provide meat

for the people.

**ספר במדבר פרק ט**

טו וביום הקים את-המשכן  
כסה הענן את-המשכן לאהל  
העדת ובערב יהיה על-המשכן  
כמראה-אש עד-בקר: טז כן  
יהיה תמיד הענן יכסנו ומראה-  
אש לילה: יז ולפי העלות הענן  
מעל האהל ואחרי כן יסעו בני  
ישראל ובמקום אשר ישכן-שם  
הענן שם יחנו בני ישראל: יח  
**על-פי יהוה יסעו בני ישראל**  
**ועל-פי יהוה יחנו כל-ימי אשר**  
**ישכן הענן על-המשכן יחנו: יט**  
ובהאריך הענן על-המשכן ימים  
רבים ושמרו בני-ישראל את-  
משמרת יהוה ולא יסעו: כ ויש  
אשר יהיה הענן ימים מספר על-  
המשכן **על-פי יהוה יחנו ועל-פי**  
**יהוה יסעו: כא** ויש אשר יהיה  
הענן מערב עד-בקר ונעלה הענן  
בבקר ונסעו או יומם ולילה ונ-  
עלה הענן ונסעו: כב או-ימים  
או-חדש או-ימים בהאריך הענן  
על-המשכן לשכן עליו יחנו בני-  
ישראל ולא יסעו ובהעלתו יסעו:  
כג **על-פי יהוה יחנו ועל-פי**  
**יהוה יסעו** את-משמרת יהוה  
שמרו **על-פי יהוה ביד-משה:**

**Bamidbar / Numbers 9:15-23**

9:15 Now on the day that the tabernacle was erected the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony, and in the evening it was like the appearance of fire over the tabernacle, until morning. 9:16 So it was continuously; the cloud would cover it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. 9:17 Whenever the cloud was lifted from over the tent, afterward the sons of Israel would then set out; and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the sons of Israel would camp. 9:18 At the command of the Lord the sons of Israel would set out, and at the command of the Lord they would camp; as long as the cloud settled over the tabernacle, they remained camped. 9:19 Even when the cloud lingered over the tabernacle for many days, the sons of Israel would keep the Lord's charge and not set out. 9:20 If sometimes the cloud remained a few days over the tabernacle, according to the command of the Lord they remained camped. Then according to the command of the Lord they set out. 9:21 If sometimes the cloud remained from evening until morning, when the cloud was lifted in the morning, they would move out; or if it remained in the daytime and at night, whenever the cloud was lifted, they would set out. 9:22 Whether it was two days or a month or a year that the cloud lingered over the tabernacle, staying above it, the sons of Israel remained camped and did not set out; but when it was lifted, they did set out. 9:23 At the command of the Lord they camped, and at the command of the Lord they set out; they kept the Lord's charge, according to the command of the Lord through Moses. (NASB)

In the Apostolic Writings, according to the Apostle Paul, in Ro-

mans he said, *15:4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (NASB)* The Word of God is given for our instruction in righteousness.

In this week's Torah portion, through *Bamidbar / Numbers 9:15-23*, we find the phrase, *עַל-פִּי יְהוָה* repeated 7 times. The repetition of these words suggests that there is something very important the Lord wants us to pay attention to in these Scriptures. As noted earlier, the words *עַל-פִּי יְהוָה* “*At the command of the Lord...*” translated literally means, “*upon the lips/mouth of the Lord,*” and is paralleled to the cloud moving and the people responding. According to the Torah, the Lord led the sons of Israel through the wilderness by His word. When the cloud would move, the people knew it was time to go, and when the cloud stopped the people knew that they were to stop. These Scriptures show a parallel between the physical manifestation of God moving in the pillar and the Word of God that proceeds from His mouth. Note how *Bamidbar / Numbers 9:23* states, *כַּג עַל-פִּי יְהוָה יִחַנּוּ וְעַל-פִּי יְהוָה יִסְעוּ אֶת-מִשְׁמַרְתּוֹ יְהוָה לְשָׂמְרוּ עַל-פִּי*, *9:23 At the command of the Lord they camped, and at the command of the Lord they set out; they kept the Lord's charge, according to the command of the Lord through Moses. (NASB)* The Targum Jonathan on *Bamidbar* states, *עַל פּוּם מִימְרָא דִּי שָׂרָן וְעַל פּוּם מִימְרָא דִּי נְטָלִין ית*, *עַל פּוּם מִימְרָא דִּי נְטָרִין עַל פּוּם מִימְרָא דִּי בִידָא דְמִנְשָׁה* saying “*according to the word (memra) of the Lord.*” The Word (Memra) of God showed the direction to move during the day, and provided light by night to see. In addition, note how the Lord provided light (*by the pillar of fire*) at night (*in the darkness*) to lead the people where they should go. Here, according to the Torah, there is a parallel to the movement of God in the pillar, to His word (the command, and to the light God provides for his people. These things (*the command, truth, light, righteousness, justice, God moving, and our being led, etc*) are all tied together by the Word of God that proceeds from His mouth (*the Scriptures*).

In *Tehillim / Psalms 19:5-7*, David, in a similar way, draws a parallel between “*light*” and “*speech.*” In the *Talmud Bavli Pesachim 10*, the rabbis say, “*When Rabha commenced to recite the Habdalah prayer he said thus: “Who hath made a distinction between sanctified and ordinary days, between light and darkness, between Israel and other nations, and*

*between the seventh day and the six working days.”* The rabbis also recognize the difference between light and darkness. According to the Torah, the Lord made a distinction between the ordinary days and the Shabbat, He made a distinction between Israel and the nations, and He made a distinction between the time to work and the time to rest. Based upon the Torah portion, Parashat Beha’alotcha, the light is also a reference to God’s directing our lives according to His Word, He makes a distinction in our lives, between the light and darkness, between righteousness and unrighteousness in the mitzvot, in the Torah. In addition, the difference between light and darkness may also be understood as a parallel between the knowledge of good and evil. In the light one is able to judge how one walks and to choose the right path to walk in. If the Torah has a one-to-one correspondence here to the light, if we are not studying Torah, how would it be possible to choose the right path (righteousness) to walk in? In addition, darkness is used to hide ones actions (his evil ways), to walk in wickedness without others observing what one is doing. Light has also been used to illustrate the choice between following the commandments of God, in His promises, and seeking to join one’s self to the Lord, and the hope for His eternal rewards, as opposed to darkness having the meaning to follow the enticing of the devil which persuade man to do evil and become captive to sin, wickedness, and being damned to hell which is also described as eternal darkness.

All of these concepts are incorporated into the first epistle of John chapter 1. John says that God is Light and in Him is no darkness. The Aramaic Targum on *Tehillim / Psalms 19:4* states, לית מימר דתורעמתא ולית, מילי דשגושא דלא משתמע קלהון: *There is no utterance of complaint, and there are no words of confusion, for their voice is not heard. (EMC)* Darkness, sin, unrighteousness, and wickedness are paralleled to the utterance of complaint and words of confusion. Note in *Tehillim / Psalms 68*, David speaks of the unrighteous being deceived by their own unrighteousness. Walking in unrighteousness and wickedness has the capacity of self deception and causes one to persuade himself to continue in his own unrighteousness, going from bad to worse. In the Lord God Almighty, there is no darkness. God is not the author of confusion (*1 Corinthians 14:33*). And using this comparison, John states that if we say we have fellowship with the Lord and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

Can you see the significance of these statements, and the Torah portion

coupled with the repetition of the phrase, על-פי יהוה 7 times in *Bamidbar / Numbers 9:23* states, כג על-פי יהוה יחנו ועל-פי יהוה יסעו את-משמרת, *At the command of the Lord they camped, and at the command of the Lord they set out; they kept the Lord's charge, according to the command of the Lord through Moses. (NASB)* How important is it for our lives to be led by the command, by the hand of God, and in the power of His Holy Spirit? The difference between light and darkness is understood as knowing the difference between truth and falsehood. The people in the wilderness journey moved according to the word of the Lord in their midst (the cloud, *9:15-19*), and yet they complained of the gifts God had given them to eat and to live (*11:1*). There were some who lived in the midst of the congregation and yet walked and lived in the unrighteousness of their hearts. This then led to the deception of others through the manner in which they lived, complaining against the Lord, against His word, against His provision and sustaining power. We should be careful not to do the same.

John wrote in his epistle, in *1 John 2:15-17* the following:

***1 John 2:15-17***

*2:15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 2:17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. (NASB)*

If one loves darkness (*which is paralleled to sin*), unrighteousness, and wickedness, as John describes, the things of the world, lust and pride, the love of the father is not in him. Notice how this is something that one does which causes the love of the Father to leave or not reside within such a person. The rabbis recognize these things, and write about these things according to the *Mishnah Pirkei Avot 4:21*, and *Missilat Yesharim on Pirkei Avot 4:21*.



***Mishnah Pirkei Avot 4:21***

*Rabbi Elazar HaKapor says: Envy, lust and honor drive a man from the world. רבי אלעזר הקפר אומר, הקנאה והתאוה, והכבוד מוציאין את האדם מן העולם.*

***Messilat Yesharim on Pirkei Avot 4:21***

*To summarize, a man was created not for his station in this world, but for his station in the World to Come. It is only that his station in this world is a means towards his station in the World to Come, which is the ultimate goal. This accounts for numerous statements of our Sages of blessed memory, all in a similar vein, likening this world to the place and time of preparation, and the next world to the place which has been set aside for rest and for the eating of what has already been prepared. This is their intent in saying (Avot 4:21), “This world is similar to a corridor ...,” as our Sages of blessed memory have said (Eruvin 22a), “Today for their performance and tomorrow to receive their reward,” “He who exerted himself on Friday will eat on the Sabbath” (Avodah Zarah 3a), “This world is like the shore and the World to Come like the sea ...” (Koheleth Rabbah 1:36), and many other statements along the same lines.*

Note how the Mishnah in Pirkei Avot 4:21 states that envy, lust, and honor drive a man from this world. What does it mean to be driven from this world? Could it be that these things cause our lives to be cut short? Note how Missilat Yesharim on Pirkei Avot 4:21 states that *“it is only a man’s station in this world, which is a means towards his station in the Olam Haba (The World to Come).”* This suggests that the way we live here on earth is preparatory for life in the World to Come. We practice walking in righteousness, we practice walking in the light, being guided by God’s Word, in preparation for the World to Come. Do you think your life here on earth is preparatory for life with God in eternity? John says that if we walk in the light (see *1 John 1:7-9*), just as He is in the Light, we have fellowship with Him, and with one another. The people of God in the wilderness however walked in the light of God’s presence each day. They

were taught the Word of the Lord at the hand of Moshe (בְּיַד-מֹשֶׁה) and yet they did not appear to have real fellowship with the Lord in heaven. The people longed for their former lives of bondage and sin. Do you long for the former life, or do you long for sin? Do you think this happens today amongst some of the people found in our congregations? The *Mishnah Pirkei Avot 4:2* states,

***Mishnah Pirkei Avot 4:2***

*Ben Azzai says: Run to do an easy mitzvah, and flee from sin; since one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah, and one sin leads to another sin; since the reward for a mitzvah is another mitzvah, and the reward for one sin is another sin.*

בן עזאי אומר, הוי רץ למצוה קלה [ כבחמורה ], ובורח מן העברה. שמצוה גוררת מצוה, ועברה גוררת עברה. ששכר מצוה, מצוה. ושכר עברה, עברה.

One command leads to another, which is similar to saying one righteous deed, when done for the glory of God and for His Name's sake, leads to our desire to do another because we love Him. Similarly, the nature of sin is that one sin leads to another. The rabbis say that the reward for a command is another command, saying essentially that the reward for a righteous deed is another righteous deed. The reason being there is joy in the performance of a command for the glory of God. And comparatively, the reward for sin is another sin. So by this reasoning, a righteous man will continue for the better, to more and more righteous deeds, whereas, the unrighteous man will continue in more unrighteousness. The words of the rabbis are very reminiscent of what is written in *Revelation 22:10-17*.

***Revelation 22:10-17***

*22:10 And he said to me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. 22:11 'Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.' 22:12 'Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to*

*what he has done. 22:13 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.' 22:14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. 22:15 Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. 22:16 'I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.' 22:17 The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. (NASB)*

John writes of the One speaking to him in revelation saying, *Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.* Thus, it is important to seek the Lord's help to overcome sin in our lives and to walk in God's ways.

The Apostle John said in *1 John 1:7-9* that, the blood of Yeshua His Son cleanses us from all sin, however, if one walks in sin (*practices sin, walks in darkness*), there is no fellowship. Does the blood of Christ cleanse when one practices walking in darkness? The point of this week's Torah portion is that you may find yourself living in the midst of the congregation of God, but do you truly desire to turn from sin, to seek His face to seek forgiveness (*Mark 9:43-49*), and to be led by the command, by the hand of God, and in the power of His Holy Spirit? This is a call for personal reflection and examination; the blood of Yeshua cleanses from sin only if we truly seek Him and His truth, in Teshuvah! On a spiritual level, one receives the forgiveness of sins in the Messiah Yeshua. But it isn't simply a matter of believing in the sacrifice. One must also have a repentant heart, to seek the Lord for the forgiveness of sin, and to turn from sin. The Torah principle at work here is the manner in which one is seeking the Lord for forgiveness, that is coupled with sacrifice, and turning from sin (Teshuvah, repentance). Each piece must be in place, and without the Lord's help, it would be impossible.



