



Dvar Torah for Parshat Behaalotekha

Based on "The Exchanged Children"

"Why should we be worse?" (Numbers 9:7)

One day [the true prince] took a stroll and then lay down to rest. He started thinking about what had happened to him. "What has God done to me?" he thought. "If I am the king's son then it is certainly not right. And if I am not the king's son, I still don't deserve to be an exiled fugitive" ("Rabbi Nachman's Stories," p. 241).

This simple question has often been asked. Many times it has led to significant changes in people's personal lives and in society at large. (Think suffrage, emancipation, labor negotiations.)

Some of us should also ask this simple question, taking care to aim it at the target of our desert predecessors: Divine connection and re-affirmation of the bond between God and us. Why? Because even though we just celebrated Shavuot, the anniversary of our having been chosen to receive the Torah and our re-commitment to living by it, we may already have begun to wonder, "Why are others doing this Jewish, Torah thing so well and I don't seem to get it? Am I worse?"

Surprisingly or not, the answer may be yes. But our "worseness" is not, God forbid, a permanent condition. It may simply be that we are currently ill or ill-equipped. These are things that we *can* change, sometimes by our own efforts, and always by prayer. If you think you're not well enough, try something like this:

"God, the Midrash teaches that when You brought us to Sinai, You made sure that none of us were blind or deaf, crippled or meshuga. Because how could a sick people keep the Torah, right? Nu. We both see that I'm not well-enough to keep the Torah the way it's meant to be kept, even though I want to. So please heal me so I can put my positive desire into action."

If you think you need some tools, keep this story handy:

The Rabbi of Rymanov was once at the table of his teacher, the chassidic master Rebbe Elimelekh. The soup had been served and everyone started to eat, except the Rabbi of Rymanov; he had not been given a spoon.

"Why aren't you eating?" asked Rebbe Elimelekh.

"I have no spoon," replied the Rabbi of Rymanov.

"Sometimes one must ask for a spoon, and a bowl, too, if necessary."

May the merit of the tzaddikim protect us and all of Israel. Amen.