



# THE SHALOM BAYIT JOURNAL



## Parashat Chukat-Balak

### Finding Meaning in the Wilderness

#### Understanding the Torah and the Human Experience

Human beings naturally seek meaning. When something painful or confusing happens, we instinctively ask, Why? Our minds search for explanations because uncertainty can feel more difficult to tolerate than the answer itself.

Parashat Chukat begins with one of Torah's greatest mysteries: the Parah Adumah. It is a mitzvah we are commanded to observe even though we may never fully understand it. Perhaps part of its purpose is to teach us that trust does not always begin with understanding.

As a father, I often think about moments when I ask one of my children to do something for me. Sometimes he understands why. Sometimes he does not. Yet there is something special when he comes excited, willing to do what I ask simply out of love and trust, especially when he does not yet understand the reasons behind it.

Throughout the wilderness, Bnei Yisrael repeatedly struggle with this challenge. They encounter thirst, hunger, fear, and uncertainty. Yet what often causes the greatest suffering is not simply the hardship itself, but the meaning they assign to it. They conclude that Boreh Olam has abandoned them, brought them into the wilderness to suffer, or forgotten His promises.

Psychology observes something similar. Human beings naturally assign meaning when faced with uncertainty. When people cannot make sense of painful experiences, they instinctively begin searching for explanations. Under stress, those explanations often become negative. The stories we tell ourselves about our experiences often shape our emotional response as much as the experiences themselves. We assume the worst because our minds would rather have a painful explanation than no explanation at all.

When looking back on the wilderness, however, Moshe offers an entirely different perspective. Rather than retelling the events, he reinterprets them. Moshe describes a Father who had been caring for His child.





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וַיֵּדַעַת עַם־לְבָבְךָ כִּי כַאֲשֶׁר יִסֵּר אִישׁ אֶת־בְּנוֹ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ מִיִּסְרֶךָ

(Devarim 8:5)

*"Know in your heart that just as a man disciplines his son, so Boreh Olam disciplines you."*

Earlier, he describes Boreh Olam carrying the Jewish people through the wilderness:

כַּאֲשֶׁר יִשָּׂא אִישׁ אֶת־בְּנוֹ (Devarim 1:31)

*"As a man carries his son."*

The Ramban explains that a loving father sometimes allows temporary discomfort because he is focused on his child's long-term growth. According to this, Moshe invites Bnei Yisrael to look back at the wilderness through a lens of growth, and purpose.

Nothing about Bnei Yisrael's time in the wilderness changed. What changed was the way Moshe taught them to understand it.

*The stories we tell ourselves about our experiences, often shape our emotional response as much as the experiences themselves.*

There are seasons in life when we do not understand why something is happening. We naturally begin searching for meaning, and sometimes we create a narrative focused solely on fear and hardship.

Yet, like Bnei Yisrael, we may not have the whole story. Sometimes it is only with time and perspective that we discover a deeper narrative—one of growth, purpose, and guidance.

*Can you think of a moment in your life when you later realized Boreh Olam was guiding a situation in ways you could not see at the time?*



### About The Shalom Bayit Journal

The Shalom Bayit Journal explores the intersection of Torah, psychology, relationships, and the human experience. Through thoughtful essays and practical reflection, the Journal seeks to make timeless wisdom meaningful and accessible for everyday life.

