



5 ways to cry out to God

I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me (Numbers 11:14). Moses' heartfelt plea to God reminds us that even the 'greats' of the bible struggled and went through periods where they experienced their faith, their mission and their community/family as a burden. How do we relate to God at such times? Five thoughts follow:

1. Acknowledge and share with God your feelings (e.g., fear, anger, despair) honestly, in prayer. God knows you intimately. There is nothing gained by 'pretending' everything is fine if it's not.

2. Pray with the Psalms. There we find the whole range of human emotions expressed with passion. Sit with a psalm, or just a single verse, that speaks to your heart. Allow the rhythm of the psalm to carry you.

3. Seek the help of a trusted, loving friend or spiritual companion whose guidance you trust. Allow God to 'reach' you through even just one

person who can support, listen and pray for you at this difficult time.

4. Avoid anything destructive to your wellbeing: the solace of drugs and alcohol, yes, but also patterns of blame, self-pity, revenge, bitterness, chronic negative-talk. Don't hesitate to seek help (step 3).

5. Make an act of faith, no matter how faltering. If the words 'Lord, I place my trust in you' stick in your throat, then say, 'Lord, I *want* to trust you, *help* me to trust you.' Even a fragile light in your darkness is strength. Thank God for that strength.



Light of Torah
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Light of Torah is a ministry arising from the Catholic community. In the spirit of Vatican II's call to Jewish-Christian reconciliation, Light of Torah encourages Torah reflection in homes and parishes, drawing on the insights of Jewish interpretative traditions.

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Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.



Numbers 8:1—12:16

Beha'alotkha:
'when you bring up'

Why reflect on Torah?

"Indeed, the words of God, expressed in human language, are in every way like human speech, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the weak flesh of human beings, became like them" (Dei Verbum, 13).

God 'speaks' to us. What an extraordinary thought! The almighty, ever-living God 'talks' to you and me in the human language of the bible; not words zapped down from the sky but through the writings of people and communities under divine inspiration. Such precious words must be received and interpreted in their proper context: a living faith community. Still, we make the bold claim that our God carries on a conversation with us, and we enter into this conversation through the scriptures.

This conversation began long ago with our Jewish ancestors-in-faith. It continues through the Jewish people, and through the church for whom the Hebrew scriptures have become part of its own bible. This *Light of Torah* series encourages Christians to listen to and converse with God through the gift of the Hebrew scriptures, attentive to the insights of Jewish commentators, and in a spirit of gratitude to the Jewish people through whom the scriptures have come to us.



Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar
of Torah readings:

Numbers 8:1—12:16

As the Israelites undertake their epic journey through the wilderness in the Book of Numbers, we find story after story of rebellion and conflict. Today we explore aspects of the rebellion in Chapter 11 and ask: what is the real significance of the people's complaints over their craving for meat? We also consider the character of Moses in both its fragility and strength.

Tasting Torah

"Who will give us meat to eat?" (11:4)
How does Moses relay this complaint to God?
"Where should I (get) meat to give to this entire people, when they weep on me, saying: Give us meat so that we may eat!" (11:13) Does Moses communicate the Israelites' complaint accurately? What contradiction do you notice?

Touching Torah

Actually, the people are not weeping to Moses. 'Who will give us meat?' implies that they consider themselves leaderless. Worse, nor do they place their trust in God. This, say the Sages, is what angers God: their grumbling amounts to idolatry. (See, too, how the psalmist recalls this event in Ps. 78:18-19.) Instead of being grateful that God feeds them with manna, the people bitterly undermine the evidence of God's action in their lives. Further, this loss of confidence is systemic. Remember all that counting of clans in Ch.1? Well, now they are 'weeping by their clans' (v.10); not only the 'riffraff' on the camp's outskirts but the entire 'Children of Israel' (v.4).

Moses cries out to God (11:11-15) in grief. The maternal imagery in Moses' prayer is striking. The images of conception, birth and suckling suggest the intimate depths of Moses' relationship with Israel. He leads not an organization but *a people* formed by blood ties and divine election, a relationship both familial and spiritual. Like a parent he hurts when his children hurt. Further, his words suggest that God, not Moses, is the real mother of Israel.

Depthing Torah

God's anger in this event is directed at the people rather than Moses. Why not Moses? Hasn't the grumbling spread though the Israelite ranks right to the top, affecting Moses himself (not to mention Miriam and Aaron as we read later in Ch.12)?

Look closely at the text. Despite Moses' suffering and remonstrance, he maintains his relationship with God, calling himself 'your servant' (11:11). He doesn't cry out 'Poor me!' to the air; he cries out *to God*, speaking directly and honestly about his pain. The 'ill fortune' which causes Moses to prefer death is not the lack of meat but grief over the people's rebellion, and a sense of having failed them. And if it seems that Moses doubts God's willingness to respond to the people's plight, in fact verse 12 leaves no room for doubt that Moses knows exactly who is Israel's real parent. If it was not Moses who 'conceived' and 'gave birth' to this people, then who did? The clear implication is that God did.

Doing Torah

In situations of conflict, sometimes people say, 'The issue is not the issue,' or 'It's a political football.' In other words, the stated matter of contention is a symbol of a deeper, underlying conflict of personalities, ideologies or value systems. Discuss this statement in the light of today's Torah reading and your own experience of community living and leadership.



Faith and Life

Remember a time when you cried out to God, with great honesty and directness, about your pain. Treasure this prayer as a precious moment in your faith journey.

Bibliography: Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (NY, 1995); Leibowitz, *Studies in Bamidbar* (NY, 1994).
Scripture: Fox.