



## Balak

Vol. 9, Issue 38 • 15 Tammuz 5785 / July 11, 2025

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### **Prophecy Lost**

*Yaakov S. Weinstein is a physicist at the MITRE Corporation and is the author of the Torah from Narnia blog.*

**S**even prophets prophesied to the nations of the world, and they are: Bilaam and his father Be'or, Job, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, Zophar the Naamathite, and Elihu ben Barachel the Buzite.

[\(Bava Batra 15b\)](#)

Her eldest son, a young boy of seven, burst through the door of their small cottage. "Father said I would see him today! Is he home yet? Did he get a message from God? Is he going to see the king?"

She took a deep breath and smiled at him. It was difficult raising a family on her own. Despite her diligence, she barely brought in enough money for food and a modest home. Of course, she knew this when she married; she supported it. This sacrifice

was a small price to pay for a husband who was a true prophet to the one God. Be'or was one of the chosen few who had meditated, fasted, and denied himself earthly pleasures in pursuit of reaching the highest spiritual plane a human could reach.

"Not yet," she replied calmly. "God willing, he will return before nightfall."

For her, the hidden price was Be'or's lack of presence for the children. But how else could one be close to God? Everyone knew it was necessary to throw off the physical to reach the spiritual. How could one attain spiritual heights amongst common, boorish humanity? Still, their son, Bilaam, missed his father terribly. Always a quick learner, he knew Father went away so he could speak with God and to do so he could only come home once a week, sometimes.

"When I grow up, I'm going to be a prophet just like Father!" declared Bilaam.

“Yes, you will,” she smiled. She dreaded the thought of her son taking the treacherous road her husband had chosen, but, for now, he was only a child...

*The Holy One, Blessed be He, did not leave over even one thing that he did not reveal to Bilaam... Bilaam was greater in wisdom even more than Moses...*

[\(Tanna de'Bei Eliyahu Rabbah 28\)](#)

The road to prophecy was a difficult one. Training in the school of Shem and Ever was arduous and only select children were accepted. Even at an early age, a child had to demonstrate intelligence and sincerity in order to qualify. Upon acceptance, each student studied the words of earlier prophets, meditation, and the ways of God. In addition, each student worked to refine his character traits, deprive himself of worldly pleasures, and work with a spiritual mentor.

With his father's encouragement, Bilaam entered the famed institution and was quickly recognized as a leading student. His wisdom and singleness of purpose was clearly evident and his ability to deprive himself of physical pleasures amazed his instructors. As the years passed, it became known to all that Bilaam was destined for greatness, a prophet capable of a unique relationship with God and of influencing others to strive for the heights of spirituality.

The night of his first prophecy began like any other night. Bilaam reviewed what he had learned that day, finished his evening prayers and rituals, and went off to get a few hours rest, ready to awaken at midnight to praise God.

And then God appeared. Bilaam had been told it was an experience like no other. Undeniable, unignorable, unable to be mistaken. And now that God appeared to him, it was obvious. The encounter of the overwhelming Infinite made every other experience he had ever had appear as fog and mist. God's prophecy was formulated not with words but experientially. And the next day he set off on his first mission as a messenger of God.

Many subsequent prophecies followed. And as Bilaam's relationship with God blossomed, his prophecies became clearer, his missions more important, and soon he became widely known as a zealot of the one God. He advised kings and directed nations. Some followed his advice, but many did not and suffered God's wrath. In between these appearances he would confine himself for long periods, to commune with God, in deep meditation, and to connect to nature. He became everything his father hoped for and his mother fretted over. He had become not only one of God's chosen few, but had reached heights that few, if any, had ever experienced.

Until the fateful prophecy came. A prophecy which would lead to his transformation from God's emissary into God's most vocal critic.

*Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba said in the name of Rabbi Simai: Three were consulted by Pharaoh when he questioned what should be done with the Jewish people. They were Bilaam, Job, and Jethro.*

[\(Sotah 11a\)](#)

The prophetic message seemed straightforward enough. A new Pharaoh was to ascend the throne

of the Egyptian Empire. Bilaam's task was to encourage him to be ethical and moral, following in the ways of his predecessor who had been advised by the great Joseph son of Jacob. Bilaam rejoiced at the opportunity not only to influence Egypt, but because it gave him the opportunity to see firsthand the workings of God's master plan.

For twenty generations, God connected with humanity through His chosen few, a small caste of prophets dedicated to Him. These were the elite who held up each generation, for they fulfilled the purpose of Creation. However, those prophets had minimal influence. The people they reached were few and far between. Noah had tried to sway his generation and failed. Shem succeeded his father and set up a school later to be co-led by his great-grandson Eber. The school educated the great prophets for over half a millenium, but even this did little to influence humanity as a whole. Bilaam himself, famed for his prophetic pronouncements, known throughout the world, could not win over many converts to the worship of God.

Now, for four generations God had instituted a new plan. It was time to go beyond the individual (though those individuals had reached great spiritual heights), and even beyond a school, and create a nation who would raise up all of humanity. The nation was fathered by the great prophet Abraham, a paragon of virtue, justice, and kindness, who pioneered a new approach of speaking to the common man and trying to influence each person, even if only a little. Abraham had made great strides and had passed the torch to his son Issac and his grandson Jacob after him. They too met with some successes,

building a clan that had gained significant clout in Canaan and its surroundings.

However, the famine of several decades ago had caused momentous change. Jacob and his clan had moved to Egypt and the torch had been passed to his son Joseph. Unlike his father before him, Joseph was responsible for feeding the people of the world's greatest empire and advising the Pharaoh, the leader of the civilized world. Joseph had little time to foster the spiritual growth of individuals the way his ancestors had, and could not go against the Egyptian priests who controlled the religious arm of the empire. Joseph's brothers and their families lived in Goshen, their own isolated province, and thus also played no role in the lives of the general population.

Joseph was now dead and a new Pharaoh, not beholden to Joseph, was to ascend the throne of the world's greatest empire. Bilaam had no doubt as to his role. He was to rally the new leaders of Jacob's descendants and, with them, to raise the spiritual level of the Egyptian Empire to the point that they would finally accept the true God. It would take work, but if successful, Egypt would bow before the Holy One, and the rest of the world could then not be far behind! With these lofty goals and grand plans percolating in his mind, Bilaam traveled to Egypt ready to embrace the children of Jacob...

*I said to them: Each of you cast away the abominations that you are drawn to, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt—I the Lord your God. But they defied Me and refused to listen to Me. Not one of*

*them cast away the abominations they were drawn to, nor did they give up the idols of Egypt. Then I resolved to pour out My fury upon them, to vent all My anger upon them there, in the land of Egypt.*  
([Ezekiel 20:7-8](#))

Despondent and defeated, Bilaam sat on the floor of his room at the inn. True, maybe he was expecting too much. But there was no way in Heaven that he could have predicted what he had experienced over the past few days. It did occur to him that perhaps the sons of Jacob had been concerned about the new Pharaoh, maybe a bit hesitant to exercise their influence before seeing what he was like. But it never occurred to him that the opposite would happen. That the descendants of Jacob would be influenced by the Egyptians!

Bilaam identified the descendants of Jacob easily enough. He talked to them, but they had no concern for him or for the true God. They were too busy playing games, sailing the Nile, even attending to the worship of the sun god! They were as bad as the Egyptians themselves. How could the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob sink to such levels? How were these people supposed to fulfill God's plan?

Well, tomorrow he had his meeting with the Pharaoh. Maybe there was something he could still do.

The next morning, Bilaam was warmly welcomed at the palace and, after the required rituals of greeting, was ushered into the Pharaoh's private rooms. The Pharaoh was clearly occupied in deep discussion with two advisors: Job and Jethro.

Bilaam was, of course, well acquainted with these figures. Job was a fellow student at the school of Shem and Eber and had become a well known philanthropist and emissary of God. Jethro was a famed religious philosopher, who had explored numerous faiths and was becoming more and more influenced by the idea of monotheism. Both seemed relieved to see Bilaam and quickly apprised him of the discussion at hand.

Pharaoh was attempting to resolve the question of what to do with the sons of Jacob. It was one thing when they were a separate tribe living in Goshen and away from the populace. They were helpful as advisors, craftsmen, even traders, but generally kept to themselves. Now, however, they wanted to become Egyptian! They were invading everything: the universities, the sports teams, the theaters and circuses. This was becoming a problem. What if they started thinking of themselves as true Egyptians and others as foreigners? Their numbers were growing and soon they could gain enough strength to take over the kingdom.

As Pharaoh explained his conundrum to Bilaam, an idea began to form. Maybe this was the chance Bilaam was looking for. A way to avenge God against those children of Jacob who had squandered their destiny and ruined His plan. But first he had to hear from the others. Jethro was adamant. Joseph had not long before rescued Egypt and the entire area from the ravages of famine. True, Joseph and his generation had now passed on, but treating his children unkindly was an affront to Joseph's memory. Leave them alone! They will remember Egypt's kindness in housing them and will not turn against Egypt.

“Typical Jethro,” thought Bilaam, “sure – being kind is important, but look at the spiritual havoc these people have caused! Now is the time for zealotry, not kindness. Job is a true prophet, he will know better.” But Job was on the fence. He too, could not unambiguously support harming a people who had done only good for Egypt regardless of their current potential threat and low spiritual stature.

Finally, they turned to Bilaam. In no uncertain terms Bilaam insisted that the Pharaoh remove the perceived threat and enslave the sons of Jacob. “Look at these people,” he said, “they are tasked to act with justice and kindness in service of the true God! But instead they have fallen to the level of the typical Egyptians. Pharaoh, God holds you responsible for the moral and ethical status of Egypt, but as for the descendants of Jacob, there is no hope, they must be taught a lesson.” Bilaam’s strident, passionate appeal quieted Jethro and Job, and of course was exactly the answer the Pharaoh desired. The Pharaoh thanked Bilaam profusely, escorted his advisors out and immediately went to work on a plan to enslave Jacob’s descendants.

Bilaam contentedly left the palace, confident that his words would bear fruit. Somewhere he remembered that he appealed to Pharaoh to be generally ethical and moral, but what was more important was revenge on those who could have been spiritually great and had instead destroyed God’s plan.

That evening, God appeared to Bilaam,

demanding, “Why have you enabled Pharaoh to enslave My people? Did you not know that my hope for humanity rests on them?” Bilaam, of course, was prepared. “Those people certainly are not Yours! They are idol-worshippers practically undifferentiated from the typical Egyptians. What I did was help them – slavery and punishment will teach them they were wrong to abandon You! After all, did You Yourself not tell Abraham that his descendants would be in a foreign land enslaved and afflicted there? Your master plan may still survive, thanks to me, and in the meantime You can rejoice in your prophets as You have for time immemorial.”

Years passed, Bilaam did not really expect the descendants of Jacob to recover from their spiritual malaise. Rather, he became more and more confident that the whole plan of a chosen nation was a bad one. God did not need all of humanity, He had his few spiritual giants and that should be enough! Nevertheless, every once in a while he would check on the latest Egyptian news, and was quietly satisfied that the spiritual level of Jacob’s descendants continued to decline.

*These (Israel) were uncircumcised and those (Egypt) were uncircumcised. These grew long locks of hair and those grew long locks of hair. These wore forbidden mixtures and those wore forbidden mixtures. Therefore, the attribute of justice would not allow Israel to ever be redeemed.*

[\(Vayikra Rabbah 23:2\)](#)

“What!”

The news hit Bilaam like a sledgehammer. God took the Children of Israel out of Egypt! He could not believe it. Miracles, plagues, the splitting of the sea, God did all of that for whom? A group of idol-worshippers! After all these years, long after Bilaam was sure that God’s plan for a specially created nation had died, God turned nature upside down for a clan of blasphemous heathens. “Yes,” thought Bilaam, “there was a promise to Abraham that his descendants will be redeemed and so on, but really there had to be some basic conditions on the promise – like recognizing God!”

The previous night, God had told Bilaam that He was going to give the Children of Israel the Torah and help them waltz into Canaan without a fight. “Does God have any standards anymore? Does He think the people would be at all capable? People do not change!”

A few weeks later, Bilaam watched in horror as Israel received the Torah, but 40 days after that he was again gleeful. “You see? A Golden Calf! You can take the people out of the place of idol worship, but you cannot so easily take the idol worship out of the people. Just like I said, God would have been much better off satisfied with His spiritual elite. It really is time to dismiss this whole silly notion...”

Yet, the nation survived. “That Moses! Sure, he is a great prophet and you have to admire his dedication to the people. But really, such naivete. Does Moses think that because he saved them once, they will never sin again? No, all Moses accomplished was to keep God’s plan alive a little

longer, but at the end the whole premise will have to be discarded...”

And before long, Bilaam was back to his self-assured righteousness. “See, now Israel is stuck in the wilderness. God’s still doing miracles for these ungrateful wretches, but any day now, they will turn around and go back to Egypt...”

But the Children of Israel did persist, despite the doubts, weaknesses, and complaints. The great Emorite kings, Sihon and Og, fell before them, and shortly afterward Bilaam was again called to solve the question first addressed so many years earlier: what could be done about the Children of Israel? This time the questioner was Balak, the King of Moab, and, once again, Bilaam approached the people seeking vengeance.

The moment the messengers from Balak arrived, Bilaam foresaw what would happen. Surely God would not want him to go. God still held on to this impossibility of a Holy Nation rather than being satisfied with holy individuals. But Bilaam was going to go anyway. Maybe seeing the people and their ways would enable him to clearly show God their weaknesses. Then he could assert his opinion. After all, that’s exactly what Moses did to save them. Worst case scenario, he would say what God tells him, but he had to try.

Of course, Bilaam was unable to curse the Jews and, much to the chagrin of Balak, instead blessed them. Bilaam walked away from the encounter frustrated, embarrassed, angry with God (though begrudgingly amused at the whole donkey affair – who said God does not have a sense of humor?). However, perhaps surprisingly, Bilaam learned

from the encounter. The lesson was not that God was going to push forward with His plan irrespective of what else may happen; Bilaam had hoped otherwise but that turned out to be wishful thinking. What Bilaam learned was that the way to force God to change his mind was to undermine the plan. And because Bilaam deeply understood the blessings he was forced to give, he knew what to do as a next step.

*“And Bilaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel dwelling tribe by tribe; and the spirit of God came upon him” (Numbers 24:2). What was it that Bilaam saw? He saw that the entrances of their tents were not aligned with each other. And he said: these people are worthy of having the Divine Presence rest on them.*  
([Bava Batra 60a](#))

From this blessing, Bilaam saw what was the key to the Children of Israel’s uniqueness before God. Maybe he should have known from the beginning. The strength of the family unit, and particularly the conscious dedication of the women, was what saved them in Egypt. This forced blessing proved it! “How fair are your tents, O Jacob, Your dwellings, O Israel!” ([Numbers 24:5](#)).

“Well,” thought Bilaam, “they are fair for the moment, but perhaps it is time to test how strong these families really are.”

*Balaam said to them: The God of Israel despises lewdness, and they desire linen garments. Come, and I will give you advice. Make for them enclosures and seat*

*prostitutes in them...*  
([Sanhedrin 106a](#))

Bilaam’s thought process was straightforward. “The Moabites and Midianites are so desperate to get rid of Israel, they will happily hand their daughters over to prostitution. The men of Israel have never been seduced before and will be easy prey. And once they are separated from the women of Israel, their spiritual state will be entirely in the hands of these foreign women.”

Even Bilaam was shocked how well the plan worked. The Jewish men saw the Moabite (and Midianite) women and were overcome with lust. The Moabite women only needed to hold out until the men agreed to renounce the God of Israel, and they did! God, as predicted, was angry! He sent a plague to destroy the people. The entire leadership of Israel was completely frozen, having no idea how to stop the blasphemy and promiscuity. Twenty-four thousand were killed, and it would have been more if not that Pinchas stood up and actually did something. But the numbers are irrelevant. Even the strategy of how to attack the Children of Israel, while useful, was not the main point. No, what was actually important was the way the entire house of cards that God had built, the entire notion of a Nation of Priests, completely collapsed.

Sure, it is easy to be a Holy Nation when there is no one else around. At Mount Sinai, and when in isolation in the wilderness, God could pretend that a nation could be ethical enough, and dedicated enough, to be a Light unto the Nations. But what happens when they actually encounter those

other nations? What happens in the 'real world'? Well, now we know, the so-called Holy Nation cannot keep its moral integrity for even five minutes.

God did His best to correct, or maybe cover up, the sins of the Children of Israel. Immediately, He commanded the Children of Israel to slaughter anyone who fell prey to idol worship and then to wipe out Midian, including the women who were the instruments of Israel's downfall. And during this battle, Bilaam faced Pinchas in single, spiritual combat.

*When Pinchas went to Midian, he and all of the soldiers that went with him, the evil Bilaam saw Pinchas and made his arms like two stone tablets. He then flew high and above using God's explicit name. When Pinchas saw Bilaam flying above, Pinchas too made his arms like two stone tablets and flew up after Bilaam. Pinchas caught up as he found Bilaam prostrating himself before the Throne of Glory. Immediately, Pinchas donned the diadem of the Holy One, Blessed be He, grabbed Bilaam and brought him down to Moses. The court judged Bilaam and killed him, as it says, "And Bilaam... they killed." ([Numbers 31:8](#)) ([Yalkut Shimoni 785](#))*

The midrash describes the spiritual battle between these two exalted figures. Both are zealous for God. Both are sure of the righteousness of their cause. Bilaam has just successfully demonstrated that a Holy Nation cannot exist in the real world. As our Sages tell us,

he had visited Midian to collect his reward for teaching the nation how to corrupt the Children of Israel. This time, Pinchas' zealousness protected the Children of Israel by removing the cancer from their midst... but there would be other times.

Utilizing their advanced knowledge of God, both combatants transformed their arms into stone tablets, the tablets of God upon which are engraved His laws. Acknowledgment of and adherence to the law enabled them to fly up to the Heavenly Throne to submit before God as the true Judge. Bilaam arrived first and prostrated himself before the Holy One. In his submission, he acknowledged that he had worked to counter God's plan for humanity, but he submitted that he is correct. Look at the actions of Israel! They cannot control themselves, they cannot even admit they have done wrong. Instead they are attempting to clear away all of the evidence of their sin by leaving no one in Midian alive.

Pinchas caught up to Bilaam. He saw Bilaam making his case before God. To counter this, Pinchas showed Bilaam the diadem of the High Priest, one that Pinchas himself will wear in future times. Upon the diadem is written, "Holy to God." The High Priest wears the diadem only when he serves in the Temple. It reminds him that the nation of Israel is holy. That even when sacrifices are brought with ritual impurity, God will accept and forgive (see [Pesachim 78a](#)). And that his own holiness is only because he serves his people.

Bilaam, who urged God to give up the notion of a Holy Nation and to be satisfied with the spiritual elite, fell to his death at the sight of the diadem.

He saw on it the explicit name of God that he himself had used to fly to Heaven. But the diadem was a reminder that God dedicates an emissary of the people, and the holiness of the High Priest is only to sanctify those people.

Pinchas emerges victorious, his zealotry vindicated. Bilaam was killed as a traitor and blasphemer of God. His prophecy lives on for us, but not for him. For Bilaam, prophecy is lost.

### **Epilogue: Bilaam and Elijah**

*Three kings and four commoners have no share in the World-to-Come... The four commoners are: Bilaam son of Beor... (Sanhedrin 90a)*

But the story is not finished. Neither the Children of Israel nor Pinchas himself live happily ever after. The Sages tell us that Pinchas later took on the moniker of Elijah the Prophet ([Yalkut Shimoni 771](#)) and, as Elijah, he again encountered the complete collapse of ethics and morality in Israel. This occurred when the northern kingdom of Israel was under the rule of Ahab and Jezebel. Upon seeing this collapse, Elijah/Pinchas was forced to grapple with the same question Bilaam posed to him so many years earlier: can a Holy Nation survive in the real world? Looking around at the rampant idol-worship of the time, it certainly did not seem possible.

In Elijah's zeal for God, he too went solo without God's instruction. He decreed a famine on the people, he insisted on the revival of the son of the Shunamite woman, and he brought sacrifices on

Mount Carmel (outside of the Temple). As a result of the chaos he caused, Elijah too lost his prophetic ability (see [Abarbanel 1 Kings 19:12](#)). Looking for refuge, he traveled to Mount Sinai, where he declared, "I acted with zealousness for the Lord, God of Hosts, for Israel has forsaken Your covenant..." ([1 Kings 19:10](#)). Elijah admitted defeat. His zeal had previously countered that of Bilaam, but could not save Israel from the idols of the nations. Elijah retired in failure and it was his student, Elisha, with an entirely different approach, who was (somewhat) successful.

*Behold, I will send to you the prophet Elijah before the coming of the awesome and fearful day of God. (Malachi 3:23)*

Yet, Bilaam and Elijah are treated very differently in the traditional Jewish worldview. Bilaam is considered evil and his story is re-imaged in the most negative of lights. Elijah is praised and poised to be the harbinger of the Messiah. Why?

Perhaps we view these two characters differently because they viewed us differently. We, the plebians, the common-folk, the spiritual lightweights, what is our status before God? Bilaam was ready to give up on us. Why should God bother with us when He can rejoice in the spiritual elite? Why care for the beast-like human when there are those who are slightly lower than angels?

Elijah, for all of his zealotry, aloofness, and transcendence, believed in us. His ardor, inflexibility, and stubbornness before God arose because he was sure that his way would awaken

the people to the one God. To Elijah there are no commoners, there are only those not yet like him. He used unorthodox methods, even ones that were harmful to the very people he was trying to save, but Elijah's goal was to raise each of us to the level of, "I acted zealously for the Lord."

Maybe the approach was problematic, perhaps it was too harsh. But Elijah's singularity of purpose enabled him to be forever praised among Israel and thus he will be the one who will "Reconcile parents with children and children with their parents..." ([Malachi 3:24](#)).

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### **Two Men Enter the Vacated Space**

*Akiva Weisinger teaches middle school Judaics at Bornblum Jewish Community School in Memphis, Tennessee.*

#### **Part I:**

#### **One summer night in Podolia, 1806**

The boy is dead, and, with him, the hopes and dreams of his father.

He believed that it was time, The Time, and that this boy, his boy, would be The One, and that he would bring this long exile, its darkness, its absence of God, to an end. He had truly believed with his whole heart, with the self assurance God grants only to his truest believers, to the insane, and to those who walk the fine line between the two. In a burst of energy and passion he barely remembered, he had written down his doctrine,

the black ink taking the form of letters and words on the blank paper, until they had filled a book that could be printed, replicated, distributed in bound form to all those who yearned for the end of days, who would recognize him as its harbinger, the Tzaddik upon whom the world is founded. He gave copies of this book, the articulation of his very being, the expression of the depths of the soul he knew was destined for greatness, to his followers, and sent them out to spread his teachings, anxiously waiting to hear of the great awakening that would result.

But no one awoke. His followers, imbued with the true zeal of the converted, expected their teachings to be greeted with rapture, with joy, with all the feelings they themselves felt at the feet of their master. Hostility – in the form of anger at being confronted with the truth – they could have lived with, and they did find their fair share. But mostly they were met with apathy. The books were politely taken, maybe glanced at a bit, maybe greeted with an appreciative nod, only to be left on tables, on benches, on shelves, never to be read, their secrets safe within their bindings. The people would remain asleep.

They returned to their master, ashamed of their lack of success, perhaps secretly fearing that what they saw in him, a man who could peer into their souls and set them aflame, was a mirage, an illusion, the product of a trickster and charlatan everyone but them saw through. Meanwhile, he agonized. Was it not yet time? Impossible. Bold action had to be taken. More had to be done. He delved deeper and tried to put down to paper the

deepest mysteries, to print and distribute the secrets that could bring the redemption, that would wake up the snake so it would bite and produce the birth pangs of the messiah, so that the redemption could finally burst through the lower waters like the Jewish people being birthed from the canal that was opened through the Red Sea.

It had failed, and a price must be paid, must always be paid when you enter realms we do not go, when you play with snakes and their fangs, when you bring fires where they do not belong and had not been commanded, when you attempt to force the end.

There are places we do not go.

And now his son is dead.

And Rebbe Nachman of Breslov has nothing to say.

## **Part II** **The Vacated Space**

*“The date of the sermon [LM 64] is not indicated in the sources, but [Arthur] Green is also of the opinion (Tormented Master, p. 305), that it is probably connected with the years 5565–66 (1805–6). I lean toward dating it to the end of 5566, after the death of his son, which led to the collapse of his messianic hopes and the awakening of many doubts, both his own doubts in*

*himself and the doubts of his Hasidim in him. It cannot be earlier than that....”*

–Haviva Pedaya, “Crisis and Repair, Trauma and Recovery,” in *Jewish Mysticism and the Spiritual Life: Classical Texts, Contemporary Reflections*, eds. Lawrence Fine, Eitan Fishbane and Or N. Rose (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2011).

One of the most popular and transformative works of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov’s Torah, [\*Likutei Moharan 64\*](#), begins, after grounding itself in the biblical text, with a relatively conventional retelling of the Lurianic creation mythos:

*God created the world as a consequence of His compassion. For He wanted to reveal His compassion, and if Creation had not taken place, to whom would He have shown His compassion? He therefore created the entire creation, from the inception of Atzilut all the way down to the center point of the corporeal world, in order to display His compassion.*

*Yet when God wanted to create the world, there was no place in which to create it, since there was nothing but Ein Sof (the Infinite One). He therefore contracted the Light to the sides, and through this contraction the Vacated Space was made. Then, within this Vacated*

*Space, all time and space came into existence—this being the creation of the world {as explained at the beginning of Etz Chaim} (translation by Moshe Mykoff, Sefaria).*

Because God is infinite, if God continued to exist in infinite form, then there would be no space for the existence of a universe to which God could be compassionate, and so God needed to withdraw Godself to create an empty space for the universe to exist. So far, so Lurianic. But Rebbe Nachman takes a turn.

*This Vacated Space was necessary for the creation of the world, since without the Vacated Space there would have been no place in which to create the world, as explained above. Yet, understanding and comprehending this contraction [that resulted in the formation] of the Vacated Space will be possible only in the Future, since it is necessary to say about it two contradictory things: existence and nonexistence.*

*The Vacated Space is the result of the contraction; that [God], so to speak, withdrew His Godliness from that place. Thus there is, so to speak, no Godliness there. Were it not so, it would not be vacated. There would then be nothing but*

*Ein Sof, with no place whatsoever for the world's creation. However the actual truth is that, even so, there is surely Godliness there as well. For there is surely nothing without His life-force. This is why it is not at all possible to comprehend the concept of the Vacated Space until the Future.*

According to Rebbe Nachman, the Vacated Space was necessary to create the world, and God retracted Godself in order to create it. Therefore, it stands to reason, God is not present in that Vacated Space; otherwise, there's no point to the contraction. But at the same time, it cannot be that there is a space without God. So we must say two contradictory things about it: That God exists there, and that God doesn't exist there. Our understanding of the *tzimtzum* process as articulated by Luria and his followers would indicate that there is no God in that Vacated Space. But there is, because it cannot be that anything exists without God willing its existence. And the problem is unsolvable, says Rebbe Nachman, at least until The Future, because it is impossible to comprehend the simultaneous truth of existence and non-existence.

This means that, according to Rebbe Nachman, we are sometimes presented with theological problems that are fundamentally unsolvable, as he makes clear in the continuation of the piece. He posits that there are two forms of heresy. The first is normal heresy, believers being led astray by secular wisdom, trapped within the broken shards

that hold the sparks of the divine light scattered by the breaking of the vessels that could not contain the light: the heresy that raises questions that have answers that can be articulated in normal language and with regular logic. These questions are relatively simple to defend oneself against. Not so for questions that come from the second type of heresy, which derives from The Vacated Space.

*In truth, it is impossible to answer these questions. This is because the questions [that arise] from this heresy stem from the Vacated Space in which, so to speak, there is no Godliness. There is therefore absolutely no way that one can find an answer for these questions that come from there, from the aspect of the Vacated Space—i.e., [no way to] find God there. For if God were found there as well, it would then not be vacated, and there would have been nothing but Ein Sof, as explained above.*

The second type of heresy is impossible to answer in common language using regular logic, because its questions come from the Vacated Space. In order to create the world, God had to create a Vacated Space in order to allow something other than God to exist, which means that the Vacated Space is a barrier of sorts, between us as created things and God as the Infinite source of Being. Without that Vacated Space, we do not exist.

Questions that derive from the Vacated Space accordingly cannot be answered without passing a barrier that, if breached, dissolves our existence in the overwhelming light of the infinite. A Vacated Space has to exist for us to exist, and therefore we cannot go to the Vacated Space without annihilation.

The Vacated Space is a Place We Do Not Go.

### Part III

#### Nadav and Avihu Enter The Place We Do Not Go

*Undersea divers know of a dangerous and mysterious phenomenon felicitously described by Jacques-Yves Cousteau as l'ivresse des grandes profondeurs, or "the rapture of the deep." This state, also called nitrogen narcosis, often manifests as a sensation of overwhelming euphoria akin to intoxication. Faced with intense pressure, likely compounded by a chemical imbalance from breathing ordinary air so far beneath the ocean's surface, the body and mind begin to flex curiously. In this rapture, the diver's judgment and vision become hazardously impaired. This subaquatic bliss is all the more dangerous because it may lead to an inscrutable longing to go deeper, overruling the panicked instinct to surface. Cousteau noted after a 1951 dive that "I could see, stretching temptingly below me, as far as my eyes could reach, what seemed the infinite sweetness and quiet of a blackness*

that would yield up the secrets of the universe if only I were to go a bit deeper.”

On that occasion Cousteau’s instinct for self-preservation prevailed, but he later acknowledged that this brush with limits of reason and mortality transformed him forever. And the combination of physical pressure, the feeling of rapture, and the sweeping undersea expanse have tempted other divers into continuing their journey even as prudence calls them to return.

-Ariel Evan Mayse, “‘Like a Moth to the Flame’: The Death of Nadav and Avihu in Hasidic Literature” in *Be-Ron Yahad*, eds. Ariel Evan Mayse and Avraham Yitzhak Green (Newton, MA: Academic Studie Press, 2019).

### [Vayikra 10:1-2](#)

Aharon’s sons, Nadav and Avihu, took each one his pan, placed fire in them, put smoking-incense on it, and brought near, before the presence of YHWH, outside fire, such as he had not commanded them.

And fire went out from the presence of YHWH and consumed them, so that they died, before the presence of YHWH.

[R. Hayyim ben Atar, Vayikra 16:1, s.v. “aharei mot”](#)  
(trans. Ariel Evan Mayse)

Their death was the result of having come too close to God.

With great love they approached the supernal Light and in doing so they

expired;

this is the

“K

I

S

s” with which the righteous die.

It is the same for all righteous individuals,

though while the comes to some of them,

others go forth and

pursue it . . .

even the feeling of their **death drawing**

**near** cannot hold them back from the

dearest and most pleasant

devequt

beloved intimacy and

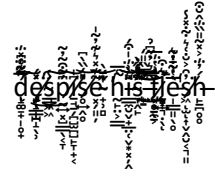
sweetest affection,

within him,

until their very souls

his soul will

expire.



The nature of this [experience] cannot be grasped.

It lies **beyond** intellectual comprehension

..... and

will.....

and cannot be **expressed in words**

..... depart.....

either spoken or

.....

wRiTtEn.

back to the house of its Father.

It cannot even be *i m a g i n e d*.

ואודיע למתבונן בפנימיות שכל שכל שכל

In order to understand it even to some small degree,

שכל שכל שכל שכל שכל

one must remove the **EVIL** Inclination that is **holding him back**.

שכל שכל שכל שכל שכל

[Growing spiritual awareness]

שכל שכל שכל שכל שכל

will allow one to **see the signs** of the **accursed** Inclination,

שכל שכל שכל שכל שכל

and he can then nullify it and prevent it

.....

from getting in his way. . .

.....

as this ability

.....

i n c r e a s e s

.....

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(Ed note: Rest Untranslatable)

וַיָּמָתוּ לִפְנֵי ה'

And they died, before the presence of YHWH

**There Are Places We Do Not Go.**

**Part IV:**

**Silence**

Rebbe

Nachman

continues:

*But know! if there is a great tzaddik who is the aspect of Moshe, he must especially delve into these words of heresy. And even though it is impossible to answer them, as explained above, nevertheless, by his delving into there, he elevates from there a number of souls that fell and became submerged within this heresy. This is because these conundrums and questions [raised] by the heresy that stems from the Vacated Space are the aspect of silence, since there is no intellect or letters to answer them, as explained above.*

*The creation came into existence by means of the spoken word, as it is written ([Psalms 33:6](#)) "By the word of God the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth their entire host [was created]." The spoken word contains wisdom, because the whole of speech is but the five articulators of the mouth.*

*Through them all the things of the entire creation came into existence, as it is written ([ibid. 104:24](#)), "You created them all with wisdom."*

*The spoken word is the demarcation of all things. [God] circumscribed His wisdom in the letters, such that certain letters demarcate one thing, while other letters demarcate something else. But there in the Vacated Space—which surrounds all the worlds, and which is, so to speak, vacated of everything, as explained above—there is no spoken word at all, and not even intellect without letters, as explained above. Thus the conundrums that stem from there are in the aspect of silence.*

Silence, to Rebbe Nachman, is the aspect of the Vacated Space. Because language is the way we understand and conceptualize the world, and the way in which God created the world, the Vacated Space that had to be emptied of God in order for creation to take place is also a space inaccessible to language, and it is that void that divides us as created beings from the Creator, finite entities bounded within letters and words separate from unbounded and undifferentiated infinity. The Vacated Space, though, is prior to language and prior to creation. The heresy that comes from the Vacated Space arises from questions which have no answer that can be articulated in normal language, with regular discursive logic, with

arguments from first principles and theological justifications. The only answer to these questions is silence, because the Vacated Space is a space to which language has no access.

Rebbe Nachman takes this framework and applies it to one of the most heart-wrenching scenes in rabbinic literature ([Menahot 29b](#)), where Moshe, having been shown the future brilliance of R. Akiva, brilliance that in some ways surpasses his own, is then shown R. Akiva's cruel death at the hands of the Romans, his skin raked from his flesh with iron combs. Overwhelmed by the injustice of what he sees, Moshe blurts out, "Master of the Universe, this is Torah and this is its reward?" to which God responds, "Be silent; this intention is what arose before Me." Rebbe Nachman explains:

*This is analogous to what we find of Moshe: When he asked regarding the death of Rabbi Akiva, "Is this the Torah, and is this its reward?" they answered him, "Be silent! Thus has it arisen in thought" (Menachot 29b). That is, you must be silent and not ask for an answer and solution for this question. This is because "thus has it arisen in thought," which is more exalted than speech. Therefore, you must keep silent regarding this question, because it is in the aspect of "arisen in thought," where there is no speech to answer it. The same is true of the questions and conundrums that stem from the Vacated Space, where there is no spoken word or intellect, as explained above. They are thus in the aspect of*

*silence; one must simply believe and keep silent there."*

In this reading of Rebbe Nachman's, God is not telling Moshe merely to bite his tongue in acceptance. He is telling him that whatever reasons he has for doing this to R. Akiva, they cannot be expressed in normal language, existing instead in the inexpressible and inarticulable "thoughts" of God. It is from that place prior to and beyond language, the thoughts of God that have yet to be formed into words, that the suffering of the righteous and the prospering of the wicked stem, *i.e.*, the questions that prompt the second heresy, and thus the only way that Moshe can hope to understand it is through silence, the rule of the Vacated Space, the void between us and God that must exist for us to exist, that must be void of Godliness but simultaneously cannot be empty of God. There is no language available to us to solve this contradiction or to explain this suffering, because it is a space inaccessible to normal language, in which discursive logic fails, that can only be understood, or perhaps withstood, through faith, by believing in impossibility, in things that transcend ordinary language, in a God in Whom contradictions are resolved in ways inaccessible to us.

There are Places We Do Not Go, of which nothing can be said except Silence.

**Part V:**  
**The Silence of Aharon**

[Vayikra 10:3](#)

*Moshe said to Aharon:  
It is what YHWH spoke [about], saying:  
Through those permitted-near to me, I will  
be-proven-holy,  
before all the people, I will be-accorded-  
honor!  
Aharon was silent.*

We can understand why Aharon is silent. A tragedy has befallen him, his two sons killed at the height of the ceremony inaugurating the *Mishkan*, at the very moment Aharon should be at the peak of joy. His two sons Went Where We Do Not Go, they attempted to blur the boundaries between the divine and human, they fortified themselves with wine, blurrer of boundaries, and put incense in their firepans and burst into the Vacated Space attempting to finish the task of creation and break the final boundary between God and Man, overcoming the primordial *tzimtzum* so that God's infinity could be revealed in totality. But they did not respect The Place We Do Not Go, and found themselves annihilated in the infinity they meant to unleash, where language fractures and disintegrates, because it is a space inaccessible to any sort of sense-making and articulation. And because without The Vacated Space we do not exist, they died before the presence of YHWH.

Maybe Aharon knows this, maybe he doesn't, but we can still understand his silence, the same way we can understand the silence demanded of Moshe in the face of R. Akiva's death. In the face of tragedy, when dealing with unfathomable loss, all he has is silence. There is no way for Aharon to be reached in ordinary language, with regular

discursive logic, to be told why it is that his two sons had to die, or why they had to die now. The question of the death of Nadav and Avihu comes from the Vacated Space, the second type of heresy that raises questions without answers, to which the only response is silence and faith.

So why isn't Moshe silent? Why does he, at the height of his brother's grief, offer a theological explanation that is shocking in its apparent banality and triteness?

Because Moshe's entire purpose, as a prophet, as the Greatest Prophet, as the giver of the Torah, is to give words to God's thoughts, to shape messages straight from the inaccessible mind of God into words that can be communicated to the people and to eternity. Everything we know about God, Creator of all, who exists beyond thought and beyond language, is founded upon Moshe's revelation and Moshe's ability to communicate that revelation to others by confining it within words. It didn't start out this way. Once Moshe was, when he started out, hesitant and afraid, of heavy tongue and uncircumcised lips, who could only gaze in wonder at the bush that was aflame and was not consumed, who required Aharon to speak on his behalf. But things have changed. After Har Sinai, where Moshe communicated the word of God to the people, when he spoke to God face-to-face and lived, Moshe is no longer the stutterer who does not believe in his own ability to communicate and convince. He is the one who entered the cloud and the fire and did not die, who went up the mountain and came back with the ineffable word of God, made communicable in

the form of words that form commands that become laws and rituals that make God's will embodied in the human community. Moshe is capable, better than anyone who has existed or who ever will exist, to traverse the void of the Vacated Space and confine divinity to words, to make it accessible and communicable.

But there are limits even to Moshe's ability. Some questions arise from the Vacated Space, and the response to this second heresy cannot be language, no matter how skilled its wielder, because they cannot be conveyed in any kind of language, and any attempt to put words to the silence of the Vacated Space will come across as trite and banal, because there are things language is not equipped to handle. The loss of one's children, their hopes and dreams for the future, into the smoke of the divine fire, or in one final wracked cough from their tiny body, has no answer that can be conveyed in language. Even Moshe, perhaps feeling compelled to respond because of his role as articulator of divine language, has nothing satisfactory to offer to Aharon in the moment of his grief, because such questions come from a place that is deeper than and prior to language. Moshe masters language to the greatest extent a human being can, gazes into the face of God and emerges not only alive but coherent, and still his articulation cannot penetrate the silence of Aharon that comes from the Vacated Space, because coherence cannot be made of what is in the Vacated Space, and language, when attempted, fails to communicate to and connect with the depths of Aharon's grief.

Because there is a void that separates us from God, that was necessary to create space for our existence, and Moshe can communicate across that void, but he cannot enter it, never having known the same loss that Aharon has. Moshe binds and limits the infinite with language, but he has no access to the Vacated Space, the void that we have contact with only when we experience something so senseless and so tragic that no logic or language, even when wielded by Moshe, could conceivably justify it; only a transcendent God Who forms light and creates darkness, Who makes good and evil, in Whom the contradiction of existence and non-existence is resolved, can do so. And thus all we can say of that void of Vacated Space, the source of the second heresy, is silence.

And thus Aharon is silent.

There are Places We Do Not Go.

And Aharon was silent.

## Part VI

### Aharon Enters The Vacated Space

And yet Aharon must enter The Place We Do Not Go.

[Vayikra 16:1-2](#)

*YHWH spoke to Moshe  
after the death of the two sons of  
Aharon,  
when they came-near before the*

*presence of YHWH and died;*

*YHWH said to Moshe:*

*Speak to Aharon your brother,  
[so] that he [does] not enter, at  
[just] any time, the Holy-Shrine,  
inside the curtain, facing the  
Purgation-Cover that is on top of  
the Coffer,  
that he [does] not die;  
for in a cloud I make-Myself seen,  
over the Purgation-Cover.*

It is not Moshe, who speaks to God face-to-face across the void of The Vacated Space, who can enter that place. It is Aharon, who has entered the realm of silence, who knows the limits of language and logic and sense-making, who must confront the death of his sons and go into the very space where his sons lost their lives, where their existence was annihilated by the overwhelming infinite when they came too near.

Aharon must follow the instructions of Moshe, who has gazed across the void face-to-face with divinity and grasped enough of the infinite to form it into letters and words that become sentences and commands, so that, unlike his sons, he will not die, annihilated by infinity. He will use Moshe's laws to ground him, as weights to keep him from flying away, to keep within our world of boundedness and distinctness.

But it is Aharon who must go in, firepan in his hand, retracing the steps of his sons as they died, and he must do it alone.

Because only Aharon understands that the only thing that can be said of the Vacated Space is Silence, and that the only way he can enter and leave in peace is if he makes no attempt to understand, or describe, or articulate.

Aharon does what God commands him through Moshe.

And he says not a single word.

There are Places We Do Not Go.

And Aharon Was Silent.

And thus, Aharon Can Go

Into The Place We Do Not Go.

## **Part VII**

### **Rebbe Nachman Breaks the Silence**

But is silence really the best we can do? Is that what God demands of us, silence in the face of tragedy and loss, to see evil triumph in the world and for the righteous to suffer, for us to do nothing but follow the laws and perform the rituals as the world burns, as truth is trampled, as children die, as the world goes on sleepwalking its way to meaninglessness and doom?

Is silence all we have to offer Rebbe Nachman as he sits there, his *hasidim* looking expectantly up at him, their hopes dashed, their trust shaken, as they look at their leader, their hero, their Tzaddik, his soul broken by grief, his body failing from the

early stages of the tuberculosis that will eventually take his life, praying that the man they have put their faith in is the real deal? Is mere silence going to get Rebbe Nachman out of this?

Fortunately, that is not all Rebbe Nachman has. Because there is something we have failed to account for in Rebbe Nachman's framework. Despite the fact that Moshe is the prophet who masters language enough to communicate the will of God to other people, and that Aharon exemplifies silence when faced with the Vacated Space of tragedy and loss, and who is tasked with entering that Vacated Space to face that loss, it is somehow Moshe, Rebbe Nachman decides, that best represents the aspect of silence of the Vacated Space, the Tzaddik who can enter the source of the second heresy to save the souls mired there.

Despite everything telling him otherwise, Rebbe Nachman retains hope that something can be communicated from the Vacated Space, that an aspect of Moshe can be found there with which to express answers to the questions raised from there. Grasping for something expressive but not verbal, for something that communicates but does not describe, Rebbe Nachman rummages around in the Vacated Space until he finds what he's looking for.

*Know, too, that by means of the melody of the tzaddik who is the aspect of Moshe, he elevates from the heresy of the Vacated Space the*

*souls that fell into there. For know! each and every wisdom in the world has its particular song and melody. This song is particular to that wisdom, so that this wisdom is derived from that song. This is the aspect of "sing an intelligent song" ([Psalms 47:8](#)), since each intellect and wisdom has a song and melody.*

There is a way out of the Vacated Space for Rebbe Nachman that is not mere silence, for the Tzaddik in the aspect of Moshe must elevate the souls that fall into the heresy of the Vacated Space which raises questions with no answers. There is a way for someone to be silent like Aharon but communicate like Moshe at the same time.

Melody.

Why melody? Because The Vacated Space is a place inaccessible to language, but that doesn't mean no communication is possible, only that we have to reach higher and deeper to communicate, to arrive at a place that is, like the Vacated Space, prior to language and to our attempts to confine the infinite to finite words and concepts that we can comprehend and use. One way to do this, as Rebbe Nachman stated previously, is faith, the decision to believe in things that cannot be comprehended through rationality and language. But faith alone is just silence, the decision to accept the boundary, that There Are Places We Do Not Go. It is not communication, it is a retreat

from meaning, a relinquishing of language and sense-making in the face of The Great Other Who is infinitely beyond human comprehension.

But there is expression that is not verbal, that is not rational, that can go to places that language and logic with their boundedness and concreteness cannot go, that can describe without description, that can create meaning without making sense. And that is melody. The Vacated Space may not have language, but everything has a melody, something that it expresses without words, and the Vacated Space, as an expression of God's infinitude and transcendence that cannot be described with language accessible to us, has the purest melody. Higher than anything else whose song is small enough to be confined to verbal expression, because only a song that relinquishes language can possibly express infinity.

It is that belief in melody as an expression of infinity, unbounded by language, that allows Rebbe Nachman to posit the existence of a Tzaddik who can save the souls of those trapped in the Vacated Space of the second heresy. There are no answers to those questions that can be worded in the typical way answers are worded to questions, because language doesn't work in the Vacated Space. But what can be communicated, what can be the aspect of Moshe rather than just Aharon, is that which is not just language.

We may extend Rebbe Nachman's idea beyond melody, to any type of creative expression that does not merely describe what already exists, but attempts to communicate and express itself in

ways that are prior to ordinary language, that convey truth using emotional expression rather than discursive logic. In other words, Rebbe Nachman is really making an argument for the necessity of artistic expression in religious life, as a way of expressing truths that cannot be conveyed in ordinary language using regular logic, but appeal to and communicate with the emotional side of human beings. There are places plain language and regular logic cannot take us. It cannot explain to us why Nadav and Avihu die, and Moshe's explanation in the text leaves us and Aharon cold. Sense-making and coherence cannot work for things that are inherently paradoxical and beyond language, that form the boundary between us and God, the Vacated Space where God is and isn't. To communicate from there, to be an aspect of Moshe and not just Aharon, requires expression that is not trying to make sense in an ordinary way, that is trying to communicate the same way melody does, emotionally, symbolically, impressionistically. Melody (and visual art) are the most obvious ways to do this, as they are unbound by words at all, but even verbal expression can be used to communicate from the Vacated Space, provided that it is not trying to make sense or explain, but just trying to express, to emote, to convey experience rather than information. Poetry, the breaking of language into meaning, is the most obvious example.

But what about stories?

Stories that are set in mythic "ancient times" with kings and princesses and giants and beggars and nary a frum Jew in sight. Stories that reach higher

and deeper than usual expression, aiming at a place deeper than the usual ways rabbinic thinkers have used language, that attempt to create myth and poetry rather than instruction and prose, that, perhaps, attempt to communicate from the Vacated Space in language that isn't language, that is more than language, that attempt to turn silence into expression, to become an aspect of Moshe in the realm of Aharon.

Stories in which Rebbe Nachman is able to take his grief, his loss, his pain, the questions of the second heresy that comes from the Vacated Space, and turn them into a corpus of writing to save those who are mired in that space with no one to save them.

There are Places We Do Not Go.

But Rebbe Nachman Went There.

And He Can Show Us The Way Out.

### Part VIII

#### A Different Summer Night in Podolia, 1806

Rebbe Nachman clears his throat, and the *hasidim* strain to listen.

“While on a journey, I told a story. Whoever heard it had a thought of repentance. This is the story.”

His eyes fill with tears.

He reaches into himself, deep, into the highs and the lows, into the sense of destiny and the struggle

to live up to it, into depression, into suffering and persecution, into discord and disagreement, into tragedy, into loss, into illness and coughing so hard you vomit blood until you have no strength to go on and you lie in your bed as the life ebbs away

from you when you're just 38 years old, struck down in what should be your prime, a failure, the

dead leader of dead *hasidim*, outcasts and wanderers looked down on and pelted with rocks, back further, beyond himself, into the prospering of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous, into the increasing godlessness of the world, into the long exile without a redeemer with worse yet to come, beyond language, into the silence, into the second heresy where there are no answers, into blankness, nothingness, void, into the Vacated Space where God is not, and there Rebbe Nachman stands, unbent and unbroken, armed only with a stubborn faith that this cannot be all that there is, that there must be God in this place even when there is no God in this place, until it yields to him, until he finds God in the place that God is not, until he has quieted his mind so that he can hear its melody, the melody of a God Who exists even where He doesn't exist, Who can be heard in silences, Who can be spoken of without words, Who can be believed in without reason, Who can be apprehended without apprehension, a melody that has been sung since ancient days, a melody that, if you get that far, you can hum along to, and maybe even put it to lyrics, giving words to silence and form to formlessness, turning the nothing to something, entering the void where language fails and silence reigns and exiting with

language that isn't language, ready to wake up a sleeping world.

He smiles.

He has the words.<sup>1</sup>

“There was once... .”

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<sup>1</sup> **Works I plundered to write this:**

Haviva Pedaya, “Crisis and Repair, Trauma and Recovery” ; Andre Neher, [\*The Exile of the Word: From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz\*](#) (JPS, 1981); Arthur Green, [\*Tormented Master: The Life and Spiritual Quest of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav\*](#) (Jewish Lights, 1992); Dov Elbaum, [\*Into\*](#)

[\*the Fullness of the Void: A Spiritual Autobiography\*](#) (Jewish Lights, 2013).

**People who looked at early drafts who gave valuable feedback and encouragement:**

Shoshanah Weisinger, R. Levi Morrow, R. Yonah Lavery-Yisraeli, Lawrence Shenkin, R. Tali Adler, Sara Marcus, and everyone in the TorahLab, Mark Cantora, R. Yaakov Klein.