

*Ekev* August 12, 2017

וַיַּעֲנֶךָ וַיַּרְעִבְךָ וַיֵּאָכְלֶךָ אֶת־הַמָּן אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַעְתָּ וְלֹא יָדְעוּן אֲבֹתֶיךָ לְמַעַן הוֹדִיעְךָ כִּי לֹא עַל־הַלֶּחֶם לְבַדּוֹ יִחְיֶה הָאָדָם כִּי עַל־כָּל־מוֹצָא פִי־יִהְיֶה יִחְיֶה הָאָדָם:

Deut 8:3 *God subjected you to the hardship of hunger, then gave you manna to eat, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, in order to teach you that one does not live by bread alone, but that one may live on anything that Adonai decrees.*



The very familiar phrase “Not By Bread Alone” appears in this week’s portion. We use that phrase today to mean that bread on its own is not sustenance enough; one needs more to survive. Sages wrote about the essential human need for a spiritual dimension. Food sustains the body yet G-d sustains the spirit - both essential to a person’s survival. Yet, when contextualized in the surrounding verses, the passage can be read as one may

live on *anything* that G-d provides. This understanding comes from the theological belief that one’s mere existence derived from Divine privilege. The Israelites were reminded that because G-d deemed them worthy, their complaints of lack of food during their wilderness wanderings were met by manna, a Divine gift to sustain them. One does not live on bread alone, rather one lives with whatever it is that God dispenses.

Since 2007 a unique group of actors from an Israeli theatre company, *Na Laga’at*, has brought this biblical phrase to life with a performance that involves making bread on stage and sharing it with the audience at the end of the show. They begin with mixing, followed by kneading, then braiding, and eventually baking, all while weaving together poignant stories about life, its challenges, and opportunities. The delicious aroma of baking bread fills the theater and soon the audience gets to taste what was created on stage. The unique sharing of bread is matched by the uniqueness of the performers. Each person on stage is deaf-blind. The entire experience is profoundly moving for all the audience members - 700,000 to date, since the founding of this company in 2007.

In Hebrew, *na lagaat* means “please touch.” The company’s director, Adina Tal, explains, “If you cannot see, and you cannot hear, you need to touch and get touched, and once you are open enough to get touched, your life is changed.” The idea of having the audience come forward to the stage to share in the bread is to have them communicate through touch with the actors who cannot hear or see the appreciative applause and standing ovation after each performance.

The actors began as waiters and waitresses in the restaurant “Black Out.” They received theatrical training to create the “Not by Bread Alone” and other shows. Just like the biblical verse that states, “*and then*

*[G-d] gave you manna to eat, which neither you nor your ancestors had ever known,*” this is a theatre company and a performance that has never existed before and continues to be unlike any other in the world.

It should not come as a great surprise that Israel is home to this incredible team of people who overcome and transcend their challenges to be a major success. Israel since its inception has been exemplary in the ways it accepts and works with all people who face physical challenges. With the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948, the Knesset already mulled laws for people with disabilities. Health plans were required to cover a wide range of disabilities. Charitable organizations were established to serve these vulnerable populations. Then, in 1998, The Knesset enacted the Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities Law, shifting the thinking from individuals who needed social-welfare to an approach that considered the legal and human-rights of disabled persons. In addition to the legislation, the Ministry of Justice established the Commission for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2000 and charged them with lawmaking, enforcement, and advocacy. As part of their work, this Commission has implemented training for many professions in the service industry. The Commission ensures that, in addition to upholding the laws, these service people truly understand and are attuned to the physical and emotional needs of persons with disabilities.

*Na Laga'at* has performed in London, South Korea, Australia, the USA, and Zurich and has plans for more touring in the years ahead. Their tagline says it all: *We believe that it is possible, we can and we deserve to change the reality in which we live.*

#### **Discussion Questions:**

Compare the way in which the disabled in this country are supported by laws and programs with what Israel provides. You can read about the Americans with Disabilities Act here:  
<http://www.ada.gov/cguide.htm>

Discuss ways in which Israel through the past 70 years has represented the credo of *Na Laga'at*: *We believe that it is possible, we can and we deserve to change the reality in which we live.*

#### **Additional Resources:**

View the Video at: [Not By Bread Alone](#)

[YouTube](#) News Briefing on Na Laga'at

Jonathan Amerikaner, Viva Sarah Press, [Israel's Unique Deaf-Blind Theatre Troupe](#), Israel 21C Blog, June 30, 2011

[The Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities Law](#), 1998

Leiba Chaya David, [Revised Law Lays Foundation for a More Inclusive Israeli Society](#), JNS.org Blog, February 23, 2015