

May Palestinians Wander No More (Numbers 33)

Parashat Matot/Masei

Rabbi Evan Traylor

July 25, 2025 - 29 Tamuz 5785

Shabbat Shalom. Yesterday, I read about the experience of Hedaya al-Mutawaq, a 31 year old Palestinian woman and mother to Joud, 3 years old, and Mohammad, 18 months old. The family lives right now in a tent on a beach in Gaza. Hedaya's husband was killed last October in the midst of the war. In talking with the New York Times, Hedaya shared that, "I walk the streets looking for food...As an adult, I can bear the hunger...But my kids can't...We go to bed hungry and wake up thinking only about how to find food."¹

¹ New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/24/world/middleeast/gaza-starvation.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>.

There was also the story from last month of Reem Zeidan, a 42 year old Palestinian woman who set out to receive food at an aid distribution center run by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, with two of her eight children, Mervat, 20 years old, and Ahmad, 12 years old. They were walking along the sea from Khan Younis, where they were sleeping in a tent, to Rafah, where the aid site was located. After five hours, most of it at night in order to arrive first thing in the morning, gunfire surrounded them. They survived, but after that, they had to be more careful in order to receive the necessary, life-saving food. According to NBC News, “At around 4 a.m., they were about half a mile from the aid site, walking among a crowd in the darkness, wary of more gunfire. They were crouched low and turning a street corner, when Mervat said she heard a girl scream behind her. She turned around and saw her mother falling to the ground. Mervat thought she had fainted, but when she turned her over, Zeidan’s face was covered in blood.”² Reem Zeidan was later confirmed dead at the hospital; her two children now forced to confront this war and this world without their mother.

²NBC News.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/world/middle-east/gaza-aid-death-food-shot-israel-palestinian-family-idf-rcna211975>.

These stories, among the many others coming out of Gaza at this moment, are tragic. They are heartbreaking. They are inhumane. Palestinians forced to walk hours upon hours, miles upon miles, just to receive food. According to the World Food Program, of the 2.1 million people living in Gaza, “a quarter of the population is facing famine-like conditions” and “100,000 women and children are suffering from severe acute malnutrition and need treatment as soon as possible.”³ **And yet, the only possibility for many Palestinians living in Gaza right now is to walk, to trudge through the heat and sand, from one village to another, slowly making their way, somehow, someway, to one of these dangerous, illmanaged aid distribution sites and pray to God that there is food left, and that they are not injured, or killed, in the process.**

³ UN World Food Program. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/07/1165454>.

One step after another step after another step after another step. Wandering for food, for hope, for themselves and their families, for anything to keep moving forward. This is the reality for Palestinians in Gaza right now, and it was the reality for our ancestors millennia ago. In our Torah this week, Parashat Matot/Masei, we read a summary of all the places the Israelites have traveled while wandering in the desert. Beginning with the exodus from Egypt, our Torah traces the path of the Israelites, noting each and every location, showing the wandering path for our ancestors to march from Egypt to Mount Sinai and eventually to the banks of the Jordan River, on the edge of the Promised Land.⁴ In consecutive verses in our Torah, we read וַיֵּצְאוּ, and they departed, or they set out, or they journeyed. וַיֵּצְאוּ, וַיֵּצְאוּ, וַיֵּצְאוּ. The Israelites are on a constant, seemingly neverending journey, walking, trudging, hoping that the next day is better than the last.

⁴ Numbers 33

Throughout this long journey, God provides the Israelites with manna, sustenance to survive in the desert. As we read in Exodus:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הֲנִי מִמָּטִיר לָכֶם לֶחֶם מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם

“And יהוה said to Moses, “I will rain down bread for you from the sky...

וַיֵּצֵא הָעָם וַלְקֻטוֹ דְּבַר־יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ

“and the people shall go out and gather each day that day’s portion...”⁵

It was through this food, provided every day, and an extra portion on the day before Shabbat, that our people were able to survive. Unfortunately, tragically, devastatingly, God is not providing manna to starving Palestinians in Gaza. God is not providing manna to the hostages languishing in Gaza. God isn’t fixing this disastrous situation. It is up to us. Us, people of conscience from Israel, the United States, and around the world. It is up to us to do everything possible to end the starvation of Gaza, to bring home the hostages, to end the war, and to work for justice and peace for all people in this holy land. We must commit to this as human beings, but also as Jews. In Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of Our Ancestors, we read the verse, “אִם אֵין קֶמַח, אֵין תּוֹרָה - Where is there no food, there is no Torah.”⁶ Where there is no food, where there is starvation, the values and lessons of Torah cannot exist. In order for us to defend the goodness of Torah, the sanctity of Torah, there must be food for the people of Gaza.

⁵ Exodus 16:4

⁶ Pirkei Avot 3:17

Following this wisdom from our ancestors, CBE launched a campaign to provide necessary, life-saving sustenance to the people of Gaza. We are working with two vetted and effective organizations, Anera and the New Israel Fund, who have the capabilities to provide aid directly to people who will feed themselves and their families. We launched this campaign two months ago and more than 200 of us have already raised more than \$34,000, including more than \$10,000 just this week. But now, the situation has become even more dire so we are renewing our call to contribute. Information about this campaign will be available on QR codes in the lobby after services, or you can find it in our weekly email, or on CBE's website. Additionally, there will be a rally on Monday, July 28th at 6 PM in front of the Israeli Consulate. Rabbi Timoner will be there and is helping to organize it. Watch CBE's social media this weekend for more information. This rally will mirror rallies that have happened in Tel Aviv almost every night over the last week, with thousands of Israelis marching for the end of starvation in Gaza. There is, of course, broader political and diplomatic work to be done to bring home the hostages, end the starvation of Gaza, and end the war. But right now, we can show up, with our presence and with our money, and make a difference.

Earlier I shared with you the stories of Hedaya and Reem and their families. There are many other, too many other, stories just like them. Too many other stories of Palestinians walking, trudging, wandering through the desert searching for food, just like our ancestors. Except now, they need more help than God can provide. In this time of chaos, tragedy, and heartache, may we pray and act for a day in which the people of Gaza have to wander no more, and that all of God's children have the food, and the water, and the shelter, and the love that they need to thrive in this world. Shabbat Shalom.

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These stories, among the many others coming out of Gaza at this moment, are tragic. They are heartbreaking. They are inhumane. Palestinians forced to walk hours upon hours, miles upon miles, just to receive food. According to the World Food Program, of the 2.1 million people living in Gaza, "a quarter of the population is facing famine-like conditions" and "100,000 women and children are suffering from severe acute malnutrition and need treatment as soon as possible."⁹ And yet, the only possibility for many Palestinians living in Gaza right now is to walk, to trudge through the heat and sand, from one village to another, slowly making their way, somehow, someway, to one of these dangerous, illmanaged aid distribution sites and pray to God that there is food left, and that they are not injured, or killed, in the process.

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<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/usaid-analysis-found-no-evidence-massive-hamas-theft-gaza-aid-2025-07-25/Exclusive: USAID analysis found no evidence of massive Hamas theft of Gaza aid | Reuters>

Vayisu, They set out...

God provided manna for the people

Quote Torah

Story of Palestinians traveling far distances to receive aid.

But God is not providing meals to starving Palestinians in Gaza.

God is not providing meals to the hostages being held captive by Hamas in Gaza.

So we must.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/24/world/middleeast/gaza-starvation.html?smid=nytcor-e-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>