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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas Beha'aloscha

When the Ark would travel, Moshe would say, "Arise Hashem, and let Your foes be scattered, let those who hate You flee from You." (10:35) Did you ever wonder why, once the Sefer Torah has been removed from the Aron HaKodesh and the reading of the Torah is about to commence, spiritual intensity in the shul seems to be lifted. It is almost as if Krias HaTorah, the reading of the Torah, is a break in the service. We have finished Shacharis; we are now taking a break for a conversation, for a walk outside, early Kiddush, etc. Does Krias HaTorah signal a relaxation period, a time to socialize and catch up on the past week's events?

In Chochmas Chaim, a novel idea is quoted from Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, which rationalizes our change of pace during Krias HaTorah. Rav Yosef Chaim spoke in 1936 at the dedication of Yeshivas Sfas Emes in Yerushalayim. He explained why we recite the pasuk, Vayehi binsoa ha'Aron, when we open the doors of the Ark. He quoted from the Zohar HaKadosh, "Rabbi Shimon says: 'When the Sefer Torah is removed (from the Ark) with the intention of reading from it, the Heavenly Gates of Mercy are opened and Hashem's love for Klal Yisrael is aroused. Therefore, this is an auspicious moment for the recital of the prayer Brich Shmei, Blessed is the Name, which entreats for Hashem's compassion and pleads that He display His salvation by finally having the Bais Hamikdash rebuilt. We declare our faith in Him and His Torah, and we ask that He make us receptive to its wisdom.'"

Brich Shmei is a beautiful and meaningful prayer which is recited during the opening of the Ark, a time when we ask Hashem for arousal in all things spiritual. As a "rule," whenever an opportunity for spiritual ascendancy is present, it is almost certainly to be countered by the forces of spiritual impurity, which will employ any medium for deflecting and impeding the Heavenly spiritual inspiration that is descending at that moment. We pray to Hashem to scatter the foes of spirituality and cause the forces that undermine holiness to flee from us, so that the sparks of kedushah, holiness, that sanctify us will be allowed to do their work.

Having said this, we now understand why, for some of us, Krias HaTorah is a difficult time during which to remain captivated by the intensity of the preceding prayer service. The forces that seek to deter us are working overtime, and, in many cases, they are successful.

The rabble that was among them cultivated a craving, and Bnei Yisrael also wept once more and said, "Who will feed us meat?" (11:4)

The erev rav, mixed multitude, who left Egypt with the Jewish People, now showed their true level of commitment to Hashem. Nothing! Instead, they were the first to complain, the first to undermine Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership, thereby showing that they had come along only for the ride. How careful we must be of those usurpers who claim to stand with us, but, in truth, stand only for themselves. Only someone who is truly committed to Hashem is able to withstand the various challenges our People have encountered during our long journey.

Horav Avraham Schorr, Shlita, offers a novel interpretation of this pasuk. He quotes Yehudah ben Teima, whose well-known dictum in Pirkei Avos 5:20 accompanies the Jew throughout his life: "Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion, to carry out the will of your Father in Heaven." In his commentary to the Aggadic portions of the Talmud, Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, derives from here that man is a composite of all of the creatures in the world. This means that he possesses the strengths and characteristics - both good and bad - which control the individual nature of each creature. Man has within him: the strength and ability to lead like a lion; the viciousness of a snake; the foolishness of a donkey; the playfulness of a monkey, etc. He is, thus, unfortunately capable of the most heinous sin and, conversely, the most sublime act of kindness. He can run like the deer to perform a mitzvah, use brute strength in the service of his fellow man, and harness incredible energy to study Torah. He can do anything if he is properly motivated. If he is negatively provoked, he can fall into the abyss of evil and commit unbelievable atrocities. This is a man.

Rav Elchanan explains that this composite known to us as "man" must be guided by yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, in order to control his animalistic urges and tendencies. Otherwise, he reverts to his creature instincts and is capable of just about any type of behavior.

Shlomo Hamelech says (Sefer Koheles 7:29): Asah HaElokim adam yashar, v'heimah bikshu chishvonos rabim, "G-d has made man simple, but they sought any intrigues." He begins the pasuk in the singular (adam, man) and concludes in the plural (heimah, they). Why is this? Sefer Eizor Eliyahu explains that this refers to the multifaceted strengths and natures of man, the fact that he is a composite of the various other creatures. All of these abilities are housed within the body and mind of "simple" man. Man is singular, but his tendencies -- based upon the various creative instinct within him--are plural. These tendencies, if left unchecked, provoke desire, passion, lack of control, base behavior - all of the negative instinct that pull man away from his Heavenly-intended "simplicity."

The word yashar is an acronym for Yehei Shmei Rabbah, "May His Great Name (be blessed)." This was Hashem's intention when He created man yashar, simple: that his life should be spent glorifying His Name. Thus, he controls his animalistic tendencies and fulfills his Heavenly mission. Otherwise, he falls prey to the "multitude" within him.

Rav Schorr now returns to our original pasuk, V'hasafsuf asher b'kirbo hisaavu taavah, "The rabble (mixed multitude) that was among them cultivated a craving." This refers to the multitude of creature characteristics imbedded in the psyche of man. They crave so much; they even initiate cravings for the sole purpose of craving! The purpose and mission of Klal Yisrael run counter to this life of abandon. We are charged to be me'acheid, unify all of our proclivities, for one purpose: to serve Hashem. We are created yashar Keil, simple by G-d, thus, accounting for our name, Yisrael. In order to maintain this name, we must live up to its meaning and objective.

If there were ever an era that brought out the worst in the human psyche, it was during the Cantonist period, during the mid-nineteenth century in Russia. Young Jewish boys were kidnapped by the Russians in order to serve in the Czar's army. The goal of the Russians was to dehumanize these children, alienate them from Hashem - with the goal of eventually baptizing them. While they did not always succeed in baptizing them, they did destroy their humanistic nature. These boys remained in the army for twenty-five years, during which they were subjected to the most cruel and inhumane torture. Indeed, the Tzemach Tzedek of Lubavitch compared the suffering of the Cantonists to the persecution of the Jews during the Hellenistic Greek rule, because of the spiritual nature of the abuse. He said, "We cannot imagine the greatness of praying and chanting Psalms by the Cantonists (this refers to those who survived spiritually intact). It is worth more in Heaven than the intention (kavanah) and fervor (dveikus) of the holy Arizal. Their prayers are filled with self-sacrifice (mesiras nefesh) and simple faith (emunah peshutah)."

The following story has made the rounds. I selected it to demonstrate how one can ascend from the abyss of being a conglomerate of creature instincts, to achieving spiritual sublimity - as long as his tendencies are all focused toward Hashem and guided by yiraas Shomayim. The most distant, base-minded Jew can be brought back to embrace Hashem, as long as he has the proper motivation and the right rebbe - as was the story with this Cantonist soldier.

The holy Chafetz Chaim, zl, often traveled from city to city. Once, at an inn in Vilna, he observed a burly Jew sitting at a table and ordering the waitress to bring him a portion of roast goose and a glass of whiskey. Without first making a brachah, blessing, he quickly devoured the meal and washed it down with the whiskey. His "dessert" consisted of a coarse berating of the waitress, for no other reason than he felt like it. Observing the entire scenario from a corner of the room, the Chafetz Chaim was about to get up and rebuke the man for his degrading behavior and foul language. The innkeeper rushed over to prevent the sage from following through with his intended reproof. He feared that the man, a simple illiterate individual, who had just recently been released from serving two and a half decades in the Czar's army, might be rude to the saintly Rav and even strike him.

"Please, Rebbe, leave him alone. You cannot speak to such a person. He is very crude, a true boor, who knows no way other than bullying. When he was merely seven-years-old, he was abducted with other child Cantonists and dragged off to Siberia. Until the age of eighteen, he lived among farmers, and then he served for another twenty five years in the Czar's army. With such an "education" could he have fared better? Is it any wonder that he is crude, wild and base? He was out of touch with anything Jewish for thirty years. He neither learned, nor spoke one letter of Torah. Judaism was foreign to him. It would be best that you do not speak with him. I value your honor too much."

A calm, affectionate smile radiated from the face of the Chafetz Chaim: "Such a Jew! I know quite well how to speak to him. I only hope that good will come from the conversation."

The Chafetz Chaim approached the man and greeted him warmly, "Shalom Aleichem! Is it true what I have just heard about you - that you were kidnapped as a child and dragged off to Siberia? That you grew up among gentiles and did not learn even one letter of the Torah? You suffered unbearable persecution, pain and misery. You endured torture by day and nightmares at night. The evil ones attempted numerous times to force you to reject your faith, to be baptized to their godless religion. They forced you to eat pork and all kinds of non-kosher food. Nonetheless, you persevered: you did not convert; you remained a loyal Jew.

"How blessed I would be to have such merits! You are so fortunate. Your place in the World to Come is guaranteed. You will sit among the greatest Jews of our nation. Your sacrifice and devotion is no trivial matter. You suffered immeasurably for over thirty years for the sake of Judaism and Heaven." Suddenly, tears welled up in the eyes of the former soldier. He was

moved by the warm and good-hearted outpouring of love from this pure, living fountain whose words refreshed and invigorated his weary spirit. When he finally realized that he was none other than the saintly Chafetz Chaim, the holiest man of their generation, a sage who had no peer, he broke into bitter weeping and kissed the hands of the Chafetz Chaim.

The sage continued, "Enough! A man like you deserves to be amidst those holy Jews who gave their lives to serve and sanctify Hashem's Name. If you would be an observant Jew for the remainder of your life, no one would be more fortunate than you."

The man remained with the Chafetz Chaim until he became a fully observant Jew.

This man had demonstrated what can become of a person who does not have Heaven as a control over his animalistic tendencies. He had become the opposite of yashar. Once the holy Chafetz Chaim activated his spiritual GPS, he became focused on Hashem, thus allowing him to become yashar - Keil - Yisrael.

That you say to me, "Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a suckling." (11:12)

Moshe Rabbeinu presents his taanah, "complaint," to Hashem. Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, explains Moshe's rationale. The developmental stages of a child require varied levels of adult support until the child matures sufficiently to the point that he is able to fend for himself. A young child of infant status requires a meinekes, nursemaid or babysitter, who feeds the child, since his young age does not yet allow for him to serve himself. An older child who has progressed beyond the need for adult feeding intervention requires an adult omein, sort of pedagogue, to train the child concerning what he must eat and what he requires in order to maintain self-sufficiency. Certainly, the two positions of the meinekes and omein cannot be interchanged. Imagine having the omein talk to the child, guiding him on what to eat and how to obtain it, while the meinekes attempts to carry and feed the child who is already educable. When the roles are reversed, we have chaos, such that neither the infant nor the older child is satisfied.

Moshe said to Hashem: Klal Yisrael contains a class of wealthy individuals whose function should be to look out for the welfare of the poor. These people are here to address the physical needs of the nation. There is also a class of Torah scholars whose function should be to address the spiritual needs of the nation. I, Moshe, am the nation's omein, pedagogue, charged with teaching Torah to the people. Instead, I have been relegated to meinekes status, whereby I am charged with providing meat and seeing to it that the physical needs of the nation are addressed. My leadership role has been altered. Instead of seeing to the spiritual needs of the nation, I am also grappling with the physical requirements.

Veritably, a Torah leader's function does not end with the spiritual development of his flock. If his people are hungry, he must feed them. A true Torah leader is all-purpose, focusing on the spiritual, but never losing sight of the physical pulse of the nation.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, remembers seeking refuge in Vilna during World War II. He was not alone. He shared accommodations with displaced yeshivah students from Poland, which was now a war zone. At this point, Vilna was part of Lithuania, thus remaining a war-free zone. One day, Horav Chizkiyah Mishkovsky told him, "I am taking you to meet Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl (Rav of Vilna and undisputed leader of European Jewry). Rav Chaim Ozer was a gadol at a time in which Europe was filled with gedolim. He was the greatest of the great, an individual whose brilliance and encyclopedic knowledge were surpassed only by his extraordinary love for every Jew and care and concern for his every need. To be invited to speak with this giant among giants was an unparalleled honor, but simultaneously frightening. A yeshivah student could well expect to be tested on his Torah proficiency. One had to be sufficiently erudite and clear in his understanding and analysis of the subject matter.

Rav Galinsky passed most of the night reviewing the Gemorah. Added to his anxiety was the fact that he would be standing face to face and speaking with the gadol hador. On the other hand was the incredible excitement over experiencing this unprecedented opportunity. He entered the room and gazed upon Rav Chaim Ozer. No sooner had he stretched out his hand to say Shalom Aleichem, that the Rav asked him his first question: "When did you last receive a letter from your parents?" Imagine, his first question was not concerning the Gemorah; rather, it was about his welfare!

Rav Galinsky replied, "It has been months since I last heard from home. My parents are in the war zone."

Second question: "Do you have a place to sleep?" Rav Chaim Ozer did not question him concerning a bed to sleep on, since no one had beds. It could be a bench, a chair, or the floor. Without a roof over one's head, however, he would be prey to the elements and freeze.

Rav Galinsky answered that he did have sleeping arrangements. The third question astounded him, as it underscored the true greatness of Rav Chaim Ozer. "Can you please show me your shoes?" the Rav asked.

Terribly ashamed, because his shoes were torn and filled with holes, he reluctantly removed them from his feet and showed them to him. Seeing his shoes, Rav Chaim Ozer took out some money from his wallet, handed it to him, and said, "Here, go and buy yourself a pair of shoes."

Rav Chaim Ozer's concern was not merely for the yeshivah student's learning. If a young man had no food in his stomach, nowhere to sleep and threadbare shoes, he could not learn properly. After the young man's physical needs were addressed, he could learn.

Horav Chaim Brisker, zl, was the Rosh Yeshivah par excellence, whose derech halimud was equally legendary. One day, the askanim, public figures who were the communities' movers and shakers, came to Rav Chaim's home and asked the Rebbetzin why it was cold in the house. Apparently, they had dropped off a load of wood the other day. It should have lasted for a few weeks. She replied that as soon as it had been delivered, the Rav informed the poor that they were welcome to take what they needed in order to heat their homes. In a short time, all was gone.

The men were frustrated. They could not keep up with the Rav's chesed. Finally, they returned with more wood. This time, they locked the storage shed and gave the Rebbetzin the key: "This is our wood, to be used by the Rav and his family. You have no permission to give it away!"

The next day, the askanim visited the Rav's home to discover to their consternation that the house was still bitter cold. "We told you not to give away the wood," they said. "We did not give it away. In fact, we did not even go to the woodshed," the Rebbetzin replied. "Why, then, is the house so cold?" they asked. She responded, "The Rav said, 'If there is insufficient wood for the poor, then I, too, will not have wood. I will not be warm when my community is cold!'"

This is the mark of a Torah leader. He suffers along with his flock. If the poor are cold - so is he. If they are hungry - so is he. Indeed, a leader who never had to worry about his next paycheck will have great difficulty understanding the economic challenges faced by the members of his community. A leader must be both an omein and a meinekes, caring for the spiritual - as well as the physical - needs of those who look to him for leadership.

In memory of

Robert and Barbara Pinkis R' Baruch Gimpel ben Chaim Yehuda z"l and his wife Esther Chana bas R' Avigdor a"h

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Meshech Chochmah

By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Longing For Longing The rabble that was among them cultivated a craving, and the Bnei Yisrael also wept again, saying, "Who shall feed us meat?"

Meshech Chochmah: Short of a supply of meat, they weren't. A surfeit of cattle[2] led to Reuven and Gad choosing to pass up their portion of the Land in favor of more appropriate grazing land on the east side of the Jordan. What they lacked was not the meat, but the ability to eat it the way they preferred, which was simply to satisfy their desire. According to R. Yishmael,[3] they were halachically constrained from consuming meat as a desirable menu item. Meat was permitted to this generation only as part of some holiness exercise, like the meat of a korban shelamim. Even those who disagree with R. Yishmael still had them (and us!) subject to innumerable laws and restrictions regarding the preparation of meat before it could be eaten. They wanted the license to eat like they had earlier in Egypt – "we remember the fish that we ate for free." [4] As Rashi explains, free means unencumbered by the demands of any mitzvos. (Specifying fish is particularly apposite, because all of a fish is permitted – even its blood.)

We can detect another dimension in their complaint. It was, after all, the mohn that they tired of, and wished some "real" food in its place. This becomes understandable if we remember that it was Moshe's merit that brought them the mohn,[5] which was more spiritual than material, and is called the food of the angels.[6] Food does more than sustain us. Different foods affect our personalities differently. While plants nurture forces of life and growth within us, only animal flesh carries with it craving and lust. (This is why the gemara[7] states that an ignoramus may not eat meat. Without Torah, he has no defense against the elevation of his level of desire that the meat contributes to him.)

Those who clamored for meat longed for the experience of passion and desire. The mohn was good food – perfect food, really. But they did not get from it the passion-surge that they reasoned they would get from meat. They longed for meat because they longed to experience longing!

The same phenomenon accounts for their "crying in/for their families," [8] which the Sifrei takes to mean arayos. This may not mean classes of forbidden relationships, as it is usually understood, but the experience of lust and desire in their intimate lives. After the experience at Sinai, Moshe had become a "godly person," [9] and separated from his wife. Typical desires had become irrelevant to him on his lofty level. They had not become irrelevant to his people, some of whom wanted to see those desires return to their previous strength and prominence.

Moshe's superior spiritual level made him the perfect conduit to provide the spiritual food of mohn to his people. By the same reasoning, however, he was useless in providing meat that was laden with desire. He therefore registered his complaint to Hashem. "Where will I get all this meat?" [10] He knew that his merit was a mismatch for it.

Hashem had a workaround. Moshe was to gather seventy people, each one worthy of receiving some of his spirit. Great as they were, they were not clones of Moshe – nor were they close. They had not separated from their wives; they still knew the meaning of taavah. If they would elevate their inner selves to the point that they, too, could be recipients of some of a Divine spirit, they would be suitable conduits to provide meat to the people.

Moshe, however, on his greater madregah, was not capable of providing the meat.

1. Based on Meshech Chochmah, Bamidbar 11:4 2. Bamidbar 32:1 3. Chulin 16B 4. Bamidbar 11:5 5. Taanis 9A 6. Yoma 72B 7. Pesachim 49B 8. Bamidbar 11:10 9. Devarim 33:1 10. Bamidbar 11:13

from: Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein <ravadlerstein@torah.org> to:
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Meshech Chochmah - Longing For Longing

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Great(er) Making the Torah Great(er) Be'ha'alotecha Volume 30, No. 35

19 Sivan 5776 June 25, 2016 Today's Learning: Nach: Tehilim 107-108
Mishnah: Demai 7:4-5 Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Kamma 25

The Midrash Rabbah connects the opening of our parashah, "Speak to Aharon and say to him, 'When you kindle the lamps, toward the face of the menorah shall the seven lamps cast light,'" with the verse (Yeshayah 42:21), "Hashem desires for the sake of [man's] righteousness that the Torah be made great and glorious." What is the connection between the two verses?

R' Moshe Gruenwald z"l (rabbi of Chust, Hungary; died 1909) writes: The Gemara (Shabbat 14b) states that when King Shlomo established the concept of an eruv, a bat kol proclaimed the verse (Mishlei 23:15), "My son, when your heart becomes wise, then My heart, too, will rejoice." R' Gruenwald explains: According to Torah law, carrying outdoors on Shabbat is prohibited in certain types of places and permitted in other types of places. Subsequently, as a precaution lest one inadvertently violate a Torah prohibition, the Sages prohibited carrying in some places where, according to the Torah, carrying is permitted. However, King Shlomo decreed that one could make an eruv to permit carrying in those places where the Sages had prohibited carrying. [In effect, building an eruv substitutes as a precaution.]

Was G-d happy with this? One might argue that G-d is not happy that we are so lax in our performance of mitzvot that all of these extra precautions above-and-beyond the Torah's prohibitions are necessary. Says the Gemara: No! When King Shlomo established eruvin (plural of eruv), Hashem rejoiced.

Why? Because, as the above verse states, "Hashem desires for the sake of [man's] righteousness that the Torah be made great [i.e., bigger]." When we add mitzvot (within proper guidelines), Hashem approves.

Ramban z"l writes that the opening of our parashah hints that, in the future, the Sages would add a mitzvah by establishing a holiday involving the menorah (i.e., Chanukah). It was for this new mitzvah that the midrash says that Hashem rejoiced. (Arugat Ha'bosem)

"Moshe said to Hashem, 'Why have You done evil to Your servant; why have I not found favor in Your eyes, that You place the burden of this entire People upon me? Did I conceive this entire People or did I give birth to it, that You say to me, "Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a suckling, to the Land that You swore to its forefathers?" Where shall I get meat to give to this entire People when they weep to me, saying, "Give us meat that we may eat"? I alone cannot carry this entire nation, for it is too heavy for me. And if this is how You deal with me, then kill me now, if I have found favor in Your eyes, and let me not see my evil!'" (11:11-15)

R' Avigdor Miller z"l (1908-2001; mashgiach ruchani of Yeshiva Chaim Berlin, shul rabbi and a prolific lecturer and author) observes that these are the harshest words uttered by Moshe Rabbeinu in the entire Torah. Why did he react this way now, when Bnei Yisrael complained about eating the mahn day-after-day?

R' Miller explains: The foundation of our relationship with Hashem is hakarat ha'tov / recognition of, and gratitude for, His never ending kindness to us. When Moshe saw that Bnei Yisrael were not satisfied with their lot, he understood that everything he had worked for—the Shechinah's very presence in the midst of Bnei Yisrael—was at risk. Moshe Rabbeinu loved Bnei Yisrael and shared their pain, but his worry about preserving their future as the nation in whose midst the Shechinah resided outweighed his empathy for their present unhappiness.

Adding to Moshe's frustration was the fact that, in his great humility, he blamed himself, R' Miller adds. Moshe assumed that, if Bnei Yisrael lacked a proper perspective on their condition, he (Moshe) must have failed to teach them well.

Hashem responds to Moshe (verse 16): "Gather to Me seventy men from the elders of Yisrael, whom you know to be the elders of the People." How, asks R' Miller, was this supposed to help a hungry nation? Moreover, isn't

the verse's description of the elders ("elders of Yisrael . . . elders of the People") redundant?

R' Miller answers: Bnei Yisrael's problem wasn't a lack of food, since they had the mahn—the most perfect food that ever existed. Their problem was a lack of hakarat ha'tov. When a person has a bad attitude about material belongings, be it food or anything else, the problem cannot be solved by giving him more belongings. He will never be satisfied that way. Rather, the only solution is to counsel him to have a healthier attitude. For this, R' Miller explains, Bnei Yisrael needed counselors who were "elders of Yisrael"—Torah scholars—but also "elders of the People"—leaders who knew the people and could relate to their feelings.

R' Miller concludes: To sing to and rejoice with Hashem, a person must be grateful to Hashem for his eyesight, his lucidity, his daily bread, and every delicious glass of water; he must recognize the debt of gratitude that he owes Hashem for a good night's sleep and for peace and tranquility in the streets of his neighborhood; he must realize how wonderful it is to have a roof over his head, to have each article of clothing that he has, and to have each of the furnishings in his house; not to mention appreciating an infinite number of other kindnesses that Hashem bestows. That was Bnei Yisrael's trial here. (Sha'arei Orah Vol. I, p.113)

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Rabbi Steven Pruzansky

The Wisdom of Kotzk

Posted on June 23, 2016

So what was a born and committed mitnaged (me) doing several weeks ago at the grave of Rav Menachem Mendel Morgenstern, the celebrated Kotzker Rebbe? Kotzk is a small village in central Poland, where the Kotzker Rebbe set up his Hasidic court in the second quarter of the 19th century, and our Heritage tour stopped there and visited the tiny Jewish cemetery where his grave is located. Indeed, the Kotzker is the Rebbe that mitnagdim can most appreciate, because he favored the primacy of Torah study above all and disdained the traditional trappings of the Hasidic court, the claims of miracles and wonders, and even the customary veneration of the Rebbe. His end also had its dark and very human side.

At his grave, I shared and explained some of his more famous aphorisms, all of which contain wisdom and insight that can benefit Jews today as well. Here are some of my particular favorites.

"The middle of the road is for horses." Human beings have to ascertain all the facts as best they can, and then decide. This is especially true of leaders, spiritual and/or political. One can choose the right side or the left side, but one must choose, at least in theory. These days, only the theory remains. So-called "leaders" are prone to nuance, obfuscation, endless debates and committees, seeing all sides and then choosing none, one compelling reason why malaise and apathy are so prevalent. Decisions are often avoided so as not to offend anyone – echoing Disraeli's famous quip: "I must follow the people. Am I not their leader?" – with anarchy and ineptitude the general result.

The Kotzker had it right, as did General Patton ("Lead me, follow me, or get out of my way"), but it is a hard sell in a world where "leaders" live in fear of laity, are forced to follow and then pretend they are courageously blazing new trails. (A distinguished rabbi who was with us explained the Kotzker's statement as referring to the Rambam's "golden mean," which is not the midpoint between two extremes – the realm of the horses – but similar to the third vertex of a triangle that draws from the other two. That could be, but I still prefer my interpretation.)

"Where is G-d to be found? Wherever you let Him in." Jews have suffered for centuries from approaches to Torah that seek to confine G-d to comfortable places that will not impinge on our desires or that sought to conform the Torah to modern, Western values that are often antithetical to Torah but, strangely, are perceived by many people as superior to those of

the Torah. Thus the ongoing efforts to legislate certain sins out of existence or re-define Jewish law and lore so that they satisfy modern sensibilities. Such endeavors are often presented as attempts to bring us closer to G-d but they are more accurately understood as feats of self-worship, with references to the Deity as a flimsy and transparent cover. G-d can be found in surrender to His Torah, in the voluntary abnegation of our desires that conflict with His stated will. And that is “letting Him in,” to our minds, hearts and deeds.

“I could probably revive the dead but I prefer to revive the living.” There is no greater wonder than the resurrection of the dead – but reviving the living might be more challenging. Habit, the great strength of the committed spiritual life, is also its bane. If we do something today – pray, wear tefilin, eat kosher, etc. – simply because we did it yesterday, then our spiritual life has ossified and teeters on the brink of irrelevance. Such can lead people who are observant in their private lives or synagogue activities to lie, steal, commit other crimes and think nothing of it.

Religious man struggles first with maintaining the daily commitment but then with infusing that commitment with vitality and enthusiasm. That is a challenge, but where is it written that we are not to be challenged? In fact, the opposite is true. In a similar context, the Kotzker stated: “Just to (by rote) fulfill one’s obligations? Not at all! Either everything or nothing,” which takes us back to the middle of the road and the horses. If you’re going to do something, do it right, and do it right the first time and every time (within the limits of human frailties).

The Jewish people could use a little revivification of the living – to minimize the sense of routine and maximize the excitement of Torah life and the opportunities that have blessed our generation. One reason why that has become more difficult in recent times is this:

“I am requesting that you not sin, not because it is forbidden to sin but rather because you should not have enough leisure time to sin.” Modern man has a lot of time on his hands, and we do not always fill that time in the most salubrious ways. The technological advances of the last century have eased the burdens of sustenance and alleviated the household chores that consumed much of our time and energy in the past, but they have also created different burdens and new obligations. Certainly, some of the social movements that have transformed the world in the last half century are the consequences of these advances that arose detached from any moral constraints or at least in a society where moral restrictions were perceived as archaic.

We have the opportunity and the means today to increase our Torah study, performance of mitzvot and pursuit of the good far more than did past generations, and yet many will argue – and with merit – that we are more disconnected from G-d than prior generations and less governed by His will. So, too, many will argue cogently that we have much greater means today of interacting with other people and yet many feel more, not less, disengaged from real, live human beings. Witness the number of people who walk the streets or sit at public events staring at their Smartphones, as if what is elsewhere is always more important and interesting than what or who is right in front of them.

Well, the Kotzker’s wish that man have no time to sin is the polar opposite of today’s reality, and how then we use that time defines our real values in life.

“I can tell you what not to do. What to do, each person has to ask himself.” Of course, the Kotzker was not talking about the performance of the positive commandments but rather the expression of one’s personality and goals in the world at large. Our Sages state (Berachot 58a) that just as no two people look alike, no two people think alike. Every personality is different, and so every human being adds a different dimension to existence. Often, people will seek out the advice of others to find out who they are. That is a risky venture, often compromised more by the advisor’s biases or predilections than what the questioner really is or wants to be. Deep down, most people know who they are and what they want to be, even if it takes time to act upon it or to actualize it. But there is nothing that is more personally fulfilling than

finding one’s role in life and carrying it out to perfection (or as close to perfection as man can come).

Finally, “You don’t love fish. If you loved the fish, you would not have killed it and cooked it on a fire.” Modern man tosses around words like “love” as if they are stray pennies found on a street in China. Often, love of “something” is just self-love projected outward. We don’t love “fish,” we love what the fish does for us, how it satisfies our appetites and pleases our palates (fish lovers, only). True love is love of the other for what the “other” is – spouse, especially – and not what that other does for us, what needs they satisfy or how they can be used. Love, as the term is commonly used, is much more utilitarian than we like to think; that is why so many marriages today are perceived as disposable, a short-term exchange of pleasures and comforts mutually agreed upon until the provision of pleasures ceases or one finds better accommodations elsewhere. Whatever that is, and however common that is today, unfortunately, one thing that it is not is “love.” Love remains a relationship of giving, not taking, and that is applicable to love of G-d and love of man.

Of course, there are many more such aphorisms of the Kotzker Rebbe, and straight Torah insights as well, even if the Kotzker himself never compiled them in a book. But wisdom is always beneficial, and the wisdom of Kotzk in so many ways still speaks directly to our generation.

If only we would heed it...

Shabbat Table Discussions

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A story is told of a king during the times of Moshe Rabbeinu who wanted to know what made Moshe such a great leader. He hired an artist to draw a portrait of Moshe so that his character traits could be studied by experts. The experts analyzed the portrait and concluded that Moshe had terrible character traits. Dissatisfied, the king decided to meet Moshe face to face. Upon seeing Moshe, he realized that the portrait was, in fact, accurate. He asked Moshe why the experts assumed that he had terrible character traits. Moshe answered: I am naturally inclined to the traits you described, but I have learned to overcome them.

Tiferet Yisroel Kidushin 4:77

from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>

to: weeklydt@torahweb.org

date: Wed, Jun 22, 2016 at 12:09 PM

subject: Rabbi Hershel Schachter - Zecharia, Miriam, and the Master Novi

http://torahweb.org/torah/2016/parsha/rsch_behalos.html

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Zecharia, Miriam, and the Master Novi

Every Shabbos we read a haftorah dealing with inyono d'yoma. Once in a while the inyono d'yoma happens to be that there is a chosson in shul or that today is erev Rosh Chodesh. But usually we consider the parshas ha'shavua as inyonei d'yoma, and there is always an obvious connection between the haftorah and the parsha. In parshas B'ha'aloshcho, both the chumash and the novi deal with the lighting of the menorah in the Beis Hamikdosh. Very often, in addition to the obvious connection, there is a deeper connection which is not that obvious. The Rambam lists the thirteen principles of faith of the Jewish religion. Two of these i'korei ha'emunah are 1) that we believe in prophecy and 2) that we believe that Moshe Rabbeinu was the greatest prophet of all times.

Regarding the uniqueness of Moshe Rabbeinu's nevuah the Rambam (in Moreh Ne'vuchim) points to the haftorah of parshas B'ha'aloshcha wherein the novi Zecharia is shown a vision/prophecy which he could not understand. Zecharia then asked the malach who showed him the vision to explain what the olive trees in the vision are supposed to represent. The malach responded, "but you certainly know what they are all about",

whereupon Zecharia again requests of the angel to please explain because he didn't understand! Finally the malach explains the vision to the novi Zecharia.

The Rambam quotes the gemorah saying that Moshe Rabbeinu's level of prophecy was much greater than that of all the other nevi'im in several different ways. One of the differences is that the prophecies of Moshe Rabbeinu were much clearer than that of the other nevi'im. The Rambam quotes the passage from the novi Zecharia to demonstrate the point that unlike Moshe, it took Zecharia a while, with quite a bit of give, to understand the prophecy.

Moshe Rabbeinu being the greatest novi is one of the major themes of Ba'ha'aloscha. Moshe Rabbeinu's own sister, Miriam, made negative comments about her brother, not realizing that his level of prophecy was way beyond hers or that of her other brother Aharon. Hashem punished Miriam for the negative comments that she made and formulated this ikar in emunah, i.e. that all should realize that Moshe Rabbeinu was the adon ha'nevi'im. This is the additional connection between Ba'ha'aloscha and its haftorah - they both bring out this ikar in emunah.

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from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>
reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com

subject: Weekly Parsha from **Rabbi Berel Wein**

BEHALOTCHA

Somehow, things start to go very wrong for Moshe and the Jewish people regarding their sojourn in the desert of Sinai, on their way to the Promised Land of Israel. The defection of Yitro, though for honorable and seemingly noble reasons, weakens the resolution of the rest of Israel to somehow enter and conquer their G-d-given homeland.

The rabbis warned us that wise people and leaders should be very careful as to what they say publicly and privately. This certainly applies to what they do and how people will view their behavior and decisions in life.

We always feel that leaders are somehow entitled to a private life as well, distinct from their public persona. However, we also all know that that is not really true and that private decisions taken by public figures have a great, if even only subliminal, influence on the general public that they serve.

There were elements within the Jewish people that reasoned that if Yitro, the father-in-law of Moshe and one of the outstanding and prominent converts to Judaism, felt that dwelling in the Land of Israel is not really for him, then there will be many others among the masses of Israel that will justify their refusal to enter the Land of Israel as just being a case of following his example.

And so, because the great vision of the Jewish homeland promised to their forefathers was no longer paramount in their lives, some of the people began to gripe and complain about all sorts of personal absurdities. This eventually led to open rebellion against G-d and against Moshe that doomed that generation to destruction and death in the desert of Sinai.

Without going into specifics or mentioning names, I am always astounded by how former political leaders here in Israel, even those who attained high office and are now freelancing and lecturing their way around the world, take it upon themselves to be openly critical – and many times unfairly so – of the government, state and people of Israel.

Can it be that they do not realize the direct and subliminal harm that they inflict upon our cause and our future? This must be the case, since I cannot imagine that they have truly evil intentions with pursuing this type of behavior. They mean well and have legitimate reasons for their opinions and statements.

But they have forgotten the adage of the rabbis that I quoted above – wise men should be careful with their words and actions. Other people are listening and are influenced - and one may even inadvertently grant aid and succor to those who wish to destroy us and our nation. It does not take much in our world to have people begin murmuring in dissatisfaction about Jews, Judaism, Israel, Torah and even G-d, so to speak.

One must always see the big picture and not be overwhelmed by the imperfections and difficult issues that are part of our existence, and in fact, of life itself. Retaining our faith in our cause and our beliefs and using good judgment in what we say and do will certainly stand all of us in good stead.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

From: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>

reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com

subject: **Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein**

RABBI CHAIM ZELIG FASMAN

My beloved friend and study partner from my yeshiva days in Chicago, Rabbi Chaim Zelig Fasman, passed away recently. I was really brought up very short and greatly distressed at learning of his passing. Even though seventy years and the space of great continents separated us, one never forgets or is really distant from one's learning partner – we studied together on a daily basis for nine years during our yeshiva days.

When I left the yeshiva, newly married and looking to find my way in life, I entered the practice of law and commerce. My learning partner, Rabbi Fasman, went on to study in one of the great Torah think-tanks of that time in American Jewish life, Beit Hatalmud, then located in the Bensonhurst neighborhood of Brooklyn.

This institution was the bastion of very intensive and analytic Talmudic study coupled with the ideas and philosophy of Lithuanian Jewish mussar. The founders and heads of that institution, after somehow surviving the Holocaust and years of exile in Shanghai, arrived haunted yet undaunted in spirit into postwar American Jewish life. Rabbi Fasman became a true disciple of these great personalities and to a large extent his passing now marks the end of that era and philosophy.

He was generous and sensitive to others, many times to a fault. Gentle in manner and in speech, he was iron in will, spirit and determination. He possessed within him a pioneering view of building a generation of Torah scholars and leaders. And, he chose Los Angeles to be the location of the institution that he founded, nurtured and expanded for decades, which literally changed the face of the Orthodox Jewish community in Los Angeles. He himself was the son of a great rabbinic figure, Rabbi Oscar Z, Fasman. His mother, Jeanette Fasman, was an extraordinary woman of influence and stature. So, he had a great heritage upon which to build his own life, family and the institution. And he did so in a very successful fashion, against many odds and a world of naysayers.

I remember the Los Angeles Jewish community of almost seventy years ago.

It was considered to be a wasteland as far as traditional Jewish life was concerned. Certainly no one ever imagined that the Los Angeles Jewish community would host and support an intensive kollel that would spread Torah in its midst. There was no shortage of those against the project and even to the very existence of such an institution in Los Angeles.

This was a generation that despaired of traditional Jewish life and said that it could not be done in America. This was followed by a generation that said that it could not be done outside of the communities that had a solid core of Orthodox Jews – such as New York, Chicago, etc.

So, Los Angeles fell into this category – with its physical, moral and social climate forbidding the success of such an institution. My beloved friend, Rabbi Fasman, proved them all wrong. And because of the institution that he founded and headed for these many past decades, the Los Angeles Jewish community has become a flourishing society of Torah study and intensive

Jewish life.

I am confident that there will be others from his family and his community that will continue his great work. The institution of the Los Angeles kollel will continue and prosper, but for me his passing leaves an irreplaceable void in my heart and psyche. There were so many shared experiences that we were partners to but I never imagined that somehow he would leave me.

But life is inexorable and there are no exceptions to our mortality. I am resigned and accepting but I grieve for the loss of such a person of nobility who always exemplified to me what the rabbis meant in Avot that a good friend can be the main focus of strength and security in one's lifetime. His loyalty was always unconditional and unshakable. He criticized what should have been criticized and encouraged when words of encouragement were required.

A good friend knows and keeps secrets, forgives transgressions and is never jealous or petty. This is why it is difficult in this world to really have a good friend in the full meaning of the words. That is why throughout Torah literature a good friend is regarded and described as a blood brother. I never had any biological brothers, but Rabbi Chaim Zelig Fasman filled that role for me during his lifetime. His memory will be a blessing not only for his immediate family but for all of Israel as well.

Shabbat shalom

Berel Wein

from: **Rabbi Yochanan Zweig** <genesis@torah.org>

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DEALING WITH ABUSE – RABBI YOCHANAN ZWEIG

Did I conceive this entire nation, did I give birth to it that You say to me carry them in your bosom like a nurse carries an infant... (11, 12)

Moshe describes his responsibility of leadership as a parent who cares for an infant. Rashi (ad loc) points out that HaShem outlined the extent of this responsibility when he first appointed Moshe: "And He commanded them (Moshe and Aharon) regarding Bnei Yisroel" (Shemos 6, 13): "Lead them with the understanding that they will stone you and insult you."

On the face of it, it seems kind of shocking. What kind of leader tolerates physical and psychological punishment? Perhaps even more perplexing - how does Moshe relate this responsibility to that of parenting an infant?

The Torah is teaching us an incredible lesson in both parenting and leadership. Every child "knows" that they were born because of their parents' self-interest, and upon superficial examination they would seem to be right. A case can certainly be made that having children is for our own self-interest: Whether it's to work in the family business or continue the family legacy or simply to escape mortality by having descendants that will be here long after we're gone, it's seemingly clear that having children is really in our own selfish interests.

In leadership it is even more glaringly clear, particularly when looking at today's political landscape. The United States has a presumed presidential nominee who is so obviously narcissistic and self-serving that the country's national self-interest is a distant second or even third to his personal agenda.

Obviously, as parents we hope that bringing children into this world isn't primarily driven by our own selfish needs. We strive to be giving, altruistic, and love unconditionally. On the other hand, we must keep in mind that our children will always look for reasons why we do what we do. Essentially, if they can explain that much of what we do is in our self-interest then they can rationalize that they don't owe us much as we aren't doing anything for their sake. This is a common mindset for one who is on the receiving side of kindness. Being on the receiving end of a largesse is discomfiting; therefore the natural response is to search for a motive behind the gift. Rationalizing that not much is owed in terms of appreciation, because the kindness was really self-serving in some manner for the benefactor, is how most people deal with this discomfort.

Unfortunately, we all make the mistake of criticizing our children in areas

where it becomes confusing as to if we are criticizing for the child's own good or merely because we are concerned for our own reputation. This can be criticism of how a child does in school, how he dresses, what profession he chooses, or even the spouse he chooses to marry. Are we being critical because we are trying to improve the child or because we are embarrassed by his actions, as if it is some failure on our part?

Obviously, as parents we want to believe that we are doing it for the right reasons. On the other hand, a child will naturally look at it as being due to our own ego and self-interest. This is why it is so important that we severely limit our criticism to issues that cannot be misconstrued as self-serving.

But even more importantly, the Torah is teaching us that being a good parent comes with the understanding that, as a parent, you're going to take abuse. In fact, that is the clearest way to send the message to your children that your parenting is for their sake not your own: If you're willing to put up with abuse, obviously the relationship is about what's good for them and not what's necessarily what's best for you.

This same lesson applies to leadership. Constituents are naturally going to look at everything their leaders do as being in their own self-serving interests. This is why HaShem commanded Moshe that he has to take the position with the understanding that there will be physical and psychological abuse. Being tolerant of those abuses is the only way a leader can relay the message that he is acting in the interest of the constituency not his own self-interest.

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>

reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

date: Thu, Jun 23, 2016 at 4:52 PM

From Despair to Hope – Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

There have been times when one passage in today's parsha was for me little less than life-saving. No leadership position is easy. Leading Jews is harder still. And spiritual leadership can be hardest of them all. Leaders have a public face that is usually calm, upbeat, optimistic and relaxed. But behind the façade we can all experience storms of emotion as we realise how deep are the divisions between people, how intractable are the problems we face, and how thin the ice on which we stand. Perhaps we all experience such moments at some point in our lives, when we know where we are and where we want to be, but simply cannot see a route from here to there. That is the prelude to despair.

Whenever I felt that way I would turn to the searing moment in our parsha when Moses reached his lowest ebb. The precipitating cause was seemingly slight. The people were engaged in their favourite activity: complaining about the food. With self-deceptive nostalgia, they spoke about the fish they ate in Egypt, and the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. Gone is their memory of slavery. All they can recall is the cuisine. At this, understandably, G-d was very angry (Num. 11:10). But Moses was more than angry. He suffered a complete emotional breakdown. He said this to G-d:

"Why have You brought this evil on your servant? Why have I failed to find favour in Your eyes, that You have placed the burden of this whole people on me? Did I conceive this whole people? Did I give birth to it, that You should say to me, Carry it in your lap as a nurse carries a baby? ... Where can I find meat to give to this whole people when they cry to me saying, Give us meat to eat? I cannot carry this whole people on my own. It is too heavy for me. If this is what You are doing to me, then, if I have found favour in Your eyes, kill me now, and let me not look upon this my evil." (Num. 11:11-15)

This for me is the benchmark of despair. Whenever I felt unable to carry on, I would read this passage and think, "If I haven't yet reached this point, I'm OK." Somehow the knowledge that the greatest Jewish leader of all time had experienced this depth of darkness was empowering. It said that the feeling of failure does not necessarily mean that you have failed. All it means is that

you have not yet succeeded. Still less does it mean that *you are* a failure. To the contrary, failure comes to those who take risks; and the willingness to take risks is absolutely necessary if you seek, in however small a way, to change the world for the better.

What is striking about Tanakh is the way it documents these dark nights of the soul in the lives of some of the greatest heroes of the spirit. Moses was not the only prophet to pray to die. Three others did so: Elijah (1 Kings 19:4), Jeremiah (Jer. 20:7-18) and Jonah (Jon. 4:3).² The Psalms, especially those attributed to King David, are shot through with moments of despair: “My G-d, my G-d, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps. 22:2). “From the depths I cry to You” (Ps. 130:1). “I am a helpless man abandoned among the dead ... You have laid me in the lowest pit, in the dark, in the depths” (Ps. 88:5-7).

What Tanakh telling us in these stories is profoundly liberating. Judaism is not a recipe for blandness or bliss. It is not a guarantee that you will be spared heartache and pain. It is not what the Stoics sought, *apatheia*, a life undisturbed by passion. Nor is it a path to *nirvana*, stilling the fires of feeling by extinguishing the self. These things have a spiritual beauty of their own, and their counterparts can be found in the more mystical strands of Judaism. But they are not the world of the heroes and heroines of Tanakh.

Why so? Because Judaism is a faith for those who seek to change the world. That is unusual in the history of faith. Most religions are about accepting the world the way it is. *Judaism is a protest against the world that is in the name of the world that ought to be.* To be a Jew is to seek to make a difference, to change lives for the better, to heal some of the scars of our fractured world. But *people don't like change.* That's why Moses, David, Elijah and Jeremiah found life so hard.

We can say precisely what brought Moses to despair. He had faced a similar challenge before. Back in the book of Exodus the people had made the same complaint: “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this desert to starve this whole assembly to death” (Ex. 16:3). Moses, on that occasion, experienced no crisis. The people were hungry and needed food. That was a legitimate request.

Since then, though, they had experienced the twin peaks of the revelation at Mount Sinai and the construction of the Tabernacle. They had come closer to G-d than any nation had ever done before. Nor were they starving. Their complaint was not that they had no food. They had the manna. Their complaint was that it was boring: “Now we have lost our appetite (literally, “our soul is dried up”); we never see anything but this manna!” (Ex. 11:6). They had reached the spiritual heights but they remained the same recalcitrant, ungrateful, small-minded people they had been before.²

That was what made Moses feel that his entire mission had failed and would continue to fail. His mission was to help the Israelites create a society that would be the opposite of Egypt, that would liberate instead of oppress, dignify, not enslave. But the people had not changed. Worse: they had taken refuge in the most absurd nostalgia for the Egypt they had left: memories of fish, cucumbers, garlic and the rest. Moses had discovered it was easier to take the Israelites out of Egypt than to take Egypt out of the Israelites. If the people had not changed by now, it was a reasonable assumption that they never would. Moses was staring at his own defeat. There was no point in carrying on.

G-d then comforted him. First He told him to gather seventy elders to share with him the burdens of leadership, then He told him not to worry about the food. The people would soon have meat in plenty. It came in the form of a huge avalanche of quails.

What is most striking about this story is that thereafter Moses appears to be a changed man. Told by Joshua that there might be a challenge to his leadership, he replies: “Are you jealous on my behalf? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit on them” (Num. 11:29). In the next chapter, when his own brother and sister begin to criticise him, he reacts with total calm. When G-d punishes Miriam, Moses

prays on her behalf. It is specifically at this point in the long biblical account of Moses' life that the Torah says, “The man Moses was very humble, more so than any other man on earth” (Num. 12:3).

The Torah is giving us a remarkable account of the psychodynamics of emotional crisis. The first thing it is telling us is that it is important, in the midst of despair, not to be alone. G-d performs the role of comforter. It is He who lifts Moses from the pit of despair. He speaks directly to Moses' concerns. He tells him he will not have to lead alone in the future. There will be others to help him. Then He tells him not to be anxious about the people's complaint. They would soon have so much meat that it would make them ill, and they would not complain about the food again.

The essential principle here is what the sages meant when they said, “A prisoner cannot release himself from prison.” It needs someone else to lift you from depression. That is why Judaism is so insistent on not leaving people alone at times of maximum vulnerability. Hence the principles of visiting the sick, comforting mourners, including the lonely (“the stranger, the orphan and the widow”) in festive celebrations, and offering hospitality – an act said to be “greater than receiving the Shekhinah.” Precisely because depression isolates you from others, remaining alone intensifies the despair. What the seventy elders actually did to help Moses is unclear. But simply *being there with him* was part of the cure.

The other thing it is telling us is that surviving despair is a character-transforming experience. It is when your self-esteem is ground to dust that you suddenly realise that *life is not about you.* It is about others, and ideals, and a sense of mission or vocation. What matters is the cause, not the person. That is what true humility is about. As C. S. Lewis wisely said: *humility is not about thinking less of yourself. It is about thinking of yourself less.*

When you have arrived at this point, even if you have done so through the most bruising experiences, you become stronger than you ever believed possible. You have learned not to put your self-image on the line. You have learned not to think in terms of self-image at all. That is what Rabbi Yohanan meant when he said, “Greatness is humility.” Greatness is a life turned outward, so that other people's suffering matters to you more than your own. The mark of greatness is the combination of strength and gentleness that is among the most healing forces in human life.

Moses believed he was a failure. That is worth remembering every time we think we are failures. His journey from despair to self-effacing strength is one of the great psychological narratives in the Torah, a timeless tutorial in hope.