

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

After her husband and sons passed away, Nu'umi left Moav, along with both of her Moavite daughters-in-law (Rus 1:6). After they had already left Moav (1:7) and were well on their way to "the Land of Yehudah" (ibid), Nu'umi tried to convince her daughters-in-law to go back to Moav, "each to her mother's house" (1:8-13). Urvah eventually listens to her mother-in-law, but Rus "clings to her" (1:14), and continues to travel with her back to Bais Lechem (1:19). This conversation happened a while after they had left the place that had been their home (1:6-7), necessitating a "return" to Moav by "traveling" back (1:8). Why did Nu'umi wait so long before trying to convince them not to return with her to Bais Lechem? Wouldn't there be some resentment at having them travel all that way and then have to travel all the way back? Shouldn't she have told them that they are better off staying in Moav while they were still in Moav, before they left?

Malbim suggests that all three agreed that they had to leave where they were because of all the troubles they had experienced there, but it was only Nu'umi who had decided that her final destination would be Bais Lechem. Later, after they had traveled a bit, when Rus and Urvah decided to stay with Nu'umi and move to Bais Lechem rather than moving elsewhere within Moav, Nu'umi tried to convince them to return home.

One of the manuscripts quoted in Tosfos HaShaleim asks why Nu'umi tried to convince them to return to non-Jewish homes, answering that she was embarrassed that her children had married non-Jews. It is unclear that Nu'umi had intended to return to Bais Lechem from the outset; she may have originally planned to move to a different part of the Land of Israel, where no one knew who she was. She had no money and no belongings (not even shoes, as they walked all the way from Moav to Bais Lechem barefoot, see Rus Rabbah 2:12), making it necessary for Rus to go out to the fields to pick up stalks of grain left inadvertently by workers (2:2) just so they could eat. It would be understandable if the formerly rich Nu'umi, who was from a noble family, preferred to live the life of a pauper in a place where no one recognized her. When she changed her mind and decided to move back home

anyway, since people she knew would see that her sons had married Moavites, she tried to convince them to return home. It is also possible that in her haste to leave Moav, it hadn't occurred to her that she would be embarrassed by who her sons had married. As she got closer to Bais Lechem, she realized the ramifications of returning with two Moavites, and tried to convince them to return to Moav.

The Vilna Gaon is among the numerous commentators who say Nu'umi didn't realize that Rus and Urvah were planning to stay with her all the way to Bais Lechem. She thought that they were just accompanying her for part of the way, and would eventually return to Moav. (Some suggest that this was in fact their original intent; they only decided to stay with her after they had traveled for a while.) When she realized that they were planning on leaving their native Moav forever, she tried to convince them not to. Others suggest that Nu'umi knew that they were planning to move with her back to Bais Lechem, but after having traveled for a while she sensed that Urvah was having second thoughts. Rather than embarrassing her by only addressing her (and not Rus), Nu'umi made her speech to both of them, thus allowing Urvah to return while Rus continued on.

Chazal (Rus Rabbah 2:12) tell us that along the way, they were discussing the laws of converting. There is much discussion regarding whether Rus and Urvah had converted before they married Nu'umi's sons, or if this discussion was part of Rus's conversion process. One of the issues that must be resolved if they had converted before their weddings, is how Nu'umi could send Urvah back if she was already Jewish. Rav Moshe Shternbuch, sh"lita, (Moadim U'zmanim) suggests that the Bais Din (Jewish court) in Moav (outside the Land of Israel) was only given the authority to make decisions through the Sanhedrin (Jewish Supreme court, in Israel), and they only gave the courts outside Israel the authority to convert sincere converts; if the convert turned out to not be sincere, the conversion wouldn't be valid. (Conversions done by courts that don't need special authority remain valid regardless.) Nu'umi's attempt to dissuade Rus and Urvah from staying with her was a way to test their sincerity. Rus passed the test, so her conversion was valid, while Urvah didn't, nullifying hers.

If trying to convince Rus and Urvah to go back home was a means of testing their initial sincerity, a delicate balance must be maintained. Pushing too hard

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NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE
WORLD WIDE WEB AT [HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG](http://AISHDAS.ORG).
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might cause them to return even if they really were sincere at the time of the conversion, but not pushing hard enough could prevent them from leaving even if they weren't. Having this conversation while still in Moav, before they left, might tempt them to stay even if the conversion was valid. Therefore, Nu'umi might have purposely waited until they were on the outskirts of Moav, when going back home wouldn't be too easy, but far enough away from Bais Lechem that continuing wasn't that easy either, in order to allow their decision to be based on their desire to be or Jew or not be a Jew rather than on how convenient or inconvenient it would be to stay in Moav or travel to Bais Lechem.

On the other hand, if they hadn't converted before they got married, this conversation was part of the conversion process. Part of the conversion process is trying to dissuade the potential convert from converting, and doing so numerous times. If Nu'umi knew before leaving Moav that Rus and Urpah were planning on moving to Bais Lechem permanently, she would have also known that they were planning on becoming Jews. It is therefore likely that even before they left, while still in Moav, Nu'umi tried to convince Rus and Urpah to stay in Moav rather than joining the Jewish people. Nevertheless, they both said they wanted to convert, so all three left for Bais Lechem. The next time Nu'umi tried to talk them out of converting, they had already traveled far enough to have to travel back to Moav if they changed their mind. Nu'umi tried again, and this time Urpah was persuaded to return home. The Megila only recorded the conversation that resulted in Urpah's change of plans (and Rus's emotional acceptance of Nu'umi's people and G-d); there was no need to tell us about the conversation that had occurred before they left Moav. Nu'umi hadn't really waited until they left Moav to have this conversation; we are only told about the conversation when it happened again later. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

And the nation became evil" (Numbers 11:1). From this week's reading of Beha'alotcha, the Book of Numbers takes a dramatic turn, ushering in the sin of the scouts, the rebellions of Korah and Zimri ben Salou, and the general squabbling which resulted in the

death of that generation in the desert.

The words which signal this destructive dénouement are difficult to translate: "And the nation became evil 'mit'onenim'" (Numbers 11:1), a word which only appears in the Bible this one time, and is generally translated as "complainers" (as if it had been written "mitlonenim"). How can we explain this sudden downward spiral? This turn of events is particularly surprising since Numbers began with such a positive and optimistic description of the tribes surrounding the Sanctuary, the Kohanim and Levites at their proper stations, and the army poised for the conquest of Israel.

I believe the answer is found in the midrashic name of this book: The Book of Censuses. Two censuses are taken: the first at the outset of Numbers, and the second in Chapter 26, in the midst of the Israelite rebellions against Moses. How the Israelites are to be identified for each census is radically different, and herein lies the reason for the apparent spiritual decline.

The first census is introduced as follows: "Take a census of the entire assembly of the children of Israel according to their families, according to their fathers' households, every male individually... everyone who goes out to the army of Israel" (Num. 1:2-2). Rashi explains that each individual is listed according to his tribe, his father's house, and his individual name; only those above the age of 20 - the minimum age for army service - were included. By contrast, Targum Onkelos interprets the word "l'mishpehotam" to mean "their children" rather than "their forebears," or "their tribes."

Even from a more general perspective, the "yihus" (familial status) that one accrues for oneself is far more important than the pedigree one receives from one's forebears. When I was the rabbi of Lincoln Square Synagogue, much of my time was spent match-making. I would often receive phone calls from out-of-town parents anxious about the impending shidduch between their child and someone about whom they knew little, asking: "And what about the family, the yihus?"

I had a stock response: "I guarantee you a better yihus than our King Messiah. After all, King David's had as his forebears a Moabite convert from an act of incest on his maternal side and the result of a forbidden sexual relationship between a man and his daughter-in-law on his paternal side."

Nevertheless, Rashi is still our most classical commentary, and since l'mishpehotam precedes leveit avotam (fathers' household) in the verse, a simple reading would favor Rashi's interpretation of "tribal forebears" over Onkelos's "children." Moreover, Rashi's interpretation helps us understand the crisis which occurred.

The second census has altogether different instructions: "Take a census of the entire assembly of the children of Israel according to their father's houses, all who go out to the army of Israel" (Num. 26: 2).

Missing are two crucial points found in the first census - the tribal background and the individual name.

Every good officer knows how important it is that each soldier has a sense of pride in his mission. This impetus derives from a historical tradition, a feeling of connectedness to a familial or tribal narrative for the sake of which the soldier is ready to sacrifice his life. Without this historical connection, the individual will be without the morale required to act with courage and commitment.

The Israelites at Sinai were imbued with the mission to be a "holy nation and kingdom of priest-teachers," to set out for Zion from whence the G-d of peace and morality would be revealed.

Somehow, they lost this sense of connectedness to their past during that first year in the wilderness. The Netziv explains the Hebrew "mit'onenim" as deriving from the phrase "anna v'anna," to wander hither and thither, without a moral compass. In the absence of connection to an idealistic past, they gave up their dream of a consecrated future - and had to die forlorn where they were. © 2011 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The flames that emanated from the lamps that were to be lit as part of the menorah lighting ritual in the Mishkan and later in the Temple in Jerusalem were to be facing towards the center stem of the great menorah itself. There is a difference of opinion amongst the rabbis as to whether the lamps themselves could be removed from the menorah or whether they were permanently affixed.

Be that as it may, all opinions seemingly agree that the lamps had to be lit in such a way that their wicks and the resultant flames faced inward towards the main stem of the menorah. The symbolism implicit in this detail of the ritual of lighting the lamps of the menorah is that all efforts of all different types of Jews are to be directed ultimately to one common cause and goal - the lighting of the menorah, which symbolizes the light of Torah and G-dly wisdom.

Many different people and groups may view this goal from different angles and traditions depending upon the place of their lamp in the menorah's superstructure, but all are required to look inward and to work together for this basic Jewish value of spreading the light of Torah in the world.

This was also the idea implicit in the idea that the kruvim - the forms of the two angels on the cover of the Holy Ark - faced each other. They covered the Ark of the Law and were united face to face in protecting and disseminating Torah to Israel. The Talmud teaches us that when they did not face each other, when they operated so to speak at cross purposes, it was a disastrous sign for the Jewish people.

There may be varying and differing ways to promote Torah and its value system but all these ways must converge face to face in a sense of unity of purpose. Looking away one from another only diminishes our chance of success in achieving this holy goal.

The honor and duty of lighting the menorah was reserved for the High Priest of Israel, the descendant of Aaron. Aaron himself was distinguished by the sense of harmony and unity he brought to Jewish life and society. He was able to take all of the different talents and traditions of twelve vastly different tribes of Israel and focus them together towards a common goal of national unity and Torah holiness. Therefore his direct descendants were charged with accomplishing this very same goal and this was symbolized for them in the daily lighting ritual of the menorah.

The concept of Jewish leadership was to foster a unity of purpose and a common national vision. It was never meant to divide and fracture Jewish society into squabbling groups. There are those in the Jewish world whose face is only turned towards the past, away from the realities and the issues that so desperately confront us.

There are those in the Jewish world who only face the present and have no connection any longer with the Jewish past thus depriving themselves of necessary perspective and historical experience. Only when all groups in the Jewish world face each other and combine their strengths in a positive fashion, will the light of the menorah again be lit in brightness and warmth. © 2011 *Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com*

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

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Parshas Beha'aloscha introduces two personalities about whom the Torah tells us very little. Nevertheless, according to certain sources Eldad and Meidad have a fascinating background. That which the Torah does tell us here about them, in light of this background, gives us new insight that is certainly worth pondering.

The nation complains to Moshe Rabbeinu, telling him they want meat. Moshe becomes frustrated with the people, shows his frustration to the Almighty ("Where will I find meat to feed this entire nation?") and finally confesses "I am not able to lead this entire nation by myself, it is too hard a job for me to handle." [Bamidbar 11:11-15].

G-d hears Moshe's request for help and commands him to gather 70 men from the elders of Israel and to have them join him in the Ohel Moed. "I

will come down and speak to you. You will be enveloped in prophecy and then I will miraculously take the prophetic spirit that is upon you and will share it with them." [Bamidbar 11:16-17]

Rashi cites the parable of the candle. Moshe is the lit candle; the 70 Elders, who until now have not "been lit?", will now have their wicks kindled, so to speak, by Moshe's candle. However, this in no way will diminish "the light of Moshe's candle."

This is exactly what happened. The seventy elders became deputized prophets, so to speak, and had the power of Moshe's prophecy transferred to them such that they too could prophesize. The Torah relates, however, that two people (Eldad and Meidad) remained in the camp. Rashi indicates that these two were supposed to be part of the 70 elders, but out of modesty, they refrained from joining the others. Rashi says that they used a lottery system to pick the 70 and these two were indeed picked, but they asked, "Who are we to merit receiving this Divine gift of prophecy?" Nevertheless, even though they did not join the others in the Ohel Moed, the spirit of prophecy was transferred to them as well and "they prophesized in the camp".

A young lad (Rashi identifies him as Gershom son of Moshe) ran to Moshe and reported that Eldad and Meidad were speaking words of prophesy in the camp. Yehoshua, upon hearing this states: "My master Moshe, put them in jail!" Moshe's response to Yehoshua is, "Are you being zealous for my sake? Would that the entire people of Hashem could be prophets, if Hashem would but place His Ruach upon them!" [Bamidbar 11:29]

Targum Yonasan ben Uziel teaches the amazing fact that Eldad and Meidad were half-brothers to Moshe Rabbeinu. How did that happen? We know based on the Gemara in Sotah that because of the decree of Pharaoh to throw the male children into the Nile River, Amram divorced his wife Yocheved. According to the Gemara, Amram was the leader of the generation and set an example that everyone else later emulated. Amram only remarried Yocheved after his daughter Miriam pointed out to her father that his decree was worse than Pharaoh's decree because it precluded Jewish girls from being born as well, while Pharaoh's decree only affected the males. Moshe was born from that remarriage.

According to the Tanna, Yonasan ben Uziel, during the period between her two marriages to Amram, Yocheved wanted to continue to have children and so she married Elzaphon ben Parnach and gave birth from him to two sons-Eldad and Meidad-during that brief marriage.

Let us ask a few questions about this amazing teaching: Here we have a situation where the Gadol haDor [leader of the generation] ruled that it was forbidden to bring children into the world while Pharaoh's decree was in effect and that therefore every married couple should separate. How could it be that

Yocheved went against the ruling of her former husband Amram, the Gadol haDor, remarried and brought two sons into the world?

Aside from this halachik question, let us ask a psychological question: Is it harder for a father to throw a baby into the river or for a mother to throw a baby into the river? Obviously, it is harder for a mother to do such a thing. How could it be that the father (Amram) said, "I can't bear to throw my baby into the river. I would rather separate from my wife and not have children." Yet, the mother (Yocheved) was willing to take her chances in this matter and was prepared to accept the fact that she may have to throw her baby in the river. Would a mother be capable of doing such a thing?

Finally, Yocheved was over 120 years old at this time. For her to still have babies required a miracle. Yet she expects to remarry and have babies after the Gadol HaDor paskened not to have babies! Why would she think the Almighty would perform a miracle for someone who transgressed the ruling of the leader of the Jewish nation?

Where is Yocheved coming from? She contradicts the ruling of the Gadol Hador, she contradicts the natural maternal instinct, and she expects a miracle from G-d despite her transgressing the ruling of the Gadol Hador! What was she thinking?

I heard from a great person that there can be only one interpretation for Yocheved's behavior. Yocheved had a clearer understanding of the Will of the Creator than did her husband Amram, the greatest personality of the generation. She was a daughter of Levi, a granddaughter of Yaakov Avinu. She was a generation closer to the Patriarchs than was Amram. The closer a person is generationally to the Patriarchs, the clearer the person's understanding of the Will of the Almighty will be.

Yocheved had the true understanding that such "calculations" are not for man to make. Man must do what G-d commands and then G-d needs to worry about the calculations. She was right and her husband the Gadol HaDor was wrong. The proof that she was right is Eldad and Meidad. They did not need the borrowed prophecy from Moshe Rabbeinu employed by the other Elders in the Ohel Moed. They had their own prophesy and it was superior to those of the other Elders. According to Rashi, the other Elders only prophesied for that one day and then it stopped. Eldad and Meidad, however, continued, to have the gift of prophesy. Their prophesy was more pristine, holier, more genuine and longer lasting than that of the other Elders. Why? They were the children of Yocheved, who demonstrated self-sacrifice to do the Will of the Creator.

We have always known that Yocheved was rewarded for her dedication to G-d by having great children (Moshe, Aaron and Miriam) descend from her [See Shmos 1:21; Rashi there]. Now we know the rest of the story. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Shavuot is a celebration of that moment when we, the Jewish people, were wed to G-d. Note the parallel between that moment and the wedding of bride and groom.

At Sinai, G-d and the people of Israel stood at the base of the mountain, "be-tahtit ha-har." (Exodus 19:17) Commenting on the word be-tahtit, the Midrash concludes that we, the Jewish people, were literally standing beneath the mountain - much like bride and groom stand under the huppah, the bridal canopy during the wedding ceremony.

At Sinai, G-d pronounces the words "ve-atem tihyu li...goy kadosh, and you will be to Me a holy nation." (Exodus 19:6) This formula is very similar to what the groom says to the bride when he places a ring on her finger - harei at mekudeshet li, behold you are betrothed to me.

At Sinai, G-d and the people of Israel signed a contract in the form of the ten declarations, aseret hadibrot. Bride and groom do the same - they enter into the marital agreement through the signing of a ketubah - a marital contract.

There are other traditions and rituals that point to a parallel between Sinai and a wedding ceremony. The Jews encircled Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:12) just as the bride circles the groom. There was lightning at Sinai. (Exodus 19:16) This is mirrored in the wedding ceremony as some have a tradition to carry lit candles to the huppah. In the end, the tablets were broken at Sinai. (Exodus 32:19) Similarly, a glass is shattered at the end of the nuptials. The Jewish people ate and drank at Sinai. (Exodus 24:11) In the same way, we also partake of a festive meal at a wedding celebration.

Thus, the Torah states, that "Moshe (Moses) brought the people forth from the camp toward G-d." (Exodus 19:17) Commenting on this sentence, the Midrash compares this moment to a groom and bride coming toward each other.

There are emotional considerations that point to a connection between divine and human love. For example, feeling the presence of G-d means, no matter how lonely one is, G-d is near. Love, in the human realm, is also a response to loneliness. Moreover, when we connect to G-d, we connect to eternity, as G-d, of course, lives forever. Eternity is also a central component of marriage as we attempt to transcend our own lives by having children. Finally, loving G-d and loving a fellow human being can both give one a sense of deep fulfillment and meaning in life.

I believe that only through the experience of blissful marital love can one understand love of G-d. While each partner in the relationship maintains her or his own individuality, love is the uniting of two souls. This gives one a sense of the absolute oneness of G-d.

Human love is also an emotion that is infinite in its scope, giving one a sense of the infinity of G-d. No wonder the Torah calls cleaving to one's spouse vedavak (Genesis 2:24), just as cleaving to G-d is called deveikut.

In one word: love of G-d and love of spouse and family interface. On this Shavuot, may each one show us the way to the other. © 2009 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI DR. ABRAHAM J. TWERSKI

TorahWeb

In commanding the mitzvah of sefiras haomer, the Torah says that we should begin counting "from the morrow of Shabbos" (Vayikra 23:15). The Talmud says that this on the morrow of the first day of Passover. Inasmuch as yom tov is a rest day, it is referred to as Shabbos. However, the Sadducees took this verse literally, that sefiras haomer must begin on Sunday, and Shavuos must always be on Sunday.

Bnei Yisaschar asks, "What is the point of the Torah referring to the first day of Passover as 'Shabbos,' thereby giving the Sadducees the option of misinterpreting it. Why did the Torah not simply say 'on the morrow of Passover?'"

Bnei Yisaschar explains the difference between Shabbos and the festivals. The festivals occur on a particular day of the month-e.g. Passover on the 15th of Nissan. Inasmuch as the calendar is determined by the Sanhedrin on the appearance of the new moon, the kedusha of the festivals is essentially dependent on the act of the Sanhedrin. Not so Shabbos, which occurs on the 7th day of the week, independent of the Sanhedrin. This is why we say, Baruch Ata Hashem, Mekadesh haShabbos, that Hashem sanctifies the Shabbos, whereas on the festivals we say Baruch Ata Hashem, Mekades Yisrael veHazemanim. Hashem sanctified Israel (i.e. the Sanhedrin), who, in turn, sanctified the festivals.

Passover was unique among the festivals, because the Jews of the exodus were not deserving of the revelation of Hashem. The angels said to Hashem, "In what way are the Israelites better than the Egyptians? They are both idolatrous." Yet, Hashem revealed Himself to them, as we say in the Haggada, "with great awe refers to the revelation of the Shechina." Thus, Passover was as unique as Shabbos, receiving a kedusha from Hashem. To indicate this, the Torah refers to Passover as "Shabbos."

Shavuos, too, was an extraordinary Divine revelation. When we say that Shavuos is zeman mattan Toraseinu, it is not only in the historic sense. We can experience mattan Torah today as our ancestors did then.

In medicine there is a "recall phenomenon." An infant is immunized with several injections, causing the body to build up a huge quantity of antibodies to the virus. Over a period of time, the antibodies disappear from the blood stream, so that years later, their presence is virtually undetectable. If, many years later, the person is given a "booster" injection, the body promptly produces a massive amount of antibodies, just as with the initial immunization. The body "recalls" the earlier experience and reproduces it.

So it is with the intense spirituality of mattan Torah. Even if we are not at a lofty level of spirituality, with proper observance of Shavuot, we can have a "recall phenomenon," re-experiencing the extraordinary spirituality of our ancestors' declaration of naaseh venishma.

Rav Shlomo Walbe in Alei Shur says that we should use our powers of imagery, to see ourselves at the foot of Sinai, seeing the mountain ablaze and trembling, hearing the thunder and shofar, seeing Moses standing atop the mountain, and hearing the voice of Hashem saying, "I am the Lord, your G-d." In this way, we can have a "recall phenomenon." Zeman mattan Toraseinu can refer to a current experience rather than only to a historic one. © 2011 Rabbi Dr. A.J. Twerski & The TorahWeb Foundation

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In this week's parsha, Moses has a breakdown. It is the lowest emotional ebb of his entire career as a leader. Listen to his words to G-d: "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? . . . I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me-if I have found favor in your eyes-and do not let me face my own ruin." (Numbers 11: 11-15)

Yet the cause seems utterly disproportionate to its effect. The people have done what they so often did before. They complain. They say: "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost-also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" (Numbers 11: 5)

Many times Moses had faced this kind of complaint from the people before. There are several such instances in the book of Exodus, including one almost exactly similar: "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." (Exodus 16: 3)

On these earlier occasions Moses did not give expression to the kind of despair he speaks of here.

Usually, when leaders faced repeated challenges, they grow stronger each time. They learn how to respond, how to cope. They develop resilience, a thick skin. They formulate survival strategies. Why then does Moses seem to do the opposite, not only here but often throughout the book of Numbers?

In the chapters that follow, Moses seems to lack the unshakable determination he had in Exodus. At times, as in the episode of the spies, he seems surprisingly passive, leaving it to others to fight the battle. At others, he seems to lose control and becomes angry, something a leader should not do. Something has changed, but what? Why the breakdown, the burnout, the despair?

A fascinating insight is provided by the innovative work of Prof. Ronald Heifetz, co-founder and director of the Center for Public Leadership at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.¹

Heifetz distinguishes between technical challenges and adaptive challenges. A technical challenge is one where you have a problem and someone else has the solution. You are ill, you go to the doctor, he diagnoses your condition and prescribes a pill. All you have to do is follow the instructions.

Adaptive challenges are different. They arise when we are part of the problem. You are ill, you go to the doctor, and he tells you: I can give you a pill, but the truth is that you are going to have to change your lifestyle. You are overweight, out of condition, you sleep too little and are exposed to too much stress. Pills won't help you until you change the way you live.

Adaptive leadership is called for when the world is changing, circumstances are no longer what they were, and what once worked works no more. There is no quick fix, no pill, no simple following of instructions. We have to change. The leader cannot do it for us.

The fundamental difference between the books of Exodus and Numbers, is that in Exodus, Moses is called on to exercise technical leadership. The Israelites are enslaved? G-d sends signs and wonders, ten plagues, and the Israelites go free. They need to escape from Pharaoh's chariots? Moses lifts his staff and G-d divides the sea. They are hungry? G-d sends manna from heaven. Thirsty? G-d sends water from a rock. When they have a problem, the leader, Moses, together with G-d, provides the solution. The people do not have to exert themselves at all.

In the book of Numbers, however, the equation has changed. The Israelites have completed the first part of their journey. They have left Egypt, reached Sinai, and made a covenant with G-d. Now they are on their way to the Promised Land. Moses' role is now

¹ Ronald Heifetz, Leadership Without Easy Answers, Harvard University Press; Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, Leadership on the Line, Harvard Business Press; Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky and Alexander Glashow, The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World, Harvard Business press.

different. Instead of providing technical leadership, he has to provide adaptive leadership. He has to get the people to change, to exercise responsibility, to learn to do things for themselves while trusting in G-d, instead of relying on G-d to do things for them.

It is precisely because Moses understands this that he is so devastated when he sees that the people haven't changed at all. They are still complaining about the food, almost exactly as they did before the revelation at Mount Sinai, before their covenant with G-d, before they themselves had built the sanctuary, their first creative endeavour together.

He has to teach them to adapt, but he senses - rightly as it transpires - that they are simply unable to change their pattern of response, the result of years of slavery. They are passive, dependent. They have lost the capacity for self-motivated action. As we eventually discover, it will take a new generation, born in freedom, to develop the strengths needed for self-governance, the precondition of freedom.

Adaptive leadership is intensely difficult. People resist change. They erect barriers against it. One is denial. A second is anger. A third is blame. That is why adaptive leadership is emotionally draining in the extreme. Many of the great adaptive leaders - among them Lincoln, Gandhi, John F. and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Anwar Sadat and Yitzhak Rabin - were assassinated. Their greatness was posthumous. Only in retrospect were they seen by their own people as heroes. At the time, they were seen by many as a threat to the status quo, to all that is comfortingly familiar.

Moses, with the insight of the greatest of the prophets, intuitively sees all this. Hence his despair and wish to die. It is far easier to be a technical leader than an adaptive one. It is easy to leave it to G-d, hard to realise that G-d is calling us to responsibility, to become His partners in the work of redemption.

Of course, the Torah does not leave it there. In Judaism, despair never has the last word. G-d comforts Moses, tells him to recruit seventy elders to share the burden of leadership with him, and gives him the strength to carry on. Adaptive leadership is, for Judaism, the highest form of leadership. That is what the prophets did. Without relieving the people of their responsibility, they gave them a vision and a hope. They spoke difficult, challenging truths, and they did so with a passion that still has the power to inspire the better angels of our nature.

But with devastating honesty - never more so than in its account of Moses' temporary breakdown - the Torah tells us that adaptive leadership is not easy, and that those who exercise it will face anger and criticism. They may come to feel that they have failed. But they have not. Moses remains the greatest leader the Jewish people has ever known, the man who almost single-handedly shaped the Israelites into a nation that never gave up or gave way to despair.

Nowhere is the difficulty of adaptive leadership more simply summarised than in G-d's words to Moses successor, Joshua.

Be strong and courageous, for you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. Be strong and very courageous to keep and obey all the law my servant Moses gave you . . . (Joshua 1: 6-7)

The first sentence speaks about military leadership. Joshua was to lead the people in their conquest of the land. The second verse speaks about spiritual leadership. Joshua was to ensure that he and the people kept faith with the covenant they had made with G-d. The first, says the verse, demands courage, but the second demands exceptional courage.

Change always does. To fight an enemy is hard, to fight with yourself harder still. To help people find the strength to change: that is the highest leadership challenge of all. ©2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI ZWEIG

Weekly Dvar

On Shavuot we received the Torah, where the Rabbis recount the Jews' proclamation that "we will do and we will hear" the laws of the Torah. The Rabbis explain that the other nations of the world were offered the Torah, and rejected it because they claimed that it was in their nature to steal and kill. But we know that both social and Noachide Laws both prohibit killing and stealing, so what was the reason for them to reject a law that they must already follow?

As Rabbi Zweig explains, to answer this question we must ask another: On the third day of creation, the earth was commanded to produce all trees, and that the branches should all taste like the fruits of that tree (1:11). The earth did create the trees, but not all branches tasted like the fruits. How is this possible? If G-d commanded the earth to produce something, how can it not? The answer is that G-d also created the ability to disconnect from G-d and nature, and that's what the earth did in that instance. By extension, anything that came from the earth, such as man, also contains the ability to disconnect from G-d (this was essential to give Man free choice).

With this perspective, it makes sense that when presenting the Torah, G-d was telling the nations that their true nature was not to want to kill or steal, but the nations were blinded by their disconnect, rejected this notion, and therefore couldn't accept the Torah (they still had to abide by the laws, but they rejected the notion that it was their nature to adhere to them). On the other hand, the Jews embraced this connection to G-d, and understood that doing G-d's will reinforces the connection that they already have, which is why they committed to doing before even hearing of all the laws. That's why doing good things makes us feel good, why

we feel guilty when we act improperly, and that's why Shavuot is so important to reconnect to the source of our being, and the purpose of our being here. © 2011 Rabbi Zweig & LeLamed, Inc.

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Our parashah opens with the command to Aharon to light the Menorah in the Mishkan. The third verse relates: "Aharon did so; toward the face of the Menorah he kindled its lamps, as Hashem had commanded Moshe." What is this pasuk teaching? Rashi writes: "Aharon did so-the verse speaks Aharon's praise, i.e., that he changed nothing."

How are we to understand this? asks R' Yaakov Kranz z"l (the Dubno Maggid; died 1805). Is there anyone who would deviate from what G-d had commanded him?

He explains with a parable: Three patients came to one doctor with the same serious illness, and the doctor gave each of them the same prescription. One of the patients was a simple fellow who understood nothing about his illness. He followed the doctor's instructions to the letter and was soon healed.

The second patient thought he knew something about medicine. He altered the doctor's instructions, taking only some of the medicines that had been prescribed. He did not recover from his illness.

The third patient also was knowledgeable about medicine, but he nevertheless followed the doctor's instructions. He also was healed.

The Torah is our prescription against the spiritual illness brought on by the yetzer hara, says the Dubno Maggid. And, the same three types of people can be found among Mitzvah-observing Jews. Some understand nothing and simply do the mitzvot. Others think they understand, and they pick and choose among the mitzvot. Finally, there are the scholars who do have some understanding of what lies behind the commandments, but they nevertheless do not try to "improve" on the mitzvot. This is the Torah's praise of Aharon-whether he thought he understood the commandments or not, he fulfilled them to the letter. (Quoted in Ve'karata La'Shabbat Oneg)

"Bnei Yisrael shall make the Pesach-offering in its appointed time." (9:2)

The word Pesach refers to the fact that Hashem passed-over ("pasach") the homes of Bnei Yisrael when He killed the firstborn of Egypt. After all the miracles before and during the Exodus, why does the name of the offering (and the holiday) commemorate this one detail?

R' Yitzchak Yerucham Borodiansky shlita (Yeshivat Kol Torah in Yerushalayim) explains: The fact that Hashem passed-over the homes of Bnei Yisrael is not a mere detail of the Exodus. Rather, it is a sign of

the hashgachah pratit / Divine providence with which Hashem relates to the Jewish People. That hashgachah pratit is the surest sign of the uniqueness of Bnei Yisrael; therefore, it is appropriate to highlight Hashem's passing-over the homes of Bnei Yisrael. (Siach Yitzchak: Shmot p.52)

"We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge; and the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic." (11:5)

R' Yosef Gikitila z"l (1248-1310; Spain; author of the influential work of kabbalah, Sha'arei Orah) writes: Although it was necessary that Bnei Yisrael be exiled and enslaved as part of their formative experience, it was an act of kindness on Hashem's part that He caused them to be enslaved in Egypt, where food was plentiful. This surely lessened the suffering compared to what it would have been in a place that lacked abundant food. Moreover, Hashem decreed that Bnei Yisrael would multiply rapidly, and Bnei Yisrael had many mouths to feed. Therefore, in His kindness, He exiled them to Egypt. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Tzofnat Paneach p.20)

"Moshe heard the people weeping in their family groups, each one at the entrance of his tent, and the wrath of Hashem flared greatly." (11:10)

R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (1910-1995; rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Kol Torah in Yerushalayim and one of the leading halachic authorities of the 20th century) observed that this verse serves as a criticism of those who mourn their own relatives who were killed in the Holocaust-"weeping in their family groups"-while failing to recognize the national tragedy. It is true, he said, that no one can grasp the full magnitude of the devastation; nevertheless, if one focuses on a Torah scholar who was killed, a yeshiva that was destroyed, or a town whose Jewish population was wiped-out, one can gradually develop an appreciation of what we lost. (Quoted in Minchat Avot p.50-51) © 2011 S. Katz & torah.org



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