

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

I have long been intrigued by one passage in this week's parsha. After a lengthy stay in the Sinai desert, the people are about to begin the second part of their journey. They are no longer travelling from but travelling to. They are no longer escaping from Egypt; they are journeying toward the Promised Land.

The Torah inserts a long preface to this story: it takes the first ten chapters of Bamidbar. The people are counted. They are gathered, tribe by tribe, around the Tabernacle, in the order in which they are going to march. Preparations are made to purify the camp. Silver trumpets are made to assemble the people and to give them the signal to move on. Then finally the journey begins.

What follows is a momentous anti-climax. First there is an unspecified complaint (Num. 11:1-3). Then we read: "The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, '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!' (Num. 11:4-6).

The people seem to have forgotten that in Egypt they had been slaves, oppressed, their male children killed, and that they had cried out to be freed by God. The memory Jewish tradition has preserved of the food they ate in Egypt was the bread of affliction and the taste of bitterness, not meat and fish. As for their remark that they ate the food at no cost, it did cost them something: their liberty.

There was something monstrous about this behaviour of the people and it induced in Moses what today we would call a breakdown:

He asked the Lord, "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 favour in Your eyes -- and do not let me face my own ruin." (Num. 11:11-15)

This was the lowest point in Moses' career. The Torah does not tell us directly what was happening to

him, but we can infer it from God's reply. He tells him to appoint seventy elders who would share the burden of leadership. Hence we must deduce that Moses was suffering from lack of companionship. He had become the lonely man of faith.

He was not the only person in Tanach who felt so alone that he prayed to die. So did Elijah when Jezebel issued a warrant for his arrest and death after his confrontation with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 19:4). So did Jeremiah when the people repeatedly failed to heed his warnings (Jer. 20:14-18). So did Jonah when God forgave the people of Nineveh, seemingly making nonsense of his warning that in forty days the city would be destroyed (Jon. 4:1-3). The Prophets felt alone and unheard. They carried a heavy burden of solitude. They felt they could not go on.

Few books explore this territory more profoundly than Psalms. Time and again we hear King David's despair:

I am worn out from my groaning.

All night long I flood my bed with weeping
and drench my couch with tears. (Ps. 6:6)

How long, Lord? Will You forget me forever?

How long will You hide Your face from me? (Ps. 13:1-2)

My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?

Why are You so far from saving me so far from my
cries of anguish? (Ps. 22:2)

Out of the depths I cry to You, Lord... (Ps. 130:1)

And there are many more psalms in a similar vein.

Something similar can be traced in modern times. Rav Kook, when he arrived in Israel, wrote, "There is no one, young or old, with whom I can share my thoughts, who is able to comprehend my viewpoint, and this wearies me greatly." (Igrot ha-Ra'ayah 1, 128)

Even more candid was the late Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik. Near the beginning of his famous essay *The Lonely Man of Faith* (pg. 3), he writes, starkly: "I am lonely." He continues, "I am lonely because at times I feel rejected and thrust away by everybody, not excluding my most intimate friends, and the words of the psalmist, 'My father and my mother have forsaken me,' ring quite often in my ears like the plaintive cooing of the turtledove." This is extraordinary language.

At times of loneliness, I have found great solace in these passages. They told me I was not alone

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in feeling alone. Other people had been here before me.

Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Jonah and King David were among the greatest spiritual leaders who ever lived. Such, though, is the psychological realism of Tanach that we are given a glimpse into their souls. They were outstanding individuals, but they were still human, not superhuman. Judaism consistently avoided one of the greatest temptations of religion: to blur the boundary between heaven and earth, turning heroes into gods or demigods. The most remarkable figures of Judaism's early history did not find their tasks easy. They never lost faith, but sometimes it was strained almost to breaking point. It is the uncompromising honesty of Tanach that makes it so compelling.

The psychological crises they experienced were understandable. They were undertaking almost impossible tasks. Moses was trying to turn a generation forged in slavery into a free and responsible people. Elijah was one of the first Prophets to criticise kings. Jeremiah had to tell the people what they did not want to hear. Jonah had to face the fact that Divine forgiveness extends even to Israel's enemies and can overturn prophecies of doom. David had to wrestle with political, military and spiritual challenges as well as an unruly personal life.

By telling us of their strife of the spirit, Tanach is conveying something of immense consequence. In their isolation, loneliness, and deep despair, these figures cried out to God "from the depths," and God answered them. He did not make their lives easier. But He did help them feel they were not alone.

Their very loneliness brought them into an unparalleled closeness to God. In our parsha, in the next chapter, God Himself defended Moses' honour against the slights of Miriam and Aaron. After wishing to die, Elijah encountered God on Mount Horeb in a "still, small voice." Jeremiah found the strength to continue to prophesy, and Jonah was given a lesson in compassion by God Himself. Separated from their contemporaries, they were united with God. They discovered the deep spirituality of solitude.

I write these words while most of the world is still in a state of almost complete lockdown because of the coronavirus pandemic. People are unable to gather. Children cannot go to school. Weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs and funerals are deprived of the crowds that

would normally attend them. Synagogues are closed. Mourners are unable to say Kaddish. These are unprecedented times.

Many are feeling lonely, anxious, isolated, deprived of company. To help, Natan Sharansky put out a video describing how he endured his years of loneliness in the Soviet Gulag as a prisoner of the KGB. From dozens of reports from those who endured it, including the late John McCain, solitary confinement is the most terrifying punishment of all. In the Torah, the first time the words "not good" appear are in the sentence "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18).

But there are uses of adversity, and consolation in loneliness. When we feel alone, we are not alone, because the great heroes of the human spirit felt this way at times -- Moses, David, Elijah and Jonah. So did modern masters like Rav Kook and Rabbi Soloveitchik. It was precisely their loneliness that allowed them to develop a deeper relationship with God. Plumbing the depths, they reached the heights. They met God in the silence of the soul and felt themselves embraced.

This is not to minimise the shock of the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences. Yet we can gain courage from the many individuals, from biblical times through to more modern ones, who felt their isolation deeply but who reached out to God and found God reaching out to them.

I believe that isolation contains, within it, spiritual possibilities. We can use it to deepen our spirituality. We can read the book of Psalms, re-engaging with some of the greatest religious poetry the world has ever known. We can pray more deeply from the heart. And we can find solace in the stories of Moses and others who had moments of despair but who came through them, their faith strengthened by their intense encounter with the Divine. It is when we feel most alone that we discover that we are not alone, "for You are with me." *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to Aaron and say to him, 'When you set up the lamps, see that all seven light up the area in front of the lampstand.'" (Numbers 8:1-2) This week's Biblical portion of BeHa'alotchah contains an important insight into the necessary qualities and major functions of our rabbis. Our Torah reading of last week, Naso, concluded with the various offerings of the Princes of the tribes at the dedication of the desert Sanctuary, forerunner of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

This week's reading begins with the kindling of

the menorah, the seven candlestick branches made of pure gold, each culminating in a golden flower with three branches emanating from either side of the central tree-like branch, and seven flames spreading warmth and enlightenment within the most sacred area and beyond. The operative verse which describes this magnificent accoutrement is “the candle is commandment, and Torah is light” (Prov. 6:23).

Rashi, the classical Biblical commentary, is apparently disturbed by the placement of the Menorah in our portion; it seems to have belonged in the Book of Exodus which describes the inner furnishings of the Sanctuary, including the Menorah (Ex 25:31-40). Rashi therefore opens his interpretation of our portion with the words of the Midrash (Tanhuma 5):

Why this juxtaposition of the description of the lighting of the Menorah with the offerings of the Princes of the tribes? It is because when Aaron saw the dedication of the Sanctuary, he became upset that he had not been included in the dedication offerings and ceremonies; neither he nor his tribe of Kohanim. The Holy One Blessed be He said to him, “By your life, your contribution is greater than theirs; you will kindle and clean the candlesticks.”

What was so special about kindling the Menorah? It happened early in the morning, without audience or fanfare, and seemed like an almost janitorial duty of turning on the lights?

I would suggest that there were two central furnishings in the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum of our Sanctuary: the sacred ark, which housed the Tablets of Stone, and the Menorah. The former, with the Torah in splendid seclusion behind the curtains, was meant for Israel alone, to form a “holy nation”; the latter, with its warmth and light spreading round-about was the Torah meant for the world, the Torah which would go forth from Zion, the word of the Lord which would emanate from Jerusalem to the nations.

The Midrash (Mekhilta de Rabbi Yishmael, Parshat Yitro, Parsha Aleph) teaches that the Revelation at Sinai was given in a desert, a parousia, rather than on the Temple Mount in order to teach us that the Torah was not meant for the Jews alone, but rather for all of humanity. Just prior to the Revelation, Israel is charged by God to be a “Kingdom of Kohanim,” teachers to all of humanity (Seforno, ad loc Ex 19:6), purveyors of a God of love, compassion, morality and peace. This universal charge is given to the Jews to become a sacred nation (otherwise they would hardly be an example to emulate), a nation of Kohanim to convey our teaching to the world (Isaiah 2, Micah 4, Zechariah 7,8,9). This is the true significance of the Kohen’s kindling of the Menorah and spreading the message of Torah beyond the Sanctuary to the world.

It is our duty to demonstrate to the world that we have righteous decrees and ordinances (Deut. 4:8); and it is our laws, our unique life-style, which now that

we have our Jewish State, we must share with the world. (Deut. 26:18-19). It is the Kohen Gadol in the days of the Messiah or the Rabbis and Jewish educators today, who must convey these righteous laws which will inspire the rest of the nations to accept our God of compassion and peace. They must be our ambassadors to the world, those who must bring the light and the warmth of Torah bring thereby blessing to all the families on earth (Gen 12:1-3).

It is not by accident that the Menorah is shaped like a tree, which grows and produces fruit, it is the “personification” of halakhah, a progressing and moving teacher of morality and sensitivity. How we treat the stranger and would-be convert, how we deal with the hapless woman chained to a recalcitrant husband who won’t let her go, is the test of the justice of our laws and the fitness of our Rabbis to be our decisors; our Torah must be righteous and compassionate. (See Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, the last chapter of the Laws of Servants). ©2020 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In this week’s Torah reading we hear an oft repeated refrain uttered by many in the generation that found itself in the desert of Sinai. They said that we want to return to Egypt. The present is too difficult, and the future is too uncertain so let us go home to Egypt which we were familiar with and where we knew what to expect.

All human beings fear uncertainty. The future is always somewhat terrifying because of its unknown quality. We lack the self confidence to know that we can somehow overcome all difficulties, even those which are currently not apparent. There is always that inner voice within that bids us to attempt to return to a known past rather than to advance to an uncertain future.

This psychological weakness permeates the entire series of events which are reflected in the Chumash of Bamidbar. There is security in the past, even in a past that was not pleasant or congenial. We see this in the Jewish world today when people want to return to the eastern European past that can never be renewed, instead of attempting to create a great future which will be relevant to its time.

This statement of let us return to Egypt is therefore representative not only of the generation of the desert but it is something that we hear repeated often throughout all Jewish history and in our time as well. It is a seductive statement but a dangerous one. Even if we wish to do so, there never was an ability to return to Egypt and to recast the world as it once was instead of what it is.

As we emerge from the scourge of the Corona epidemic, we again hear within us the refrain to return

to what was – to the world that we knew just a few short months ago. However, that is a false hope and an unrealistic view of the matter. No matter how we will judge current events there can be no question that the world has changed and that certainties we had may no longer remain. It is the uncertainty of the future that is now descending upon us that makes us anxious and somewhat frightened.

Human beings and especially the Jewish People are extremely adaptable and capable of facing the challenges of the unknown future. It is within our power to renew our self confidence and to proclaim that we are willing and able to undertake building a newer and morally healthy and humanly beneficial society. Because of this we will have an opportunity that has not been granted too many times, to mold and shape the Jewish future in a productive and holy fashion. We should appreciate having such an opportunity and make certain that we do not squander it on nostalgia and, even worse, on repeating errors of the past. Going back to Egypt has never been a positive solution. ©2020 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Moshe (Moses) had many qualities that we should emulate. Yet, the quality that he was most famous for was his humility. In the words of the Torah, “now the man Moshe was very humble above all people.” (Numbers 12:3) How does one attain this most important quality?

Maimonides argues that in life one should always try for the middle road, the golden mean. Humility, however, is so difficult to achieve, that one should try to go to the extreme, becoming absolutely self-effacing. Unable to reach that level, one will fall short and settle on the middle level.

Thus, when Moshe is told that two men, Eldad and Meidad were prophesying in the camp, he was not upset. Being so humble, he thought little of his prophetic ability. Feeling unworthy, he declares, “if only all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put His spirit upon them.” (Numbers 11:29)

A closer look at this story suggests an opposite idea. Moshe’s graciousness may reflect not meekness, but self-confidence. Assured of his own capabilities, he is not threatened by others who are prophesying.

Herein lies an important message. Humility doesn’t require people to think little of themselves. Created in the image of God, we should all feel a sense of self-worth in our abilities to succeed. Humility, however, is the recognition that whatever our strengths, they are blessings from God.

And, it is vital to remember that with blessings

come responsibility to reach one’s full potential.

A story teaches this lesson. The great Chafetz Chaim was among the humblest of people. Once, on a train, a fellow passenger, who did not recognize the rabbi, lauded the Chafetz Chaim to his face. The Chafetz Chaim responded that he knew him personally and knew that he actually had many weaknesses. The passenger was outraged and slapped him. When coming to the next town, and realizing who he had slapped, he begged the great rabbi for forgiveness.

“No” responded the Chafetz Chaim. “There is no need to apologize. I was wrong to belittle myself.”

The upshot: humility should not be associated with putting oneself down. Rather, it is the recognition of strength, while acknowledging the role of God and others in our achieving success. ©2020 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 DAVID LEVIN

The Make-Up Pesach

In Parashat B’ha’alotcha we find the commandment for the B’nei Yisrael to celebrate the second bringing of the Korban Pesach. The B’nei Yisrael are given this mitzvah even though they are in the desert, and there is a difference of opinion in Halacha as to whether the bringing of the Korban Pesach was required in the desert. The Korban Pesach is not brought again until the B’nei Yisrael enter Eretz Yisrael forty years later. This second Korban Pesach was possible only because they had completed the dedication of the Temple, did not leave Har Sinai, and were not yet commanded to begin their journey into Eretz Yisrael. They were able to circumcise all the newborn males, so there were no children who were ineligible to participate in the Korban.

An interesting problem occurred that year. The dedication of the Mishkan took place on Rosh Chodesh Nisan. It was followed by the eight days of the inauguration of the Kohanim. On that eighth day, Nadav and Avihu, the two eldest sons of Aharon, brought a “strange fire” into the Mishkan which resulted in their death. Two men, Misha’el and Eltzafan, were given the responsibility of burying them. This resulted in making Misha’el and Eltzafan ritually unclean for seven days. On the last day of their tum’ah, the fourteenth of Nisan, they went to the mikvah and were sprinkled with the ashes of the Red Heifer. They were then totally purified, but only with the coming of nightfall. This disqualified them from bringing the Korban Pesach on the fourteenth. Even though they would be pure in the evening when the Korban Pesach was eaten, they were ineligible since they were ineligible to bring the korban “at its set time”.

The Torah tells us, “There were men who had

been made impure by a human corpse and could not make the Pesach offering on that day so they approached before Moshe and before Aharon on that day. 'We are impure through a human corpse, why should we be left out by not offering Hashem's offering in its set time among the Children of Israel?'" They became impure not through any fault of their own but through a selfless act of burying someone who had died. They had been assigned this task by Moshe, and their complaint was entirely justified.

The solution that Hashem gave these men is one which applies not only to them in this particular incident but also to others in the future who find themselves in similar circumstances. One month later on the fourteenth of Iyar, these men were to bring a Korban Pesach and eat from it that night. This day is known as Pesach Sheini or the Second Pesach. There is no other such mitzvah that exists with a "second chance". We do not find that if one inadvertently missed hearing the shofar on Rosh Hashanna that we listen to it a month later and this would enable us to fulfill the mitzvah. What is it about the Korban Pesach that was so unique?

HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the term used by the Korban Pesach of "at its set time" may convince us that the Korban Pesach was not to be omitted in any circumstance, even in impurity. There is the concept of "its time is permanently established" and the concept of "a community sacrifice", which are brought even in impurity. In this case, impurity is superseded by "at its set time". The Korban Pesach is a unique Korban since it is both a community sacrifice and an individual one. As a community sacrifice, if the majority of the community is impure because of a corpse, the Korban Pesach is still brought and the impurity recedes in place of "at its set time". This does not apply to any other kind of impurity nor does it apply to a situation when only a smaller number of individuals are in a state of impurity. The question that these men had was whether the subjective obligation of the individual was so much integrated in the general obligation of the community that they were required to bring the Korban Pesach "at its set time" even in a state of individual impurity.

The holiday is known by three names. Chag HaPesach it is not talking about the Passover holiday as we know it. That holiday is called Chag HaMatzot. Chag HaPesach refers to the bringing of the Korban Pesach on the afternoon of the fourteenth of Nisan prior to the evening of the Seder meal. Chag HaMatzot is known as Z'man Cheiruteinu, the Time of our Freedom. Chag HaPesach precedes this time yet is a vital prelude to the holiday. Without the bringing of the Korban Pesach, there could have been no Z'man Cheiruteinu. Was Freedom a time when they were "left alone" with no limits or restrictions to their actions? Were they now to be free and unfettered with

responsibilities? Hashem demonstrated that one needed guidelines and limits in everything. Only through accepting a set of mitzvot could one be truly free from being a slave to either Man or a false concept of Truth.

Rabbi Meir Goldwicht adds to our understanding in an essay concerning the holiday of Shavuot. He quotes the Magen Avraham who asks why we celebrate Shavuot on the fiftieth day after the first day of Pesach as the "Time of the Giving of our Torah", when the Torah was given on the fifty-first day. He explains that the fiftieth day was really the day of "the receiving of the fear and respect of Hashem". Without accepting fear, one cannot truly accept the Torah. The same concept applies here with the Korban Pesach. Without accepting being limited in our Freedom by Hashem's laws, we could not possibly understand what true Freedom is.

It is this understanding that drove these men to seek out Moshe and Aharon. They knew the importance of demonstrating that they understood the unique significance of the Korban Pesach, and they questioned whether they should bring the Korban even if they were impure. Hashem acknowledged their desire and instituted the idea of Pesach Sheini. Hashem chose to postpone this "second chance" until one month later when the date itself would assist in remembering the significance of this lesson.

It is not an easy decision to restrict one's life. We do not like to feel burdened by responsibilities and limited in our choices. Yet without those burdens and limitations we will find it difficult to understand what is right and just. Today's society has lost track of those limitations. Every action is justified, every cause deemed righteous, every perversion deemed truth. We must once again remember the significance of the message of Pesach Sheini, that without limits we cannot understand real Freedom. © 2020 Rabbi D. Levin

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Sounding the Trumpets

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Bamidbar 10:9 presents the mitzva of sounding trumpets during wartime ("When you are at war in your land"), and during a time of trouble ("against an enemy who oppresses you"). Some require that both these conditions be present for the mitzva to be in effect. This leads the *Avnei Nezer* to ask whether we should blow the trumpets only for a voluntary war, or also for a *milchemet mitzva* (obligatory war). After all, since G-d has guaranteed us a successful outcome, one might posit that it is not considered a time of trouble. During the war against Jericho (which was a *milchemet mitzva*), they blew the *shofar* and not the trumpets (*Yehoshua* 6:2). This would seem to prove that blowing the trumpets is limited to a voluntary war.

While some limit the trumpet-blowing to a voluntary war, others offer a different limitation. The *Pri Megadim* points out that the verse uses the word “*be-artzechem*” (“in your Land”). He explains that this is the reason that in his time (18th century) the trumpet was not blown for trouble, as this was limited to trouble in the Land of Israel (or, by extension, trouble for the majority of the world’s Jews).

With this background, we can understand why Rav Shraga Feivel Frank (*HaMa’ayan*, 1970) exhorted people to blow trumpets near the *Kotel* in contemporary times of trouble. He argued that this would fulfill the mitzva.

In wartime, the trumpets are sounded as part of a special prayer service designed for this purpose. This prayer service is similar to that of *Mussaf* on Rosh Hashanah, with verses of *Malchuyot* (G-d’s kingship), *Zichronot* (asking G-d to remember), and *Shofarot* (about times when a *shofar* was sounded). Some maintain that the trumpets are blown in the battlefield itself, as we see from historical descriptions of the wars of the Maccabees.

Similarly, when our soldiers return from war or when they celebrate victory, they should celebrate and sound the trumpet. This is what King Yehoshaphat did when he returned victorious from the wars against Ammon and Moab. As it states, “For G-d had given them cause for rejoicing over their enemies. They came to Jerusalem to the house of G-d, to the accompaniment of harps, lyres, and trumpets” (*II Divrei HaYamim* 20:27-28). As a result, “The terror of G-d seized all kingdoms of the land when they heard that G-d had fought the enemies of Israel. The kingdom of Yehoshaphat was untroubled, and his G-d granted him respite on all sides” (*ibid.* 29-30). ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

For Mine is every firstborn of the Children of Israel, man and beast; I consecrated them to Me at the time I struck all the firstborn in Egypt.” (Bamidbar 8:17) Rashi and others say that it is a matter of right that the firstborn belong to Hashem since He saved them during the final plague, the killing of the firstborn, in Egypt. The bechorim would have been the ones to serve in the Mishkan and the Bais HaMikdash had it not been for the fact that later some of them would sin with the Golden Calf.

Because they did, the Levi'im were given that role instead, which they chose when Moshe called, “Whoever is for Hashem come to me!” Then, they avenged Hashem’s honor by slaying those who worshiped the Golden Calf. By doing so, they stepped in to appropriate the role that the firstborn had previously possessed.

If we look at what happened, we may be

curious about Hashem’s claim to the firstborn as His servants. He says they became His “as a matter of right” when He saved them from death during the slaying of the firstborn. But who brought that plague upon the world? Hashem! How can He utilize this as a reason for them to be bound to serve Him if the danger Hashem saved them from was one that He caused to begin with?!

There is another strange item here, but it can help us understand what’s really going on. Hashem said, “All the firstborn are Mine, man and beast.” If Hashem was looking for servants, why does He need the firstborn animals? They can’t serve Him in the Mishkan! It must be that the idea of Hashem’s acquisition is not simply to have people who are bound to serve Him by dint of some debt for having spared their lives.

Rather, the idea is that when Hashem set a clear boundary between the Egyptian first born and those of the Children of Israel, He was making a declaration. Just as a groom says, “You are consecrated to me with this ring according to the laws of Moshe and Israel,” and this creates a bond of marriage, so did Hashem establish a special relationship with the B’nai Yisrael by showing that they were different than the Egyptians. He showed that He had chosen us to be His beloved. We are so dear to Him that even our animals are special and different than the animals of other nations.

Quite often, we find ourselves suffering through challenges and difficulties in our lives. Most of the time, we make it through them and come out stronger. That’s because Hashem is supporting us and helping us through the perils that He designed to show that we are very beloved by Him and that we are connected to Him through thick and thin.

Let’s not make the mistake of those who served the Golden Calf imagining that there was some other power but His. Don’t ascribe troubles to those who mistreat us or seek to harm us. They are merely pawns in Hashem’s plan, and He is behind all the moves; Ain Od Milvado, there is nothing but Him. Instead, appreciate the statement Hashem is making when He puts us through hardship and then saves us: I love you and want you for Myself.

A professor entered his classroom one day with a large jar. He filled it with stones and asked the class if it was full. They responded that it was. He then took out a bag of gravel and poured it into the jar. As the small pebbles settled between the larger rocks, he repeated his question.

“NOW it is full,” they replied. He then took out a bag of sand and emptied into the jar, watching as it filled in the even smaller spaces. “Ah...” said the class with understanding. “NOW it is completely full!” At this point, the professor took out a bottle of water and poured it into the jar.

"NOW it is full," he declared. "It is important to realize that even when we think we know all there is to know, there are many more opportunities to learn and grow." ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Beha'alotcha begins with G-d instructing Aaron to light the Menorah with the candles facing its center (8:2). Rashi explains that Aaron felt dejected because his tribe was not listed in the preceding list of tribe offerings. G-d was addressing his disappointment by giving Aaron a task that is more eternal than a one-time offering. However, why would G-d need anyone's help in lighting the Menorah? The Midrash explains that this was to elevate the Jewish nation as a whole, but how does this act of Aaron lighting the Menorah comfort Aaron's feelings and elevate an entire people?

Rabbi Henach Leibowitz answers by describing two levels of chesed (kindness). The basic level of kindness is compassion for the plight of others, while the higher level stems from a feeling of love. The difference lies in the way others receive these acts. While accepting kindness may leave the recipient feeling indebted, giving compelled by love makes the recipient feel loved, wanted, and appreciated. When G-d asked Aaron to light the Menorah, He was making Aaron a partner. Giving and helping from a place of love and acceptance has the potential to change not only all our interactions but the world. ©2020 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"Miriam and Aharon spoke against Moshe regarding the Cushite woman he had married..." (Bamidbar 12:1) At the end of this week's parsha, Miriam and Aharon consult about their brother's marital relationship. Apparently Tzipporah, their sister-in-law, had let slip a complaint about being married to a prophet of God, and they thought that maybe they should try to bring Moshe back down to earth a little, for the sake of his family.

In the end, it turned out that they had been in the wrong, and God told them so. Miriam ended upon with tzara'as, and according to the Talmud, Aharon as well. Apparently they had spoken loshon hara about Moshe, and even though it had been for all the right reasons, God still took them to task for it.

At the heart of the matter is a separate mitzvah, the obligation to judge another to the side of merit. If Miriam and Aharon had assumed that Moshe Rabbeinu had good reason for his actions, their loshon hara would never have occurred, and neither would the tzara'as that came as a result.

The Talmud, when discussing this seemingly

very important mitzvah also provides examples of the extent to which it goes (Shabbos 127b). The first example is of a wealthy man who could not pay his worker what he owed him. The worker asked for his money, and when his employer said that he had none, the worker then asked for other things of value, just to get paid before returning home to his family. He did not wish to come home to his family empty-handed.

No such luck. To each request the employer said no, each time saying he was unable to comply but never giving a reason why. When the worker figured he had run out of options, he threw his sack over his shoulder and headed home disheartened. But never once did he ask his employer for an explanation, or accuse him of lying and trying to shortchange him. He just accepted the answers and his fate and went on his non-merry way.

Shortly after the holiday, the employer loaded up his donkeys with food, drink, and money. Then he headed off for his employee's home. After feasting with him and paying him his due, he asked his worker, "When I told you I had no money, possessions, produce, etc.," what did you suspect?

For each thing, the employee gave a reason that absolved his employer of any wrongdoing. Each time, though he could have easily suspected his employer of no-good, the worker instead assumed that some unforeseen circumstance had come up, that had prevented his employer from making good on his debt. As heartbroken as he had been to have worked so hard and not bring anything home to his family to show for it, he never allowed himself to turn against his employer. He always judged his boss to the side of merit.

Then came the punchline: "Everything you assumed in my merit was exactly what had happened. As you have judged me to the side of merit, may God always judge you to the side of merit."

The story gets at least two "Wows." The first "wow" is for the employee who had the wherewithal to judge his employer to the side of merit to such an extreme. I think that most people would have started with the accusations and arguing much earlier, especially while making their humble request on such a wealthy estate. I know my yetzer hara has a difficult time believing in the honesty of others, especially in situations similar to this one.

The second "wow" is for how every weird situation the employee had imagined, had actually been the weird truth. To be right about one or two of them would have been something. But ALL of them? It seems a little much, yet the Talmud reports that's the way it was.

The truth is that in everyday life we've all seen how our negative assumptions about people or situations can end up being wrong, as logical as they seemed at the time. A lot of the time there IS a good reason for what doesn't work out the way WE plan. The

"egg" ends up on our face, not on the face of the assumed guilty party. The point of the Talmud therefore should be well-taken.

The only problem with the stories from the Talmud (there are two) is the language used. When the employer later questions his worker about his assumptions, and the rebi, his students about his behavior, they don't ask, "What did you think..." or "What was your assumption." They instead say, "What did you SUSPECT me of?" THEY suspect that the other side has SUSPECTED them, who could have asked in turn, "What did YOU suspect ME of suspecting YOU?"

There is a phrase, "kabdayhu v'chashdahu -- honor and suspect." It means that even when you suspect someone of no good against you, still show them respect while keeping an eye out for what they might do. Had Gedaliah ben Achikam approached his "guest" this way, perhaps he would not have been assassinated by him, and the Babylonian exile would not have been so total.

On the other hand, perhaps Gedaliah was trying for something loftier. Maybe he was saying, "Even though I have great reason to suspect my guest as someone dangerous to me, I will fight off that urge and judge him to the side of merit anyhow!" Perhaps his approach to suspicion is the one the Talmud is trying to teach us.

The employer knew full well that all the evidence was against his claims, and that his employee had every right to suspect him of fraud. Though he may have "honored" him by not yelling, "Liar! How can you possibly have no money to pay me when you are surrounded by your own wealth!" he had to have at least harbored such feelings in his heart, and justifiably so.

The "chiddush" was that the employee didn't even think such accusations to himself. Instead, as the Talmud later reveals, he devised all kinds of answers to the circumstances that left his employer innocent and honorable. And not only had he been right, thanks to Divine Providence that wanted to MAKE him right, but he was rewarded for it, in this world and the next one.

The moral of the Talmud: Great is the person who can suspect and honor someone who seems to be suspicious. Even greater is the person who not only honors them, but doesn't suspect them at all, finding legitimate reasons for what appears to everyone else as transgressions.

The only question is about Gedaliah. He was neither rewarded in this world or the next one for his complete turning of the other cheek. On the contrary, it cost him his life, and cost the Jewish people the only thread of independence that they had left after Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed the Temple and exiled the rest of the nation. What was the difference?

What was the difference? We must keep in

mind the person you are dealing with. If someone's reputation of deceit precedes them, meaning they have indeed been proven to be dangerous on some level, then it becomes one's halachic obligation to keep an eye on them. The mitzvah to guard one's health alone dictates this. In some instances, you may not even have to honor them at all.

But if the person under suspicion has no previous record of guilt, or just the opposite, if they have been known for their honesty, then you should ONLY honor them, and not suspect them. Not only will they not pose a threat to you, but if for some reason, they have changed their ways, God will see to it that they will not harm you.

Surely Moshe Rabbeinu fit that bill. As God tells Moshe's well-meaning siblings, "You're talking about the great Moshe Rabbeinu, humblest man on the face of the earth, completely trusted in My house, and the greatest prophet that will have even lived! There was nothing to suspect him of...AT ALL!"

It is ironic that God inflicted them with tzara'as. As Rashi points out back in Parashas Tazria, tzara'as means having to go into quarantine. This is because people, through their loshon hara, end up distancing people from one another, like a husband and a wife, for example. In this case, Miriam and Aharon had spoken as they had to in order to devise a way to bring husband and wife closer!

There is another lesson for the person who does not judge a "good" person to the side of merit. Your suspicions about them, even with the best of intentions, will only backfire, accomplishing the opposite of what might have been intended for good. It may not be the main point of the parsha, but it is certainly a crucial one. ©2020 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

