

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

David Brooks, in his best seller, *The Road to Character*, (Allen Lane, 2015) draws a sharp distinction between what he calls the rsum virtues -- the achievements and skills that bring success -- and the eulogy virtues, the ones that are spoken of at funerals: the virtues and strengths that make you the kind of person you are when you are not wearing masks or playing roles, the inner person that friends and family recognise as the real you.

Brooks relates this distinction to the one made by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik in his famous essay, *The Lonely Man of Faith*. (Doubleday, 1992) There he speaks of Adam I -- the human person as creator, builder, master of nature imposing his or her will on the world -- and Adam II, the covenantal personality, living in obedience to a transcendent truth, guided by a sense of duty and right and the will to serve.

Adam I seeks success. Adam II strives for charity, love and redemption. Adam I lives by the logic of economics: the pursuit of self-interest and maximum utility. Adam II lives by the very different logic of morality where giving matters more than receiving, and conquering desire is more important than satisfying it. In the moral universe, success, when it leads to pride, becomes failure. Failure, when it leads to humility, can be success.

In that essay, first published in 1965, Rabbi Soloveitchik wondered whether there was a place for Adam II in the America of his day, so intent was it on celebrating human powers and economic advance. Fifty years on, Brooks echoes that doubt. "We live," he says, "in a society that encourages us to think about how to have a great career but leaves many of us inarticulate about how to cultivate the inner life."

That is a central theme of Behaalotcha. Until



now we have seen the outer Moses, worker of miracles, mouthpiece of the Divine word, unafraid to confront Pharaoh on the one hand, his own people on the other, the man who shattered the tablets engraved by G-d himself and who challenged Him to forgive His people, "and if not, blot me out of the book You have written" (Ex. 32: 32). This is the public Moses, a figure of heroic strength. In Soloveitchik terminology, it is Moses I.

In Behaalotcha we see Moses II, the lonely man of faith. It is a very different picture. In the first scene we see him break down. The people are complaining again about the food. They have manna but no meat. They engage in false nostalgia: "How we remember the fish that we used to eat in Egypt for free! And the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic!" (Num. 11: 5). This is one act of ingratitude too many for Moses, who gives voice to deep despair. "Why did You bring all this trouble to your servant? Why haven't I found favor in your eyes, that You are placing the burden of this entire people on me! Did I conceive this people or give birth to them, that You tell me to carry them in my lap the way a nurse carries a baby... I cannot carry this whole nation! The burden is too heavy for me! If this is how you are going to treat me, please kill me now, if I have found favor in your eyes, because I cannot bear seeing all this misery!" (Num. 11: 11-15).

Then comes the great transformation. G-d tells him to take seventy elders who will bear the burden with him. G-d takes the spirit that is on Moses and extends it to the elders. Two of them, Eldad and Medad, among the six chosen from each tribe but left out of the final ballot, begin prophesying within the camp. They too have caught Moses' spirit. Joshua fears that this may lead to a challenge to Moses leadership and urges Moses to stop them. Moses answers with surpassing generosity, "Are you jealous on my behalf. Would that all G-d's people were prophets and that He would rest his spirit on each of them" (Num. 11: 29). The mere fact that Moses now knew that he was not alone, seeing seventy elders share his spirit, cures him of his depression, and he now exudes a gentle, generous confidence that is moving and unexpected.

In the third act, we finally see where this drama has been tending. Now Moses' own brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, start disparaging him. The cause of their complaint (the "Ethiopian woman" he had taken as wife) is not clear and there are many interpretations. The point, though, is that for Moses, this is the "Et tu

Brute?" moment. He has been betrayed, or at least slandered, by those closest to him. Yet Moses is unaffected. It is here that the Torah makes its great statement: "Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than any other man on the face of the earth" (Num. 12: 3).

This is a novum in history. The idea that a leader's highest virtue is humility must have seemed absurd, almost self-contradictory, in the ancient world. Leaders were proud, magnificent, distinguished by their dress, appearance and regal manner. They built temples in their own honour. They had triumphant inscriptions engraved for posterity. Their role was not to serve but to be served. Everyone else was expected to be humble, not they. Humility and majesty could not coexist.

In Judaism, this entire configuration was overturned. Leaders were to serve, not to be served. Moses' highest accolade was to be called eved Hashem, G-d's servant. Only one other person, Joshua, his successor, earns this title in Tanakh. The architectural symbolism of the two great empires of the ancient world, the Mesopotamian ziggurat (the "tower of Babel") and the pyramids of Egypt, visually represented a hierarchical society, broad at the base, narrow at the top. The Jewish symbol, the menorah, was the opposite, broad at the top, narrow at the base, as if to say that in Judaism the leader serves the people, not vice versa. Moses' first response to G-d's call at the burning bush was one of humility: "Who am I to lead?" (Ex. 3: 11). It was precisely this humility that qualified him to lead.

In Behaalotecha we track the psychological process by which Moses acquires a yet deeper level of humility. Under the stress of Israel's continued recalcitrance, Moses turns inward. Listen again to what he says: "Why have you brought all this trouble to your servant?... Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth?... Where can I get meat for all these people?... I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me." The key words here are "I," "me" and "myself." Moses has lapsed into the first person singular. He sees the Israelites' behaviour as a challenge to himself, not G-d. G-d has to remind him, "Is the Lord's arm too short"? It isn't about Moses, it is about what and whom Moses represents.

Moses had been, for too long, alone. It was not that he needed the help of others to provide the people with food. That was something G-d would do without the need for any human intervention. It was that he needed the company of others to end his almost unbearable isolation. As I have noted elsewhere, the Torah only twice contains the phrase, *lo tov*, "not good," once at the start of the human story when G-d says that "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2: 18), a second time when Yitro sees Moses leading alone and says, "What you are doing is not good" (Ex. 18: 17). We

cannot live alone. We cannot lead alone.

As soon as Moses saw the seventy elders share his spirit, his depression disappeared. He could say to Joshua, "Are you jealous on my behalf?" And he is undisturbed by the complaint of his own brother and sister, praying to G-d on Miriam's behalf when she is punished with leprosy. He had recovered his humility. We now understand what humility is. It is not self-abasement. C. S. Lewis put it best: humility, he said, is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less. True humility means silencing the "I." For genuinely humble people, it is G-d, and other people and principle that matter, not me. As it was once said of a great religious leader, "He was a man who took G-d so seriously that he didn't have to take himself seriously at all."

"Rabbi Jochanan said, Wherever you find the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, there you find His humility." (Megillah 31a) Greatness is humility, for G-d and for those who seek to walk in His ways. It is also the greatest single source of strength, for if we do not think about the "I," we cannot be injured by those who criticise or demean us. They are shooting at a target that no longer exists.

What Behaalotecha is telling us through these three scenes in Moses' life is that we sometimes achieve humility only after a great psychological crisis. It is only after Moses had suffered a breakdown and prayed to die that we hear the words, "The man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone on earth." Suffering breaks through the carapace of the self, making us realise that what matters is not self regard but rather the part we play in a scheme altogether larger than we are. Lehavdil, Brooks reminds us that Abraham Lincoln, who suffered from depression, emerged from the crisis of civil war with the sense that "Providence had taken control of his life, that he was a small instrument in a transcendent task." (Ibid., 95)

The right response to existential pain, he says, is not pleasure but holiness, by which he means, "seeing the pain as part of a moral narrative and trying to redeem something bad by turning it into something sacred, some act of sacrificial service that will put oneself in fraternity with the wider community and with eternal moral demands." This, for me, was epitomized by the parents of the three Israeli teenagers killed last summer, who responded to their loss by creating a series of awards for those who have done most to enhance the unity of the Jewish people -- turning their pain outward, and using it to help heal other wounds within the nation.

Crisis, failure, loss or pain can move us from Adam I to Adam II, from self -- to other-directedness, from mastery to service, and from the vulnerability of the "I" to the humility that "reminds you that you are not the centre of the universe," but rather that "you serve a larger order." (Brooks, *ibid.*, 263)

Those who have humility are open to things greater than themselves while those who lack it are not. That is why those who lack it make you feel small while those who have it make you feel enlarged. Their humility inspires greatness in others. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Speak unto Aaron, and say unto him: when you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the menorah." (Numbers 8:2) Is it permissible to study science and philosophy in the beit midrash (religious study hall)? Should a yeshiva curriculum include "secular" studies?

Our Torah portion opens with the kindling of the seven lights of the branches of the menorah, specifically ordaining that it be kindled by the kohen-priests and that it be beaten of gold, in one piece, from "its stem until its flower" (Numbers 8:4).

At first glance, it would seem that this biblical segment is misplaced; its more natural setting would have been the portions of Teruma or Tetzaveh in the Book of Exodus, which deal with the Sanctuary, its sacred accoutrements and the task of the kohen-priests in ministering within it. Why revisit the menorah here, in the Book of Numbers?

The classical commentary by Rashi attempts to provide a response: "Why link this segment of the menorah to the segment of the tribal princes (which concludes the previous Torah portion)? Because when Aaron saw the offerings of the princes (at the dedication of the Sanctuary), he felt ill at ease that he was not included with them in the offerings, neither he nor his tribe. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, 'By your life, your contribution is greater than theirs; you kindle and prepare the lights'" (Rashi, Numbers 8:2).

Why would such a task give comfort to Aaron? Since when is cleaning and kindling a candelabrum a greater honor than participating in the opening ceremony of the Sanctuary? We cannot expect to penetrate the significance of Rashi's words (which are taken from Midrash Tanhuma 8) unless we first attempt to understand the significance of the menorah.

At first blush, the lights of the menorah symbolize Torah: "For the commandment is a candle, and Torah is light," teaches the psalmist. But the ark (aron kodesh) is the repository of the Tablets of Stone, and that is what represents Torah in the Sanctuary.

Moreover, the menorah has a stem, or trunk, and six branches which emanate from it, each with its respective flowers – together making seven lights. And the "goblets" on the branches are "almond-shaped" (meshukadim, cf. Ex. 25:33) reminiscent of the almond

tree, the first tree to blossom and thus the herald of spring. The imagery is certainly that of a tree.

If the Sanctuary symbolizes a world in which the Almighty dwells – "And they shall make for me a Sanctuary so that I may dwell among them," a world of perfection manifesting the Divine Presence and its consummate goodness and compassion – then the Sanctuary symbolizes a return to Eden, to universal peace and harmony.

If so, the menorah may well represent the Tree of Life – after all, Torah is aptly called "a tree of life to all who grasp it" – or perhaps a tree of knowledge, especially since the ancient Greek tradition speaks of "the seven branches of wisdom," paralleling the seven branches of the menorah (including the central stem). One may even suggest that the menorah is the amalgam of both trees together: Torah and wisdom united in one substance of beaten gold, a tree of life-giving and life-enhancing learning when the light of Torah illumines every branch of worldly wisdom.

I believe that this fundamental unity encompassing Torah and all genuine branches of wisdom was recognized clearly by the Sages of the Talmud. Indeed, from their viewpoint, all true knowledge would certainly lead to the greatest truth of all, the existence of the Creator of the Universe.

Hence the Talmud declares: "Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi in the name of bar Kappara: 'Anyone who has the ability to understand astronomy/astrology [the major science of Babylon] and does not do so, of him does the Scripture say, 'Upon the words of the Lord they do not gaze and upon the deeds of His hands they do not look'" (B.T. Shabbat 75a).

The Sages are saying that one cannot begin to properly appreciate the world without a grounding in the sciences.

The 12th-century philosopher-legalist Maimonides also understood the crucial inter-relationship between what is generally regarded as secular wisdom and Torah. He begins his halakhic magnum opus Mishne Torah with the Laws of Torah Fundamentals, which includes cosmogony, philosophy and science.

He concludes the fourth chapter in saying that these studies are necessary for anyone desirous of learning about God, the command to love, know and revere God. Most amazing of all, Maimonides ordains that the scholar must divide his learning time into three segments: one third for the Written Torah, one third for the Oral Torah, and one third for Gemara: and Gemara includes extracting new laws, as well as science and philosophy! Apparently, an advanced yeshiva led by Maimonides would include in its curriculum the study of science and philosophy as a means of understanding the world, human nature and God.

Let us now return to the relationship between

the task of the kohen-priest in the Sanctuary. If indeed the menorah represents knowledge in its broadest sense, enlightenment in terms of the seven branches of wisdom, the tree of knowledge, then the duty of the kohen-priest becomes clear. All of knowledge, indeed the entire world, may be seen as "matter"; Torah must give "form," direction and meaning to every aspect of the material world and the life which it breeds.

The kohen, who is mandated to "teach the Torah laws to Israel," must prepare, clean and purify the lights of the menorah. This is the highest task of Torah and the greatest calling of the kohanim: to utilize all branches of knowledge to bring us closer to the God of love, morality and peace. ©2022 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

One of the tasks of the Priests in the Tabernacle and in the Temple was the rekindling of the great Candelabra on a daily basis. We are taught in this week's Torah reading that the Priest had to keep the flame, with which he was lighting the wicks of the lamps, next to those wicks until the lamp wick caught hold and was able to burn by itself. Over the ages, this has become the metaphor for Jewish parenting - for Jewish education itself. The parent or the teacher is responsible for the child or the student, just as the Priest was responsible for the wicks until they were lit.

The task of the parent/teacher is that the child/student will sustain himself or herself spiritually, socially, financially, and psychologically, after having been given the necessary life tools. I was a child at a time when children were considered adults by the time they reached puberty and their teenage years. However, in our more modern era childhood extends far beyond even the teenage years. Many children and students do not achieve any sort of true independence until they are well into their twenties, and sometimes even later than that.

The question then arises: is the responsibility of the parent/teacher open ended, i.e., does it remain, no matter how long it takes for the child or the student to truly become independent? Is the parent/teacher still on the hook, so to speak, to provide aid, sustenance, financial support and means for survival? Since it is not clear to us when the flame of independence and self-sufficiency is truly able to burn on its own, there arises a situation where the obligations of the parent, the educational system and even of society generally appears to remain unlimited. This type of dependency eventually becomes self-destructive, and certainly cannot be what the Torah had in mind for the Jewish family and the Jewish society.

The goal of parenting and of education is to produce people who are well-balanced, to provide their child/student – the next generation, with the necessary

tools for self-reliance and independence of thought and action. There is a window of time for such an opportunity. In my opinion, that window closes quickly as time progresses. The options remaining in life for someone in their 30s or 40s are far fewer than the options that existed when they were in their 20's.

Keeping the outside flame on the wick of the lamp of the candelabra for too long does not enhance the flame nor will it light the candelabra. Rather, it creates a situation of danger, containing too much fire, and is counterproductive in its purpose of lighting the lamps of the candelabra itself. So, too, a wise parent and/or a devoted teacher will eventually see the productivity of removing that outside fire and letting the wick burn on its own, to radiate its own life. Every human being is unique and holy. Every human being is entitled to its own lamp and light. ©2022 *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

For Nachmanides, prayer is a function of human distress so piercing that it leads one to fully rely upon God. In his words: That we pray to Him in times of distress [b'et hatzarot], and that our eyes and hearts be directed toward Him like servants in the hands of their masters. And this is the meaning of the verse "And when you come to war in your land against an enemy who has besieged you, and you will sound the trumpets and be remembered before the Lord your God" (Numbers 10:9). And it is a commandment to call out [litzok] to God for every distress that comes upon the community. (addendum to Sefer Hamitzvot, positive commandment 5)

Note that Nachmanides emphasizes our calling out to God, not God's response. While the request for God's intervention is an implicit part of prayer, it is not, in Nachmanides's view, prayer's fundamental goal. The foundation of prayer in the view of Nachmanides is the reaching out to God in our times of greatest loneliness and despair. Whatever the outcome, prayer allows us the possibility of forging an intimate relationship with God. Whatever the future brings, we are no longer alone.

The idea that the essence of prayer can be found in the individual's feeling close to God rather than in God's response finds expression in the words of Rabbi Dr. Eliezer Berkovits: In its original form, prayer is not asking God for anything; it is not a request. It is a cry; an elementary outburst of woe, a spontaneous call in need; a hurt, a sorrow, given voice. It is the call of human helplessness directed to God. It is not asking, but coming with one's burden before God. It is like the child's running to the mother because it hurts. It is not

the bandage that the child seeks instinctively but the nearness of the mother, to unburden his heart to the one of whose love he is certain. (Prayer, 28)

For Nachmanides, God's primary role in prayer is that of listener. Yes, prayer can impact a decree, but that is not its primary purpose. In the most basic sense, the purpose of prayer, according to Nachmanides, is to establish a "fellowship" with God.

This is "prayer as feeling God's embrace."
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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 DAVID LEVIN

Unintentional Gossip

I have always been amazed that the two incidents of *lashon hara* (gossip) found in the Torah are both connected to Moshe Rabbenu. The first occurs in Parashat Sh'mot, when Moshe responds to Hashem that the B'nei Yisrael will not listen to him. Hashem makes his hand leprous, a punishment for gossip, as one of the signs that he was sent by Hashem. The second case is found in our parasha this week, B'ha'alotcha, where Miriam and Aharon speak about Moshe's separation from his wife Tziporah. Miriam develops leprosy and must be isolated from the camps of the B'nei Yisrael for a week until she can return. Both incidents are unusual in their very nature and do not fit into the general mode of what we think of as *lashon hara*.

When Moshe met with Hashem on Har Sinai before first going into Egypt, he did not intentionally speak *lashon hara* about the B'nei Yisrael. Moshe was really speaking about himself and his lack of speaking ability, which he believed would affect the way that the B'nei Yisrael would greet him and his message from Hashem. "And Moshe answered (Hashem) and he said, 'and they will not believe me and they will not listen to my voice because they will say that Hashem did not appear to you.'" Moshe believed that he was incapable of speaking before Par'oh or the B'nei Yisrael. When Moshe said that the B'nei Yisrael would not believe him, it was because they would think that Hashem would not send someone to save them who could not speak clearly. In that context, Moshe's answer to Hashem might not be considered *lashon hara* about the B'nei Yisrael. Yet our Rabbis attribute this act to *lashon hara*.

Miriam and Aharon have a different concern. When Moshe asked Hashem for assistants to lead the B'nei Yisrael, Hashem also gave them *n'vu'ah*, prophecy. Two of those who were chosen continued to prophesy after the others had stopped. Miriam was concerned for their wives if they were to continue to speak with Hashem. Moshe was so spiritual that he and Tziporah had separated from each other so that he could be ready at any time to respond to Hashem's call. Miriam was worried for Eldad and Medad's family life. Her intention was not to spread gossip about

Moshe and Tzipporah. but instead to warn Eldad and Medad and their families about the consequences of their prophecy.

It is important to understand the nature of Miriam's sin. According to Midrash, Miriam overheard Tzipporah lamenting the possible fate of the wives of the new "prophets". Tzipporah was concerned for these wives. She was willing to make this sacrifice for her husband, but could other women be so selfless? Most meforshim do not say that Miriam spoke with the B'nei Yisrael about this problem, but that she spoke with Aharon. Miriam was concerned that Moshe had accepted upon himself a stringency that was not commanded by Hashem. The second pasuk here explains her question: "And they said was it only with Moshe that Hashem spoke (?), did He not also speak with us(?), and Hashem heard." HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch points out that Miriam's concern was that she and Aharon were "prophets" in that Hashem had spoken to them, yet they did not separate from their spouses. The forefathers also spoke with Hashem but did not separate from their wives. If Moshe had created a stringency for himself, would his example be applied to them also?

According to Hirsch, Moshe was actually commanded by Hashem to separate from his wife. When all of the B'nei Yisrael were at Sinai, they separated from their spouses for three days in order to be prepared to hear the Word of Hashem directly. When Hashem had finished speaking, He told Moshe to tell the people, "Return for yourselves to your tents." (Devorim, 5: 27). This was their permission to resume family relations. But to Moshe Hashem said, "And you stand here with Me and I will speak to you." (5:28). Moshe, because of his humility, did not publicize his special relationship with Hashem. That is the reason for the next pasuk, "And the man, Moshe, was very humble from all of mankind on the face of the land."

Miriam and Aharon had presumed that both the forefathers and they had the same level of prophecy as did Moshe. They did not comprehend the uniqueness of Moshe's relationship with Hashem. That is the reason for Hashem's explanation of that uniqueness in the next few p'sukim. "And He said listen please to my words, if he were one of your prophets I, Hashem, would make myself appear in a vision to him in a dream I would speak to him. Not so my servant Moshe, in all My house he is trustworthy. Face to face I will speak with him and through seeing and not in riddles, and the "image" of Hashem he will behold, and you do not fear to speak against My servant Moshe?"

Miriam's punishment was unique, also. Were it not that Miriam was punished directly by Hashem and sent out of the camp by Him, she could not have been labeled a metzora'at. Only a Kohen can officially say that a person is a m'tzora. Yet a Kohen may not judge a blood relative as there would be a personal conflict.

As Aharon's sister, Miriam was a close relative of all of the Kohanim at that time. Only Hashem could label her a m'tzora'at and send her out of the camp. Hashem also understood that Miriam's sin was unintentional. She was not trying to harm Moshe or to belittle his greatness. Her only concern was for the spouses of the new prophets. That is why Hashem could say in advance that she would be cured after seven days without being examined by the Kohen to determine if this one-week isolation was sufficient.

We normally think of a person who speaks lashon hara as a person who has issues with himself. His jealousy causes him to speak unkindly of others. But lashon hara is a difficult sin because it has so many ways in which we may innocently transgress it. Perhaps it is for this reason that Miriam's case is the one which the Torah chooses to portray in its entirety. We must be warned that it is easy to speak lashon hara in spite of our diligence. Even with the best of intentions, our actions may still transgress the Law. May we strive to be very careful not to speak lashon hara even when gossip and harm are not our intention.

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RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"Mouth to mouth I speak to him; plainly and not in riddles... (Bamidbar 12: 8) When Miriam found out that Moshe had separated from and divorced his wife Tzipora, she was critical of his decision to separate from her. She reasoned that Hashem had spoken to Aharon and to herself, but they nevertheless remained in their marital relationships.

Hashem, Himself, spoke out against her error in speaking ill of Moshe, explaining that Moshe was unlike other prophets. Whereas other prophets were spoken to in unclear, dream-like manners, Moshe was spoken to clearly, as if face-to-face with Hashem.

Rashi, here, explains that Hashem was telling Miriam that He was the one Who commanded Moshe to separate from his wife, and therefore she should not have spoken against her brother for his actions. When Hashem told Moshe to tell the Jews to return to their tents, He continued, "And you shall stay here with Me." This was when Moshe was instructed to separate from his wife.

The troubling thing about this is that the Gemara (Shabbos 87a) tells us this was one of three actions which Moshe decided to do based on his own reasoning, which Hashem later condoned and agreed to. (The other two were breaking the luchos and adding a day of separation to the Jews prior to the giving of the Torah.) Tosfos there says it must be that Moshe initially separated and then Hashem agreed, or else why would Aharon and Miriam take issue with it?

Rather, Tosfos explains, Moshe first separated from his wife and then Hashem made His declaration

that Moshe remain with Him (and not return to his wife.) Miriam took issue with it because if Moshe had not initiated the move, Hashem would not have directed him to do so. He only did so because of the rule, "In the way a person wishes to go, he is guided." If so, how can Rashi here say definitively that Hashem declared it was His idea?

Perhaps we can understand that indeed, as the Gemara says, Moshe made a Kal v'Chomer, the inference that if the Jews knew when Hashem was speaking to them, and they had to separate from their spouses for three days prior, then he, who could be spoken to by Hashem without warning, had to remain pure at all times.

What then was meant by Hashem saying, "I told him to separate?" Something striking and unique. Hashem said "I speak to Moshe mouth-to-mouth." If it was only referring to clarity, it should have said face-to-face. Rather, Hashem was saying that Moshe is at the level where My words come from his mouth!

Yes, Moshe decided for himself to separate, but that was not because he wished to separate from his wife. It was because he understood what Hashem wanted from him and Hashem gave Moshe the opportunity to show he was able to commune with Hashem to such a level that he instinctively understood what to do.

Therefore, Hashem told Miriam not to question Moshe, for he had surpassed all prophets who hear Hashem, to become one who can hear Hashem even before he is spoken to. Peh el peh was appropriate because when Moshe spoke, it was really Hashem talking.

The Brisker Rov had some Baalei Batim (congregants) who questioned his decisions and felt they were more attuned to what HaKadosh Baruch Hu demands of us than he. They derided him saying, "Why should we listen to you? Who says that you know Da'as Torah?"

Rabbi Soloveitchik calmly responded, "I am confident in my decisions. Perhaps you are correct, and I do not know Da'as Torah. However," he said with a wry smile, "I do know Da'as Baalei Batim, so I just need to rule the opposite way." ©2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

Do Not Forget

The receiving of the Torah was the most significant event in the history of the Jewish people. Not only does the Yom Tov of Shavuot revolve around the experience of Har Sinai, but we are also commanded to never forget the events that occurred on that first Shavuot. We are given a two-fold commandment, "Do not forget what you have seen... and transmit them to your children and grandchildren" (Devarim 4:9) What precisely must we be careful not to forget? What

exactly are we to impart to the next generations?

We are taught (Pirkei Avos 3:10) that one must be exceedingly careful not to forget what one has learned, and one who forgets even one word of what he has learned is in violation of the prohibition mentioned above. Although one who tries to retain the information studied and doesn't succeed does not violate this prohibition, the essence of this halacha is to emphasize the significance of remembering as much Torah knowledge as possible. The corollary of this prohibition is the positive commandment to transmit all of our knowledge to our children.

There is a dispute between Rabbeinu Yona, the Rambam, and the Ramban as to the precise nature of this dual commandment. Rabbeinu Yona in his commentary to Pirkei Avos explains why the Torah insists that we not forget what we have learned. One who forgets will inevitably commit errors in his mitzvah observance. According to Rabbeinu Yona the Torah is highlighting the role of talmud Torah as the prerequisite for the proper observance of the mitzvos. We are required to do everything in our ability to maintain proper observance for ourselves and our children, and his begins with a thorough knowledge of the Torah.

The Rambam (Hilchos Talmud Torah 1:10) emphasizes a different aspect of talmud Torah concerning the prohibition of forgetting. The Rambam cites the prohibition against forgetting one's learning as the source that one must learn until the end of one's life. Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that the Rambam is addressing the dimension of talmud Torah as an end in it and of itself. How much must one learn to fulfill this mitzvah properly? One must learn the entire Torah. One who forgets any Torah must continue to learn because otherwise this mitzvah is not fulfilled in its entirety. Thus, the Rambam saw in this passuk the source for an independent, never ending obligation to study Torah, not just as a way to fulfill other mitzvos. Only if we dedicate ourselves to maintaining a complete mastery of Torah as a goal in it of itself can we impart this knowledge properly to our children.

The Ramban in his Sefer Hamitzvos (prohibition two not mentioned by the Rambam) interprets this dual obligation as focusing on the general experience of Har Sinai rather than addressing forgetting a specific part of the Torah as the Rabbeinu Yona and the Rambam did. The Ramban elaborates as to why the nature of the Har Sinai experience must be constantly remembered. It was only this experience which enables the Torah to remain eternal in our eyes. If we would have only received the Torah from Moshe without seeing Hashem's presence revealed on Har Sinai, we could potentially be led to believe by a subsequent navi that a new Torah had been given. We who saw with our own eyes that Hashem gave us this Torah are certain that this Torah will remain eternal. We must constantly strengthen our own faith in this

principle and transmit it to our children.

As we celebrate that monumental day at Har Sinai, we have to once again commit ourselves to all aspects of kabalas haTorah. We must constantly strive to reach greater heights in talmud Torah enabling ourselves and our children to properly observe the mitzvos. Talmud Torah must also be an independent goal; mastering as much Torah as we can must be an absolute priority for ourselves and our children. An absolute commitment to the eternal truth of the Torah must be maintained. This cornerstone of Jewish belief must be guarded and transmitted properly to the next generation. ©2014 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky & TorahWeb.org

AL SHEIM HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE Z"l

Bais Hamussar

Beha'aloscha is the first parsha on the list of parshios that give an account of the "transgressions" committed by Bnei Yisrael in the desert. We read how Bnei Yisrael left Har Sinai like a child running away from school, and how they complained about the mann. The parsha ends with Miriam speaking derogatorily about Moshe Rabbeinu. Parshas Shelach recounts the sin of the meraglim and parshas Korach tells about the fiasco of Korach and his cohorts. Parshas Chukas contains an account of Moshe hitting the rock and parshas Balak concludes with Bnei Yisrael straying after the idols and daughters of Midyan. A superficial reading and understanding of these parshios could lead one to think that this remarkable generation wasn't so lofty after all.

Rav Wolbe writes (Daas Shlomo) that one who wishes to get a true picture of just how great these people were, must bear in mind three points. Firstly, the Kuzari (3:54-63) presents a most important principle. He asserts that the Torah only recounts well known events. The Torah does not tell of the great Torah knowledge of Yehoshua, Shmuel, Shimshon, and Gidoen. Rather it recounts the miracles of the splitting of the Yarden, the sun standing still, and the great strength of Shimshon. Sefer Shmuel recounts the wars fought by Dovid but it tells us nothing about his great piety, his awesome Torah erudition and his exceptional holiness. Except for a single story regarding the two women who argued over a baby, the Torah does not tell us about the great wisdom of Shlomo. Rather it mentions his fabulous wealth and his lavish meals. The Torah relates the famous stories while the rest of the details are meant to be filled in by Chazal. Learning The Written Torah without the aid of the Oral Torah is like trying to get a picture of someone's life by looking at a few postcards instead of watching an extended video documenting his life.

Secondly, all twenty four books of Tanach are the word of Hashem, just recorded by humans by means of prophecy or ruach hakodesh. Thus, the gauge to measure those mentioned therein cannot be a

human yardstick, for these people are being described by Hashem's exacting standards. The greater the person, the more demanding Hashem is in His dealings with them. Minute infractions indiscernible to the human eye are sometimes recorded as severe transgressions.

Lastly, we are literally spiritual light years away from the people discussed in Tanach. The Gemara (Eruvin 53a) in describing the difference between the Tanna'im and Amora'im writes that the hearts of the earlier generations were open like the entranceway to the Ulam (twenty cubits wide) while the hearts of the later generations are open like the eye of a needle! Moreover, Chazal declared "If the earlier generations were like angels then we are like humans; if they were like humans then we are like donkeys!" In other words, the difference between a few generations is compared to the difference between two entirely different species! Similar statements were made by Abaye and Rava who merited visits by Eliyahu Hanavi on a weekly and yearly basis respectively! We must multiply these differences a thousand fold to include the transformation that occurred from the times recorded in Tanach until the Tanna'im, and the many generations from the times of the Amora'im until the present day. We simply do not have the intellectual capability to comprehend the awesome stature of those mentioned in the Torah.

Let us not jump to conclusions regarding the misdeeds mentioned in the Torah. One Chassidic Rebbe pithily summed up this idea when he commented, "I wish my mitzvos were on the level of their aveiros!" Bearing this in mind will give us a fresh approach to the next few weeks of parshios. Instead of condemning their actions, we will be inspired by the immeasurable greatness attainable by man and hopefully be motivated to push ourselves to attain as much of that greatness as we possibly can! © The AishDas Society

