

# Likutei Divrei Torah

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## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### From Pain to Humility

David Brooks, in his bestselling book, *The Road to Character*,<sup>[1]</sup> draws a sharp distinction between what he calls the résumé 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*.<sup>[2]</sup> This essay 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.”<sup>[3]</sup>

That is a central theme of Beha'alotcha. 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 God 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 Beha'alotcha 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:

“We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost, the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic!”

(Num. 11:5)

This is one act of ingratitude too many for Moses, who gives voice to deep despair:

“Why have You treated Your servant so badly? Why have I found so little favour in Your sight that You lay all the burden of this people upon me? Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who gave birth to them all, that You should say to me, ‘Carry them in your lap, as a nursemaid carries a baby’?... I cannot bear all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how You treat me, kill me now, if I have found favour in Your sight, and let me not see my own misery!”

(Num. 11:11-15)

Then comes the great transformation. God tells him to take seventy elders who will bear the burden with him. God 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 the Lord's people were prophets, that He would rest His spirit upon them all!”

(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 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 there to serve, not to be served. Moses' highest accolade was to be called Eved Hashem, God's servant. Only one other person, Joshua, his successor, earns this title in Tanach. 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 God's call at the Burning Bush was one of humility: “Who am I, to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” (Ex. 3:11). It was precisely this humility that qualified him to lead.

In Beha'alotcha 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 I found so little favour in Your sight...? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? ... Where can I get meat for all these people? ... I cannot carry bear these people alone; 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 God. God 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 God 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

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elsewhere, the Torah only twice contains the phrase, *lo tov*, “not good,” once at the start of the human story when God says: “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 sees the seventy elders share his spirit, his depression disappears. He can say to Joshua, “Are you jealous on my behalf?” And he is undisturbed by the complaint of his own brother and sister, praying to God on Miriam’s behalf when she is punished with leprosy. He has recovered his humility.

We now understand what humility is. It is not self-abasement. A statement often attributed to C. S. Lewis puts it best: humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.

True humility means silencing the “I.” For genuinely humble people, it is God 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 God so seriously that he didn’t have to take himself seriously at all.”

Rabbi Yochanan said, “Wherever you find the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, there you find His humility.” (Megillah 31a). Greatness is humility, for God 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 Beha’alotcha 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.”[4]

The right response to existential pain, Brooks 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 epitomised by the parents of the three Israeli teenagers killed in the summer of 2014, 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.”[5]

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.

[1] David Brooks, *The Road to Character*, Random House, 2015.

[2] Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, Doubleday, 1992.

[3] David Brooks, *The Road to Character*, xiii.

[4] *Ibid.*, 93.

[5] Brooks, *ibid.*, p. 261.

### **Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm’s Derashot Ledorot**

#### **A Definition of Anivut**

Our sidra this morning introduces us, rather casually and incidentally, to one of the most important and highly celebrated virtues in the arsenal of religion – that of anivut. We read in today’s portion, “And the man Moses was the most humble (anav me’od), above all the men that were upon the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3). Whatever may be the particular translation of the Hebrew word anav, the idea that is usually imparted is that anivut is humility, a feeling by the individual that he lacks inner worth, an appreciation that he amounts to very little. Indeed, the author of *Mesilat Yesharim*, one of the most renowned works on Jewish ethics in all our literature, identifies the quality of anivut with *shiflut* – the feeling of inner lowliness and inferiority. According to this definition, then, the Torah wants to teach each of us to see ourselves in a broader perspective, to recognize that all achievements are very trivial, attainments mere boastfulness, prestige a silly exaggeration. If Moses was an anav, if he was humble and able to deprecate himself, how much more so we lesser mortals should be humble.

However, can this be the real definition of this widely heralded quality of anivut?

We know of Moses as the *adon hanevi'im*, the chief of all the prophets of all times, the man who spoke with God “face to face” (Exodus 33:11). Do the words, “And the man Moses was the most humble” mean that Moses himself did not realize this? Does the anivut of Moses imply that he had a blind spot, that he failed to recognize what any school child knows? Does a Caruso\*\* have to consider himself nothing more than a choir boy, and an Einstein merely an advanced bookkeeper, in

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order to qualify for anivut? In order to be an anav, must one be either untruthful or genuinely inferior?

To a very great extent, modern psychology is concerned with the problem of inferiority. Deep down, people usually have a most unflattering appraisal of themselves. Many are the problems which bring them to psychologists and psychiatrists; yet all so often the underlying issue is the lack of self-worth. Are we, therefore, to accept the Jewish ethical prescription of anivut as an invitation to acquire an inferiority complex?

In addition, the definition of anivut as self-deprecation and humility does not fit into the context of today’s sidra. The identification by the Torah of Moses as an anav is given to us as part of the story in which we learn of Aaron and Miriam, the brother and sister of Moses, speaking ill of Moses behind his back. They criticize him harshly because of some domestic conduct in his personal life. They are wrong, and they are punished by the Almighty. But what has all this to do with the humility of Moses? The substance of their criticism, namely, the domestic relations of Moses, is as unrelated to Moses’ humility as it is to his artistic talents or his leadership ability.

Furthermore, the Talmud relates an exchange that is all but meaningless if we assume that anivut means humility. The Talmud (Sota 49a) tells us that when Rabbi Judah the Prince died the quality of anivut disappeared with him. When this was stated, the famous Rabbi Joseph disagreed. He said, “How can you say that when Rabbi Judah died anivut vanished? Do you not know that I am still here?” In other words – I am an anav!

Now, if anivut really means humility, does this make sense? Can one boast of his humility and still remain humble? Is it not of the essence of humility that one should consider that he possesses this virtue in himself?

It is for these reasons, and several more, that the famous head of the Yeshiva of Volozhin, popularly known as the Netziv, offers us another definition of anivut (in his *HaAmek Davar*) which, I believe, is the correct one. I would say that the definition the Netziv offers means, in English, not humility, but meekness. It refers not to self-deprecation but self-restraint. It involves not an untruthful lack of appreciation of one’s self and one’s attainments, but rather a lack of arrogance and a lack of insistence upon kavod, honor. To be an anav means to recognize your true worth, but not to impose the consequences upon your friends and neighbors. It means to appreciate your own talents, neither over-emphasizing nor under-selling them, but at the same time refraining from making others aware of your splendid virtues at all times. Anivut means not to demand that people bow and scrape before you because of your talents, abilities, and achievements. Anivut means to recognize your

gifts as just that – gifts granted to you by a merciful God, and which possibly you did not deserve. Anivut means not to assume that because you have more competence or greater endowments than others that you thereby become more precious an individual and human being. Anivut means a soft answer to a harsh challenge, silence in the face of abuse, graciousness when receiving honor, dignity in response to humiliation, restraint in the presence of provocation, forbearance and a quiet calm when confronted with calumny and carping criticism.

With this new definition by the Netziv, the statement of Rabbi Joseph becomes comprehensible. When he was told that with the death of Rabbi Judah the Prince there was no more meekness left in the world, he replied with remarkable candor and truthfulness: You must be mistaken, because I, too, am meek. There is no boastfulness here – simply a fact of life. Some people are meek, some are not. If a man says, “I am humble,” then obviously he is not humble; but if a man says, “I am meek,” he may very well be just that. In fact, the Talmud tells us that Rabbi Joseph was at least the equal in scholarship of his colleague, Rabba, but that when the question arose who would head the great Academy in Babylon, Rabbi Joseph deferred to Rabba. And furthermore, all the years that Rabba was chief of the Academy, Rabbi Joseph conducted himself in utter simplicity, to the point where he did all his household duties himself and did not invite any artisan or laborer, physician or barber, to come to his house. He refused to allow himself the least convenience which might make it appear as if he were usurping the dignity of the office and the station occupied by his colleague Rabba. This is, indeed, the quality of meekness – of anivut.

And this meekness was the outstanding characteristic of Moses as revealed in the context of the story related in today’s sidra. Here were Aaron and Miriam, both by all means lesser individuals than Moses, who derived so much of their own greatness from their brother, and yet they were ungrateful and captious and meddled in Moses’ personal life. A normal human being, even a very ethical one, would have responded sharply and quickly. He would have confronted them with their libelous statement, or snapped some sharp rejoinder to them, or at the very least cast upon them a glance of annoyance and irritation. But, “The man Moses was the most meek, more so than any man on the face of the earth.” Although aware of his spiritual achievements, of his role as leader of his people, even of his historical significance for all generations, Moses entertained no feelings of hurt or sensitivity, of injured kavod. There was in his character no admixture of pride, of arrogance, of harshness, of hyper-sensitivity. He had an utter lack of gall and contentiousness. He was, indeed, an anav, more so than any other individual on the face of the earth. And he was able to write those

very words without self-consciousness! Hence he did not react at all to the remarks of his brother and sister. Therefore, God said that if Moses is such an anav that he does not defend himself against this offense, I will act for him!

The quality of anivut, as it has been defined by the Netziv, is thus one of the loveliest characteristics to which we can aspire. One need not nourish feelings of inferiority in order to be an anav. Indeed, the greater one is and knows one’s self to be, the greater his capacity for anivut, for meekness. It is the person who pouts arrogantly and reacts sharply and pointedly when his ego is touched who usually reveals thereby feelings of inferiority and worthlessness, of deep shiflut. The individual who feels secure and who recognizes his achievements as real can afford to be meek, to be an anav.

For it is this combination of qualities – inner greatness and outer meekness – that we learn from none other than God Himself. The Talmud (Megilla 31a) put it this way: “Wherever your find mentioned the gedula, the greatness, of God, there also you will find mentioned His anivut.” Thus, for instance, where we are told that God is mighty and awesome, immortal and transcendent, there too we learn that God is close to the widow and the orphan, the stranger and the sick, all those in distress, those overlooked, ignored and alienated from the society of the complacent. God’s anivut certainly does not mean His humility or self-deprecation! It does mean His softness, gentleness, kindness – His meekness.

Here, then, is a teaching of Judaism which we can ill afford to do without. When we deal with husband or wife, with neighbor or friend, with children or students, with subordinates or employees – we must remember that the harsh word reveals our lack of security, and the impatient rejoinder shows up our lack of self-appreciation and self-respect. It is only when we will have achieved real gedula, true inner worth and greatness, that we shall learn that remarkable, sterling quality of anivut.

Let us leave the synagogue this morning aware of that mutual, reciprocal relationship between greatness and meekness. If we have gedula let us proceed to prove it by developing anivut. And if we doubt whether we really possess gedula then let us begin to acquire it by emulating the greatest of all mortals, Moses, and the immortal Almighty Himself, and practice anivut in all our human relations. If this anivut does not succeed at once in making us truly great, it at least will offer us the dividends of a better character, a happier life, more relaxed social relations, and the first step on the ladder of Jewish nobility of character. *[Excerpted from Rabbi Norman Lamm’s Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Numbers, co-published by OU Press, Maggid Books, and YU Press; edited by Stuart W. Halpern]*

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**Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

### **It Was Not the Cucumbers and Onions!**

The pasuk says: “We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge, the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic” (Bamidbar 11:5). The people were ostensibly crying over the food that they missed while they were in the Wilderness. Rashi quotes the teaching of Chazal that they were not really crying over the fish, cucumbers, garlic and onions, but rather they were crying over “family matters.” They were bemoaning the fact that they recently became forbidden in the arayos prohibitions.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky shares a very basic idea over here (as he does in two other places in his Chumash commentary). He asks, how do Chazal know this? The simple reading of the pasuk is that they were crying over food deprivation. Chazal say that rather than crying over food, they were really crying over the newly-given arayos prohibitions. There is no indication of such in the pasuk, so how do Chazal put words into the mouths of the Jews in the Wilderness that appear nowhere in the p’shuto shel Mikra?

Rav Yaakov answers that there is a concept in Torah interpretation called “PaRDeS”. PaRDeS is an acronym which represents the Torah being understood on several different levels—the level of Pshat (simple interpretation), Remez (hidden allusion), Drash (homiletic exposition), and Sod (mystical interpretation). So too, he says, human beings need to be understood on different levels. When a person says something, it needs to be analyzed at the level of Pshat, at the level of Remez, at the level of Drush, and at the level of Sod. Many times, people don’t really understand their own words on the subconscious level.

Sometimes something much deeper is really going on than the face value of someone’s words. People don’t really cry about fish and cucumbers—especially when they have mann falling from Heaven on a daily basis. The mann was the best food in the world. According to Chazal, it could taste like whatever the person consuming it desired. So obviously, no one’s taste buds were being deprived by a lack of garlic or onions. Either through Ruach HaKodesh or some other means, Chazal realized that something much deeper than onions was motivating them over here. This is what Rav Yaakov calls “Klayos v’Lev” (literally kidneys and heart), which is a Rabbinic idiom for what we call the subconscious. In other words, they were not even aware themselves of what was really bothering them.

This occurs all the time with interpersonal relations—with our children, our spouses, our employees and our employers. Sometimes a person has a “fit” about something and we ask him, “Why are you having a fit about this? It is

such a trivial issue (whatever it may be). Why are you having a fit about this?" Sometimes the answer is that something else is going on. It is not the onions. It is something else.

Rav Yaakov says the same thing in Parshas Lech Lecha. Lot said he wanted to separate from Avraham Avinu and go live in Sodom. Why did he say that he wanted to go live in Sodom? It was because "Sodom was a fertile lush valley" (Bereshis 13:10). Rashi there cites a Medrash Aggadah that Lot's real interest in moving to Sodom was because they were an immoral and licentious people. He desired to live in a region where the residents had an "everything goes" lifestyle.

Rav Yaakov asks the same question there: Why do Chazal attribute such amoral intentions to Lot? Where do Chazal see this motivation? Why not assume that Lot is going there to make a better living in the fertile region? Rav Yaakov explains the same idea: Lot was with Avraham Avinu. Not only was he with Avraham Avinu, which is a tremendous merit, but he made an economic fortune by virtue of having attached himself to Avraham. "Also, Lot, who went with Avram, had flocks, cattle, and tents." (Bereshis 13:5) So if he wanted to make a good living, he should have stayed with Avraham Avinu! Why then is Lot migrating to Sodom? The answer is that it is for some un verbalized reason. It is not for parnassah!

There is an old quip: "We say the Hagaddah, but we want the Kneidlach." It was the same thing over here: We say "Parnassah, paranassah," but it is not really parnassah. Now, Lot may not have even realized this himself. That is the nature of the PaRDeS of human conversation—there is Pshat, Remez, Drash, and Sod behind each of man's comments. Lot may not have fully understood what he was saying, and neither do we fully understand everything we say.

Sometimes we get upset about something. We need to ask ourselves, "Why am I so upset?" Sometimes we don't even realize it. "Why should this bother me so much? It is such a minor issue!" We need to ask ourselves: "What is really bothering me?" We see this by the cucumbers and onions. We see this by Lot. We always need to ask the question: What is really motivating us?

### The Ish Moshe Was More Humble Than Any Adam

The Torah testifies: "And the 'Ish' Moshe was extremely humble, more so than any 'Adam' on the face of the earth" (Bamidbar 12:3). In Lashon HaKodesh, the word "Ish" (literally – 'man') always connotes a distinguished individual, a person who has accomplished something important in his life. The word Adam (also meaning 'man') connotes any human being.

Rav Nissan Alpert, zt"l, points out that this pasuk apparently lacks symmetry. Rather than comparing the 'Ish' Moshe with any 'Adam', the pasuk should have used the plural of the word 'Ish' (Anashim) and state that the Ish Moshe was humbler than any Anashim on the face of the earth.

Rav Nissan Alpert explains that the pasuk is telling us that Moshe Rabbeinu was haIsh Moshe—the most accomplished person in the world, an Ish haElokim. He had what to be haughty about! And yet, he was humbler than even the simplest unaccomplished Adam anywhere in the world!

The Gemara (Sotah 5a) says that a person should learn a lesson from his Creator. The Holy One Blessed be He abandoned all the higher peaks in the world and had His Presence descend onto a relatively lowly mountain upon which He gave His Torah (i.e. – Mt. Sinai).

The Kotzker Rebbe once asked, if the Almighty wanted to teach us humility, why didn't He give the Torah in a valley? The answer is that true humility occurs when someone has something to brag about and nevertheless remains humble. Hashem gave the Torah on a mountain. If someone is a nothing (e.g. – a valley) and does not act haughty about it, that is no big deal. However, when a person has what to be gayvedik about (for example, a mountain) and nevertheless remains humble, that is a big deal! Therefore, the Almighty gave the Torah on a mountain, but on a humble mountain.

Similarly, that is why there is a principle that the Divine spirit of prophecy descends upon people who are strong, wealthy, wise, and tall. What is the reason for that? It is because the Ribono shel Olam wants people to remain humble, despite having qualities that can legitimately cause them to be proud, or even haughty.

### Dvar Torah Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Aharon was great because he never changed. In Parshat Behaalotecha the Torah tells us about the great privilege that Aharon the High Priest had to kindle the menorah. Following the instruction given to Aharon, the Torah says (Bamidbar 8:3) "Vayaas ken Aharon." – "Aharon did it."

It's quite an astonishing statement! Of course he did it! Would he think of doing anything else? And then Rashi on Bamidbar 8:3 cites the words of the midrash:

"Lehagid shifcho shel Aharon, shelo shinah." – "The Torah tells us this as praise for Aharon to let us know that he never changed."

What exactly is meant here by the words 'he never changed,' and why is it so praiseworthy

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for Aharon the High Priest to carry out the will of Hashem? Surely no other thought could have crossed his mind?

The Sfat Emet gives a beautiful peirush here: Usually when one starts to perform a deed, even if it is an enormous privilege, in the course of time you'll start to get used to it and the original enthusiasm is likely to wane. However, that never happened with regard to Aharon.

On the first day, when he had that privilege of kindling the menorah, he was full of excitement and passion, and that never changed – 'lo shinah!' Throughout the entire time that he was the High Priest, every time he kindled that menorah, he had the same enthusiasm as that which he had on the very first day.

The message of this Torah passage is, I believe, of particular relevance today at a time when sadly, in some quarters, there is apathy. If that was the case in pre-Covid times, how much more so is it the case now that hopefully the pandemic is behind us?

We need to follow in the footsteps of Aharon, to maintain that level of passion. What an enormous privilege we have – to have the Torah to inspire and guide us always!

Let us therefore guarantee that the natural enthusiasm and passion of Aharon will be part of our lives forever.

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### Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

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#### A Cloudy Voyage

#### Rabbi Nechemia Krakover

One of the greatest revolutions in recent years – one which has significantly impacted the way we travel – was the introduction of the navigation app, Waze. It has become such a crucial tool for anyone hitting the road that it is hard to imagine how we managed to find our way and get around before it entered our lives.

The fact that we are suddenly able to arrive at any destination anywhere in the world with no great difficulty has not only changed our perception of what it means to navigate, but has also revolutionized travel planning. However, every good thing has its drawbacks.

Although Waze has certainly made it easier to plan a trip and navigate to any given destination, it has undermined our ability to self-navigate, turning us into disoriented people with no sense of direction. So much so, that we often have no idea where we are. Even if we have travelled a road many times before, we no longer remember what the way is really like, nor are we truly familiar with the road.

The application which aims to help us find our way in any given place, has rendered us more dependent, less creative and less able to find our way.

This is not only the case when one sets out on a trip using a navigation app; it is also true of the voyage of life, and how we choose to navigate through it. On the one hand, the better the guidance and the more accurate the directions – the better our chances of reaching our desired destination. On the other hand, this dependency on external guidance and directions makes us less competent and takes away our sense of responsibility.

Good guidance can be defined as assistance that is meaningful, yet does not render the person on the receiving end impotent or incapable.

When it comes to education, this notion is all the more important. Educational wisdom is all about finding the equilibrium between giving guidance and leaving room for self-growth; offering assistance and granting independence. Educators have to know how to lead from behind, so to speak. Pointing the individual towards the paved road but still leaving open options and undetermined factors along the way, such that the individual is always presented with growing opportunities that will teach them that it is more rewarding to get to one's destination by making an effort.

Our portion depicts this very process.

Parshat Bechukotai gives a detailed account of the Israelites' wanderings in the desert, a voyage led by a pillar of cloud. It was the cloud that determined the walking pace and the distance that would be covered each time; it was the cloud that decided where the people would camp, and when they would set out again on their journey. However, although the cloud led the way, there was always an element of surprise. The people never knew in advance when they would journey ahead and when they would be told to stop and set up camp. Every time there was some sort of change, the people had to cope with the "cloud's decision", so to speak. Furthermore, the cloud, by its very nature, made it impossible for anyone to see the road ahead. In fact, the Israelites' journey across the desert was a foggy and unclear one.

Why did God choose to lead His people through the wilderness in this fashion? Why did it have to be in the midst of a cloud, with great uncertainty and no clear horizon?

The answer to this is that the purpose of the journey was not only to reach a specific destination; rather, the voyage in itself was meaningful, in that it taught the People of Israel to take responsibility and make an effort, instead of simply relying on Divine guidance.

Journeys interwoven with trials and tribulations make for stronger travelers. Complexity and hardship bring to surface hidden strengths. Uncertainty evokes great faith.

The People of Israel were required to have more than just faith in their leader, Moshe, or even in God Almighty Himself. First and foremost, they had to have some faith in their own strengths and capabilities. These, in turn, would not only enable them to cope with the unknown, but would help them grow from the cloudy uncertainty.

With the right perspective, uncertainty can produce people of great magnitude and faith – so much more so than humdrum days and regular routine ever could.

If we only allow our educational path to be strewn with islands of uncertainty, we have a better chance of letting our students' innermost strengths break surface. This would not only be a blessing to them, but the entire world would benefit by it.

But all on condition that we, too, are ready to have faith, to be on a constant learning curve, and, more importantly – to know when to let go...

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#### **Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org**

**Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg**

#### **The Opportunity to Serve**

In the beginning of Parshas Behaloscha, Hashem commands Moshe to tell Aharon to light the menorah, and the posuk says that Aharon did as he was told. "Vaya'as kein Aharon - Aharon did so; toward the face of the menorah he kindled its lamps just as Hashem had commanded Moshe" (8:3). Rashi comments that the extra words "vaya'as kein Aharon" reveal how praiseworthy Aharon was, that he did not change - "shelo shinah". Why is this so remarkable? Would we actually think that Aharon would light the menorah differently than he was told?

The Sfas Emes (5635) suggests that normally when a person does something for the first time, he feels exhilarated. But if he continues to perform the same action, his initial excitement will eventually wear off and the action will become more mechanical. The Torah is teaching that Aharon never changed in his performance of the mitzvah. Each time he kindled the menorah, he did so with the same enthusiasm he had the first time he fulfilled the mitzvah.

This attitude is important not just for lighting the menorah, but for all mitzvos. The posuk says, "On this day Hashem, your G-d, commands you to observe these decrees and laws" (Ki Savo 26:16). Rashi explains that the Torah uses the phrase "on this day" to highlight that "each day it should be in your eyes like something new." We should view mitzvah observance not as a burdensome obligation but as an exciting endeavor. The Torah alludes to this concept many times (see Rashi on Yisro 19:1, Va'eschanan 6:6 and Eikev 11:13).

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

In his introduction to the sefer Mesillas Yesharim, the Ramchal writes that one of the critical components of an ideal avodas Hashem is shleimus haleiv - serving Hashem with a full heart, as the posuk says "to serve Hashem with your entire heart" (Eikev 10:12.) This involves, among other things, performing mitzvos with heartfelt devotion, not just as a mitzvas anashim m'lumadah (Yeshaya 29:13) - doing mitzvos robotically, out of habit. A true oveid Hashem is one who observes mitzvos out of love, not just because he is obligated to do so. He puts his full heart into every mitzvah because he feels excited to be involved in its performance no matter how many times he has already done that mitzvah.

Such an attitude seems somewhat attainable in the realm of Torah study. The posuk says, "And it will be if you will surely listen - shamo'a tishma..." (Eikev 11:13). Chazal (Sukka 46b) explain that the Torah uses the double language of shamo'a tishma to hint to the fact that if you listen to the old, then you will also listen to the new. Rashi explains that this means if you review your old studies, then you will hear anew because you will arrive at a deeper understanding of the old teachings ("tischakeim bo lehavin devarim chadashim mitoch devarim yeshanim"). Each time a person reviews words of Torah, he discovers additional layers of meaning hidden within them. This revelation can be quite an enlightening experience and it can bring a person to a newfound sense of joy and excitement for talmud Torah.

But how can one maintain a sense of hischadshus - a feeling of freshness and exuberance - in mitzvos like tefilla, berachos, tefillin and tzitzis after observing these very same mitzvos day after day? How was Aharon Hakohein able to feel a heartfelt enthusiasm each time he lit the menorah?

The answer lies in another statement of Chazal about Aharon. Rashi, earlier in the parsha (8:2), quotes from the Midrash Tanchuma that the parsha of lighting the menorah is placed next to the parsha which describes the korbanos that the nesi'im brought at the inauguration of the Mishkan because when Aharon saw the nesi'im bringing korbanos he felt discouraged since neither he nor his shevet were included in this effort. Hakadosh Boruch Hu told him, "Your role is greater than theirs because you kindle and prepare the lights of the menorah."

Why was Aharon upset in the first place? After all, if Hashem did not ask of him to bring a korban, then wasn't he exempt? Why should there be any reason for distress? What's more, Aharon actually did bring his own special korbanos at the inauguration of the Mishkan (see the beginning of Parshas Shemini). So why did he feel left out just because he was not also included in the korbanos of the nesi'im? The answer is that Aharon was never satisfied with simply fulfilling his spiritual obligations.

He cherished the opportunity to serve Hashem. That is why he felt upset when he was excluded from the special korbanos of the nesi'im.

For the same reason, Aharon felt a newfound excitement each time he lit the menorah because when a person appreciates that serving Hashem is a privilege, then it never gets stale. Each mitzvah is an opportunity to connect with Hashem, the Giver of the mitzvah, and to be elevated in the process. If a person sees a mitzvah as a gift - no less than the gift of a spouse or a close friend - he will perform that mitzvah with exuberance and devotion each and every time, showing attention to every detail, savoring every moment that he is involved in the mitzvah, because he understands that mitzvos are not just obligations but they are really Hashem's expression of love for Klal Yisrael and they are opportunities not to be squandered.

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### **Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam**

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#### **Encouragement!**

HASHEM said to Moshe saying, "Speak to Aaron and say to him: When you "light-up" the lamps, toward the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light." Aaron did so- (Bamidbar 8:1-2)

Aaron did so: To tell the praise of Aaron that he did not change. (Rashi)

What's so great that Aaron lit the lights? Anybody could do that! Why would he do differently than what he understood perfectly what HASHEM had instructed him to do? If any one of us understood with that level of clarity what it was that HASHEM wants us to do, would we, could we do otherwise?! So, what's the great praise about? He did what he was supposed to do!

Now it is occurring to me that it is not only we who are hearing about the praise of Aaron for not having deviated from HASHEM's instructions, but it is in order to praise Aaron for not changing, to tell the praise of Aaron to Aaron. Aaron is being praised for doing the right thing. How does that help? It helps a lot!

I was shown at a Shiva call just last night a moving video clip of my good friend Shimi who just passed away. There he is in a hospital room in Israel, hooked up to wires and looking frail. A troubadour of musicians with guitars are serenading him.

He's singing along and at one point he even stands up and with great effort begins dancing with them. Then he starts to tell them what a great thing they are doing by coming and performing for him.

"Doctors are prescribing all kinds of medicine that we hope will be effective, but this is the best medicine of all that you are doing here for

me today." He continues to heap praise on them and thank them in multiple ways, and he tells them that he is having this little Chizuk session videoed so he can send it to their families so they can see how much good they are doing.

They were coming to give him courage and strength and he was feeding them. It was truly amazing! He was truly amazing!

He recognized that everybody needs encouragement, even people who know that what they are doing is the right thing. Why not!?

The guy sweeping the floor needs encouragement. The gabbai of the Shul needs encouragement! Teachers need encouragement. Doctors need encouragement. Principals need encouragement. Husbands need encouragement. Wives need encouragement. Parents need encouragement. Kids need encouragement. The Rav of the community needs encouragement. Elderly people need encouragement. The mailman needs encouragement. The grocer needs encouragement. The Baal Koreh needs encouragement. The cab driver needs encouragement. Everybody needs encouragement! Even Aaron HaKohain needs encouragement.

He had been involved incidentally and tangentially in the Chet HaEgel and he was feeling embarrassed by all the pomp and pageantry involved with the inauguration of the Mishkan. He was assuming that he was excluded because of his association with that cosmic- national disaster.

When he was called upon to light the Menorah, which would be the crowning event, he felt woefully unworthy and he was ready to hide behind his deep sense of shame and excuse himself with good reason. "I am not worthy of such an honor." "And Aaron did so..." He did what he was commanded to do. It was not a small thing and HASHEM, Who reads the heart of men, let Aaron know that, it wasn't easy but he did the right thing. Even people who know they are doing the right thing need words of encouragement. Certainly, people who have doubts about themselves need encouragement.

I saw a phrase like this and I believe it describes all of us; "I can be both a masterpiece and a work in progress!" The "masterpiece" part of us is need of being recognized. We cannot demand that attention but since we recognize the need, we might as well identify it in others. The "work in progress" part of us is in constant need of encouragement. We cannot command it, but since we recognize the need, we might as well give as much as we can to others, encouragement!

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

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### **Mizrachi Dvar Torah**

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**Rav Doron Perz**

#### **The Sinai Generation**

How can it be that the generation that came out of Egypt, saw all the great miracles, spent a whole year at Mount Sinai, who are about to enter the Land, reach such low depths?

They begin inexplicably complaining - they moan about how wonderful it was in Egypt. Then, the entire generation was wiped out in the desert. In fact, Rabbi Akiva says that they fell so low that the generation has no place in the World to Come!

You can be in the best environment, have the greatest teachers - but there may be some personal reasons why you may not be able to internalize those teachings.

There was something impeding their ability to remain at the level of Mount Sinai and caused them to fall to the greatest depths.

We must utilize the opportunities that we have - not blame those around us - because ultimately the choice is ours. It is up to us!