



LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

PARSHAS BEHA'ALOSECHA

BY
HESCHEL GREENBERG

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS BEHA'ALOSECHA

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Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has
prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

ESSAYS ON PARSHAS BEHA'ALOSECHA

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on parshas Beha'alosecha was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

"The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and

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Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our galus/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

* * *

The parsha of Beha'alosecha features the positive form of complaining and demanding of G-d. G-d is not at all unhappy when a Jew makes demands to be more involved and committed. This forms the basic rationale for our prayers in which we plead, beseech and indeed even demand of G-d to bring us Moshiach and Redemption!

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ESSAY ONE

SAY NO TO CHANGE?

Humanity is synonymous with the opposite of truth.

Torah is the epitome of truth and consistency.

Every Mitzvah we do imbues us with some of that G-dly truth.

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ESSAY ONE

SAY NO TO CHANGE?

Aaron Didn't Change! Big Deal?!

One of the most frequently asked questions on the Biblical text can be found in this week's parsha. Aaron, Moses' brother, was commanded to kindle the Menorah—the seven branched candelabrum. The Torah reports that indeed, "Aaron did as he was commanded." If this statement was not obvious, Rashi, the principal Bible commentator adds: "This comes to teach us that he did not alter [any of G-d's instructions]." In other words, the Torah goes out of its way to tell us that Aaron complied with the commandment he was given by G-d concerning the lighting of the Menorah.

Isn't it incredible that the Torah has to tell us that Aaron—Moses' equal in many respects, one of the holiest and spiritually sensitive people that ever lived—is to be praised for not deviating from a commandment

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given to him by none other than G-d! (See following essays for alternate explanations.)

The following is a two-tiered approach to this question that will provide us with a powerful lesson about our role in G-d's world.

Obsessed with Peace

Aaron, among his many virtues, was known for his desire for peace. Aaron would go from home to home to make peace between husband and wife. He would also go from one person to another to help them heal the breaches between them. His preoccupation with peace-making made him the Jewish nation's most beloved leader.

To achieve his goal of making peace, the Talmud tells us that he would "tweak" the truth somewhat. He would tell each party to the conflict how sorry the other party was, and that each one had such high regard for the other, etc., etc. When the two would meet, all the animosity they possessed for each other would dissolve and their relationship would be restored to its original position.

Indeed, from Aaron's efforts at peace, a precedent was established. Jewish law rules that one may tell a "white lie" in order to preserve the peace.

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Needless to stress, Judaism maintains the highest regard for truth. "G-d's seal is truth," our Sages teach us. And the Torah itself is characterized as "Toras Emes-the Torah of Truth." We are also commanded to "distance ourselves from falsehood." Nevertheless, in certain limited cases, such as for the promotion of peace, we may bend the truth. Peace overrides truth.

One might have thought that Aaron, who was accustomed to compromising the truth, albeit to facilitate peace, might have internalized ever so subtly this potentially undesirable trait of inconsistency. He might have subconsciously altered certain aspects—either the physical manner or the proper meditative exercises - required by the Menorah lighting ceremony.

The Torah therefore tells us that we should disabuse ourselves of this thought. Aaron's integrity and commitment to truth and consistency was beyond reproach. In fact, what appeared to be a 'white lie' in the pursuit of reconciliation was reserved for that purpose exclusively; it did not extend to other areas of life because it was not a result of a personality flaw, rather it stemmed from his understanding of the preeminent position peace held in the hierarchy of Torah values.

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Exposing the Inner Truth

Furthermore, Aaron's "white lies" were not really distortions of the truth. On the contrary, they were a reflection of a deeper truth. Aaron was able to see beneath the surface of adversaries and realize that the animosity they harbored towards each other was only on the surface. Beneath the surface a pure, caring and loving soul that craves friendship and peace is revealed. No lie could succeed in altering the feelings of truly bitter enemies.

Aaron was thus not lying to former adversaries; he was merely removing the façade that was the lie.

And this is where the Torah informs us that Aaron's "altering" of the truth, his apparent inconsistency, was not internalized and was not reflective of a flawed, inconsistent person who could not be trusted, G-d forbid. He was fully capable of maintaining the highest standards of consistency and integrity without the slightest tinge of compromise when it came to lighting the Menorah. It attested to the fact that although, on the surface, it seemed that his penchant for peace overrode his fidelity to truth and consistency, the truth was that Aaron's devotion to the highest standards of truth was impeccable.

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Moving in Opposite Directions

On a deeper level, one can understand why Aaron had to be praised for following instructions, based on the diverse roles of Aaron and Moses; According to the Zohar, Aaron and Moses represented two opposite movements and approaches toward uniting G-d and the Jewish people:

Moses is referred to as the "Escort of the King" and Aaron as the "Escort of the Queen." Moses brought the word of G-d—the King—down to the people, while Aaron's role was to escort the people—the "queen"—and bring them closer to G-d.

G-d is the epitome of truth and consistency. The Prophet thus declares: "I G-d, have not changed."

We, by definition, are always products of constant change. Any creation of G-d, in and of itself, is constantly in a state of flux. Only through the observance of Torah and its Mitzvos can we introduce an element of G-dly truth and consistency to our lives.

Moses, chosen by G-d as the conduit of G-dly truth, was easily identified as a source of truth. Moses could easily be unbending and unyielding in his demands of fidelity to the law. Moses could not tolerate the slightest hint of insubordination to the will of G-d. To be

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sure, Moses was consumed with love for the Jewish people and was even willing to die to save them from punishment. But in his role as G-d's "spokesman" he personified truth and absolute commitment to the minutest details of G-d's will.

Of the People, By the People, For the People

Aaron, as the representative of the people, by contrast, had to know and feel where the people were coming from. To be true to his role and life's mission as the escort of the queen, he had to experience their flaws, pettiness, foibles, inconsistencies, vacillations and immaturity. He could not possibly be an agent of the people to bring them closer to G-d if he did not empathize with them and get down to their level to raise them up. It was his mission in life to take the people from their position in life and work with them.

By definition then, Aaron was as close to understanding the nature of a flawed person as a flawed person could be. Aaron went down into their realm in order to be able to pick them up.

And so it was that Aaron, albeit reluctantly and inadvertently, became involved in the creation of the golden calf. Not, G-d forbid, that he sanctioned it, but that he could not resist it with the same intensity as

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Moses, or his nephew Chur, who was murdered by the rebellious idol worshippers when he protested their efforts.

One would have therefore entertained the notion that Aaron was incapable of maintaining the highest order of discipline because he represented, empathized and identified with all the undisciplined people. Aaron, we might have thought, was comfortable with the rebels whom he loved and cared for so much. Aaron, we could have entertained the notion, was not into following orders with precision, because that was not his G-d given forte. His job was to be part of the chaotic and anarchistic community and work some order and holiness into it.

And now Aaron was asked to follow a rigidly prescribed ritual means of bringing light to the Jewish people, represented by the seven branches of the Menorah. Aaron could have very easily rationalized changing things to make "his" crowd feel a little more at ease with a relaxation of the rules.

The Torah, therefore, emphatically declares: "Aaron did exactly as he was commanded." His association with the flawed people did not allow him to water down the rules as to the way we bring light into the minds, hearts and souls of the Jewish people. He lit the Menorah and

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thereby ignited the souls of all the Jews without the slightest bit of compromise.

This explains the words of Hillel in Ethics of the Fathers: "Be like the students of Aaron; love peace and pursue peace; love all creatures and bring them close to the Torah." The Rebbe pointed out repeatedly: It does not say bring the Torah to them by watering it down and compromising its standards. It says to bring them to the Torah. Raise them to a higher level. Let them see the truth of G-dly knowledge and they will embrace it, step by step.

Peace Through Strength

The above has a direct bearing on the Jewish approach to the Messianic Age. Unlike other belief systems, Judaism does not believe that the Messiah will change the Torah, or alter it in the slightest. On the contrary, Moshiach's task is to ignite the spark of Jewishness in each and every one of us so that we get closer to the teachings of the Torah.

When the inner soul is ignited, it actually produces two distinct effects: It inspires us to be more conscientious about our spiritual lives and devotion to the Torah and its commandments. It also allows us to

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deemphasize the things that separate us from others and cause discord. With our soul's naturally self-effacing character revealed, we experience genuine unity and love for all.

The Messianic Age is the age of true peace; it is not the ephemeral and deceptive version, the sound of which is so intoxicating and it is not at the expense of truth and integrity. The Messianic Age will demonstrate that in their most essential and potent state, truth and peace are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, one informs and complements the other.

It is stated in the Midrash that the two liberators of the Messianic Age—Elijah and the Moshiach—represent the twin virtues of truth and peace, respectively. Elijah's main contribution was truth; rigid, unadulterated compliance with G-d's commands. Elijah could not tolerate those "fence sitters" who could not decide whose side they were on, G-d or the idol ba'al. Moshiach's most obvious contribution will be bringing universal peace.

In truth, there are ample sources that speak of Moshiach's relationship to truth and Elijah's role as a peacemaker, because, in reality, they are complementary. Anyone who tells you that the Messianic process must involve obfuscation, deception, compromising values, discord and strife is not talking about the Jewish version of Moshiach.

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ESSAY TWO

TRANSCENDING
EMOTIONS

When doing a Mitzvah, we must ask ourselves, "what effect did the
Mitzvah have on me?"

ESSAY TWO

TRANSCENDING EMOTIONS

Aaron Dismayed

In last week's parsha, Naso, we learned about the gift offerings the leaders of each tribe brought for the inauguration of the Altar.

According to Rashi, Aaron felt badly that he was not chosen to bring the dedicatory offering on behalf of his tribe, the Levites, although the leaders of all the other tribes did so.

In this week's parsha, G-d consoles Aaron by telling him that his role is far more significant than that of the other leaders because "he would prepare and light the Menorah."

There are many questions regarding this saga.

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The Five Questions

First, why did Aaron wait to express his chagrin at not being chosen until after all the tribes brought their sacrifices? Why didn't he complain at the outset?

The simple answer is that he did not know that he would be excluded until the other tribes finished bringing their offerings. Only when Aaron realized that he had been passed over for the honor did he express his hurt feelings.

However, the question can be rephrased. In the beginning of the book of Numbers the tribe of Levi was excluded from the general census. G-d had them counted separately because the tribe of Levi was chosen to be G-d's "personal" legion.

Considering the tribe of Levi's superior role, Aaron should have been the very first leader selected to bring a dedicatory sacrifice.

Thus the question returns: why didn't Aaron complain when he was not asked to be the first to bring a dedicatory offering?

Second: Who prevented Aaron from bringing his own offering? These were personal offerings from the tribal leaders themselves. If Aaron chose not bring the offering how could he later complain?

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Third: Why did G-d console him by saying he had the greater role because he would prepare and light the Menorah? What does lighting the Menorah have to do with bringing a dedicatory sacrifice? Are they mutually exclusive? Would it have been so difficult for Aaron to bring the dedicatory sacrifice and also light the Menorah.

Fourth: Why did G-d have to console him at all? Weren't Aaron, and his tribe, the ones to offer all the daily and festival sacrifices? Only a Kohain was permitted to offer the animal, bird or flour on the Altar. Isn't his role obviously greater? After all, the sacrifices brought by the leaders of each tribe required the service of the Kohain at the Altar.

Fifth: How could Aaron think that he was not part of the dedication of the Mishkan when, in fact, he furnished the ultimate sacrifice? Aaron's two sons were consumed by the Divine fire at the Altar. Moses told Aaron that this fulfilled G-d's words that He would be sanctified through their sacrifice. How could Aaron think that he was found lacking in bringing a sacrifice?

Chanukah

The answer to all of these questions lies in the word that Rashi uses to describe the offerings of the tribal leaders; Chanukah. This word, which

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is also the name of a Holiday, is translated as inauguration or dedication. It is a cognate to the word chinuch, which means education. It is also related to chein, which means charm of grace. The term connotes not just an initial act but one that instills new life, excitement, joy and a sense of purpose in one's life.

When Rashi says that "when he saw the inauguration of the leaders" Aaron was not thinking of the sacrifices they brought, for he knew they were minor compared to his major and exalted role in the Mishkan.

What troubled Aaron was that he saw how the act of bringing the offerings actually changed the leaders themselves. First, they were dedicated and inspired enough to offer the sacrifices. Second, when they brought the sacrifices to the Mishkan they were again uplifted; they felt renewed and invigorated both emotionally and spiritually. They were no longer the same people they were before this.

Aaron felt badly that all of what he did, including the terrible sacrifice of his sons, did not appear to affect his emotional or spiritual state. In his mind he remained the same Aaron; he did not feel that he had been transformed. He did not feel more dedicated and inspired; in his mind, he was not part of the dedication process at all regardless of the great things that he did.

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This premise can help us shed some light on an enigmatic statement in the Torah: "Aaron did so... as G-d had commanded Moses." Rashi comments: "This teaches the praise of Aaron that he did not deviate (literally "he did not change")."

Commentators have been puzzled by this statement. Isn't it obvious that Aaron would not deviate from G-d's commandment to him? Who could think otherwise?

One may propose that even after Aaron performed the service that G-d said was superior to the service of the other leaders it still did not affect a change in him. Notwithstanding that he did not feel any more invigorated and inspired, Aaron still did as he was told; it mattered not that it had no effect on him.

Emotional Blunting?

There seems to be a troubling pattern here. Aaron, the paragon of love, the man of unbounded kindness, was becoming emotionally numb. This emotional pattern seems to have begun when he lost his two sons. The Torah says that "Aaron was silent." He was unable to show any emotion.

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According to this interpretation Aaron did not feel any spiritual boost when he performed his service in the Mishkan. And if our interpretation is correct, even after he lit the Menorah Aaron was still emotionally detached. It did not change him emotionally.

What was going on in Aaron's life?

A secular psychologist might opine that he was so traumatized by the loss of his sons that he could not emote. However, a Chassidic approach to this matter yields a completely opposite explanation.

Transcending Emotion

Aaron had reached a spiritual level where he felt so inspired and uplifted that it transcended emotion.

Emotions derive from our recognition of the positive or negative value of someone or something. Emotions are a gauge of how close or distant we are to the other person, situation or thing. If we feel how special the other person is, we will develop a feeling of love for that person. The same is true for fear, hate and all the other emotions. Love is also a sense of yearning for something you don't yet have and pine to get closer to.

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However, when the two things merge into one; when we reach the object of our desire, we transcend emotion. There is no longer a need to emote because we have reached and have become one with our goal.

Jacob Recites the Shema

We can find another example of transcending emotion with Jacob when he was finally reunited with his son Joseph. Jacob showed no emotion when Joseph fell on his neck, embraced him and cried. Rashi says: "he [Jacob] was reading the Shema!"

Jacob's bizarre lack of feeling for his most beloved son at such a powerful moment of reunification can be explained in light of the above. Jacob had reached the epitome of his love for Joseph, because Jacob had reached the epitome of oneness with G-d expressed in and through the recitation of the Shema. He was not cold and indifferent to Joseph. He was at one with Joseph because Joseph had now become part of his experience of oneness with G-d.

This, we may suggest, is at the heart of Aaron's "coldness." Aaron had reached the state of oneness with G-d which transcends even the most

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heightened awareness of G-d's emotion engendering light. Aaron was connected and at one with G-d's essence.

Aaron's Humility

Aaron, in his humility, however, attributed his own silence and lack of emotion as a sign that his mind was weak. Without a strong intellect one cannot elicit the deepest emotions.

When Rashi describes Aaron's reaction to not being part of the dedication ceremony he uses the term, "Chalsha da'ato," which literally means his "da'as-knowledge" became weak. What did Rashi mean?

Da'as is the intellectual power that generates emotion. One whose emotions are occluded will generally lack da'as.

Aaron therefore thought that his lack of emotion was attributable to his weak intellectual faculties.

In truth Aaron was mistaken about himself. Aaron was not, as he thought, beneath a heightened and sophisticated level of understanding, he was above it. He had reached the climax of attachment to the oneness of G-d and transcended palpable emotions.

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Nevertheless, Aaron felt badly that he was denied the ability to experience more emotion along with other less sophisticated people. It gets lonely on top where you are the only one who has this heightened level and yearn to share in the feelings of the rest of the people.

So how did G-d respond to his unhappiness?

Having Your Cake and Eating it Too

G-d told him that in the end he would also enjoy the emotions that others feel. Aaron's role was to prepare and light the Menorah which metaphorically means that he was to kindle and prepare the souls of others for a heightened consciousness and passion for G-d. While Aaron may, at certain times, remain above the realm of emotion, he will nevertheless be able to ignite the emotions of all others. As a result Aaron too would be affected and able to feel their emotions

Rashi concludes thus: "Yours is greater than theirs." One can interpret this two ways:

First, Aaron's role transcends that of the others, for he is above conventional emotional attachments.

Second, Aaron's role is greater because "you will get it from them." Aaron will not lose because of his higher level; he will also share some

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of the emotion of others because he helped them develop it. When we help someone with something we are rewarded with the same.

In the Messianic Age we will be able to have our proverbial cake and eat it too. We will, on the one hand, experience total unity with G-d and transcend limited emotional attachments. Our relationship with G-d will be with His very Essence. This relationship is consummated as a result of our commitment to fulfilling G-d's will even when we feel no emotion; just doing what G-d wants of us even when, as with Aaron, we may not feel that we've changed emotionally and spiritually.

On the other hand, because of the way we kindle the souls of others and bring them excitement we will also be rewarded with the joy and excitement from basking in the G-dly manifestations.

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ESSAY THREE

OUR EFFORTS COUNT

One of Judaism's paradoxes is that while G-d is infinite He cares for every detail of our lives and our actions.

ESSAY THREE

OUR EFFORTS COUNT

Aaron Did Not Alter

One of the paradoxes of Judaism is that it is G-d-centric and people-centric. It's not about us and it's all about us!

To make some sense out of this conundrum we should cite an enigmatic verse in this week's parsha, Beha'alo-secha, which discusses the lighting of the Menorah (Candelabrum) in the Holy Temple.

Aaron, Moses brother, the Kohain Gadol-High Priest, is given specific instructions as to how the Menorah should be lit. At the very end of the discussion the Torah relates: "Aaron did so, as G-d had commanded Moses." Rashi, anticipating the obvious question, why it is necessary to mention that he did as he was commanded by G-d? observes that the

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Torah thereby wishes to inform us that Aaron did not alter anything he was told to do.

Commentators are puzzled at Rashi's explanation.

Why does the Torah have to tell us that Aaron, one of the most G-dly people and greatest Jewish leaders of all times, would not deviate from G-d's instructions to him? Why would anyone have thought that Aaron would have even considered changing the method of lighting the Menorah? If the lighting of the Menorah was a self-serving procedure, one could have considered the possibility that some egotistical individuals might be tempted to do things in a self-aggrandizing fashion. If there were some benefit to be gotten from doing things differently, one could understand how a lesser person than Aaron might cut corners. But, there was nothing to be gained by deviating from G-d's command to him, and even if there were some possibility of benefit, it was certainly beneath a person of Aaron's caliber to try it.

Commentators have supplied dozens of answers to this question, which guides our understanding of what we must be cognizant, as human beings and as Jews, in order to light the Menorah of our souls.

To uncover a deeper significance in Rashi's approach, we should reflect on the significance of the Menorah and why it was crucial for the one

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who kindled it not stray one iota from the prescribed manner of lighting it.

The Miracle Menorah

The Menorah was an unusual component of the Beis Hamikdash. Its creation was miraculous. As the Midrash relates, Moses was confounded as to how the Menorah should be fashioned. The seven branched menorah, with its elaborate design (flowers, buttons, goblets) all hammered out of one piece of pure gold proved to be an insurmountable challenge and an elusive goal even for the greatest human being of all time—Moses. At that point, G-d instructed him to throw the gold into the fire and out came the Menorah!

The Menorah's construction was entirely an act of G-d.

In addition, the light of the Menorah was of a miraculous nature. One of the seven lights of the menorah, referred to as the Ner HaMa'aravi - the Western Light - would never extinguish by itself. Indeed, the Talmud (Shabbos 24b) relates that the Menorah was testimony to G-d's presence in Israel.

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The Extremes of the Human Condition

We can now understand why it is necessary for the Torah to state that Aaron did not alter the instructions about how the Menorah should be kindled.

Aaron could have entertained the question: since the light of the Menorah was a manifestation of G-d's supernatural power, why would G-d be concerned about how the Menorah was lit by mortals? Why would human actions, which are limited and finite, be so crucial in a process that emanated from G-d who is unlimited and infinite?

Moreover, Aaron could have questioned the entire ritual of lighting the Menorah. If the Menorah and its light depended on G-d's overt intervention, unlike other aspects of life that follow a natural order, couldn't G-d cause the Menorah to shine without any human involvement? And, if G-d wanted some token show of effort on our part, why would the nature of the token make a difference?

Aaron could have also reached an opposite conclusion. If G-d really wants our participation and He wants us therefore to give our all, then Aaron could have concluded that the instructions he received concerning the lighting were merely a minimum standard. If he wanted

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to do more—add more oil, add another branch etc.—more power to him.

These two opposite reactions are quite typical human reactions to challenges from others. Either we try to shirk personal responsibility by passing the buck and getting away with minimum effort, or we feel that we have to do it and own it all. And when we deal with following G-d's instructions these two attitudes can be exacerbated. We either think that G-d does not need our efforts or that G-d needs us to do more than what He instructed us to do.

Resolving the Paradox

The Torah thus underscores that, in fact, Aaron did everything strictly in accordance with G-d's instructions to him. Aaron understood, intuitively perhaps, that every little human action counts even when it involves G-d's power.

Moreover, G-d also cares about the way we do things. What seem to be minutiae to us are products of our own finite grasp of things. So small things are insignificant; big things are important. However, to G-d who is infinite, big and small are equally insignificant. Furthermore, if G-d so desires, the small details can be huge and infinitely more

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significant than big things. The rationale for this is that just as G-d transcends big things, so does He have the capacity to invest His infinite Self into the smallest of things. And G-d does that by simply commanding us to do a specific seemingly trivial act. If it is His will that we do it, then it is a G-dly act, for G-d and His will are one. If it is a G-dly act, it is also endowed with infinite power. One slight deviation from G-d's instructions, however, reduces the G-dly act to a mere limited and flawed human gesture.

When G-d asked Aaron to light the Menorah giving him intricate instructions, Aaron realized that the little details are potent expressions of the true infinity of G-d, and actually express a greater Divine power than the miracle of the creation and burning of the Menorah. For the miracle of the Menorah was a manifestation of G-d's association with big-ness, and His meticulous instructions are expressions of His ability to transcend big and small.

The Third Temple: A Joint Project

There are conflicting sources as to who will build the future Temple in Jerusalem. According to one Midrashic source, cited by Rashi, it was already constructed by G-d and will descend from Heaven, in the Messianic Age. According to another Midrashic tradition, cited by

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Maimonides, the Jewish people, under the stewardship of Moshiach, will construct it.

The Rebbe explains how both views are compatible.

First, there are two scenarios for the coming of Moshiach. The first is miraculous and the second is natural. If we are deemed worthy enough, everything about the future redemption will be magnificent and miraculous and the temple will descend from on high.

If we fail to meet the highest standards as a people, we will then build the Temple with our limited human resources.

However, the Rebbe finds another way of reconciling these two views: The gates of the Temple were not destroyed but sank into the ground. Moshiach will install those gates, so that it will be a joint project.

And yet a third way the Rebbe reconciles these two views suggests that the Heavenly G-d-made Temple will descend and clothe itself within the man-made Temple. This will be the ultimate scenario because it will represent the fusing of the two worlds. G-d enters into our world and endows our efforts with infinite power and meaning.

This is much like the synthesis of the miraculous Menorah and Aaron's scrupulous adherence to G-d's instructions—the merger of Heaven and Earth.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS BEHA'ALOSECHA

ESSAY FOUR

SAM SAPOZHNIK

Our generation is very special.

We are a fiercely independent minded people.

Yet, we nevertheless yield to G-d's will and seek ways to follow every
Mitzvah with precision and then more.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS BEHA'ALOSECHA

ESSAY FOUR

SAM SAPOZHNIK

Aaron's Praise?

One of the enigmas in this week's parsha is the Torah's description of Aaron's compliance with the commandment to light the Menorah (Candelabrum) in the Temple in a prescribed manner.

Moses, commanded by G-d, tells Aaron to light the Menorah so that all of the flames face the center of the Menorah. Immediately after this instruction is recorded, the Torah continues: "And Aaron did so, as G-d commanded Moses." Rashi, the principle Bible commentator explains: "This teaches us that he did not alter [G-d's command]."

This comment has prompted many to ask the obvious question: How could it be that Aaron, Moses' brother, would even harbor a desire to change the way he was instructed to light the menorah? Why would he

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be praised that he was faithful to G-d's instructions directed to him?
(See preceding and following essay for alternate answers.)

Fish in the Water

On a simple and basic level one could explain that the whole idea of lighting a Menorah was not just as a ritual. In Chassidic literature, the lighting of the Menorah by Aaron was his way of kindling the souls of all the Jews. They are divided into seven general categories, based on seven personality types.

Aaron was chosen to perform this service precisely because he was a person whose own soul was on fire. To do the work of Aaron one must be motivated by a passion for G-d and a passion for other people. If one is missing one or the other they are not the most suited to light the Menorah, either figuratively or literally.

Now when Aaron was about to approach the Menorah, he could have said, "I know exactly what to do. This is my life's passion and obsession. I am like a fish in the water. I do not need precise instructions to tell me how to do it." If a skilled professional instructs us concerning an area of which we have virtually no knowledge, we are more than eager to heed his or her words. But we would take umbrage if we were given

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instructions about how to, let us say, bake a cake, when we have been baking all our lives.

There is a famous Russian expression, employed by Chassidic Masters, that sums up this attitude. A Russian peasant was caught with stolen Tefillin. When he was confronted, he said "Sam Sapozhnik-I am a shoemaker, I made these myself." Frequently we exhibit this sense of independence and indignation when we are "confronted" by someone who implies that he or she knows more than we do about a subject in which we think we are quite proficient.

Aaron, with all of his expertise in the area of lighting up souls, as natural and effortless as it would have seemed for him, did not find the least amount of external or even internal resistance to accepting the instruction he received from Moses about how to do that which was in his greatest area of expertise.

Facing the Center

But, there must be a more specific message intended by the Torah's emphasis that Aaron did as he was told. The specific instruction was that when the Menorah was lit, the six branches, three of the right and

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three on the left, should face the central branch, referred to as the "face of the Menorah."

The fact that it was this particular instruction that the Torah stresses Aaron heeded, indicates to us that there would have been a reason for Aaron to find this particular instruction hard to follow.

What is it about kindling all of the six branches towards the central branch of the menorah that is so significant? And what is the lesson for us?

Rashi explains that by directing the lights towards the center, it deflected the claim that G-d needed the light to illuminate His Temple. If one wanted to increase the light in an area one would normally try to get the flames to be extended outward.

Now, the question can be strengthened. Why would Aaron find it difficult to do something that was designed to show that G-d did not need the light for illumination?

To answer this question, another question must first be resolved: How could Rashi say that there was a need to dispel the notion that G-d needed the light? Who, in his right mind, would have thought that G-d, who wrought all the miracles, needed the light for Himself?

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It may be suggested that by requiring the wicks to be directed towards the center of the Menorah, G-d was responding to a rather sophisticated belief that some might have entertained, that the Menorah was indeed intended to illuminate G-d's Sanctuary. They could have reasoned that since the Mishkan was a physical structure subject to the laws of physics, it required physical illumination. And while G-d does not need physical illumination for Himself, they could have argued that He would need it for His physical Sanctuary.

In other words: there is a belief that though G-d is infinite and beyond the constraints of the physical world, He is subject to the limitations of nature when His presence is introduced into the physical, corporeal world. G-d, in this erroneous view, "respects" the parameters of nature, and will not allow the supernatural and spiritual to intervene and override the natural order.

Aaron, too, might have thought that his role of kindling the Menorah was to bring physical illumination to the Sanctuary and therefore it would have been better to extend the wicks outward to maximize the illumination.

The Torah therefore states that Aaron did not deviate from G-d's instructions.

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True, logic may have dictated otherwise that, when dealing with G-d's Sanctuary within the physical world, the natural order ought to be maximized by maximizing the illumination. Moreover, if the illumination was not as strong, a dark Sanctuary would detract from the honor that it would be accorded. After all, in our tradition, lighting of candles is our way of according honor to the place and time, such as the Shabbat candles or candles lit in the synagogue.

Aaron could thus have reasoned that since Moses' instruction to him flew against logic and would prove to be disrespectful to G-d, it was his obligation to "defend" G-d's honor by extending the wicks outward so that there would be more light for G-d's honor.

The Torah therefore declares that Aaron did not stray one iota from the instruction he received through Moses.

Where Logic Stops

Two lessons emerge from this story:

First: the importance of not allowing our own logic to weigh against G-d's commandments to us through Moses.

Second: that the notion that G-d Himself is "captive," so to speak, to the norms of nature and cannot or will not override it is erroneous. And

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while it is true that G-d respects nature because He is its Creator, He nevertheless has "reserved" the right to override it.

A Message for Modern Times

In recent times we've witnessed miracles that rival those seen in Biblical times. The only difference is that now they are cloaked in nature.

There are those who cannot fathom what it means to be on the very threshold of the Messianic Age. How, they say, can the world change overnight? After all, we are living in a natural order. And while they believe in a Supernatural

G-d, they cannot grasp how the supernatural can enter into the natural in a seamless unity of two worlds; where nature remains nature, and we have the awareness of the supernatural presence.

The Messianic Age, according to most Jewish sources, will produce a fusion of the supernatural within the natural world. Maimonides wrote in his Mishneh Torah that there will be no suspension of the laws of nature in the Messianic Age. He later conceded that this assertion was not categorical and there is room for the alternate view that we will experience great miracles in defiance of nature.

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The two views are not really mutually exclusive. While nature will still be intact, we will see glimpses of the supernatural, especially in the Beis Hamikdash. May we see this happen imminently!

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ESSAY FIVE

COMPLAIN, BUT DON'T RUN
AWAY

A Jew can never run away from his or her connection to Mount Sinai.

When we try to escape, our soul picks up a heavenly voice from Sinai
that beckons us to return.

ESSAY FIVE

COMPLAIN, BUT DON'T RUN AWAY

Upside Down

There is a phenomenon that occurs only twice in the entire Torah, both times in this week's Torah portion entitled Beha'alosecha.

In the middle of the narrative describing the Jewish peoples' journey further into the desert and away from Sinai, two verses are set off from the surrounding material by the upside-down Hebrew letter nun.

The Talmud explains the reason for this interruption by noting that the segments of the story, preceding and following the upside down letters, both involve catastrophes. Not wishing a second tragic story to follow immediately on the heels of the first one, the Torah separated

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them with two verses that discuss another matter, setting them even further apart with the unusual upended letters.

But why is it important to separate one disaster from another? If the Torah needs to tell us of two unhappy events, does it make a great deal of difference if we are told of them together or separately?

There is another question for resolution here. We can easily see what the second catastrophe is: the Torah shows us how the Jews started to complain against G-d. But what is the first catastrophe? In the first of the separated segments, the Torah tells us how the Jews journeyed from Sinai. Were they expected to never leave Sinai?

A Jew Can Never Leave

Upon deeper reflection, we begin to realize that the catastrophe in their journeying from Sinai — the place where they received the Torah — was that they not only left the place in a geographic sense, but also in a spiritual sense. To be sure, they were not rebelling against their experience at Sinai. Without a doubt, they cherished the events there as the high-point of their lives.

But, precisely because they considered Sinai to be a singular high-point or peak phenomenon, they felt that its spiritual lessons were intended

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for only unique occasions and special places. Perhaps once a year, on the anniversary of Sinai itself, they would try to capture the excitement and holiness of the Sinai experience. It did not yet occur to them that, wherever and whenever they should travel, they would have to take the spirit of Sinai with them.

The lesson is as profound as it is obvious: A Jew must never truly take leave of the Sinai experience. Moreover, in truth, a Jew is fundamentally unable to leave Sinai because our experience there is etched into the soul and psyche of every Jew. Indeed, all the souls of all Jews, including converts, stood together at the foot of the mountain and heard G-d speaking to them directly. The Divine words uttered then and there were seared into our consciousness forever.

In addition, our Sages tell us that every day a heavenly voice emerges from Mount Sinai and beckons us to return to G-d. There are times, however, when we don't feel the experience of Sinai or hear the heavenly voice and we attempt to put some distance between ourselves and Sinai.

The upside down "nuns" are a reminder that our existence is turned on its head if we think we can turn away from Sinai.

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The Second Catastrophe

The second catastrophe — the complaining of the Jews — on its own was not so harmful. There were many other occasions when the Jews complained to Moses and they were not treated so harshly for it. It is perhaps intrinsic to Jewish nature or the Jewish mindset to complain and “kvetch.” In some instances, the Jews were actually commended and rewarded for their griping, because it expressed their desire to get closer to G-d and live by the commandments they were given at Sinai.

A perfect example of this can be found in this week’s Parsha. There we are told that a few Jews were denied the opportunity to bring the Paschal offering through no fault of their own. When they complained to Moses: “Why should we be deprived?” G-d agreed with them and gave them the Holiday called Pesach Sheni-The Second Passover.

When does complaining pass beyond obnoxious and objectionable to become a catastrophe? When it is linked with our journeying away from Sinai.

Thus, by separating the narratives of their journeying away from Sinai and their complaining, the Torah ameliorates the severity of the complaint. The Torah warns us that however we may justify our complaining we must never do so by asserting the irrelevance of Sinai.

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By dismissing the Sinai experience, the single most important event in the world's history, we can turn an otherwise innocuous complaint into a catastrophe.

Kosher Kvetching

Conversely, when our gripes and demands are based on our desire to get closer to the Sinai experience, they are not only legitimate, but desired and appreciated by G-d.

Thus, Rabbi Yosef Karo, the famed author of the classic Shulchan Aruch (The Code of Jewish Law) writes that our daily prayers express our demands of G-d that He make good on His promise to bring Moshiach and the future Redemption. This is a positive "complaint," one that is both acceptable and desirable.

Indeed, Rabbi Yosef Karo cites to the Midrash comments that the Jews suffered in the days of King David is because they did not "demand" the building of the Beis Hamikdash-the Holy Temple.

If we analyze this statement, even superficially, a question begs to be asked:

In the days of King David there was a Temple in the city of Givon. True, it was not the magnificent structure built by his son, King Solomon, but

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what was so egregious about their failure to demand a grander Temple?

The answer lies in a better understanding of the Holy Temple. From the time the Mishkan was built and served the Jewish community in the desert for forty years, it was a makeshift structure. The temporary nature of the structure made manifest the temporary and tentative nature of G-d's relationship with the Jewish nation.

As the Jewish people became more established in their Land, the portable structure of the Mishkan was replaced by a more solid structure in Shiloh and then in Nov and Givon. Even so, there was still something temporary about these structures: the cloth coverings of the Mishkan remained as the covering of all these Temples.

The construction of the Beis Hamikdash by King Solomon was an auspicious sign of the times. It indicated that the relationship between G-d and His people had matured to such a point that each "spouse" felt secure in the relationship; understanding that it is one that will never be severed. It was a sign that they had internalized the Sinai experience where G-d had set forth the terms of their mutual relationship.

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When we feel that our relationship with our spouse remains tentative and half-baked, it is a troubling sign that there is a very serious problem, on at least one side of the equation.

In the days of King David, G-d was ready for a total and unequivocal commitment to the Jewish people. G-d's love for us was at its peak and He was eager to consummate the "marriage" by allowing Himself to dwell in their midst. G-d desired and expected that the Jewish people would reciprocate by demanding a more intimate experience in the permanent structure of the Beis Hamikdash.

The Jewish people, tragically, took a more relaxed and passive attitude towards their relationship. There is no need to rush into it, they believed; the level of our love is fine now, there is no need to reach a higher level of love and commitment.

Thus, the Jews were at fault for not demanding more. Such a demand made on G-d would not have been an act of hubris or impudence but rather a sign that they really cared for and reciprocated in kind His overtures to them.

When a parent insists that his or her child wear a warm coat in the winter, it is a selfless demand and one that the child will eventually appreciate.

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Demanding Moshiach

The lesson for our time is obvious. We do not presently have the Beis Hamikdash, nor even the Sanctuaries that preceded the Beis Hamikdash. We are in exile and G-d, our Sages teach us, is also "suffering" the pain of exile and wants nothing less for us than the final Redemption. He desires and expects of us to pray, beseech and indeed demand that Moshiach be revealed and usher in the final Redemption by rebuilding the Beis Hamikdash, thus restoring and enhancing the Sinai experience; the ultimate marriage between G-d and His people.

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ESSAY SIX

STAIRS AND RAMPS

The Menorah was not intended for the sinners.

It was intended to illuminate the souls of the Jewish people.

Their souls, which were already on fire, would now be inspired to climb
higher and higher.

The goal of the Menorah was to awaken deeper and deeper spiritual
powers.

ESSAY SIX

STAIRS AND RAMPS

Light!

Light! If there is one theme that runs through all of Jewish life that captures the essence of Judaism it is light. Torah is called the “Torah of Light.” Mitzvos are likened to a candle. The soul is G-d’s flame. And one of the primary functions and rituals of the Beis Hamikdash/the Holy temple—discussed in this week’s parsha of Beha’alosecha was the lighting of the Menorah-Candelabrum that was designed to bring spiritual light to the entire Jewish nation and through them to the entire world.

So important is the theme of light, particularly the Menorah in the Beis Hamikdash, that every detail and facet of the ritual associated with the Menorah must be a source of light to us in our own lives.

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With this introduction, let us examine one aspect of the ritual of kindling the Menorah that is discussed in the Talmud. Superficially, this detail may seem to be insignificant, but upon deeper reflection there is an important message that it conveys:

Romping on the Ramp?

Our Sages tell us that in order to light the Menorah, the Kohain would go up three steps to be able to reach the top of the Menorah which stood about six feet tall. The three steps enabled him to easily light the flames. This requirement appears to be no more than a practical means of reaching the wicks. Yet, in this apparently secondary or tertiary fact, lies an important lesson.

Indeed, a cursory examination of the Torah's approach to the use of steps for lighting the Menorah prompts us to ask a question. There is a clear prohibition for the Kohain to climb stairs as he would approach the Altar. Instead he the Torah required that a ramp be built. The reason given for the prohibition against climbing stairs to reach the top of the Altar was to avoid taking wide strides that would expose the Kohain to the Altar. Even though the Altar was an inanimate object, the

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Torah wanted to teach us that if we are to be sensitive, even to a rock, how much more so to a fellow human being.

That being the case, how do we justify the use of stairs to light the Menorah? Why was there no ramp built for the lighting of the Menorah?

A Wide Gulf

One answer that sheds some light on the way we must display sensitivity towards others is based on the different roles of the Altar and the Menorah.

The Altar was intended primarily to bring about atonement for the sins of the people who brought the offerings. Even the daily offering served to cleanse the people of certain sins. Now people who would bring these sacrifices were usually down and broken because they realized their degraded state due to their sins. The bringing of a sin-offering would usually cause the sinner embarrassment and discomfort.

The Kohain, by contrast, would feel good about himself and in a spiritually uplifted mood. After all, he was serving in the holiest place on earth and privileged to be a member of the elite priestly class.

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The Kohain's potential upbeat and proud disposition would be reflected in the way he would climb up to the Altar. Every step he took physically to reach the summit of the Altar the Kohain could palpably feel their rising to greater spiritual heights.

At this point, the disparity between the Kohain and the Jew who brings his or her offering is at its peak. The Kohain is on high ground, literally and figuratively, while the Jew whom the Kohain is assisting with his offering is in the abyss. As a result, a wide moral gulf between the two has been created.

On the one hand, we have a lowly and broken-hearted sinner; on the other hand we might have a spiritual giant, who is climbing to greater heights in the process of offering the sacrifice on behalf of the lowly sinner.

At a time like that it is critical that the Kohain should not act condescendingly towards the shattered soul to whom he is ministering. The Kohain must not exhibit an air of superiority by demonstrating how he is now rising to greater heights leaving the sinner in the "dumps." And while it is necessary for the one who helps to enjoy some measure of distance from the lowly individual, in order to lift him up, it must always be performed with the utmost sensitivity and with a healthy dose of modesty. There should be no sense of superiority.

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The prohibition against climbing the Altar with stairs sends a powerful message to the Kohain:

Don't make the sinner feel more rejected, dejected and lowly than he or she already feels. On the contrary, gently lift him or her up, slowly but surely; take them with you on your journey to higher places.

Lighting Up the Souls

When we analyze the function of the Menorah and the role the Kohain who lit it played, we discover a stark contrast to the Kohain's role in the offering of sacrifices on the Altar.

The Menorah was not intended for the sinners. It was intended to illuminate the souls of the Jewish people. Their souls, which were already on fire, would now be inspired to climb higher and higher. The goal of the Menorah was to awaken deeper and deeper spiritual powers. No matter how spiritual and righteous one is, there is always a need to look beyond the horizon and to climb to new heights of spiritual awareness.

For people of this caliber, it is crucial that they recognize their place. Furthermore, every person must know his or her spiritual location and not think he or she is on par with someone who is more spiritual. When

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it comes to spiritual growth and development, no two people are on the same level. We must recognize the fact that when it comes to spirituality, there is and ought to be a hierarchy. And each individual must look up to the person who occupies a more exalted perch and strive to reach that level. If we fail to recognize the fact that there is a higher rung on the spiritual ladder that is occupied by another, we will never be motivated to grow. A sense of complacency and stagnation will set in.

Moreover, if we err about where we belong on the ladder of spiritual development, not only will it retard our growth; it might cause us to lose balance and fall backwards, G-d forbid.

Thus, when lighting the Menorah, the Kohain had to climb a set of stairs that accentuated the different levels and grades, to indicate that the objective of the Menorah lighting was to rise to the highest rung, putting misguided modesty aside. The Kohain had to serve as the role model. We have to look up to him in our pursuit of spiritual growth.

Aaron's Struggle with Lighting the Menorah

With this premise we can also answer one of the questions asked by commentators as to why the Torah emphasizes that Aaron did

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precisely as he was told concerning the kindling of the Menorah. Why would anyone think that Aaron would not comply with the commandment given to him to light the Menorah? (See Preceding Essays.)

Perhaps, we might suggest, since lighting the Menorah involved recognizing the need to put aside modesty for the sake of growing and helping others grow, Aaron might have encountered some difficulty and would not have complied with this because of his modesty. Aaron, by nature, was one of the people and never saw himself as being their superior. Everyone loved him precisely because he did not act as their leader, but worked within the community, as equals to the people he served. Aaron's personality militated against his climbing a ladder and setting himself up as the paragon of spirituality showing the way for others to aspire to his exalted level.

As such, Aaron might not have been able to perform this particular service with precision because it ran contrary to his personality.

To dispel this notion, the Torah tells us that, incredibly, Aaron did not deviate even one iota from the commandment to kindle the Menorah. His loyalty and devotion to G-d trumped his modesty. His submission to a Higher Authority impelled him to transcend his own spiritual

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nature of humility and conform to the will of G-d. In the final analysis, that approach did more for the people than misplaced modesty.

Moshiach's Self-Transcendence

It is not easy to strike a balance between modesty and responsibility to help others grow. The Kohain had to alternate between his service on the Altar, where he had to suppress feelings of superiority as he helped a person climb out of the morass, and his service in lighting the Menorah, where he had to lead from his high perch, with modesty taking a back seat. To alternate between these two opposite sentiments requires self-transcendence.

One individual who will be capable of performing this balancing act will be the Moshiach. On the one hand, Moshiach will be a powerful monarch, whom everyone will recognize for his superior wisdom and spirituality. At the same time, Moshiach will be recognized as one who shares Aaron's humility and sense of equality with his people.

One of Moshiach's tasks is to imbue us with the ability to combine the two by helping us reveal the essence of our souls which transcend our soul's traits and personality types. When that essence is revealed, we can combine opposite modes of behavior and emotion.

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ESSAY SEVEN

LIGHTING UP THE ENTIRE
WORLD

When Aaron lit the Menorah he did not focus on the individuality and parochial nature of his or any other specific tribe.

All of his thoughts were directed towards the center, the unifying element of the Jewish community.

He was single-minded about his role as the one to inspire and uplift all of the Jewish people by focusing on that aspect of our Jewishness that we all share.

ESSAY SEVEN

LIGHTING UP THE ENTIRE WORLD

What's the Connection?

In last week's parsha the Torah relates how each of the twelve leaders of the twelve tribes brought a special offering to dedicate the newly constructed Mishkan-Sanctuary in the desert.

This week's parsha commences with G-d telling Moses to tell Aaron to light the Menorah-Candelabrum in the Sanctuary.

It is axiomatic that there ought to be a link between two Torah portions. What connection does the lighting of the menorah have to the dedicatory offerings of the twelve leaders?

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Rashi cites a Midrashic explanation that G-d gave Aaron the honor of lighting the Menorah in response to his reaction to the twelve offerings. With these twelve offerings each of the twelve tribes were represented, encompassing the totality of the Jewish nation. That is, with one notable exception. The twelve tribes did not include the tribe of Levi; Aaron's own tribe. Aaron was dejected because neither he nor his tribe had the opportunity to bring this inaugural offering. In Aaron's humble way of thinking, his exclusion was a punishment for his involvement in the construction of the golden calf.

To dispel any notion that Aaron was denied an opportunity to bring an offering, and that he was inferior to the other tribes, G-d thus tells Moses to tell him that his role as the one who kindles the Menorah is greater than the role of the other tribes in bringing the dedicatory offerings.

The Torah concludes this narrative by stating that "Aaron did so; he fired up the lamps toward the center of the Menorah, as G-d had commanded Moses." Rashi explains that "this tells the praise of Aaron that he did not deviate [from G-d's command]."

Commentators are puzzled by the need to tell us that Aaron did not deviate from the instructions he was given by G-d through Moses. Why

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would anyone think that Aaron would ever stray? (See preceding essays for other explanations.)

The question is even stronger considering the first, earlier, citation of Rashi that the kindling of the Menorah was

G-d's way of pacifying Aaron by telling him that his role was greater than that of the other leaders. Why would Aaron want to do anything that would invalidate his unique contribution?

Identical yet Different

One approach to this lies in a better understanding of the twelve offerings of the other leaders of the tribes and contrasting it with Aaron's lighting of the Menorah. When we survey their offerings we see that they were identical; yet the Torah goes to lengths to repeat each and every detail of the twelve offerings as if they were all different from one another.

The reason for this paradox is that, indeed, each offering was different. Each leader tribe had different thoughts when they brought their offering. Aware of the unique spiritual character of his tribe; knowing the strengths and weaknesses of his constituents, the leader geared his thoughts to them specifically. Since each leader's soul was connected

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to the souls of the members of his tribe, his thoughts allowed him to cement that connection and thereby inspire and uplift them. By bringing these offerings with the accompanying thoughts, each leader sought to touch and arouse the individual potentials of his tribe. Thus, the thoughts of the leaders were geared to the specific souls and spiritual needs of each tribe. The offering brought by the leader of the tribe of Judah, for example, would not benefit the members of the tribe of Yisachar.

Illuminating All the Souls

Aaron's role was greater than the role of the other leaders, because, although the twelve leaders were responsible for the uplifting of the souls of their own tribe, Aaron's role of lighting the Menorah was to illuminate all the souls of all the tribes. The seven branches of the Menorah, we are told in Kabbalah and Chassidic literature, represents the seven personality types that comprise all the diverse patterns of all the Jewish people. Thus when Aaron lit the Menorah he was lighting up the souls of all the twelve tribes simultaneously.

When Aaron lit the menorah he was told to light all of the branches towards the center. This suggested that Aaron's thoughts were to be

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directed toward the common denominator of all the tribes. Even as he lit the seven branches representing all of the Jewish people, his focus was on each tribe as it was a part of the larger unified whole. He directed his thoughts to the center, i.e., to the aspect of the soul that unites all of the Jewish people, notwithstanding their differences.

Aaron's responsibility was to bring unity into their diversity, whereas the leaders of the tribes had to focus on the individuality of each tribe. Aaron focused on the essence of all of the tribes through which each tribe would derive inspiration and spiritual energy in its individual nature.

So there was a fundamental difference between the direction of Aaron's thoughts when he lit the Menorah and the direction of the thoughts of the twelve leaders when they brought their offerings:

The twelve leaders were required to think parochially. It was their job to represent the needs and interests of their particular tribe. Much like an attorney whose job it is to represent the needs of his client, the twelve leaders were duty-bound to focus on the needs of the people in their own respective tribes.

Aaron, on the other hand, was duty-bound to think of the totality of the Jewish people; channeling the inspiration to them individually through the medium of soul that they shared.

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This difference is further underscored and dramatized by virtue of the fact that nowhere in his performance of the lighting of the Menorah was there a focus on his individual tribe—the tribe of Levi. All of his thoughts were directed towards the common thread that unified all of the branches of the Menorah.

Thus, while Aaron would certainly not have entertained the notion of deviating from the instructions he was given about the actual kindling of the Menorah, Aaron might have been tempted to concentrate on his own tribe as he was lighting the Menorah. He might have changed his thought patterns so that his individual tribe's interests would be especially represented and enhanced.

The Torah, therefore, tells us that Aaron did not deviate from his role to light the Menorah, and he lit the Menorah facing the center. This suggests that he did not focus on the individuality and parochial nature of his or any other specific tribe. All of his thoughts were directed towards the center, the unifying element of the Jewish community. He was single-minded about his role as the one to inspire and uplift all of the Jewish people by focusing on that aspect of our Jewishness that we all share.

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Where the Two Roles Meet

But this explanation begs another question. Why was his tribe of Levi denied the opportunity to have its leader focus on them as individuals? Why did the other tribes merit to have someone look out for their parochial interests, while the leader of the tribe of Levi only concerned himself with the totality of the Jewish people? Why should their individual status be overlooked?

The answer to this question is that this is precisely the individual role of the Tribe of Levi. Their individual role and nature was their ability to reach out and touch all of the people. Any parochial interest of theirs was subordinated to and actually derived from their role as leaders of the entire nation. A member of the tribe of Levi—especially its leaders Moses and Aaron—did not have a private life that was disconnected and distinct from their communal role. And any parochial interests of the members of the tribe of Levi were best served when they were influenced by their interests for the entirety of the community.

All great Jewish leaders of the past have followed in the footsteps of Moses and Aaron, subordinating their own personal interests to that of the community. But it's deeper than that. The needs of the entire community become their personal needs. Their individuality is their obsession with the entire Jewish nation.

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The Lubavitcher Rebbe, after a lengthy conversation with the late Prime Minister of Israel, Menachem Begin, concerning communal and international concerns said to Mr. Begin: "Can you do me a personal favor? There is a young woman in this country who is on the verge of intermarrying. Can you use your influence to bring her back to the Jewish fold?" The Rebbe thereby demonstrated that his personal needs, in the tradition of the greatest Jewish leaders going back to Moses and Aaron, were focused on helping every single Jew materially and spiritually.

Qualifications of Moshiach

Moshiach—who will usher in the final Redemption and who is the last in the line of great Jewish leaders—personifies this trait of Aaron.

According to Maimonides, one of the qualifications of Moshiach is that he is dedicated to influencing all of the Jewish people to go in the path of Judaism. Moshiach is one who will never be content with serving the needs of only his group and community. He certainly does not concentrate on his own personal interests, for his personal interests are the needs of the entire Jewish community; and indeed of all of humanity.

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The Ba'al Shem Tov taught that within each of us are sparks of Moses, Aaron and Moshiach. Thus, each and every one of us should see himself or herself as one whose role it is to light up the entire world with the light of his or her soul and the light of Torah, so that all of the darkness that envelops the world will be banished once and for all.

ESSAY EIGHT

HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

Kabbalah teaches us that the specific details involved in the performance of a Mitzvah are not arbitrary.

When we perform a physical act in the course of doing a Mitzvah, our physical movements parallel the spiritual effects of our Mitzvah.

ESSAY EIGHT

HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

Aaron the Weightlifter

A Torah Trivia question: Who was the first weight lifter? The answer: Aaron, the High Priest, Moses' older brother.

In this week's parsha, the Torah tells us that Aaron was given a rather interesting task. When the entire tribe of Levi was chosen to be members of G-d's "Special Forces," their dedication ceremony required that they be lifted and waved. Aaron literally had to lift 22,000 Levites! (By the way, Aaron was 83 years old at the time!)

Rabenu Bachya, one of the medieval Bible commentators, observed that this was either a public demonstration of Aaron's strength, or alternatively, it must have been a great miracle.

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This entire exercise of Aaron lifting and waving all the Levites is baffling. While it is clear that lifting and waving the Levites was an important element of their initiation into the unique role as G-d's chosen servants, why did Aaron have to physically lift and wave them? Why did G-d have to perform this great miracle to enable Aaron to do all the lifting? Couldn't this ceremony have been performed by means of some symbolic gesture?

No to Symbolism

The simple answer to this question will surprise many readers. Judaism does not recognize symbolic actions. All of Judaism's so-called rituals are not really rituals or symbolic ceremonies. Indeed, our Holidays are not commemorations of past historical events. To be sure, one can find much meaning in remembrances and symbolic gestures, but a Mitzvah goes way beyond ritual and symbolism.

Every Mitzvah, every Divinely ordained act—which many will identify as a ritual or symbolic act—is, in truth, an act that instructs, edifies and instills holiness within the person who performs the Mitzvah and, by extension, the entire world.

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When we eat Matzah on Passover, for example, we are not eating simple flour and water, but, by way of the physical act of eating we internalize a profound spiritual energy, that vitalizes and liberates our soul.

Similarly, when we put Tefillin on our heads, it is not just as a reminder of the unity of G-d—the theme of the Shema contained within these black leather boxes—we actually generate Divine energy that permeates our consciousness.

When a woman lights Shabbat candles before the onset of the Sabbath, she is not just performing a ritual or engaging in some nostalgic tradition that goes back thousands of years, she actually generates spiritual light that will change the atmosphere of the home by introducing Divinity, serenity and peace. Indeed, it brings light to the entire world. According to the Midrash, lighting Shabbat candles will ultimately transform the world of darkness and usher in the Messianic Age, when the “Lights of Zion”, meaning the light of the Beis Hamikdash-the Holy Temple, will shine.

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Uplifting!

All of the above can help us gain some measure of understanding as to why the Levites were actually lifted by Aaron. Aaron was not just performing a ritual laden with meaning. By his physical action, ordained by G-d, Aaron was actually lifting the Levites and their descendants up spiritually as well.

Had Aaron only performed a symbolic gesture, one that was not Divinely ordained, it might well have inspired some of the Levites, but it certainly would not have instilled within them the G-dly energy they and their descendants needed to realize their potential.

Kabbalah teaches us that the specific details involved in the performance of a Mitzvah are not arbitrary. When we perform a physical act in the course of doing a Mitzvah, our physical movements parallel the spiritual effects of our Mitzvah. For example, when Aaron lit the Menorah he was actually illuminating the souls of the Jewish people.

Based on this premise, the question that may still arise is: Why lift and wave the Levites? What spiritual dynamic is related to the physical lifting and waving? And why was it necessary that it be done by Aaron

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specifically? Couldn't one of his sons have performed this rather onerous task in his place?

Tempering Passion

Chassidic literature, based on Kabbalah, understands the act of lifting the Levites as a way of tempering their natural fiery passion with the kindness of Aaron.

To explain: There are two primary personality types. The Kohain (Priest) is known as a man of kindness. Aaron, the first priest, was known for his love of, and obsession with, peace. Hillel, the great Sage, states in Ethics of the Fathers: "Be like the disciples of Aaron, love peace, pursue peace, love the creatures and bring them close to the Torah." By contrast, the Levites were known for their fiery nature. While passion for good things is no blemish, one can misplace that passion and use the fire destructively. To cite a simple analogy: One's enthusiasm for Judaism can become misdirected and used in arrogance to put down someone who is not as passionate.

Aaron, who personified the attribute of kindness, was therefore charged with the responsibility of uplifting the Levites, and in so doing, uplift their passion so that it only served a lofty end.

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Waving the Levites in all six directions symbolizes the synthesis of their diverse character traits. Each of the directions represents a different personality trait. When they were combined and directed towards one goal—serving the one G-d—they transformed the Levites' diverse character traits into a harmonious blend, reconstituting them into a wholesome individual whose passion would not provoke a mishap.

Even after Aaron lifted and waived the Levites, thereby instilling in them some of his love and kindness, they still remained passionate and zealous guardians of Jewish interests. Without Aaron's initiation process, they would have not been such an asset to the Jewish people. However, there remains a perennial need to govern their occasional one-sided zealous streak.

Complete Levite-Kohain Synthesis

In the Messianic Age, the Kabbalists tell us, the Levites will be promoted to the rank of Kohain. Perhaps this implies, among other lessons, that in the age of perfection the Aaronic effects on the Levites will be complete. In times of exile, fragmentation and division is the rule, whereas unity and synthesis is the exception and is resisted by the people who are prone to lean in one direction. As a result, we—and

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especially those with the Levite temperament—often find it hard to combine the two attributes of kindness and fiery passion.

With the coming of Moshiach and the beginning of the Redemption, the fiery passion of the Levite will become the norm for everyone.

However, the Messianic Age is also the age of unity and synthesis. We will therefore experience the Levite mindset as it is tempered and uplifted by the loving temperament and spiritual state personified by Aaron.

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ESSAY NINE

SING A NEW SONG

When we grow in appreciation for and closeness to G-d, what seemed to be ideal in the past is severely wanting now.

ESSAY NINE

SING A NEW SONG

Wine and Song

Music plays an important role in Judaism. And while song is often associated with vice along with wine, in Judaism those two go together.

In this week's parsha, Beha'alosecha, the Torah describes the role of the Levites. In Chapter 8, verse 16, the Torah states: "For they are dedicated to Me from among the children." A more literal rendition reads: "For they are dedicated, dedicated to Me..." The repetition of the word "dedicated" prompts Rashi to explain that the Levites had two primary functions in the Sanctuary: One was to carry the Mishkan and the other was to sing."

At which point in the Temple service did the Levites sing? The Talmud informs us that it was when they would pour wine on the Altar. The Talmud puts it as follows" "One says shirah-song only over wine."

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Music and wine are known to be powerful agents for removing one's inhibitions. There are things people will not say unless they have allowed their tongues to be loosened by wine. Music, too, allows people to vent their feelings in a way that they could not possibly express in prose.

In a spiritual vein, wine and song at appropriate times would allow people to express deeper feelings of devotion to G-d.

Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds' Diverse Views of Song

There is, however, a difference between the Babylonian Talmud and Jerusalem Talmud concerning the role song played in the Temple. The Jerusalem Talmud cites another verse in this week's parsha (verse 19):

"I have given the Levites, from among the children of Israel, as a gift to Aaron and his sons, to carry out the service in the Tent of Meeting for the children of Israel, and to atone on behalf of the children of Israel..."

The Jerusalem Talmud comments that the atonement mentioned in this verse was procured through song. Moreover, the Jerusalem Talmud insists that the offering that the song of the Levites accompanied was not effective in procuring atonement without the Levite's musical accompaniment. The Babylonian Talmud, however,

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does not go so far in according song with such atoning power.

According to the Babylonia Talmud, the musical accompaniment was a way of embellishing the sacrifice that was brought; it was not, however, indispensable to the efficacy of the atonement process.

Several questions come to mind:

First, why would the Jerusalem Talmud claim that song was so crucial to the atonement process?

Second, what is the conceptual difference between the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds' approaches concerning the power of song in the Sanctuary?

Third, the requirement of singing during the offerings was restricted to public burnt offerings. When a person brought an offering as atonement for a sin it was not accompanied with music. If music is a form of atonement, why did a sin offering not have that requirement? Why only public burnt offerings?

Kapparah on Two Levels

The answer to the last question is the key to answering the other two questions as well.

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Atonement exists on two levels. When one commits a crime, the atonement process requires serious introspection and sometimes brutal honesty with oneself. One cannot blithely dismiss his or her action by waxing poetic and spiritual. The sin was down-to-earth and so must the atonement for the sin come through down-to-earth recognition of the harsh and uncomfortable reality that we did something wrong. If it makes the person feel shame, it is a positive effect because the embarrassment for one's degradation is a cleansing and cathartic agent.

At this stage in the atonement process, music with its loftiness will merely paper over the underlying flaw, which will simply reappear after the effects of the inspiring musical interlude wear off.

The daily burnt offerings, however, brought atonement on another level. The Hebrew word for atonement "kapparah" has several layers of meaning. The first is simply atonement. A person acts improperly towards another. To get the offended individual to forgive the offender, he or she must apologize. However, the apology, even a sincere apology, will not restore the good relationship that existed before the offense was committed. How does one restore the warm relationship he or she enjoyed previously?

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The answer is by following the apology with a positive gesture such as sending the offended person a gift as a sign of good will.

When the relationship is thus restored to its original positive state the meaning of kapparah assumes a deeper character. It is no longer translated as forgiveness but as "wiped off" or "scoured." Not a trace of the previous negative relationship remains.

Similarly, the Talmud states, the burnt offering was a form of a gift that would bring about the higher form of kapparah, one that restored our relationship with G-d to the highest level.

However, kapparah is a term that has infinite application. No matter how good we may be and no matter how ideal our relationship with G-d, there is a sense that we are still lacking in our devotion to Him and, therefore, there is the need for a higher and deeper form of kapparah.

Moreover, when we grow in appreciation for and closeness to G-d, what seemed to be ideal in the past is severely wanting now. This realization then elicits from us a need to rectify the newly discovered "flaw" in our relationship. In other words, the more we are atoned, the more sensitive we become and the more we detect small hairline cracks in our connection to G-d. These cracks can only be seen by the person who is endowed with superior vision because he or she has so

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purified himself or herself. In simple language: the more refined we become, the more refined we feel we need to become.

And it is concerning this deeper level of kapparah that the Jerusalem Talmud establishes the indispensable role of music. To disentangle ourselves from evil, music is not as crucial as rolling up our figurative sleeves to deal with the reality of evil in our lives. However, when we deal with the more sophisticated levels of kapparah, it is then that the Jerusalem Talmud demands that we use music to rise above the most subtle and refined flaws.

Talmud of Exile and Talmud of Light

We can now understand the difference in approach to the role of music between the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud.

The Babylonian Talmud is the Talmud of exile. It was written in the Diaspora in a dark country—Babylonia—and about which the Sages of the Talmud applied the verse in the Book of Lamentations: “He has made me dwell in dark places.” The Babylonian Talmud is described by the Talmud as the Talmud of darkness because it relates to the challenges that we have in galus, the nadir of darkness.

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From the position of darkness, mired in exile, song is not that crucial. A person who is lost in a dark forest would never get out if they would just sing. He or she must look for ways to get out of the dark place. In this context, music is important but not indispensable. Music will certainly help alleviate some of the feelings of fear that accompany the person who is trying to climb out of the morass and make the trip more pleasant and smooth, but it is no substitute for the basic survival requirement of extricating oneself from the moral quagmire he or she is in.

Music - the Pen of the Soul

The Jerusalem Talmud, by contrast, is the Talmud of the Land of Israel, the Land that is associated with and characterized by light. In this enlightened mode, music plays a much more crucial role. In the world of light, the emphasis is on climbing to greater heights and not being content with the most significant achievements of the past. In this context, music is an integral part of the process. As the Alter Rebbe stated, "speech is the pen of the heart, but melody is the pen of the soul."

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When dealing with the desensitized heart that leads us astray we need, first and foremost, proper speech; words of Torah and prayer to effect our emotions. However, when our objective is to reveal the deeper spiritual dimensions of our soul enabling us to soar to greater heights, spiritual music is an integral part of the process, not just an enhancement and support.

Living in Two Worlds

We are now living in two worlds. On the one hand we are still affected and challenged by galus values that are quite lowly and despicable. All of the immorality around us is real and we must, in the Babylonian Talmud mode, roll up our sleeves and combat all of the negative influences in our society, utilizing spiritual melodies and music as an aid, but not a substitute for helping to liberate ourselves from galus darkness.

However, we are also, paradoxically, beneficiaries of the light of the future Era of Redemption. We can already see and feel the more sophisticated light and influence of the Jerusalem Talmud's obsession with lighting up the light. We are able to feel the light of our souls yearn for more light. In this "Jerusalem Talmud of Light" mode, music is

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an indispensable part of the process of experiencing the sophisticated energy of Redemption.

It is important to recognize that the degree to which music can assist us in liberating ourselves from dark places and especially the extent of music's ability to energize our soul to reach higher levels depends on the nature of the music itself. The more spiritual the music is—composed by holy people or sung by people in their pursuit of spiritual goals—the more effective the music is.

The proper use of music is certainly one very significant preparation for the future Redemption, which is associated with the “new song” that we will all sing. It will be the song of unmitigated and unadulterated spiritual growth.

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ESSAY TEN

FIFTY AND STILL
COUNTING

Counsel is more than acquisition of knowledge in all of its forms
(breadth, length and depth).

It is also the ability to distill that knowledge, removing the undesirable
ideas that can taint and distort the thinking of even one endowed with
the greatest intellectual capacity.

ESSAY TEN

FIFTY AND STILL
COUNTING

Forced Retirement

When a Levite reached his fiftieth birthday, as this week's parsha informs us, he was required to retire from his service for the Mishkan (the portable Temple in the desert).

The Levites were charged with several responsibilities: They performed the musical service that accompanied various offerings; they also manned the gates of the Temple; and, during the forty years the Jewish people were in the desert before entering the Promised Land, the Levites were also responsible for transporting the Mishkan and its vessels.

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From which of these functions did the Levite have to retire when he reached fifty? Rashi tells us that this refers, specifically, to “the work of transporting the parts of the Mishkan on their shoulders. Even after their retirement from this work, they would return to close the gates of the Temple.”

Rashi appears simply to be distinguishing between the more physically challenging labor of carrying heavy objects and the relatively light work involved in opening and closing the gates. When the Levite reached the age of fifty, and was no longer in the prime of his physical prowess, he still would be required to perform the lighter duties. In our own day and age, virtually all professional athletes have retired by the age of fifty.

Getting Older and Better

Upon deeper reflection, though, it is evident that the mandatory retirement age for the Levite and his transfer to gate duty was not simply a matter of the physical changes that occur by the age of fifty. In Judaism, aging is not a down-hill headed process. In fact, our tradition recognizes that the reason one’s physical capabilities decline is to facilitate the growth of intellectual and spiritual qualities. Our

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sages, thus, state in Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) that “Fifty is the age of eitzah-counsel.” When we reach the age of fifty we have, hopefully, garnered sufficient life experience that we are capable of imparting some of our “counsel” to others.

Kidney Counseling?

Counsel has been defined in at least three ways. Taken together, they describe the three levels of counsel that we acquire by the age of fifty.

Maharal defines counsel as having and using a deeper level of understanding. At the age of forty, one achieves the level of binah, which enables the drawing of inferences from knowledge that is already possessed. Counsel, however, refers to an added dimension that exists beneath the surface, which cannot be deduced logically but must be appreciated by one whose mind is so attuned.

In our younger years, when our capacity to remember is at its peak, we acquire a breadth of knowledge. By the age of forty, we are able to extend our knowledge to new areas. We can take a concept and find ways of applying it to other situations. By the age of fifty, according to Maharal’s approach, we develop the capacity to delve more deeply into the subject matter.

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A second level of Counsel is alluded to in the Talmud's association of counsel with the kidneys! With the kidneys? Yes, with the kidneys!

The organic function of our kidneys is to filter undesirable matter from the body. When we absorb a plethora of ideas from the outside world, we need to be able to filter the wrong ones from the right ones, to separate the chaff from the wheat.

This "filtration" process is what one acquires by the age of fifty. Life's experiences at that point should suffice to enable us to know which ideas – though logical and reasonable seeming – are absolutely wrong.

On this level, counsel is more than acquisition of knowledge in all of its forms (breadth, length and depth). It is also the ability to distill that knowledge, removing the undesirable ideas that can taint and distort the thinking of even one endowed with the greatest intellectual capacity.

A young man was once lost in the forest, going in circles until he chanced on an older person. He was overjoyed to find someone who could show him the way out. The older man said that he was also lost, but the young man was not to despair, because while the older man did not know the correct way out, he could tell him which paths he should not take...

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The art of knowing which way not to go is the art of counsel that we acquire at the age of fifty.

Teaching at Fifty

There is yet a third level of counsel that we develop by the age of fifty. Counsel, in Chassidic thought, is associated with the ability to transmit knowledge. When we are endowed with the highest levels of wisdom and possess the power of discernment, we can transmit our knowledge to the outside world.

Occasionally, even the brightest person can find it difficult to transmit knowledge to those who are intellectually inferior. One needs to use one's power of counsel to convey profound knowledge without either adulterating the knowledge or overwhelming the student. This ability comes by the age of fifty.

To summarize, counsel includes, the "beneath-the-surface" knowledge, the power of discernment and the ability to transmit knowledge to others.

Moving to a New Venue

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In this context, we can understand why the fifty year old Levite retires from carrying the holy objects of the Mishkan to tending its gates. Carrying the holy objects, metaphorically refers to the process of bringing holiness from one holy location to another. While performing this function, the Levite was involved in strictly holy premises, with holy objects. The movement of the Mishkan did not involve moving something holy to a less holy venue.

This is a burden that any dedicated person could “shoulder.” One did not need to have these extraordinary powers of comprehension, intuition and eloquence that are wrapped up in the Torah’s definition of counsel.

Open the Gates

At the age of fifty, however, the Levite is introduced to a higher form of Divine service. By then he is able to open and close the gates, to know whom (and which influences) to allow into the Temple precincts and whom not to allow. This power of counsel and discernment requires a higher level of maturity, intelligence and spiritual growth.

Fifty: The Power of Redemption

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The number fifty is also a reference to the state of freedom, based on the Biblical assignment of the fiftieth year as the Jubilee year, when all slaves would go free. This also alludes to the advanced state of knowledge we all will attain during the Messianic Age, when the world will achieve a complete state of freedom from all distractions and impediments to knowledge and spiritual growth. This is the age of which it is said that "one will not have to teach one another for all will know Me," an allusion to the intuitive knowledge that one acquires at the age—and state of— fifty.

With the coming of the Messianic Age that is associated with the number 50, we will have attained all three levels of counsel in their most complete form. We will be endowed with the deeper knowledge, have the power to filter the negative and be able to transmit the knowledge to everyone.

This is actually alluded to in our daily prayer, when we ask G-d to restore our judges and our counselors. Moshiach is the ultimate counselor who will endow us with his power of counsel as well.

By devoting our lives to that which is represented by the number fifty— particularly those who have actually reached the chronological age of fifty—which is deeper understanding of Torah, standing vigilant to discern between healthy and harmful influences, and by eloquently

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transmitting this knowledge to others, we will all hasten the coming of Moshiach and the onset of the Age of complete freedom with its concomitant attainment of the highest levels of knowledge.

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ESSAY ELEVEN

PASSOVER IN JUNE!

The Lubavitcher Rebbe cited the words of the Midrash:

“The Time of your Redemption has arrived!”

The Rebbe declared that we are on the threshold of the Redemption.

What we need now is the desire and courage to cross over this threshold into the “Sanctuary courtyard”—the Final Redemption!

ESSAY ELEVEN

PASSOVER IN JUNE!

Second's Please!

In the very first anniversary of the Exodus from Egypt, this week's Parsha recounts how the Jews celebrated Passover for the second time. What makes this episode unique is that there were a few Jews who complained about not being permitted to participate in the ritual of the Paschal offering. They were denied this right because they were ritually "unclean" having been involved in the burial of the dead.

They protested:

"Why should we be denied the opportunity to bring the offering of the L-rd in its appointed time among the children of Israel?"

G-d communicated His response to them through Moses that they—or anyone in the future who was denied the right to bring the offering as

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ritually unclean or by being on a faraway journey, were to be given another opportunity to bring it a month later.

Their complaint was deemed to be a praiseworthy gesture and thanks to it we now have another Jewish Holiday: Pesach Sheni-the Second Passover. This holiday conveys the twin lessons that it is important to demand that G-d give us more opportunities to be close to Him and that, even if we miss such an opportunity, we are given a second chance.

What's the Point?

Rashi, citing the Talmud, observes that in the Torah—which does not ordinarily have any punctuation—there is a little dot written over the words “far-away journey.” This, Rashi comments, is to qualify and limit the definition of “far away.” Far away does not necessarily imply that the person is miles away from the Temple. Even if he is situated “right outside the threshold of the Sanctuary courtyard,” he or she is considered to be far away.

This obviously begs several questions. First, how can simply standing outside the threshold be characterized as being “far away?” And why does the Torah transmit this lesson to us by way of a little dot? Why

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couldn't the Torah have taught us the same lesson by explicitly stating that, if one were outside the threshold of the Temple when Passover arrived and failed to bring the offering, one would be given another opportunity to do so?

Calling Long Distance

The answer to all these questions is to redefine distance. Distance is not necessarily measured by physical proximity. The greatest gap between two people is when they are back to back, even if they are touching one another, whereas two people miles away who face each other can be said to be close.

One's "journey of life" can be such that even if one were to stand so close to the holiest place on earth that all one had to do was cross over the threshold, he or she may still choose to remain outside. This person is truly farther away from the Temple than the one who may be situated thousands of miles away from it, but whose heart is always yearning for the day that he can come there.

King David expressed himself thus when he was physically far away from the Temple, "My soul thirsts for You.. in a dry and weary land... So do I thirst to thus perceive You in the Sanctuary." The Ba'al Shem Tov

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interpreted King David's words to mean: "O that I would so perceive You in the Sanctuary." King David prayed, according to the Ba'al Shem Tov, that his yearning for G-d would be as strong when he was close to Him in the Sanctuary as when he was far away.

Close But Far

There are times when one's physical closeness is, ironically, in an inverse proportion to one's emotional distance. There can be many causes. Three of these causes come to mind:

First, "familiarity breeds contempt," is one cliché that describes this phenomenon. When one is so close they tend to take the other for granted. We expect them to be there and we don't acknowledge their presence. Worse still, is when we have unfair expectations of one who is so close to us that it actually turns us away from them.

Second, oft-times, closeness gives us a false perception that we already have what we are close to, and have no need to go and get it.

Third, frequently, the prospect of finally realizing one's greatest dream, entering the most holy place on earth, could generate feelings of fear

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and trepidation. People are known to fear success. They would rather dream about it than ever achieve it.

It's Not Pointless!

Whatever the cause, one might expect that, when people missed an opportunity to bring the Paschal offering, even when or, perhaps because they were so close (they were standing on the other side of the threshold of the Sanctuary), they would not be given a second chance. It would be futile to give them a second chance when they were so far.

However, Torah teaches us by placing the little dot on the words "far away journey," that even one who is so far still possesses what has been called "the pintele yid," the "point" of Jewish consciousness, that doesn't allow any Jew to ever lose his or her Jewish identity. All one has to do is to recognize that he or she has this "point" and then make another effort to cross the threshold that is the sole barrier between the Jew and G-d's Sanctuary.

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We're Close and Close

That we are living on the threshold of a new age of spirituality has been universally recognized by all of the greatest Jewish leaders of our times. In the words of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, in turn, cited the words of the Midrash, "The Time of your Redemption has arrived!"

What is lacking now seems to be the desire and courage to cross over this threshold into the "Sanctuary courtyard"—the Age of Redemption.

We seem to be so close but yet so far. In truth, while we might think we are far, the Torah tells us that we have the "point" that feels dissatisfaction with galus and yearns to be inside G-d's Sanctuary.

Whenever a Jew emits a sigh and is intolerant of the suffering, pain and evil that still exists, that is his or her "pintile yid" expressing itself. That is our way of saying we want G-d to make good on the last promise that He has yet to keep: bring us Moshiach and the ultimate Redemption!

There are some stubborn souls who may think they are too emotionally and spiritually distant from the Sanctuary and that their "point" has been dulled and blunted. They feel that they are too far gone to be given another chance. The Torah, in this week's parsha, conveys the opposite message and states emphatically that no Jew will be left

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behind. No Jew is unworthy of being given another opportunity to enter into the Sanctuary and celebrate the ultimate Festival of Liberation.

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ESSAY TWELVE

THE "MAKE-UP" HOLIDAY

When a community of Jews is involved in a Mitzvah it introduces an element of holiness that is truly infinite.

No matter how many excuses we may have for separating ourselves from the communal effort, it will not make up for the lost spiritual gain.

ESSAY TWELVE

THE "MAKE-UP" HOLIDAY

The Value of Life

There is one Holiday that can be celebrated twice. This Holiday, known as Pesach Sheni-The Second Passover—allows one who was precluded from the observance of the first Passover to observe it a month later.

The circumstances behind this "make-up" holiday are recorded in this week's parsha: There were a number of people who were ritually defiled because they had been involved in the burial of some dead people. According to Jewish law, one who comes in contact with a dead body becomes ritually unfit. This simply means that they cannot enter into the holy Temple, or partake of any consecrated offering.

The spiritual reason for this exclusion is to impress upon us the value of life and that holiness resides where there is life. The absence of life,

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where G-d's vitality is obscured, is in direct conflict with the offerings to Him that are all about experiencing one's closeness to G-d.

Diminished

However, these individuals could not make peace with the idea that they would be excluded from such an important celebration and they complained to Moses saying: "Why should we be diminished?" Their argument was that not only were they not privileged to be a part of the celebration as all others were, but that this actually diminished them; their spiritual stature was reduced.

At first glance their argument was inappropriate. There are many instances in which the Torah tells us that certain people are exempted from certain obligations and celebrations. Yet, one does not find many cases where people complained and their arguments were accepted. What was so different about this situation?

Selflessness Should Not Be Punished

The individuals who became defiled because they were involved in the burial of the dead did this as an act of kindness for others, not for their

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own benefit. Indeed, burying the dead is regarded as the ultimate act of kindness since one does not expect to receive anything in return from the recipient of this kindness.

If they were just involved in some neutral pursuit, or even in the pursuit of a mitzvah that involves one's own self-enhancement, they would not have complained. They would have appreciated the fact that there are tradeoffs. By virtue of their involvement in one effort they might be preventing their involvement in something else.

However, these individuals could not fathom how, in light of their sacrifice for others, they could lose their ability to get closer to G-d. How could selfless behavior for another render one ineligible for the Paschal Sacrifice and all the spiritual benefits that it entailed?

Community Minded

Perhaps one can add another point. Their selfless act meant that they were not thinking of their own individual spirituality. They were community conscious. Why then, they argued, should they be treated as "exceptions" to the communal effort associated with the Paschal lamb. They did not want to be left out of the communal effort.

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And indeed, G-d concurred with their argument. When one goes out of his or her way to help another individual, that person will not end up losing. One way or another, G-d will provide this individual with an opportunity to make up whatever they may have lost.

There are several lessons that come to mind:

The first is that there is no real substitute for the Mitzvos we do in a communal setting. A community is not just the sum total of its constituents. When a community of Jews is involved in a Mitzvah it introduces an element of holiness that is truly infinite. No matter how many excuses we may have for separating ourselves from the communal effort, it will not make up for the lost spiritual gain.

This thought can help us understand the words of Hillel in Ethics of the Fathers (Chapter 2): "Do not separate yourself from the community."

The problem with this statement is that it was inserted into the Mishnah that features a statement of his descendent, Rabban Gamliel, some seven generations later! His statement reads: "Fulfill His will as if it were your own... Nullify your will before His will..."

What is the reason for adding Hillel's admonition to not separate from the community with his descendant's teaching to conform to G-d's will?

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In light of the above, it may explain that Rabban Gamliel was talking of the need to subordinate your own individual interests to G-d's will.

Hillel is then quoted because he takes this idea to the next step, subordinating your will to that of the community. Even when it would seem that your own spiritual interests can best be served by your personal journey, there are times when you must subordinate it to the community.

You Never Lose

There is yet a second lesson, a powerful one that is particularly pertinent to our times.

We are living in the last days of the dark exile, on the very threshold of the age of light and Redemption. However, at the end of the night, the darkness is even greater than before. As a result of this darkness many Jews have lost their spiritual vitality. Their souls are concealed; their connection to G-d obscured.

There are those, however, who are more fortunate and have not lost their connection to their heritage. Their practice of Judaism is vibrant. When they survey what has happened around them and they see the

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spiritual carnage, they may be hesitant to stop and help those individuals who have lost their zest for Jewish life.

One argument, specifically, is usually heard: "How can I help these less fortunate Jews? If I take away time from my Torah studies, I may lower my position in life. I will be precluded from participating in Jewish experiences that require more intense involvement."

Our parsha comes to dispel this line of reasoning.

When people are involved in efforts to help restore life to others, they will never be losers. G-d will always provide them with opportunities to make up anything that they may have temporarily missed.

As a result of the complaint that those who had participated in burying the dead lodged, not only were they given another opportunity to observe Passover that year, but from that time onward any Jew, for whatever reason, could make up the Passover observance.

In other words, not only did their sacrifice not deprive them of the opportunity to bring the Paschal offering, it gave them additional merit. From that time onward every Jew could correct their past, even if their failure to bring the offering was due to less than idealistic concerns.

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In these days, every effort to assist others with their Jewish awareness and observance can only provide the final thrust into the period of Moshiach.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

G-D, MOSES AND THE TRUMPETS

The Land of Israel is G-d's special gift to the Jewish people. It is not
ours to give away.

Giving it away is not why we traveled this long, arduous journey.

Being in Israel is also a mindset that encourages us to conform to G-d's
will.

The phrase "Land of Israel" can be translated as "the land that
expresses its desire to follow G-d's will."

ESSAY THIRTEEN

G-D, MOSES AND THE TRUMPETS

Three Leaders

One of the many themes in this week's parsha is the commandment given to Moses to fashion silver trumpets. These trumpets were to serve several functions. The first few functions of the trumpets mentioned in the Torah were: to gather the people and their leaders, and to signal when they were to travel.

Commenting on this verse, Rashi states that the journeying of the children of Israel depended on three things: G-d, Moses and the trumpets. The Midrash (Beraisa d'Mileches Hamishkan) clarifies the role of G-d, Moses and trumpets. G-d, by forming the special Cloud into a

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pillar, and placing it above the tribe of Judah, indicated that Judah and the others were to travel. Moses, then, would tell the Jews in the evening to prepare for their journey the next morning. And finally, when they heard the sounding of the trumpets, they would start to travel.

What is the significance of these three influences in the journeying of the Jewish people in the desert and how can it be applied to our own journey through life?

Do You Know Where You're Going?

On one level, our life's journey is mapped out by G-d. The Psalmist declares: "Man's footsteps are determined by G-d." Wherever we go, and wherever we end up, has been determined by G-d.

There is a well-known story of a famous rabbi who was greeted by a powerful nobleman as he was walking down the street.

"Where are you going?" the nobleman asked the rabbi.

"I have no idea," was the rabbi's curt reply.

The nobleman was enraged at the rabbi's evasive answer and had him thrown into prison.

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However, the nobleman was curious to know why the rabbi refused to divulge where he was going and decided to visit him in prison.

"Why didn't you tell me where you were going?" the nobleman asked the rabbi.

To which the rabbi replied, "If you would have asked me where I was planning to go, I could have told you. But, when you asked me where, in fact, I was going, I truly had no idea. Did I anticipate that I would end up in jail?"

Lest one think that, since G-d determines where we are going and where we will end up, there is no need to seek guidance as to where we should go, the Torah informs us otherwise. We must consult Moses, or the Moses and spiritual leader of each generation, about where to go. But, more precisely, the spiritual guides are there to prepare us for our journey, telling us when and how we should travel.

And finally, there are times when the Moses of the generation asks the Kohanim, or his emissaries, to sound the trumpets to inspire us all to take the first step in the right direction.

In other words, our lives have to be informed by the realization that we are in G-d's hands, and that ultimately, G-d guides our footsteps.

Moreover, we must realize that we depend on our spiritual mentors for

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specific guidance and that we must become the trumpeters that bring their message to the entire world community.

Our Destination

From the day we received the Torah at Mount Sinai, over 3,300 years ago, G-d has told us in general terms where we are to go. Our destination is the Land of Israel, where we would implement all of G-d's teachings in our lives.

Had we, as a nation, heeded G-d's commands as we made the Land of Israel our home, that would have been the final destination; the Messianic Age. But, alas, we were compelled to make that trip to the Promised Land following a circuitous route. First, we went through the desert for forty years and then, after the destruction of the first Temple, we returned to Israel by way of Babylonia and Persia.

Had we, as a nation, learned our lesson, after we returned and built the Second Temple, that era could have evolved into the age of utopia. But alas, that was not to be. We were forced to pack our proverbial bags and wander through the Diaspora for close to two-thousand years. But we know that our destination has not changed. Our journey in exile is intended to get us to return to the Land of Israel not just in the

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physical sense, but in the spiritual sense as well. This means that we are to realize what the Land of Israel represents.

The Gift, the Mindset and the End

First, we must recognize that the Land of Israel is G-d's special gift to the Jewish people. It is not ours to give away. Going to Israel for the purpose of giving it away to others is not why we traveled this long, arduous journey.

Second, we must recognize that being in Israel is not just a geographic experience. It is also a mindset. A mindset that encourages us to conform to G-d's will. Indeed, the phrase "Land of Israel" can be translated as "the land that expresses its desire to follow G-d's will."

Third, we must also recognize that the end of our journey is the complete Redemption of the Jewish people from exile and peace for the entire world. In the end scenario, we will see Moshiach building the Third Temple, which will be the medium by which G-d's presence is revealed to the entire world.

The Pointers

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All the different cataclysmic and miraculous events of the past century, and particularly, the last few decades, are G-d's way of pointing us in the direction we should go.

But not all signs that G-d gives us are as clear as we would like them to be. G-d, therefore, sends us sensitive spiritual leaders who pick up these signals and tell us what they mean. Throughout the past century, the greatest Jewish spiritual leaders have told us that we are living in the Biblically predicted "end days" that are characterized by the Talmud as the "Heels of Moshiach." In the last few decades, the tempo has increased with the Lubavitcher Rebbe's declaration that the "time of the Redemption has arrived," meaning that we are in the most fitting time for us to end our journey.

But these leaders also tell us how we are to prepare for the last leg of the journey. They sound the "trumpets" to awaken us from our exile-induced reverie. Some of the historical clarion calls heard a little over a decade ago by the Rebbe include:

The Message of the Trumpets

"Learn Torah, specifically the teachings of the Torah concerning Moshiach and the Era of Redemption."

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"Live with the teachings about Moshiach." This means we should live now the way we anticipate we will be living in the Messianic Age. We will perform more Mitzvos and perform them with more sincerity and integrity.

"Open our eyes" to see the new reality in the world around us. We should appreciate the changes for the good, even as we implore G-d to bring an end to the suffering.

"Prepare ourselves to welcome Moshiach." We prepare for Moshiach by doing more acts of goodness and kindness, and, more specifically, by a more meticulous devotion to all of the obligations we have as Jews.

And last, but not least: Moshiach is associated with joy. We must think positively and try to instill that joy in all that we do.

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ESSAY FOURTEEN

LOST AND FOUND
DEPARTMENT

Our generation might be less spiritually sophisticated than preceding ones, but, our ability to remain faithful despite all odds makes us eminently qualified and deserving to witness and experience the last leg of the journey.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

LOST AND FOUND DEPARTMENT

On the Road

The Jewish people have spent most of their long history on the road. The “wandering Jew” epithet given to us by our detractors highlights the disproportionate number of journeys that our people have made.

Our first journey took us out of Egypt. Instead of going straight to the Promised Land, which was only a few days’ journey from Egypt, we were taken through a most circuitous route, on a trek that lasted for forty years. It would not be far-fetched to say that that experience set the tone for all future journeys.

Thus, that forty-year odyssey can serve as a paradigm for all future journeys of the Jewish people and is a portent of the final journey from

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out of the present exile back again to the Promised Land with Moshiach.

Moreover, even the small and apparently insignificant details concerning that journey can prove to be instructive for us in our own personal lives.

Gatherer of All The Camps

This week's Torah portion describes the formation of the twelve tribes as they traveled through the desert on their way to the Promised Land. The tribes were divided into four groups or camps. The group that travelled last, "Machaneh Dan-The Camp of Dan, is described in the Torah as "M'asef l'chol hamachanos-the last or 'gatherer' of all the camps."

Rashi explains that this camp had a special responsibility. If any of the other tribes that traveled ahead would have lost anything, the Camp of Dan would return the loss to its rightful owner.

Despite the fact that all the twelve tribes were equally Jewish, each of them serving G-d in its unique way, there were some tribes whose function and mission appeared to be more sophisticated than others.

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For example: The tribe of Yehudah was always looked up to as the leader of all the other tribes. Yehudah, the ancestor of Kings David and Solomon, was the “king” of all the twelve tribes. In a similar way, the tribe of Yissachar and Zevulun were looked up to as the scholars and financial pillars of the Jewish community, respectively. The Camp of Dan, by contrast, consisted of “simple” Jews, whose claim to fame, it appears, was their role as the ones who were in charge of the “Lost and Found” department of the Jewish nation.

In truth, the Camp of Dan was unique. And, precisely because of their special spiritual status, the Jews of the tribe of Dan were capable of returning the lost objects to their fellow Jews.

Returning a lost object is not restricted to a material loss. A true loss is when one loses a spiritual possession. When we lose our spiritual compass and our sense of where and why we are going there, this is a genuine loss. And if our spiritual equilibrium is not restored, there is little hope that we will reach our destination.

Simple Faith

Of all the tribes and camps, it was the group that seemed the simplest that were endowed with the ability to restore lost property – physical,

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as well as, and particularly, spiritual – to their fellow Jews. They possessed this ability because they had a strong sense of commitment to G-d and His Torah, based on simple, but steadfast, faith. While Judaism is concerned with learning and spiritual growth, we must build upon a strong foundation of faith and trust in G-d. No matter how hard the winds of assimilation and indifference blow against us, that firm foundation will keep all of us strong and resolute in our faith.

The Camp of Dan was chosen to restore lost possessions to all the other more “sophisticated” tribes, not because it was inferior. On the contrary, its members possessed a greater sense of awareness of the fact that they were Jews with one mission, to travel towards the Holy Land, in accordance with G-d’s will.

What was true about the Jewish nation in its journey towards the Promised Land in geographic space – that the Camp of Dan was the last camp and therefore was able to restore the lost property of all the other tribes, materially and spiritually – is also true in terms of time.

Our Unique Generation

Our generation – the last of exile and the first of Redemption as the Rebbe frequently described it – is in one special way the most unique

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generation in history. Our tenacity to remain Jews despite all of the many influences to assimilate will restore and correct all the deficiencies of all preceding generations. Our generation is "the Camp of Dan" of all the preceding generations.

There may have been more spiritually sophisticated generations than ours, but our post-Holocaust generation's ability to remain loyal and committed Jews, in spite of all that we've been through, and all the assaults against our Jewishness, accords us the unique role of being the "Gatherer of all the Camps."

The above can be said as a response to the question that many have asked in recent times. How could it be that all of the preceding generations of Jews who were far more observant, learned and committed to Torah could not bring Moshiach? How can we assert that Moshiach can and will come in our time despite the fact that we seem to be inferior to our forebears?

The answer is that the entire premise of the question is wrong. Our generation might be less spiritually sophisticated than preceding ones, but, our ability to remain faithful despite all odds makes us eminently qualified and deserving to witness and experience the last leg of the journey.

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ESSAY FIFTEEN

LOSS LEADER

When we are unaware of our G-d-given talents that we could have used to make the world a better place—that is a major loss.

When a person “kills” time, those lost moments are far more significant than the loss of material objects.

When a Jew is unaware of his or her soul’s existence and its potential, he or she has suffered a major loss. There can be no greater loss than a Jew who is oblivious to his or her Jewish heritage.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

LOSS LEADER

The Collectors

When the Jewish nation journeyed in the desert, the Jews traveled in a set formation. In this week's parsha, the Torah recounts that the twelve tribes were divided into four camps, the last of which was the Camp of Dan, comprised of the tribes of Dan, Asher and Naftali.

When the Torah describes the order in which these four camps traveled, it states that the Camp of Dan traveled in last place. It is described as "the collector for all the other camps."

The Jerusalem Talmud, cited by Rashi, explains that since the Camp of Dan was very numerous, it served as the rear guard. In that capacity, the members of the Camp of Dan returned objects that were lost by those who preceded them. This, then, is the meaning of the descriptive phrase: "the collector for all the other camps." The Camp of Dan

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literally collected the objects left behind and lost by all the other camps. Its great numbers allowed its members to spread around to all sides of their encampment so that no lost objects would escape their view.

Why Not Yehudah?

Commentators question why the Camp of Dan was charged with this responsibility. It was not simply because they were numerous. Indeed, the Camp of Yehudah was even more numerous and thus even better suited to restoring all the lost objects of the other tribes.

The commentators answer that the Camp of Yehudah was the most distinguished of all the camps. It was, therefore, important that its members serve as the leaders. Consequently, the task of returning lost objects fell to the second most populous camp.

The question still remains: Of all the remaining tribes and camps, why was the Camp of Dan selected for the important role of restoring the losses of the Jewish people? True, it was the second most numerous camp, but nothing happens by chance. The very fact that its members were so prolific, and thus suited for this task, indicates that the Camp

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of Dan also possessed a spiritual advantage over the other camps. (See preceding essay.)

The Spiritual Losses

The search for an answer to the question of why the Camp of Dan was selected for the role of restoring lost objects is even more consequential when we consider the Chassidic definition of “losses.”

When we are unaware of our G-d-given talents that we could have used to make the world a better place—that is a major loss. When a person “kills” time, those lost moments are far more significant than the loss of material objects. When a Jew is unaware of his or her soul’s existence and its potential, he or she has suffered a major loss. There can be no greater loss than a Jew who is oblivious to his or her Jewish heritage.

Losing Our Mah

On a deeper level, the Rebbe explains (Likkutei Sichos vol 1, parshas Vayechi) the nature of this loss by referring to a Talmudic statement (Chagigah 3a) regarding the definition of a shoteh, a person who is

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exempted from Mitzvah observance because he is mentally incompetent. The Talmud asks rhetorically: "Who is a shoteh? One who loses what is given to him."

The Hebrew word used here for "what" is mah. In Kabbalistic terminology, the term "mah-what" expresses the idea of utter self-abnegation. When Moses and Aaron were challenged by their critics, Moses responded: "and mah-what are we that you quarrel with us?" Moses employs the term "mah" to describe his utter insignificance.

This state of subordination to G-d, that allows a person to be humble and submit to G-d's will, derives from the soul's natural state of devotion to G-d. However, when we stray from G-d's commandments and act in ways that are inconsistent with His will, it is an indication that we have lost touch with the mah of our soul. In the words of the Talmud (Sotah 3a): "No person transgresses unless a spirit of folly enters him." A sin is thus a case of temporary insanity. The sinner has lost his or her soul's subservience to G-d. The sinner has lost his or her mah.

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The Spiritual Dimension of Dan

Consider the deeper meaning of the losses suffered by the Jewish people in their journeys through their personal lives and through history. It seems strange that the people who were charged with the responsibility to restore these losses were the lowliest of all the tribes! What was it about the Camp of Dan (composed of the tribe of Dan—the lowliest of all tribes and the dominant force in this camp—and the tribes of Asher and Naftali) that empowered them to restore the spiritual losses of the Jewish people?

The answer to this question depends on our having a better understanding of the spiritual character of the tribe of Dan.

When Jacob blesses his sons, the blessing he confers on Dan was: "Dan shall judge his people..." Dan's defining quality was that he was able to judge people. This power of judgment can be found within every Jew today. With this trait we can objectively examine our talents and abilities as well as those of others. Upon close scrutiny of these talents we begin to question ourselves: Have we used them to the fullest, in a constructive manner? Have we allowed our soul the freedom to express itself? Have we used our time wisely? And have we allowed our soul's natural state of self-abnegation to override our animal soul's egotistic and selfish nature?

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Kabbolas Ol—Accepting the Yoke

There is another aspect of the tribe of Dan that qualified it to be the restorers of the lost spiritual assets of the Jewish people. When we view the entirety of the Jewish people, there are tribes, whose attributes correspond to the head, making them well-suited to serve as our leaders. There are other tribes who occupy lesser positions of importance and are said to have attributes which may be likened to the heart and the torso. The lowliest of the tribes, such as the ones included in the Camp of Dan, are likened to the feet of the Jewish body.

The “head” symbolizes the superior intellectual state of these tribes and the feet represent the state of what our Sages referred to as “kabbalos ol”, accepting the yoke. This state, while it may be regarded as inferior to an intellectual one, is actually essential to our lives as Jews.

Feet First

The first thing Jews must possess is the recognition that

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G-d is beyond us. No matter how intelligent and advanced we may be, G-d transcends us and we cannot fathom Him. This accepting the yoke or "feet first" approach dictates that we surrender our own egos and understanding to G-d and follow His commandments as soldiers follow marching orders. Only by our self-effacing dedication to the will of G-d, symbolized by the tribe and Camp of Dan, can we keep from losing our mah and our soul's other virtues.

To be sure, that recognition is only the first step. It must be followed by involving our emotions and our intellect in the process.

Just as there was a Camp of Dan that followed the other tribes and helped restore their material and spiritual losses, so too, historically speaking, are we at the tail end of galus-exile. Our generation has the distinction of being the Camp of Dan of all preceding generations.

Trepidation and Joy

This realization should infuse us with feelings of both trepidation and joy: Trepidation because it imposes an extraordinary responsibility on our generation—deemed by the Rebbe to be the last one of exile and the first one of Redemption—to restore all the imperfections of the past.

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Yes, we have the cumulative goodness of the past that endows us with the capacity to restore all that has been lost by our forebears. But, by the same token, this realization should generate tremendous excitement and joy, knowing that we—and no previous generation—have been given that special responsibility. Indeed, in the words of the Talmud: “A Mitzvah is credited to the one who finishes it.” We have the opportunity to finish the ultimate Mitzvah of transforming this world into one that has not lost its mah; a world that has not lost its ability to experience G-d’s overarching presence in our lives.

Beis Moshiach—Collectors of All Camps

It is fascinating that the phrase in Hebrew “m’asef lchol hamchanos” (“collectors of all the camps”) is numerically equivalent to the words “Beis Moshiach-Moshiach’s Home.” The implication here is that our role in creating a home for Moshiach is for us to be “the collectors” of all the losses from our own lives and to help restore the losses of our fellow Jews.

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ESSAY SIXTEEN

FREE FROM FREEDOM

The message of Judaism is that to reach a genuine spiritual high one must spend years, indeed a lifetime, in its pursuit.

Spiritual gains require a life of devotion to G-d's commandments, coupled with profound study and deep meditation.

Jewish Messianism is nothing less than an insistent demand for us to plunge into the pursuit of holiness, by self-refinement, study, observance of the Mitzvos and personal dedication to the ideals of love and unity.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

FREE FROM FREEDOM

Easy Street

When the Jewish people grew tired of the Manna that they miraculously received as their staple in the desert, they reminisced about the “good old days” in Egypt. “We remember the fish that was given to us by the Egyptians gratis,” they rebelliously proclaimed.

The Talmud, as cited by Rashi, raises the obvious question. If the Egyptians wouldn't even give the Israelite slaves straw for their bricks, why would they give them fish for free? The Talmud answers that it wasn't the fish that was free; it was that they, the Jewish People in Egypt, were “free” from doing the Mitzvos. When they were slaves in Egypt, as painful as that experience was, they had no responsibility to observe any of the commandments.

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Thus, according to our Sages, it was not the lack of meat or fish per se that upset them, it was that they now had responsibilities that they did not have when they were brutalized as slaves in the Land of Egypt.

Two Paths to Riches

To appreciate what they were actually complaining about, we must discuss the fundamental difference between the dynamics of achieving goodness and holiness as opposed to the dynamics of accessing that which is evil and unholy.

In the realm of the unholy, it does not take much effort to obtain the “desired” result. A simple example from the world of crime illustrates this point. While an upstanding citizen might have to work for many months to make \$50,000, a bank robber can get that amount in a single heist.

In stark contrast, the degree to which we are able to achieve our positive goals is related to the degree of effort that we bring to the task.

Another illustration of this notion can be found in the Talmudic tradition that before babies are born, an angel teaches them the entire

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Torah. At birth, an angel strikes the babies above the lip, causing them to forget it all.

But, why would G-d want us to forget everything that His specifically appointed angel taught us? The answer is that the Torah knowledge that we were taught "free," without our active involvement, is not really what Torah is all about. Judaism teaches us that Torah knowledge must be acquired through toil and effort. Torah cannot be bequeathed to us or be absorbed by osmosis.

Instant Bliss

Many spiritual paths promise adherents great spiritual bliss, with only minimal effort. By mastering certain meditational techniques, for example, many people may experience a spiritual high that is said to resemble the feelings of one who consumes mind altering drugs. The promise that a person can (apparently) attain such marvelous, blissful feelings in such a short amount of time is anathema to Judaism.

Judaism demands a lifetime of effort at self-refinement, along with a dedication to the Torah and its Mitzvos involving the totality of the person, to gain access to true, G-dly delight.

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The analogy of two alternative pathways to acquire wealth applies just as well to the acquisition of spiritual wealth. As before, there are movements out there that promise their devotees instant bliss. All you have to do, they claim, is master a certain technique and you're all set.

The message of Judaism is that to reach a genuine spiritual high one must spend years, indeed a lifetime, in its pursuit. Spiritual gains require a life of devotion to G-d's commandments, coupled with profound study and deep meditation.

Many of the recently freed Jewish people were upset about the new system that was to govern their existence once they received the Torah. From that time onward, they had to work hard and long for everything spiritual. They had to expend their energy to obtain the spiritual results that they desired.

In a way we can say that they were "spoiled" by the initial G-dly initiative that "plucked" them out of Egypt with great miracles. They quickly became used to being carried on the wings of eagles, and they cherished that free and easy manner of experiencing G-d's presence.

However, they totally missed the point. True liberty is when we have the freedom to fulfill our G-d-given mission. At Mount Sinai, G-d gave us the formula for true freedom: commit yourselves to G-d's Torah and

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its Mitzvos. Any "freedom" that disregards the importance of action on our part is actually freedom from true freedom.

Keep On Truckin!

If there was ever a time that demanded action, it is now. We can understand why the Jews wanted everything free when they first became a nation. Now, after thousands of years of life, through the thick and thin of Two Temples and cruel exiles, we've matured. We've learned that those generations of Jews that remained Jewishly active survived and flourished. Those who were passive in their Judaism, unfortunately, could not meet the challenges of modern life.

If there were ever a time for this lesson about remaining actively Jewish to be applied it is now as we stand poised to make the last leg of our long journey through history. We, as a people, are tired and worn out. And it is precisely that feeling of fatigue which is the greatest threat to our ability to appreciate true freedom.

As we come so close to fulfilling our mission, the challenge we have now is this desire to slow down and rest. We cannot afford to sit back and just wait for the utopian age to come. If one's hopes for a better future are not matched by vigorous action and dedication to the ideals

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of Moshiach, then one has not really grasped what Moshiach is all about.

Jewish Messianism is nothing less than an insistent demand for us to plunge into the pursuit of holiness, by self-refinement, study, observance of the Mitzvos and personal dedication to the ideals of love and unity.

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ESSAY SEVENTEEN

ARE YOU AN ELDER?

Depression, the Chassidic masters say, is not technically a sin, but it can lead the person down a slippery slope which can ultimately lead to the transgressing of all sins.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

ARE YOU AN ELDER?

Non-Kosher Jewish Whining

At the end of this week's parsha, the Torah relates several tragic episodes involving the Jewish people in the desert.

First, the Torah reports that there were people who complained and were punished for it. These people are described by the Torah as Misonenim, which is simply translated as "complainers."

The Torah follows this unfortunate incident with an account of a group of Jews who were overcome by an intense craving for meat.

Moses then complains to G-d, asking why He placed the burden of those people upon him. Moses pleads with G-d: "Did I conceive the entire people? Did I give birth to them?" Moses concludes his passionate plea to G-d: "If this is the way You treat me, please kill me—if I have found favor in Your eyes."

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The Enigma

Several questions have been raised that point to the enigmatic nature of this entire narrative.

First, why does the Torah not mention what the first group was complaining about? Rashi explains that they were upset about the tedium of their non-stop journey toward the Promised Land. But the fact that the Torah does not identify the nature of their complaint suggests the possibility that it may be hinted at by the very word for complaint that the Torah uses here: Misonenim.

Second, how could Moses—the ultimate Jewish leader, who liberated a nation of slaves from Egypt and contended with so many of their complaints and their rebellious nature—not be able to deal with a few more “kvetching” Jews?

Third, why would Moses ask G-d to kill him? Isn't that an extreme overreaction to the request by some dissatisfied Jews for meat?

Fourth, what purpose was served by the appointment of seventy elders whom G-d would imbue with Moses' spirit to stand with him and share the burden of the troublesome people? If Moses couldn't provide meat for the complainers how would the seventy elders be able to do it? In the end it was G-d who brought the birds that

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supplied the people with ample meat to satisfy their craving. If G-d caused these things, what difference would it make whether Moses had seventy deputies or acted by himself?

In short, this entire story is hard to comprehend when taken at face value.

The Root Cause of Depression

The early Chassidic work Ma'or V'shemesh shed new light on this story. Its refreshing approach provides us with important lessons concerning the challenges of our generation, standing here on the very threshold between exile and Geulah/Redemption; as we are poised to enter the Promised Land, with Moshiach at our head.

The Hebrew word for complaint used in our text, as noted above, is Misonenim. This word is a cognate of the word onein. The latter term describes the sadness experienced by a person suffering bereavement. Thus Ma'or V'shemesh explains that the Jewish people were suffering in that moment from an acute case of depression.

Depression, the Chassidic masters say, is not technically a sin, but it can lead the person down a slippery slope which can ultimately lead to the transgressing of all sins.

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But the first symptom of depression, Ma'or V'shemesh states, is a marked increase in the appetite for food, which ultimately degenerates into a compelling need to satisfy other unwarranted desires as well.

In our day and age, we can see this dynamic playing out. As a case in point, many of our youth have degenerated into drug use or other equally self-destructive behavior. The source of this negative state of depression which so many of our youth feel, is that they perceive their lives as without meaning.

(This discussion obviously excludes clinical depression caused by chemical imbalances for which one must seek professional medical assistance in the spirit of the Torah's "license" granted to physicians to heal. However, as part of the treatment and therapy, it behooves medical professionals to realize that they need to augment their medical intervention by enabling the person to develop a sense of purpose in life. This is accomplished, first and foremost, by commitment to the observance of the Mitzvos. This Mitzvos-based approach can be an indispensable tool in the depressed person's recovery. Moreover, while medication deals with the symptoms that are important to treat, improvement of a person's sense of worth and purpose in life can often address the root cause of the problem directly.)

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Thus, the Torah follows the discussion of the Misonenim (for which we now read: “the depressed”) by recounting the story of those Jews who developed a strong craving and temptation for meat, and, as our Sages point out, for other forms of undesirable gratification. This follow-on effect is very often a consequence of the fundamental cause—depression.

The Cure - The Tzadik

How does one relate to this phenomenon?

Ma'or V'shemesh recommends that those who have allowed their depression to render them hostage to their passions should seek healing through finding the right mentor—the tzadik.

The mentor obviously cannot be someone who has himself succumbed to the pressures of life and degenerated into the world of temptation. But, by the same token, the mentors cannot be one of those who are so refined that all their physical activities have been sublimated into spiritual exercises. Their exalted spiritual state makes them ineligible for the role of a mentor to one who is still struggling with his or her base desires and impulses.

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Moses' Dilemma

When Moses realized how far depression had led these unhappy Jews, beset by their uncontrollable cravings for meat— and despite the availability of the heaven-sent Manna and other ample sources of food—he was convinced that he could not be their leader and spiritual mentor. Moses, indeed, was justified in his assessment. After all, he was the perfect tzadik. As Maimonides explains, no barrier existed between Moses and G-d. Moses had achieved the pinnacle of spiritual refinement. He was, therefore, baffled. How could he be the one to help these people out of their lowly state?

Moses thus states: "Did I conceive the entire people? Did I give birth to them?" Moses suggests that had he conceived the nation and given birth to them, he would have shared at least some of their base characteristics, just as a mother shares genetic material with her offspring. Since he was totally removed from their lowly state, Moses was incredulous: how could he, of all people, help them?

In Moses' mind there was but one way he could help them out of their compromised state. Only if G-d were to "kill him" could he help them. In Kabbalistic tradition, killing is a metaphor for someone who falls from his exalted spiritual plane. If G-d would "demote" Moses, he would then be able to find some common ground with such morally

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depraved people. Moses, in his spirit of self-sacrifice and love for his people, was pleading with G-d to diminish his unique spiritual level so that he could be the mentor to even the lowliest class and most morally compromised of his people.

Moses was not shirking his role as leader, or trying to escape responsibility; he just wanted to come down "closer" to their level so he could help raise them up.

The Divine Compromise

G-d provided the Divine "compromise." Moses would still remain as exalted a G-dly leader as he had been previously. Notwithstanding that, he would be able to help those who were prisoners of their moral turpitude and raise them up from the morass and state of depression they were in. He would be able to delegate some of his spiritual energy to the seventy elders, and they would be enabled to become the mentors who could bridge the gap between Moses and the people. However, it would not be their personal energy that would accomplish this objective. They received their energy from Moses, who vicariously uplifted the people by delegating authority to these seventy elders.

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The Parallel to Our Generation

We are living in a generation that is parallel to the generation that left Egypt. We, too, are getting tired and restless as we still journey along the seemingly endless road toward the Messianic Age. Many are in danger of slipping into depression. Indeed, symptoms of depression are evident in the growing trends among our youth to focus all their efforts on seeking ways of satisfying their physical cravings and desires.

Over twenty-five years ago, the Rebbe told us that he had done everything possible to bring about the Redemption. More specifically, the Rebbe stated that he had tried to get us to move out of our own internal spiritual exile. From that point onward, he was delegating the responsibility for bringing the Redemption to us.

These historic words mirrored the delegation of Moses' spirit to the seventy elders. Our role is to serve as the elders and mentors, to bring the Rebbe's message of the imminence of the Redemption to all our people and, equally, to get out of our own exile by raising our moral standards.

Indeed, one of the Rebbe's recurrent instructions to us was both to seek out a mentor and to also serve as mentors for others. To get out of our own rut, we must help someone else get out of theirs.

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By accepting the role of "elder" we bring the world one step closer to the time when the spirit of evil and impurity will be removed.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

CELIBACY AND JUDAISM

Marriage is the most powerful institution in Judaism, and making it holy, not shunning it, is the ideal.

The Zohar teaches that marriage is the reunion of two half souls that were separated at birth. Marriage makes the soul complete and fully capable of taking on the challenge of changing the world.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

CELIBACY AND JUDAISM

The Moses Enigma

One of the most enigmatic narratives of the Torah can be found at the end of this week's parsha.

Miriam and Aaron said something disparaging about Moses that concerned his "Ethiopian wife." They added the fact that G-d had spoken to them as well. G-d then defends Moses as one who possessed a unique quality of prophecy and humility.

What was this all about?

Rashi, citing earlier rabbinic traditions, refers to the fact that Moses' wife Tziporah (who was nicknamed "Ethiopian" for reasons we will not go into here), upon hearing of the introduction of two new prophets into the Jewish community, exclaimed: "Woe is to their wives, who will

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have to be separated from their husbands, now that they are prophets, in the same manner that Moses separated from me.”

When Miriam heard—for the first time—that Moses separated from his wife, presumably because he was a prophet, she was indignant. Why would Moses have to separate from his wife? After all, she and Aaron were also prophets, yet it never occurred to them that they could not resume normal married life. Thus, Miriam concluded, Moses must think of himself as being superior to his brother and sister. This, Miriam and Aaron thought, was presumptuous on Moses’ part.

G-d’s response was that:

(a) Moses, in fact, was the most humble person on the face of the earth, and he certainly did not leave his wife because he thought he was superior to anyone else.

(b) Moses was indeed commanded by G-d, after Sinai—when he was 80 years old—to separate from his wife, because he had to be “on call” with G-d twenty-four hours a day. Unlike other prophets who received their prophecies at designated times—so they could “have time” for their spouses as well as for G-d—Moses had to be prepared to receive a prophetic message, at any time.

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Why All the Mystery?

Why, we may ask, does the Torah discuss this issue so cryptically? Without the Oral Tradition's "reading between the lines," there is absolutely no way we can make heads or tails of this story. Why couldn't the Torah explicitly say what Miram's and Aaron's complaint was against Moses, and how G-d defended him? Nowhere in the text does it mention anything about Moses' wife being separated from him. And if that is what their quarrel with Moses was all about, why does the Torah leave out the main point of the story?

To be sure, this and other similar cryptic Biblical texts are examples that compel us to recognize that the Written Torah was given together with the Oral Tradition. And in many places, the written text makes absolutely no sense without the commentary of the Oral Tradition. And as such, the enigmatic story highlights the inseparable nature of the Written and Oral Traditions.

But a question still remains. Granted, the Torah deliberately leaves out crucial details from this and many other sections of the Torah so that we are compelled to consult and delve into the Oral interpretations. However, everything related to G-d's Torah is precise. Why is this salient fact that Moses was celibate (after many years of marriage)

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omitted from the narrative? What lesson can we derive from this lacuna?

Not an Ideal

One simple answer is that the Torah did not want us to look at celibacy as an ideal. If we were exposed to the notion that Moses separated from his wife because of his role as a prophet, some might have taken this as a sign that the ideal situation is celibacy and that marriage is a necessary evil, as some religious philosophies believe.

To discredit this notion, the Torah omits references to Moses' separation explicitly, as if to say, Moses' situation was not intended to be paradigmatic. On the contrary, Moses' behavior was the sole exception to the general rule. And if we want to learn something about and from Moses, it should not be about his celibacy, but rather his humility and closeness to G-d. If we want to aspire to attaining greater heights, we should not even consider a life of celibacy.

Judaism is about Marriage

The reason Judaism does not regard celibacy as an ideal is twofold:

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First, the objective of the Torah is not to negate the physical world and its natural forces, but to elevate it by harnessing the forces for the good and G-dly. Marriage is the most powerful institution, and making it holy, not shunning it, is the ideal.

Second, if the reason for our existence in the physical world is for the soul to interact with a body and transform the physical into something G-dly, the ultimate worldly experience is that of marriage. That is when the soul truly enters the physical world.

Moreover, the Zohar teaches that marriage is the reunion of two half souls that were separated at birth. This implies that when we get married, the soul is complete and fully capable of taking on the challenge of changing the world.

Third, marriage is not just a vehicle to carry out our G-d-given mission; it is the mission. The institution of marriage exists in our physical realm because it exists primarily in the spiritual realm. Indeed, the entire Sinai experience has been likened by our Sages to a wedding; a wedding between G-d and the Jewish people. When we wed, in accordance with G-d's laws, we, thus, emulate G-d and introduce G-dly energy into this world.

Marriage is, thus, not a one-time event that occurs at the wedding; it continues throughout life. Every day is a reenactment of the original

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marriage because every day we are challenged to bring heaven and earth together.

Thus, in the ultimate Messianic Age, when the union of heaven and earth will be complete, marriage will remain the most holy of institutions.

Moreover, if Sinai was the beginning of the marriage between G-d and Israel, then the ultimate age of Redemption can and has been likened to the consummation of the marriage. In the future, when we will be at our peak of spiritual achievement, marriage will be placed on a pedestal as never before.

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ESSAY NINETEEN

TRUE HUMILITY

Moses was overwhelmed, awe stricken and humbled when he was shown the Jews of the last generation of exile, who could remain steadfastly committed to the Torah, despite the suffering, hardships and temptation.

ESSAY NINETEEN

TRUE HUMILITY

Now I'm Perfect

The story is told about a person who no one wanted to marry because of his arrogance. When he inquired of a friend as to why no one would marry him, he was told, bluntly, that his ego was a serious problem. His friend counseled him to work on that very serious flaw. A few weeks later he returned to his friend and very happily stated: "I've worked on my ego problem, and now that I'm humble I am truly perfect..."

Another story is told about the rabbi who, on Yom Kippur, stood in front of the ark and berated himself. "I'm a nothing, a nobody, etc., etc."

Upon hearing this impressive display of self-effacement, the president of the congregation got up and repeated the same exercise in humility, "I'm a nobody, a nothing, etc., etc."

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One of the congregants, seeing the way in which these distinguished people humbled themselves before the congregation and G-d, stood up and derided himself, as well: . "I'm a nobody, a nothing, etc., etc."

When the rabbi heard this simple Jew's self-deprecation, he turned to the president and said indignantly, "Who does he think he is to call himself a nothing, a nobody..."

And there is even a true story about false humility. The Previous Rebbe relates in his memoirs how several hundred years ago, someone wanted to call attention to the false humility exhibited by some of the rabbis in the shul. On Simchas Torah, the man announced that the first honor of carrying a Sefer Torah would be given to the most humble individual. Pandemonium broke loose. There was a mad rush to grab the first Torah. When one person seized the Torah, another protested, "I was entitled to be the first, but because of my infirm condition, the other rabbi got there ahead of me..."

* * *

Knowing Your Qualities

In this week's Torah portion we are told that Moses was the most humble person on the face of the earth. We are also told that Moshiach will be characterized by his humility.

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The question begs itself. How could people of the caliber of Moses and Moshiach be humble knowing their qualities? Moses obviously knew that he was the greatest prophet that ever lived. In fact, he even knew that the Torah said that he was the most humble person that ever lived. How could he have maintained his humility knowing this about himself?

The Talmud (end of tractate Sotah) relates how Rav Yosef stated that the trait of humility was still alive and well. He then cited his own humility as proof of his claim! And indeed, in another passage, the Talmud extols the virtue of Rav Yosef's humility. The question here is even stronger. How could he be regarded as humble if he was so conscious of his own humility?

The answer to these questions lies in a more precise definition of humility.

Humility is not the denial of one's qualities. Humility is the realization that all of the qualities that one possesses are not one's own, but are entirely G-d given.

Accordingly, Moses knew that he was endowed with extraordinary talents and virtues. However, he possessed the knowledge that these qualities were all G-d given. Furthermore, Moses imagined that, had G-

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d blessed any other individuals with these gifts, they would have been able to accomplish even more than he had.

Moses could, therefore, appreciate the fact that he was humble, for humility means to know that you have no personal talents that are not G-d's gifts to us.

We can now understand what Rav Yosef meant when he said that he was proof humility was still extant. He meant to say that he knew that any virtue he possessed was not really his, but a gift from Above. He, like Moses, did not feel superior to anyone else, even those who did not possess his qualities. Rav Yosef, obviously didn't go around telling everyone that he was humble, rather he wanted people to know that true humility—not the feigned and fake humility—was achievable by everyone. Every person is capable of recognizing that, their grand achievements notwithstanding, they are not necessarily superior to others.

Moses' Unique Humility

To know that our talents are G-d given is something everyone can appreciate and is not unique to Moses. While it is true that there is a wide gap between knowing one's true status and actually feeling it,

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nevertheless, it is in reach of everyone to realize that our assets and accomplishments are gifts from G-d. The question can be raised: What makes Moses' humility stand apart from all others?

In truth, although the humility discussed now is possible for everyone, there was something that so humbled Moses that no one else in all of history was able to feel it.

According to Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (known as the Alter Rebbe, the founder of Chabad Chassidus), Moses was humbled to the core when, according to the Talmud, he was shown by G-d the future generations of Jews. When G-d came to the end of exile, and Moses was shown the self-sacrifice, relatively simple Jews exhibited, he was overwhelmed with a sense of awe and humility. That Jews, despite their suffering and hardships, could withstand the pressures and resist the temptations, and remain steadfastly committed to the Torah, was a most powerful realization to Moses. And it was this realization that made him humble.

We can now understand how Moses' humility was more profound than anyone else's. Whereas other humble people will not allow their talents and achievements to go to their heads, Moses went far beyond that. He felt inferior, specifically to the generation that ranks low in comparison with preceding generations.

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Giants Standing on Giants

This last point can serve as a response to those who ask, why should we merit the Redemption, when our forebears were so much more learned and committed to the Torah than ourselves?

The classical answer is that, notwithstanding our lowliness, we are like a "dwarf standing on the shoulders of giants" and can see further than the giants themselves.

However, in light of the above explanation of Moses' humility it emerges that our generation, in fact, is like the giant standing on the proverbial giants of the past. While they are giants in learning, piety and spiritual sophistication, we are, in one sense, superior to our ancestors. We have lived through the worst persecution and encountered the most potent forces of assimilation. That we have seen the light through the darkness and persevered is a testimony to a unique quality that we possess that, as stated above, even humbled Moses.

Our generation is eminently qualified to bring Moshiach for ourselves and for all of the preceding generations. It will then emerge that in one sense our forebears are the giants standing on our shoulders because

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it is specifically our generation that will be credited with bringing
Moshiach and the complete Redemption.

ESSAY TWENTY

THE UNCOMPROMISED LEADER

Compromise, complacency and comfort are signs of immobility and stagnation. They derive from a distorted picture of one's purpose and capabilities, as well as a jaundiced and jaded image of the world's potential.

To reverse that situation, one's eyes must be opened to see the unblemished truth of existence that lies below surface appearances.

When we see the road ahead of us and the boundless opportunities that are available to us, it will shake us out of our state of complacency and ignite the spark in us to seek unadulterated goodness and G-dliness.

ESSAY TWENTY

THE UNCOMPROMISED LEADER

Turmoil for Yehudah

In our Parsha this week, the Torah describes the orderly journeying of the Jewish people in the desert organized by tribe and regiment.

When the Torah describes the movement of the tribe of Yehudah it uses the Hebrew word *vayisa*. With respect to all the other tribes, the Torah uses the word *v'nasa*. While both words have the same translation they represent different grammatical forms of the word for journey. The question has been raised why is the term *vayisa* used exclusively for the camp of Yehudah?

Some of the early commentators answer this question by observing that these two words have significantly different numerical values.

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Ba'al HaTurim makes the following comment: The numerical difference between the values of the words v'nasa and vayisa is 40. The numerical value of the word vayisa, used for the camp of Yehudah, was 40 less than that of v'nasa. This is to intimate that Yehudah, the progenitor of the tribe bearing his name, was "lacking" in his journey. Yehudah had long since passed away by the time of the Exodus but his remains were carried out of Egypt and through the desert years. The Talmud (Sotah 7b) relates that Yehudah's bones rattled around in his coffin for 40 years because of the promise Yehudah made to his father Jacob: if Yehudah did not bring Benjamin back to Jacob from the brothers' trip to Egypt he would be excommunicated forever. The mere fact that he invoked the stigma of excommunication on himself, even though it was conditioned on not returning Benjamin to his father, meant that it could not be revoked except by a duly authorized tribunal of Sages.

As a result of his excommunication, Yehudah's remains were constantly in a state of turmoil until, as the Talmud, relates, at the end of 40 years, Moses found justification for the ban to be removed.

Why didn't Moses find a way to commute the excommunication ban on Yehudah at an earlier point in the 40 years? Why did his body have to go through the ignominy of excommunication, even after his passing, for an entire generation?

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True Leadership

The answer to this question can perhaps be found in a simpler explanation for the different words chosen to describe their journeying.

The term v'nasa, used for all the other camps, carries the connotation that their traveling was more passive. Whereas the term vayisa used for the Camp of Yehudah implies a more active mode of travel.

Indeed, Yehudah was the first camp to travel and to lead the way. Even before the Mishkan-Portable Sanctuary made its first move, the Camp of Yehudah blazed the way. The Torah thus uses the more active form vayisa, whereas the other tribes/camps followed, hence the passive form of v'nasa.

The Chassidic work Igra d'kalah cites the Zohar as a source for the difference between the yud in the word vayisa and the nun of the word v'nasa. The yud is the letter of bestowing and generating, hence leadership, while the letter nun represents the power of receiving and following. By its choice of words, the Torah indicates that Yehudah was the ultimate leader.

There is a clear message in this.

Yehudah was the tribe chosen to lead all the others. Yehudah was the progenitor of Kings David and Solomon and the source of the Davidic

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dynasty of leaders, including Moshiach, who, the Torah tells us, will be a descendant of David. From the very outset, it was Yehudah who took responsibility for his brother Benjamin, which corrected his failure to save his brother Joseph. Instead, Yehudah advised his brothers against killing Joseph and urged that they sell him into slavery. That act was unbecoming of a true leader and was the key transgression for which he had to atone.

Yehudah's Atonement

Yehudah's atonement was partially achieved when he undertook to bring Benjamin home to his father. The atonement was completed during the 40 years that his body could not achieve a state of rest and peace. Only when his body's compromised state endured for 40 years did the stain of his misguided compromise leave him.

The Talmud relates that not only was his body affected by his self-excommunication. His soul was denied entry into the Heavenly Academy. It was only with Moses' importuning that Yehudah's soul was able to reach its zenith and lead the way in the Heavenly spheres.

For Yehudah to be "rehabilitated" he had to experience the devastating effects that an ill-advised compromise can have on both body and soul.

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Uncompromised Leadership

The above is particularly relevant to our own day and age. We Jews believe that Moshiach is a human being of flesh and blood, body and soul; he is a scion of David and Yehudah. Moshiach's uniqueness is that he leads and cares for his people unequivocally. Moreover, his concern for the welfare of the Jewish people extends both to their bodies and souls. For Moshiach, as for any true leader, the other person's material needs are his own spiritual needs.

Indeed, the Ba'al Shem Tov's leadership was distinguished by his devotion to the material needs of the broken-spirited generation in the aftermath of the horrible pogroms of the 17th century and the false Messiah, Shabbatai Tzvi. The Jewish people were left demoralized and devastated in body and spirit by both of those terrible events.

A true Jewish leader concerns himself with the spiritual needs of his flock as well as their material needs. And in both areas he sees no room for compromise, i.e., a half-baked, temporary or Band-Aid solution. He seeks a total and all-encompassing remedy for the problems of the world.

Moshiach, the ultimate model of leadership, cannot rest until every Jew has all that he or she needs materially and spiritually. For Moshiach,

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batting .999 is not enough. He wants everything for his people and he wants it now!

Moshiach's focus goes beyond his efforts for the Jewish people.

Moshiach sees the entire world as his area of concern. The Jewish belief in the Moshiach and the Messianic Age he ushers in is that it will bring universal peace. Moreover, the entire world's population will be uplifted and enjoy an unprecedented spiritual epiphany that will last forever! Even before the final Redemption unfolds, Moshiach will reach out to all of the nations of the world and encourage them to abide by the Seven Noahide Commandments, which form the bedrock of all civilized society.

However, Moshiach is not just an individual leader. According to the teachings of the Ba'al Shem Tov, every one of us possesses a spark of Moshiach. When we ignite this spark it awakens in us the realization that our mission is to bring perfection to our lives and to the lives of every person with whom we have contact. There is no room for compromise.

Yehudah's compromise, the one by which Joseph was sold into slavery, lead us to disaster. This, our Sages tell us, was the very cause of our Egyptian bondage, which foreshadowed all subsequent periods of exile including our own. Compromise thus is synonymous with exile.

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The Three Cs

The underlying message is that compromising our values and commitments is the root cause of an exile existence. Compromise, complacency and comfort are signs of immobility and stagnation. They derive from a distorted picture of one's purpose and capabilities, as well as a jaundiced and jaded image of the world's potential.

To reverse that situation one's eyes must be opened to see the unblemished truth of existence that lies below surface appearances. When we see the road ahead of us and the boundless opportunities that are available to us, it will shake us out of our state of complacency and ignite the spark in us to seek unadulterated goodness and G-dliness.

No Time for Delay

There is another explanation for the variance in the expression used for the travelling of the camps. The reason Yehudah's journeying is described with the word *vayisa* is that the Camp of Yehudah had to start its travel without any delay. As soon as they saw the lifting of the cloud from above the Mishkan they knew it was time to start moving with dispatch. That is what is indicated by the term *vayisa*. By contrast,

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the other camps had to wait for the dismantling of the Mishkan and, of necessity, they tarried, which is best described by the word v'nasa.

This explanation also signals the uniqueness of Yehudah as a leader. The leader has no time to wait before the Sanctuary is dismantled; he moves in the right direction without hesitation.

This pattern was the hallmark of the tribe of Yehudah. Right before the splitting of the Sea, it was Nachshon from the tribe of Yehudah who made the plunge, whereas all the other tribes waited first for the miracle.

The Rebbe cited the Talmudic expression for the Messianic Age, miyad, which means immediately. The Rebbe explained that it is an acronym for Moses, Israel (Ba'al Shem Tov) and David. (These three leaders are intimately connected to the recently observed Festival of Shavuos: the Torah was given through Moses on Shavuos, while King David and the Ba'al Shem Tov both passed away on this Holiday).

The message here is that through the study of Torah (Moses), true leadership (David) and spiritual inspiration (Ba'al Shem Tov) we unleash the energy, alacrity and enthusiasm that is associated with Moshiach.

The lesson for our time is clear. Just like the Camp of Yehudah, we cannot wait until the entire Messianic drama unfolds before we jump

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on the bandwagon. We have to initiate the Messianic dynamic before the actual Redemption commences. This we do by anticipating the changes that will occur in the Messianic Age and bring that unbounded energy, joy, alacrity and completeness into our own lives today, despite our exile conditions. This will certainly change our entire outlook on life and serve as the catalyst to remove the final obstacles to the ultimate Redemption.

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ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

REALIGNMENT

The irony of exile existence is that we tend to glorify and revere the very forces that withhold all of the kindness to which we are entitled. In the future Messianic Era we will again return to a state of complete alignment. The physical world will mirror the spiritual world and there will be no need for correction.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

REALIGNMENT

Free Fish in Egypt?

This week's parsha Beha'alosecha, relates how the erstwhile slaves complained about their food. They fondly remembered the fish they had eaten gratis in the "good old days" when they were slaves in Egypt.

Commentators are puzzled by the bizarre sense of gastronomic nostalgia the Jews in the desert had for the fish they received gratis when they were slaves in Egypt! Was it really gratis? They were brutally subjected to torturous slavery? What was so free about their existence in Egypt?

The Talmud addresses this question and redefines the word "free." Free meant they had no Mitzvos, no obligations. Now that the Torah was given, they had obligations they did not have previously, and it was the

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absence of these obligations when they were in Egypt for which they longed.

Their desire to suffer as slaves fed a paltry supply of food rather than enjoy G-d's abundant gifts of Manna from heaven simply because there were obligations that went along with it is totally irrational. The institution of slavery is indeed the most restrictive form of existence; yet that was preferable to them to a Jewish life with considerable fewer, and far less painful, obligations!

Furthermore, a slave serves an evil and cruel tyrant, whereas a Jew who follows the commandments serves G-d, the ultimate source of kindness and blessing. How can we understand the bizarre psychological phenomenon whereby otherwise sane and rational people prefer servitude to Pharaoh over following the limited restrictions that G-d places upon us.

Physical versus Psychological Pain

One answer is that in Egypt the Jews' bodies were enslaved, but their minds were free to think. After the Torah was given at Sinai, Jews were also told how to think. While a human being can overcome physical pain, he or she is vulnerable when subjected to psychological torture.

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An experiment was conducted with rats. When they were subjected to physical pain they did not do as well as the control group of rats that did not experience pain. The same experiment performed with humans did not yield the same results. Even when experiencing pain, the human subjects did not suffer any loss of mental acuity. However, when they substituted mental anguish for physical pain, the researchers discovered that it did in fact slow them down. Those who suffered mild mental anguish did not do as well as the control group of individuals who did not experience that uncomfortable feeling.

This answer, however, is not sufficient to help us understand how it was possible for the Jews to prefer abject slavery over a G-dly life.

Moreover, even if the objective of Torah observance is to change our way of thinking, G-d never took away our ability to choose freely and think freely. So what was really the difference between the "freedom" of thought they experienced in Egypt and the freedom of thought they still had in the desert?

The Paradox

The way to answer this question is to reflect on the paradoxical view Torah has on our role in procuring our needs. On the one hand we

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must acknowledge G-d's exclusive role as our Benefactor. On the other hand we cannot deny the natural resources that are responsible for our lives. To best illustrate this point let us reflect on the role of medicine and healing in Torah literature.

Nachmanides the great Jewish leader of the 13th century cites Biblical sources that inveigh against medical intervention. King Asa is faulted for turning to doctors to treat his leg ailment. King Chizkiyahu destroyed the medical books because people were relying on them and not on G-d.

On the other hand, the Talmud makes it clear that "permission has been granted (by the Torah) for the physician to heal." This and many other sources, including Nachmanides' own writings elsewhere (and, indeed, Nachmanides himself was a practicing physician), make it demonstrably clear that one may, nay one is obligated, to turn to the medical profession for healing. How do we reconcile the apparent contradictory statements in the Torah, Talmud and other classical Jewish writings about the role and propriety of medicine?

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Two Channels

The following exposition is based on a letter penned by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (the founder of the Chabad movement, known as the Alter Rebbe) to a physician:

The Alter Rebbe explains that there are two modes and channels of energy that comes to us from their source in the spiritual realm. In the era of prophecy, there was a direct channel between the spiritual realm above and our physical existence below. If one was in touch with the spiritual power of healing above there would be automatic healing below. There was a complete alignment between the spiritual and the physical. Thus, the straightforward approach to good physical health was to enjoy good spiritual health.

However, if one refused to lead a G-dly life, he or she was still able to access the power of healing in an indirect fashion by using the forces embedded within nature. To facilitate free choice, G-d always gave a person an alternate and circuitous route to be healed.

In those days of spiritual domination, if someone was ill, it was a sign of a spiritual misalignment or a blockage in the direct channel caused by one's wanting behavior. The straightforward remedy was to clear the blockage and realign oneself with the spiritual realm by returning

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to G-d. The very word Teshuvah, which means return, can also be understood as restoring the alignment between the physical and the spiritual.

Kabbalah and Chassidus refer to the word Teshuvah as a composite of two words Tashuv Hei, returning the G-dly energy that is represented by the Hebrew letter hei, back to its original position. By virtue of our sins we cause a misalignment of G-d's name.

If, however, a person refused to mend his ways, G-d provided an alternate system where even one who was "disconnected" from the spiritual realm could still restore his health by availing oneself of the powers contained within nature. However, to follow this circuitous route it was an admission that he or she refused to reconnect with G-d, preferring to live off the Divine energy that was disconnected from its source and diverted into the physical realm. In this modality one is empowered to recover from illness without treating its root cause. Circumventing the straightforward path of healing by realignment was an affront to G-d.

However, once the era of prophecy ceased and particularly after the Holy Temple was destroyed and the period of Galus/exile began, the spiritual and physical worlds drifted apart. In the present period of exile misalignment, the "direct" approach to healing is to find the G-d given

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properties of healing within nature. Only a towering spiritual personality whose connections to G-d now are like those enjoyed in the days of the prophets, can heal without the use of conventional means. Absent their special powers we must follow the Torah that granted the physician the license to heal.

In summary, for a person in the days of old to take medicine was akin to a doctor today who performs surgery when a relatively harmless dose of medicine would have sufficed.

Stockholm Syndrome

We can now return to the question posed at the beginning: Why did the Jews in the desert crave the fish they had for nothing in Egypt? How could they prefer the paltry rations of fish they had as slaves with the Manna from Heaven they had in the desert?

The answer is that in those days Jews had only one choice; to align themselves with G-d's will or else they would be hard pressed to get their needs taken care of. The pressure of surviving compelled them to follow G-d's commands.

In later times a Jew had free choice. He could decide that he wanted to receive his sustenance and healing directly from G-d's kindness by

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"plugging" in to the system which aligns every aspect of one's life with G-d's will. Or he can decide to circumvent that system and follow the dictates of his heart and obtain his needs from conventional sources.

They therefore felt this nostalgic feeling for the "free fish" they received in Egypt. This means they did not have to commit themselves to fulfilling G-d's will. Instead they would receive their sustenance through the channels that do not require fidelity to G-d.

The fact that in Egypt they had to slave for their food didn't bother them as much as having to do Mitzvos to get their food. Even a slave begins to identify with the task master and regards him as the source of benevolence. He was the benefactor.

Indeed, this so-called "Stockholm Syndrome" is the essence of exile; the true source of our existence is either denied or ignored. In its place we create and identify with new imaginary sources.

The Irony of Galus

The irony of exile existence is that we tend to glorify and revere the very forces that withhold all of the kindness to which we are entitled. This is reminiscent of the story in the Talmud of one who practiced witchcraft causing women to have severe complications in childbirth.

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She would then remove her spell but pretend that it was her prayers that helped the women give birth...

In the future Messianic Era we will again return to a state of complete alignment. The physical world will mirror the spiritual world and there will be no need for correction.

When we open our eyes to the reality that exile forces give us nothing—it all comes from G-d—we then realign ourselves with the true source of G-d's beneficence. We then discover that leading a Torah true life is the most efficient and effective method of procuring our needs. We are then ready for the Redemption when all collateral channels will cease and we will see how everything flows directly from G-d to a realigned physical world.

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ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

KEEP ON COMPLAINING

The secret to our survival is our resistance to Galus-exile and to all forms of authority; even those that we may pledge allegiance to.

Our essence only accepts G-d's authority.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

KEEP ON COMPLAINING

The Entire People?

If one had to find a common theme in this parsha, it is that the Jewish people complained to Moses. Some complained about their inability to bring the Paschal offering and others complained about the Manna and the lack of meat. Some just complained for the sake of complaining.

Upon hearing their complaint about the Manna and the absence of meat in their diet, the Torah relates that G-d was angered and Moses was distressed. Moses then addresses G-d with his own "complaint."

"Why have You done evil to Your servant; why have I not found favor in Your eyes, that You place the burden of this entire people upon me? Did I conceive this entire people or did I give birth to it, that You say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a suckling, to the

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Land that You swore to its forefathers?' Where shall I get meat to give this entire people when they weep to me, Saying, 'Give us meat that we may eat'? I alone cannot carry this entire nation, for it is too heavy for me! And if this is how You deal with me, then kill me now, if I have found favor in Your eyes, and let me not see my evil!"

When examining this section one is struck by Moses' choice of words. He speaks of the "burden of this entire people" that G-d placed upon him. Why does he stress that it was the burden of the entire people? Moses then reemphasizes this point when he asks G-d, "Did I conceive this entire people?" And again a third time Moses asks G-d, "Where shall I get meat to give this entire people?" Moses then reiterates this theme a fourth time, "I alone cannot carry this entire nation..."

It seems that Moses' difficulty was that all the people were involved in this rebellion. But we have to understand this: why would it have been so much different if it hadn't been the entire people?

Moreover, it is hard to believe that Moses implicated the entire Jewish people in this act of rebellion. Obviously, the Levites always remained faithful to G-d. Isn't it likely that they, or at least a significant number of them, did not complain now? One may also assume that there were other righteous individuals, such as Joshua, Caleb, Nachson, etc., who

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did not join the complainers. So, why did Moses emphasize "the entire people?"

Why Such a Strident Reaction?

To answer this question we must first answer another question: Why did Moses react so stridently to their complaints? This was not the first time Moses had confronted complaints. In the Book of Exodus (15:23; 16:2-3) the Torah recounts that shortly after the Jewish people departed from Egypt they complained about the lack of drinkable water and then about their lack of food. In the first instance, Moses cried out to G-d, but did not complain about the people. In the second instance Moses simply rebuked the people mildly and relayed G-d's response to them. Moses did not complain to G-d about his inability to lead these fractious people and provide for their needs.

The question that arises therefore is why did Moses react so strongly now? What was so different about their complaint at this point?

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Three Differences: Pattern, Pretext, Persuasion

To answer this question one could suggest that Moses' desire to "abdicate" was motivated by three characteristics inherent in the complaints in this parsha that differed from the earlier complaining.

First, Moses was particularly chagrined that it was not the first time they complained. By repeatedly complaining they were establishing a pattern of cantankerousness. Moses was concerned that their grumbling would become a permanent

This would not augur well for the future. Moses, therefore, was justifiably apprehensive that they had become a nation that would never be able to handle adversity and that with the first sign of hardship in the future it would fall apart. This pattern suggested their immaturity.

Hence Moses compares them to children and asks G-d "Did I conceive this entire people or did I give birth to it, that You say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a suckling.'"

Second, Rashi explains that the grievance about the lack of meat was meritless because the Jewish nation left Egypt with sheep and cattle. Their only reason for complaining for meat was as a pretext to complain about G-d. This was more than just a bad habit or a sign of

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immaturity. It reflected a deep seated pathology. The people were plagued by their inability to show appreciation for the good they had received and demonstrated a resistance to authority.

Upon further analysis of the events of this parsha one can find a third, perhaps even more troubling, aspect to their complaints.

To understand the unique nature of the complaints that so troubled Moses that he asked to be relieved as leader we should cite an earlier verse describing the complaint about the lack of meat:

"The rabble that was among them had strong cravings. The children of Israel were also influenced and began to cry (with them). They said, 'Who will give us meat to eat?'"

What emerges is that the rabble rousers (who, as Rashi explains, were the Egyptian converts who joined the Jewish people for ulterior motives) involved in this act of rebellion were supported by the rest of the Jewish people. However, there was a more troubling aspect to their alliance with the riffraff. It was the fact that they could so easily be swayed by the fringe. It demonstrated an inherent weakness of the majority that it was so easily influenced by a small but noisy minority.

In Moses' mind, while it might be possible to rehabilitate one who has become a chronic complainer, it is more challenging to rehabilitate one

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who has acquired an ingrained resistance to authority. Moses feared that it would be next to impossible to reeducate one who has no backbone. Those who are perennially influenced by their intellectually, spiritually and morally inferior fellows will always be unable to resist the pressures of assimilation. How could such a people survive for the long term?

We now see why Moses emphasized the "entire" people. If one segment of the people had rebelled, Moses could have accepted the reality that there will always be those who rebel. However, he saw how a small group of agitators influenced the majority of the people. That was, he feared, a sign that would indicate that the lowest common denominator of the nation would prevail. It is this realization that prompted Moses to request that G-d relieve him as leader.

Yet, notwithstanding all of the above, we beat the odds and survived. Moses' concern was not for naught; tragically there were many Jews who fell to the wayside under the pressure of assimilation. Even so, we survived as a people and have even flourished.

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The Secret of Our Survival

The secret to our survival is, ironically, the very same three reasons that concerned Moses about the people.

First, we have a pattern of complaining. As mentioned above, this week's parsha describes the righteous complaints of those who were precluded from bringing the Paschal offering. The daughters of Tzelaphechad complained when they thought that they would not inherit their father's share of the Land of Israel. Throughout history Jews have complained to G-d, ad masai, how much longer do we have to suffer in Galus-exile?

Second, we do have a deep seated resistance to all forms of authority. While consciously or even subconsciously, we may pledge allegiance to all forms of authority, our essence only accepts G-d's authority. On his way to the exile imposed by the Soviet regime the Previous Rebbe declared that our souls have never gone into exile! The soul's essence always remains steadfastly connected to G-d and His Torah.

Third, even as a small minority we have the power to influence others. G-d chose us to bring His message to the entire world. And within the Jewish people themselves, there have always been select individuals and groups who kept Judaism alive and spread G-d's message

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throughout the world. In our generation the Rebbe, with but a small army of followers, ignited a post-Holocaust Jewish revival which brought the light of Torah and Mitzvos to millions of Jews. By so doing we have brought the entire Jewish people—and indeed the entire world—to the cusp of the ultimate Redemption. As the Rebbe told us repeatedly, we are the last generation of exile and must prepare for the imminent Redemption.

Three Dimensions of Complaints for Redemption

The lesson for us in these last moments of exile is that we must heed the three positive characteristics that have enabled us to maintain our existence:

First, we must be persistent in demanding of G-d to bring on the Redemption through Moshiach. The fact that we already demanded it yesterday and many days before does not suffice. Just as the Jews were persistent in their complaints, we too must complain persistently that we want Moshiach now!

Second, just as the Jews then appeared to be complaining about meat while really complaining about G-d, in a similar vein, while we demand Redemption for all its material and spiritual benefits, our true

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underlying demand is to see G-d's presence fully revealed and that He be recognized as the sole power in this world.

Third, we must not be deterred by the fact that we are still a minority in this regard. The Rebbe told us in his historic talk (of the 28th of Nissan, 5751) that we need but 10 stubborn people to bring about the Redemption! May we be among the privileged 10 who will bring us to the Promised Land with Moshiach at our head!