

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Yaacov Haber

Be the Hero

One of the greatest men in history, one of the greatest heroes in history and one of the greatest leaders in history is Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe grew up in the palace of Pharaoh, as part of the royal family. He was raised by the Princess of Egypt, and there he was. He lived such a life until he was twenty years old and at twenty, the Talmud tells us, he was given bigdei malchus, royal clothing, and empowered to walk the streets of Egypt and observe the slave nation. And then he saw. A situation of abuse. He saw a downtrodden nation, the Jewish people. He saw abuse of human rights. And then he did what he did. He eventually ran away from Egypt, and the rest is history.

But let's go back for a moment. Moshe Rabbeinu was in the Palace of the King, the palace of Pharaoh for twenty years. He might have even become the Pharaoh had he stayed. Batya, the daughter of Pharaoh, was telling him and teaching him, "Moshe, you have a great future. We will give you everything you need. You will be educated. You will ask for nothing. You'll have as much power as a human being can have. We are giving you the world on a silver platter."

But Moshe had another mother, as we know. He had his real mother, his biological mother, who through miraculous events, was hired by Pharaoh to take care of Moshe. So what might have

happened? Batya was talking to him the entire time, speaking into his ear and saying, "You have the whole world ahead of you," and his biological mother was telling him, "Moshe, you're a Jew and you're destined for a different type of greatness. And everything you see around you, all the gold, the silver and the palatial space, that's not for you." Moshe was in a position, that on some level we're all in at some point or another.

Moshe had to make a decision between one mother and his real mother. Should I go on in the House of Pharaoh and become possibly the most powerful person in the world? Everything that I need, everything that I can ever dream of is right here. Where should I go with my heart and my soul? Who am I really?

That was the decision Moshe had to make. And at twenty years old, he walked out into the streets of Egypt, and there he saw suffering and there his heart told him, "No, I'm willing to risk everything. I'm willing to give up everything I need in order to do what's right. I need to do what my heart tells me to do." And from there, he went on to become the greatest man, the greatest prophet and the greatest leader in Israel for us.

We're always given opportunities, whether they be this way, whether they be that way, whether they be spiritual, whether they be physical. Our job is to choose and to make the correct decisions and the correct decisions are not always the easy decisions. They're not necessarily the

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wealthy decisions. They're not the obvious decisions, but the right decision is the right decision because the greatness that you can reach is so much more.

Now let's fast forward ... We might think that once Moshe chose the destiny of a Jew, the life of his kin, that he'd be eager to seek and obtain all the greatness he could through leading the Jewish nation. But he didn't. He didn't think, "So now I chose to forego the life of a prince in Egypt and decided to take up the cause and suffering of my brothers and sisters, I ought to be the leader and be in a position of power. I deserve it, after all I put aside for them. I could've been a great Egyptian, and now I ought to be a great and powerful Jewish leader." Moshe had a different attitude though. Quite to the contrary.

Moshe was 80 years old and he stumbled upon a burning bush. He was a shepherd watching the flock of his father in law and had been away from Egypt for 60 years. He hadn't even seen a Jew in six decades. And suddenly there's a call from the burning bush. Hashem says, "Moshe, the time has arrived to fulfill your dream. I want you to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt." In shock, Moshe says, "Dream,? That dream was decades

ago, that dream was when I had energy, when I had political connections, when I was part of the Palace of the Pharaoh. I have a dream now? I'm old, I can't even talk. Why are you asking me now to save the Jewish people? Who are you? What is your name?"

G-d continued to explain to Moshe. "No, you are the leader of the Jewish people." Moshe's hesitation was very, very clear. According to the Talmud, Moshe argued with Hashem for seven days, "I'm not the man, I'm unqualified, I don't have the ability, I don't have the political connections any longer. What do you want for me? Leave me alone. Pick an angel. Put my brother in charge. Pick somebody else. It's not for me." Until Hashem finally told him, "Yes, Moshe, it is for you."

Leadership in Israel has never been about political connections. It's never been about the ability to communicate. It's never even been about feeling that one should be the leader. Leadership in Israel is about becoming transparent and understanding that I am a messenger of G-d. And the more that Moshe spoke about his underqualifications, the more G-d said, "You are the man to do the job."

Rav Chaim Volozhin once com-

mented that this can be compared to a cup of water. The thicker the cup, the less water can fit into it. The thinner the walls of the cup, the more water you get to drink. Moshe's ego had to be thin, Moshe's political presence had to be gone. The thinner the cup, the more Divine Presence of Hashem and the more holiness Moshe was able to contain. Do we want a lot of the cup or do we want a lot of water? It wasn't about Moshe being the leader or being in charge; all the time, from the very outset, it was about Moshe seeing the suffering of others and doing what's right. And with this, Moshe went on to lead the Jewish people until he was one hundred and twenty years old and made the greatest contribution a human being can ever make.

Rebetzin Chaya Sora Getzulin

Second Chances

Ever feel like you messed up? Concerned about lost opportunities? Missed out because of circumstances beyond your control?

What message does the Torah convey to us for times when opportunities pass us by?

It was the first year following the Exodus. Bnei Yisroel was commanded to offer the Pesach sacrifice on the 14th of Nissan,

just as they had done the previous year when they were about to leave Egypt.

But what about those who were unable to do so? There was a group amongst the people who were ritually impure, being that they had come in contact with a human corpse. They sincerely desired to participate, but were unable to. They approached Moshe and Aaron with a heartfelt request: "Why

should we lose out by not being able to bring HaShem's offering at the appointed time..." (Bamidbar 9:7)

Moshe received an answer to their plea. "HaShem spoke to Moshe saying, if any man will become spiritually impure through a human corpse, or be on a distant road, whether you, or your generations, he shall make the Pesach-offering for HaShem on the 14th day of the second month (the month of Iyar)."

(Bamidbar 9:10-11)

HaShem's gift to man. The gift of Pesach Sheini, the Second Pesach. The opportunity for a "make-up" exactly a month later. The ability to take the worry away, to lift the heavy weight off one's heart, knowing that there is a second chance.

"Whether you, or your generations...." A message not just for the generation of the Exodus, but for all time. A message that speaks to us today, relevant in the 21st century as it was thousands of years earlier.

Those "spiritually impure through a human corpse, or on a distant road..." Pesach Sheini, a second chance is for everyone. While only those who were ineligible because they were spiritually impure appealed for a special dispensation, HaShem broadened the group to include those on "a distant road".

Second chances are for everyone. No one is ever too far removed, too distant from HaShem, that they can't have a second chance. HaShem gives us the opportunity to draw closer to Him. We may have taken distant paths in life, but HaShem's gates are always open. Like a parent who leaves the door open all night, anxiously waiting for their child to return home, HaShem's door is always open.

Those who addressed Moshe exclaimed "Lama nigara.... Why should we be left out...?" Clearly, they were not looking for a "free pass" but had a genuine yearning, a love and desire to keep mitzvos. These words can also be under-

stood as a question that at times we must ask ourselves. Do we ever give up the opportunity to grab a mitzvah? Do we "go into hiding" when someone is collecting tzedakah? Are we a bit too relieved when others volunteer for chesed projects? Or do we exert the extra effort so that another mitzvah can be "ours".

Pesach Sheini is this Friday, May 5, the 14th of Iyar. It is a custom to enjoy some matzah, as a symbolic remembrance that second chances are always here.

Pesach Sheini teaches us that there is a second chance for self-improvement, both spiritually and in our relationship with our fellow man. If our davening wasn't as it should be, it's a time to begin. Add another tefillah, concentrate a little harder on the meaning of the words. Maybe we can increase our Torah study. Do more chessed. Give more tzedakah. Be more forgiving of others who may have slighted us. There are so many ways to apply the gift of Pesach Sheini to our daily routine.

It was Erev Pesach. I was a young married with little ones, packing up to spend Yom Tov with my in-laws.

The phone rang. Expecting a "have a good Yom Tov" call from a friend, I lunged to pick it up. "A good Erev Pesach" I called out, but this time it was my mother. Her voice was broken and cracking. The words came tumbling out. "Zeide just had a stroke... is in the ER... I'm packing up and going to the hospital for Pesach.... I need you to come and help finish cooking... to be here for Yom Tov."

A change of plans. We were heading to my parents' home.

I told Ema that we would all dav-

en, that HaShem would help, and Zeide will have a refuah. Iy"eh, everything will work out.

My father was out delivering matzah and charosses to members of the shul, a custom he had for many years. It was pre-cell phone days. No way to get in touch. My siblings helped my mother pack up the essentials, a Seder plate, Haggadah, matzah, charosses, wine, and some food for Yom Tov.

My mother spent the Seder nights in a cold, sterile hospital room, reading the words of the Haggadah and softly singing the familiar Seder tunes at Zeide's bedside. With HaShem's help, Zeide recovered and was able to return home several weeks later. As the 14th of Iyar drew closer, my mother seized the opportunity to gather the family for a "second chance" Seder. We gathered at my parents' home, where we had a "mini Seder" complete with matzah, wine, the recitation of the Mah Nishtanah by my son Yosef and daughter, Tziri, who were just toddlers at the time, followed by a delicious dinner.

It was our time to say, "Thank you, HaShem, for giving our family a second chance."

Let's not allow HaShem's gift of second chances to slip by. If you really think about it, every day is a day of second chances.

Thank you for reading this edition of The TorahAnyTimes Newsletter. If you've enjoyed, please let us know - we'd love to hear from you! Email info@torahanytime.com.

Rabbi YY Jacobson

Words Can Save

Some time ago I was at a Shabbaton when a young man came over to me and shared what a difficult time he had growing up in the school system. By the time he was fourteen years old, he had been expelled from eight yeshivas. Why so many?

"Everybody wanted me," he said. "I like the attitude," I shot back. The truth... nobody could deal with him. At home, his father was even harsher than the principals. He would come home and his father would punish him, double the amount, because of what happened in school. Instead of feeling the safety and the embrace of his father, he was given distance and apathy. When he turned fourteen, his father put him on a plane to Israel. "Even he couldn't stand me," the man said.

When I arrived, I started going to one Slonimer shul in Bnei Brak. I had no other place to go. Every day, there stood a ninety-five-year-old man, whom I later learned was Asher Arkovitch. He had been a Partisan in the Second World War and survived. He got married, but for the past ten years, his wife had been ill, and he had taken care of her. Recently, she had passed away, leaving Reb Asher, at age 95, alone. But even with his loss, Reb Asher davened as if he was truly talking to G-d. It was a real, bona fide conversation. You could feel his words in the room.

One morning, after everyone had filed out of the shul, those who remained were the boy and Reb Asher. With just the two of them, Reb Asher turned to him and said, "I haven't seen you around before. What

are you doing here?" The boy told him exactly the situation. "I haven't had luck in any school system. I was expelled from eight schools, and my father sent me here to Israel." Reb Asher looked the boy in the eye and gently said, "You know, we say every day in the prayer of Ashrei, 'Le'ho-dia livnei ha'adam gevurosav ... - To inform mankind of Your [G-d's] greatness.' Literally, it means that G-d wants us to spread recognition about His strength and royalty. But the Maggid of Lechevitch provided another interpretation. You know why we talk so much about G-d's infinity and majesty? To inform each and every person of their own greatness.

With every person you meet, draw out their strength and let them know about it. Show them their own beauty, their own glory, their own profundity, their own holiness. We talk about G-d's greatness, not because He needs our compliments, but because we need to do the same to others. If G-d is great, that means He didn't make a mistake when He created you. If G-d is omniscient and omnipresent, that means that when He created you, He was making the statement that the world is incomplete without your contribution. Make others cognizant of their own power, of their own fortitude, of their own majesty, of their own creativity, of their own inner, infinite dignity and light and gift.

"Rabbi Jacobson," said this man, now an adult, standing in front of me, "I got into another yeshiva in Israel, and six months later, I was expelled. I then got into a tenth school

a half a year later, until the principal said, "You're not for us."

Here I was, 15 years old with a record of ten schools expelling me. I had nobody to turn to. I didn't have a father to call. I was so lost in the world that I decided I can't live any longer. The pain was just too deep. The loneliness, the solitariness was just too profound. One morning I walked to the roof of a tall building. It was 11 o'clock in the morning. I began pacing at the edge of the roof, about to jump and take myself out of my agony. And suddenly, I had a flashback of that conversation I had one year ago when this old Jew, Asher Arkovitch found me and told me, 'Whatever happens, never forget about your strength.' And there and then, on that rooftop, I told myself, 'You know, before I jump, I first have to become aware of my strengths and then I'll make a decision.' I walked back. I went down. I got my life together, and here I am today, married with three beautiful children and an extraordinary wife. And I built a successful business.

I looked at the man who had tears streaming down his eyes. My eyes also moistened. Would Reb Asher ever have known the impact his words had on that morning in a Slonimer Shul in Bnei Brak to a fourteen-year-old boy? Could he have imagined the life-altering influence? They literally saved a life from suicide.

Don't be stingy with words. Don't be stingy with gestures. Don't be stingy with hugs. Don't be stingy with embraces. Don't be stingy with letting every person you meet know about their strengths, their beauty,

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