

The Torah Any Times

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Mr. Charlie Harary

The Smallness of Greatness

One of the greatest blocks to growth is our understanding of greatness. We misunderstand what greatness is. We all want to be great and we all want to be accomplished. We all want to lead lives that we're proud of, but we often don't know how to get there. And so, a lack of understanding prevents us from even trying.

So what is the measure of true greatness?

I came across an incredible insight in a sefer called *Olam HaMiddos*, by Rav Moshe Don Kestenbaum.

Sefer Shemos opens by introducing us to two incredible women. The Torah says, "And the king of Egypt said to the Jewish midwives, the name of one, Shifrah, and the name of the second, Puah." The commentaries explain that these two women, Shifrah and Puah, were in fact Yocheved and Miriam, the mother and sister of Moshe Rabbeinu. Yocheved was married to Amram, the gadol hador, the leader of the generation, and Miriam successfully convinced her father to remarry her mother and also led the women out of Egypt. These two women were very accomplished. They both lived incredible lives, filled with kindness and strength. They had a list of achievements which Hashem could choose to call upon and formulate a nickname around. Yet, He

calls them Shifrah and Puah. Why?

Because Yocheved would physically beautify the children (m'shaperet, related to the word Shifrah). When the babies were born, she would fix them up a little bit, brushing their hair, cleaning them off, wrapping them in a little swaddle, and giving them back to their mother. And what would Miriam do? She would coo at them. As the babies cried, she would go "goo-goo-ga-ga."

Now, let's think about this. Is this really what Hashem should choose to highlight out of everything they accomplished?

Rav Kestenbaum brilliantly explains that we make a mistake. We think that the measure of greatness is based on the measure of outstanding and extraordinary deeds. When we see people who are great, we learn of their incredible stories—stories of incredible scholarship or stories of leadership. When we hear this, we look up and go, "Oh, that's never going to be me." We feel despondent. We give up, telling ourselves that we're never going to amount to that.

Don't get the wrong idea. Great things are great, but the real question is how we measure them, and that is something else. Hashem looks at two women and says, "Trust Me, there are few people to ever walk the face of this earth who were as great as you. And now let Me tell you how I'm going to nickname you. Not by the big things you do, but by the small things you do."

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The measure of greatness is measured by small things—by how you speak to your spouse when no one's home, by whether you spend time with your children, by how you daven when no one's looking, by how much you concentrate when recit-

ing berachos, by whether or not you succumb to a prohibited desire when there's nobody around. Every day, we have the opportunity to do lots of little things. And that's where our greatness is set—by how we act when no one's looking, by how we act when

no one's going to pat us on the back. There are no dinners, no honors, no stories. Just us and Hashem and a small little deed.

And the more we do that, the greater we truly are.

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Inventing a Religion

Let's invent a religion. In this religion, we're going to tell people that every seven years they have to stop working the fields. Put down your tools and do not plant or harvest. However, having said this all, we promise them that they'll be okay because miraculously, they'll get a bumper crop in the sixth year, and that sixth year will feed them for that sixth year, the seventh year, and the eighth year. A bumper crop is necessary because seeing as nothing was planted in the seventh year, there'll be nothing to harvest in the eighth year unless the sixth year carries an abundance of food.

What would our interested religionists say to this?

No way! If you're going to make up a religion, the worst thing to do is promise people things you can't deliver. Your religion is going to fall flat on its face in its first seventh year, when everyone is starving and there's no bumper crop.

This week's Torah portion begins with Hashem telling Moshe Rabbeinu about the mitzvah of Shemita. The Torah states, "And Hashem spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai." Why does the Torah specify that it was on Mount Sinai that the mitzvah of Shemita was given? All the mitzvahs were also given on Sinai! Why emphasize that the mitzvah of Shemita was given there?

The Jewish people kept Shemita for 394 years, which means that 41 times in those 394 years, the Jewish people

put down their agricultural tools and put their trust in Hashem. As a result, they were rewarded with a miraculous crop that sustained them for three whole years. Now, if you're making up a religion, you can't fake 41 Shemita years and guarantee that the produce of the sixth year will suffice for three years. The Torah specifically connects Mount Sinai with Shemita to tell us that just as Shemita provides a verifiable test that the Torah is true, similarly, the rest of the Torah, which was also given on Sinai, is also the authentic word of G-d.

So if you're trying to invent a religion with agricultural guarantees like this, think again. No one can grant guarantees. Unless, of course, you're G-d.

Rebbetzin Chaya Sora Gertzulin

Mystical Fires

Mikrah – coincidence. But we know that there are no coincidences in life. Everything is b'yad HaShem – in HaShem's hand. In fact, our rabbis teach that the word mikrah alludes to that very idea. The Hebrew letters of mikrah - mem, kuf, reish, hay, can be rearranged to form the phrase rak m'HaShem – meaning only from HaShem (reish/kuf, mem/hay). While it may not always be visible to us, there is a reason and purpose for

all that transpires. Rak m'HaShem – It's all part of HaShem's master plan.

Lag B'Omer. The day the devastating plague ended, and the students of Rabbi Akiva ceased dying. Years later, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai passes away on Lag B'Omer. Coincidence or not?

Following the horrific loss of so many thousands of Rabbi Akiva's students, there was a fear amongst the nation of how will the chain of Torah learning continue. With so

many talmidei chachomim gone, who will be the Torah leaders of the next generation? Rabbi Akiva started teaching once again. Amongst his new students was Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, also known as Rashbi, (an acronym of the first letters of his name) lived during the hard times of Roman rule. Once, while conversing with other Torah sages, Rabbi Shimon criticized the Roman leaders. Unbeknownst to him, his words were

overheard and repeated to the Roman authorities.

Rashbi made it onto the Roman's "Most Wanted List." He was viewed as an enemy, and a death sentence was decreed upon him. In fear for his life, Rabbi Shimon, together with his son, hid out in a cave. Miraculously, a carob tree grew outside the cave, and a stream flowed alongside it. Rashbi and his son subsisted on the fruit of the carob and the water from the stream, gifts from HaShem.

They spent their days and nights fully immersed in Torah study. It was during this time that Rashbi authored the Zohar, a book of Jewish mystical thought known as Kabbalah. Zohar means "shining light," for it revealed many Torah secrets, shedding light and understanding to whomever studied its holy words.

After twelve years in the cave, Eliyahu HaNavi appeared to them, bearing news that the Roman emperor had passed away, and the decree against Rashbi was lifted. It was time to emerge from hiding, and re-enter society. As they traveled home, they came across a farmer who was busy tending to his field. Coming from so many years of living a spiritual existence, they couldn't comprehend how one could be involved with the mundane aspects of life. Rabbi Shimon glared at the farmer; it was as if daggers of fire emanated from his eyes. Fires that "zapped" whatever they were focused on, totally consuming them.

A Heavenly voice called out to Rabbi Shimon, "Do you want to destroy My world? Go back to the cave. The world cannot exist with

your holiness." Rabbi Shimon and his son returned to the cave for another year. Besides being immersed in Torah study, it was a year of working on acceptance and love for every man. A year of concentrating on the lessons of Rabbi Akiva, to "love your fellow as yourself." It was only then that the father and son were ready to emerge from the cave a second time.

It was an Erev Shabbos, and they encountered a man carrying two bundles of hadassim, myrtle branches. When Rabbi Shimon inquired as to its purpose, the man replied that it was in honor of the Shabbos. One bundle for the commandment of "shamor" - to keep the Shabbos holy, and the second for "zachor" - to remember the holy Shabbos. Rabbi Shimon lifted his head upward and proclaimed, "HaShem, look at Your beloved people. Look how they prepare for and treasure the holy Shabbos."

To this very day, Am Yisroel has a special love for the Holy Shabbos. I think of the busy bakeries, groceries and flower stands on Fridays. Men, women and children carrying their Shabbos "bundles." Like Rabbi Shimon, we too, can say to HaShem, "Look how precious the mitzvos are to Your children." The plague which consumed Rabbi Akiva's students ended on Lag B'Omer. Rabbi Shimon's yahrtzeit is on Lag B'Omer. No coincidence at all.

We have come full circle. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai emerged from the cave with a new appreciation for his fellow. The ability to see the "tzelem Elokim", the Divine spark within each and every soul. To connect to others with love, appreciation, acceptance and tolerance. Rabbi Shimon lived his life according to

the teachings of his beloved Rebbi, Rabbi Akiva. Through his words and actions, Rabbi Shimon brought tikun, merit and repair, to the lives of the many students of Rabbi Akiva who perished.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai spent his last hours on this world teaching Torah, surrounded by his students. The sun began to set. The light in the room began to dim. With his last vestiges of strength, Rabbi Shimon continued teaching. As the room was getting darker, the students wrote faster and faster, not wanting to miss any of his holy words.

It was then that a miraculous fire appeared outside Rabbi Shimon's home, illuminating the room with its mystical light. Rabbi Shimon's students were able to continue writing, enabling them to keep his holy teachings alive midor l'dor, for future generations. But then, just as it came, the fire left, and the soul of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai returned to its Creator.

At the entrance way to Rashbi's kever, his burial place in Meron, there is an arch with the words "Ki lo sishochach mipi zaroh—For it (the Torah) will not be forgotten from His children" (Devarim 31:21). A promise that regardless of any difficulties or challenges, the Torah will never be forgotten. Indeed, this passage is connected to Rabbi Shimon, with the last letters of each word spelling out the name Yochai.

Before his death, Rabbi Shimon instructed his students to see his yahrtzeit as a Yom Hillula, a day of celebration. He referred to his passing as "his happiness." He felt fulfilled as he was preparing to face

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his Maker, for during his lifetime, he came to understand the depths of Torah wisdom.

Sadly, the ongoing rocket and missile attacks in the north of Israel by Hezbollah have claimed another “victim,” as the annual Lag B’Omer celebrations in Meron have

been canceled. While the massive gathering in Meron will not be happening, tens, or even hundreds of thousands of Jews will commemorate Rabbi Shimon’s yahrtzeit with hadlokas, bonfires throughout the world.

The memory and teachings of

Rashbi live on. Lessons of achdus, unity and understanding, seeing the beauty in each and every individual. Lessons of the primacy of Torah study. Lessons that will, b’ezeras HaShem, lead us to the ultimate celebration with the coming of Moshiach, speedily, in our days.

Rabbi Avi Wiesenfeld

The Farmer in Heaven

Shlomie was a mashgiach in Shoreshe, a small kibbutz in Israel. He made a daily minyan for mincha for the members of the kibbutz. But one day they were stuck. They had nine people for the minyan, and they were missing a tenth. Shlomi ran outside, looking for someone to complete the minyan. There and then, he noticed a farmer, a totally irreligious man. Approaching him, he asked, “Would you like to complete a minyan?” The farmer looked back at him. “Minyan? What’s a minyan?” So Shlomie explained. “Ten people gather together and pray together.” Going along with things, the farmer said, “Sure, no problem,” and followed Shlomie.

As they were about to start the minyan, all of a sudden, a tenth religious man walked into the shul.

That changed things. The farmer saw that he was no longer needed and walked out.

A number of months later, Shlomie had a dream. It was the farmer, his face glowing. “I died a month ago, and I want to tell you something. The zechus (merit) that I had by merely agreeing to be part of the minyan, even though I didn’t even daven with you, was so powerful that in Heaven they allowed me to come back and tell you the following message: ‘Please go to my son. He’s not religious, but ask him to say Kaddish for me.’”

One piece of advice I often give to others, especially when it comes to self-control in the face of temptations, is to celebrate your successes. We don’t realize how powerful these small feats are.

The very fact that this farmer tried to daven with the minyan, even though he wasn’t successful, meant everything in Heaven.

The small successes you have when you turn away, don’t press or don’t look, warrants the most incredible celebration. In Heaven, it’s celebrated more than we can imagine. As the Vilna Gaon tells us, for every single second a person withholds from doing an aveira, he merits the most tremendous light. Yes, we’re living in a world with temptations wherever we go and whatever we do. But the smallest success—if we can push it off, if we can try not to look, if we can try not to press—even if it’s just for a few moments and even if we’re not successful in the end, that trying is worth everything in Heaven.

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RABBI BENTZION SHAFER | RABBI PAYSACH KROHN | RABBI JOEY PALACCI | RABBI ARI BENDOUSSAN | RAV GAV FRIEDMAN | RABBI YITZCHOK FINGERER | RABBI YOEL GOLD

R' JOSH MEHLMAN | RABBI ELI SCHELLER | R' CHEBKY KAUPTHEIL | RABBI PINCHAS WOLHENDLER | RABBI YISROEL MAJESKI | RABBI PINCHAS LANDIS

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Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza

(Updated: 15 Iyar)

קית' שמואל בן גלדיס חוה (סיגל) קרינה בת אירנה (ארייב) רום בן תמר נועה (ברסלבסקי) רומי בת מירב (גונ) שגב בן גלית (כלפון) שגיא בן נעמית (חן דקל) שירי בת מרגיט (ביבס) שלומי בן רוזיטה אירה (זיו) שלמה בן מרסיל (מנצור) תמיר בן חירות (נמרודי)	כרמל בת כנרת (גת) לירי בת שירה (אלבג) מישל בן סולמירה (ניסנבאום) מקסים בן טלה (הרקין) מתן בן ענת (אנגרסט) מתן בן ירדנה (צנגאוקר) נדב בן חנה (פופלוול) נועה בת ליאורה (ארגמני) נמרוד בן ויקי (כהן) נעמה בת איילת (לוי) עדן בת שירית (ירושלמי) עודד בן בלהה (ליפשיץ) עומר בן ניבה (ונקרט) עומר בן שלי (שם טוב) עומר מקסים בן אורנה אסתר (נאוטרה) עופר בן כוכבה (קלדרון) עידן בן יעל (אלכסנדר) עידן בן דלית (שתיו) עמירם בן שרה (קופר) עמרי בן אסתר ורוניקה (מירן) צחי בן דבורה (עידן)	אריאל בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו) אריאל בן שירי (ביבס) בר אברהם בן ג'וליה (קופרשטיין) גד משה בן שרה (מוזס) גיא בן מירב (גלבוע דלאל) גלי בן טליה (ברמן) דוד בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו) דולב בן יעל (יהוד) דורון בת סימונה שרה (שטיינברכר) דניאלה בת אורלי (גלבוע) הירש בן רחל (גולדברג פולין) זיו בן טליה (ברמן) חיים בן נחמה (פרי) חן חנן בן ורד (יבלונקה) טל בן ניצה (שוהם קורנגולד) יאיר בן רות אדית (הורן) יגב בן אסתר (בוכשטב) יוסף חיים בן מרים (אוחנה) יורם בן בלה (מצגר) יצחק בן אנטה חנה (אלגרט) ירדן בן פנינה (ביבס) כפיר בן שירי (ביבס)	אבינתן בן דיצה תרצה (אור) אביתר בן גליה (דוד) אברהם גלעד בן אמונה (מונדר) אגם בת מירב (ברגר) אוהד בן אסתר (בן עמי) אוהד בן אסתר (יהלומי) אור בן גאולה (לוי) אורי בן עינב אפרת (דנינו) איתן בן רות אדית (הורן) איתן אברהם בן אפרת (מור) אלון בן עידית (אהל) אליה בן סיגלית (כהן) אליהו בן חנה (שרעבי) אלכסנדר בן אוקסנה (לובנוב) אלכסנדר סשה בן ילנה לאה (טרופנוב) אלכסנדר בן נינה (דנציג) אלמוג בן אורית (מאיר ג'אן) אלמוג בן נירה (סרוסי) אלקנה בן רוחמה (בוחבוט) אמילי תהילה בת אמנדה פרנסיס (דמארי) אנדריי בן יבגניה (קוזלוב) ארבל בת יעל (יהוד)
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Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza

(Updated: 15 Iyar)

Ofer ben Cochava (Kalderon)	Yagev ben Esther (Buchashtev)	Francis (Damari)	Avinatan ben
Idan ben Yael (Alexander)	Yosef Chaim ben Miriam (Ochana)	Andrei ben Yevgenia (Kozalov)	Ditza Tirtza (Ohr)
Idan ben Dalit (Shtivi)	Yoram ben Bella (Metzger)	Arbel bat Yael (Yehud)	Evyatar ben Galya (David)
Amiram ben Sarah (Cooper)	Yitzchak ben Aneta Chana (Elgarat)	Ariel ben Sylvia Monika (Konyo)	Avraham Gilad ben Emunah (Mondar)
Omri ben Esther Veronica (Miran)	Yarden ben Penina (Bibas)	Ariel ben Shiri (Bibas)	Agam bat Meirav (Berger)
Tzachi ben Devorah (Idan)	Kfir ben Shiri (Bibas)	Bar Avraham ben Julia (Cooperstein)	Ohad ben Esther (Yahalomi)
Kieth Shmuel ben Gladis Chava (Segal)	Carmel bat Kineret (Gat)	Gad Moshe ben Sarah (Mozes)	Ohad ben Esther (Yahalomi)
Karina bat Irena (Ariav)	Liri bat Shira (Elbag)	Guy ben Meirav (Gilboa Dalal)	Ohr ben Geula (Levi)
Rom ben Tamar Noa (Brasalevsky)	Mishel ben Solamira (Nissenbaum)	Gali ben Talya (Berman)	Ori ben Einav Efrat (Danino)
Romi bat Meirav (Gonen)	Maxim ben Talleh (Herkin)	David ben Sylvia Monika (Konyo)	Eitan ben Ruth Idit (Horen)
Segev ben Galit (Chalfon)	Matan ben Anat (Angrest)	David ben Sylvia Monika (Konyo)	Eitan Avraham ben Efrat (Mor)
Sagi ben Naamit (Chen- Dekel)	Matan ben Yardena (Tzangauker)	Dolev ben Yael (Yehud)	Alon ben Idit (Ohel)
Shiri bat Margit (Bibas)	Nadav ben Chana (Popplewell)	Doron bat Simona Sarah (Steinbrecher)	Eliya ben Sigalit (Cohen)
Shlomi ben Rosita Ira (Ziv)	Chana (Popplewell)	Daniella bat Orli (Gilboa)	Eliyahu ben Chana (Sharabi)
Shlomo ben Marcelle (Mansour)	Noa bat Liora (Argamani)	Hirsch ben Perel Chana (Goldberg- Polin)	Alexander ben Oksana (Lubanov)
Tamir ben Cheirut (Nimrodi)	Nimrod ben Viki (Cohen)	Perel Chana (Goldberg- Polin)	Alexander Sasha ben Yelena Leah (Tropanov)
	Naama bat Ayelet (Levi)	Ziv ben Talya (Berman)	Alexander ben Nina (Dantzig)
	Eden bat Shirit (Yerushalmi)	Chaim ben Nechama (Perry)	Almog ben Orit (Meir-Jan)
	Oded ben Bilhah (Lifschitz)	Chen Chanan ben Vered (Yablonka)	Almog ben Nira (Sarusi)
	Omer ben Niva (Venkrat)	Tal ben Nitza (Shoham- Corngold)	Elkana ben Ruchama (Buchbut)
	Omer ben Shelly (Shemtov)	Yair ben Ruth Idit (Horen)	Emily Tehilla bat Amanda
	Omer Maxim ben Orna Esther (Neutra)		