

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Dovid Kaplan

Traveling in Luxury

Imagine a successful businessman named Reuven who works for a major company. He's a top salesman, consistently producing impressive results. One day, his boss calls him into the office and says, "Reuven, there's a crucial deal in another city, and you're the one person I trust to close it. I want you to travel in style. I'm sending you in a limousine, and you'll fly first class. And when you arrive, you'll stay overnight in a five-star hotel. I want you well-rested and at your best."

Reuven is pleasantly surprised. "Limousine? First class? Five-star hotel? Sounds great!" So off he goes, enjoying every step of the trip. He travels in luxury, eats well, sleeps comfortably, and ultimately, closes the deal successfully.

At the end of the week, Reuven returns to the office. He sees the boss handing out paychecks, but to his surprise, the boss walks right past him. No check. Reuven waits, expecting his envelope, especially since he knows a bonus should be included. Still nothing. Finally, he knocks on the boss's office door.

"Excuse me," he says, "I think you forgot my paycheck."

The boss looks up. "Paycheck? Reuven, you had a limousine, first class airfare, a five-star hotel; what more could you want?"

Reuven looks back at him. "I'm not working for the limousine, the plane seat, or the hotel. I'm working for the paycheck."

And he gets his check.

This story reflects a key point raised in Parshas Bechukotai. The Parsha begins, "If you follow My statutes..." and then promises a series of material blessings: rain in its season, abundant produce, peace in the land, security from enemies, and so much surplus that one won't know where to store it all.

The classic commentators ask: if the Torah is promising reward for fulfilling its commandments, shouldn't the reward be spiritual? After all, the true reward for a life of mitzvos is in the World to Come, the eternal world of truth. Why then does the Torah only mention physical blessings?

The answer is that these blessings are not the ultimate reward; they are provisions for the journey.

We are all like Reuven. If we serve our Creator sincerely and wholeheartedly, then G-d, our "boss," provides us with comfort along the way. The rain, the food, the peace, the security—these are not the goal. They are the limousine, the first-class seat, the five-star accommodations that make our service more efficient, more focused, and less burdened by worldly distractions.

If we are committed to our mission, G-d may grant us a livelihood that comes with ease, so we can devote more time to Torah study and spiritual growth. We won't have to exhaust ourselves with endless labor or be preoccupied with material concerns. He will bless us with peace

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so we can learn, pray, and live with clarity and calm.

The Torah is not promising a reward. It is describing the conditions that Hashem may provide when we are truly living according to His will. As the Sages explain, these material blessings are “the fruits in this world” of a spiritual life (Shabbos 127a). They are not the reward itself, which is reserved for the World

to Come.

Still, who wouldn’t prefer a smoother ride? Who wouldn’t want a five-star hotel as the backdrop for their mission on earth? In every advertisement for a luxury vacation, five-star accommodations are a key selling point. Why? Because we all crave comfort. But comfort is not the destination; it’s a means to help us reach our purpose more effectively.

This world can be like a five-star hotel for us, if we use it properly. If we strive to fulfill the will of G-d to the best of our ability, He may ease the path for us. The more faithfully we serve our Creator, the more pleasant and dignified our journey can become, and the true reward, the eternal reward, will await us in the World to Come.

Rabbi Elazar Meisels

The Holy Hunchback

In contemporary culture, hunchbacks are rarely portrayed with dignity. Literature and theater have long cast the figure of the hunchback as a symbol of moral decay or tragic misfortune, and at best, an object of pity. A straight spine has come to represent strength and integrity; no spine at all suggests cowardice. But a crooked spine? That, we’re told, is the mark of someone crooked within—morally twisted and deviant.

Yet, like much of what modern media promote, this symbolism is superficial and misguided.

Most are familiar with the revered Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Herman, the inspiring figure immortalized in the beloved biography *All for the Boss*, a man who dedicated every fiber of his being to avodas Hashem (serving G-d) and kirvas Elokim (closeness to G-d). Less well-known, however, is Rabbi Chaim Yerucham Fishel Dov—also known as Philip

Kaufman—who married Rabbi Herman’s daughter, Freida. Tragically, Freida passed away in the prime of her life, leaving her husband with young children to raise on his own. It was no small task. Remarkably, he rose to the challenge, raising a family that carried his legacy far beyond what he may have imagined.

His son, Rabbi Shmuel Kaufman, went on to become a legendary mechanech in Detroit, Michigan, guiding generations of students and later becoming the subject of the recent biography, *An Eternal Fire*. The book recounts a poignant episode from Rabbi Shmuel’s life.

In his later years, Rabbi Fishel Dov suffered from severe spinal curvature, stooped so deeply that his appearance resembled that of a hunchback. Wanting to help, Rabbi Shmuel and his sister Ruthie, despite limited means, sacrificed greatly to purchase an expensive, custom-fitted brace to help their father stand upright.

Yet, to their surprise, Rabbi Fishel

Dov rarely wore it.

Puzzled and disappointed, Rabbi Shmuel asked, “Why don’t you wear the brace? We worked so hard to help you stand straight again.”

At first, his father avoided the question. But Rabbi Shmuel, never one to give up easily, gently persisted. Finally, Rabbi Fishel Dov replied, “Shmuel, my whole life I davened that I should not have my eyes wander and look beyond my daled amos, my immediate vicinity right in front of me. Now that Hashem has granted me that request—made it easier for me not to see beyond my own four cubits—should I give that up just to stand tall and look out into the world?”

I cannot tell you with certainty how to raise a child like Rabbi Shmuel Kaufman, a man who educated thousands of students, raised astronomical sums of tzedakah for many Torah institutions, and embodied chesed in every fiber of his being. But I have a strong suspicion that it had something to do with the quiet greatness of a father—stooped in body, yet towering in spirit.

Then again... it’s only a hunch.

Rabbi Hillel Eisenberg

All Aboard

In the late 18th century, there was an infamous island in the Atlantic Ocean, near Bermuda, known for a horrific practice that targeted

passing ships. Positioned along a heavily traveled trade route, the island saw frequent maritime traffic, and its inhabitants devised a sinister scheme to exploit it.

Whenever a ship appeared on the horizon, the islanders would stage a lavish display along the shoreline. They set up raucous parties with loud music, abundant food and alcohol, all designed to draw the attention of weary, homesick sailors desperate for relief from the harsh-

ness of life at sea. Enticed by the spectacle, many ships would dock out of curiosity or temptation.

But the moment the sailors disembarked, the islanders would ambush them, slaughtering the crew and looting the ship. This gruesome deception continued for years, and while the danger became widely known, it remained difficult to avoid. The island's strategic location along the trade route made bypassing it nearly impossible. Captains were left in a constant state of anxiety, searching for ways to protect their men from falling into the trap.

Some tried reason. They warned and pleaded with their crews, explaining that the party was a carefully crafted illusion masking a death trap. But the sailors, exhausted and emotionally depleted, were too vulnerable to temptation. Others experimented with blind-

folding the crew as they passed by, but getting adult men to wear blindfolds for even a short period proved futile. A few desperate captains resorted to shackling their men in chains, just for the half-hour it took to pass the island, but that only bred resentment and unrest, threatening mutiny.

Finally, one captain devised a novel approach, one that actually worked. He understood the allure of the island's deception, and rather than suppress it, he decided to redirect it. "If it's a party they're after," he reasoned, "then I'll give them a better one—right here on this ship!"

As they neared the island, the captain descended into the lower decks, threw a tablecloth over some barrels, and laid out wine and beef jerky. He pulled out a guitar and began to sing. He told stories. He asked the sailors about their childhoods. Soon, the crew was laughing,

dancing, singing, playing games, genuinely enjoying themselves. By the time the ship had safely sailed past the wretched island, the men had barely noticed. They had something better.

Olam Hazeh, this physical world, can be a place of immense opportunity, where a person can live a magical, spiritually rich life. But it can also be a deadly trap, where the yetzer hara, our evil inclination, disguises destruction as delight, luring us with empty pleasure.

The way to resist the island of the yetzer hara is not simply through fear or suppression, but through inspiration. We must teach ourselves, and our children, that our party is better. That a life of Torah, meaning, and connection is the greatest celebration on earth, and that no illusion, no matter how loud or enticing, can ever compare.

Mr. Charlie Harary

The Easy Path

When the Jewish people left Egypt, the Torah makes a striking statement: "And Hashem did not lead them through the land of the Pelishtim, for it was close" (Shemos 13:17).

There was, in fact, a direct path—along the Mediterranean coast—from Egypt to the Land of Israel. A stunning route, scenic and efficient. One could practically walk it in days. No map needed. Yet G-d deliberately avoided that route.

Why? The Torah says: "Because it was too close."

What does "too close" mean?

The Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 20:16) fills in the background. At that time, the Land of Canaan was not ready for the Jewish people. The Canaanites, aware of the Jewish people's impending arrival, had destroyed the trees, leaving the land barren and unplantable. Amalek prepared ambushes, ready to annihilate them along the way. The bones of members of the tribe of Ephraim, who had prematurely left Egypt, still lay scattered across the route.

In other words, although it looked like the fastest, most logical route, it was the most dangerous. Likewise, the Land of Israel wasn't

yet spiritually or physically prepared for their arrival.

So why doesn't Hashem just say that? Why not state clearly, "I didn't take you that way because it would have destroyed you"? Instead, He simply says, "It was too close."

It sounds almost like a euphemism. But it's more than that. It's a profound truth.

Think of a butterfly emerging from its cocoon. It struggles, fights, writhes its way out. If someone were to gently slice open the cocoon to make the process easier, thinking it would help, the butterfly would never survive. That struggle is what strengthens its wings. That difficulty is what makes it capable of flying.

"Because it was too close" means: sometimes the easy path is not the

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right path.

In our own lives, we often believe that when we face a choice between two paths—one difficult and one smooth—the hard one must mean something is wrong. We view challenges as detours from success. We view spiritual struggle as a sign that we are not enough. When temptation confronts us, we take it as proof that we aren't truly holy. When we stumble, we assume G-d is disappointed in us. When we suffer or face hardship, we think we must be on the wrong path.

But G-d says: I had many reasons

for not taking you straight into the Land of Israel. But the one I want you to remember is this: it was too easy.

The easy path often leads to mediocrity. The easy path can lead to fragility. It robs us of growth. But challenge? Challenge builds greatness. Struggle reveals essence.

If you find yourself on a path that doesn't feel short, smooth, or simple—if you feel like you're walking through a desert, wondering how long this will last—know this: you are not alone. You're walking the same path that our ancestors

walked for forty years. And Hashem is whispering, "Keep going. Just keep walking."

While you're walking, He's preparing the land. The soil is being fertilized. The enemies are weakening. The scattered bones are being gathered. And when the time is right—when you have become who you are meant to be—your promised land will be ready for you too.

So let us not pray for the easiest path. Let us instead lean into the struggle with courage and faith. Because the struggle itself may be the very thing preparing us for a future

Rabbi Aharon Pessin

A Favor for Rav Shteinman

Years ago, there was a fierce public campaign against the late Torah giant, Rabbi Aharon Leib Shteinman zt"l. The campaign lasted for years. It was relentless—ads were plastered across newspapers and public walls. The attacks were personal, humiliating, and deeply painful.

The individual who spearheaded this campaign eventually got married, but found himself struggling with infertility for several years. In a moment of introspection, he began to suspect its cause. "I publicly humiliated one of the greatest sages of the generation," he thought. "Surely that has consequences."

Determined to make amends, he went to Rabbi Shteinman in person. "Rabbi," he said, "I've come to ask for your forgiveness."

Rabbi Shteinman looked at him and said gently, "Forgiveness? What for?"

The man replied, "I don't know if you're aware, but for the past several years there's been a public campaign against you. I was the one behind it. I got married, and we haven't been able to have chil-

dren. I believe it's connected. Please, Rabbi, forgive me."

Rabbi Shteinman responded, "Don't worry about it. It's okay."

"No, Rabbi," the man pleaded, "Please, say you forgive me."

"I don't think I need to forgive you," Rav Shteinman said calmly. "In fact, I think I should give you a Yashar Koach. I should thank you."

"Give me a Yashar Koach?" the man asked in shock. "I publicly embarrassed you for years. I disgraced the honor of Torah. Why would you thank me?"

Rabbi Shteinman then reached for a volume of Shaarei Kedusha (Gates of Holiness), authored by Rabbi Chaim Vital, the primary disciple of the Arizal. He opened to Shaar Aleph (Section one), paragraph six.

There, Rabbi Chaim Vital writes: "If you had any measure of spiritual insight," he says, "you would rise each morning and pray, 'Master of the Universe, please send me one or two humiliations today.'"

Why? Because, he explains, humiliation and emotional suffering cleanse a person of sin.

Would you rather lose an arm, Heaven forbid? A child? Watch

your business collapse overnight? Wouldn't you rather just be embarrassed? It purifies the soul. It awakens a person to return to Hashem.

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, in his Tomer Devorah, teaches the same idea: if a person is destined to endure suffering, let it come in the form of public shame. It is the gentlest and most redemptive form of pain.

"So you see," said Rabbi Shteinman, "I think I owe you a thank you. You gave me something incredibly valuable."

Still stunned, the man asked again, "But Rabbi... even so... please say that you forgive me."

Rabbi Shteinman smiled. "I truly don't believe I need to forgive you. You deserve a heartfelt yashar koach."

The man stood silently, absorbing the moment, then began to smile. "Wow," he said quietly. "Thank you, Rebbe." He turned to leave.

But just as he reached the door, Rabbi Shteinman called out after him.

"Wait—one more thing," he said. "I really do thank you. But please... don't do this favor for anyone else."

Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza and Partial List of Injured Soldiers

(Updated: 26 Iyar)

שמות חיילים פצועים לרפואה שלמה

אביתר מנחם חיים בן זהבה
אברהם מרדכי בן יעל
אהרן בן שרה הנדל
אופק בו אלינור
אורי אברהם בן הדסה
אייל אליעזר בן חנה
אלון בן מרים
אלחנן יאיר בן דבורה
אליה בן רות
אלישע יהודה בן רות
אלעד בן שרית
אמיר בן אלה
בנימין בן ריינה
בנימין יצחק בן שרה
בר חיים בן נורית
גלעד איתי בן אפרת
דוד בן זיוה
חיים מרדכי בן שרה איטה
טל גרשון בן שרה
יאיר יונה בן דרורה צפורה מלכה
יהודה אהרון בן מרים אסתר
יהונתן יאשיהו בן כרמית
יהונתן יוסף בן שירה
יואל בן אילה
יוחאי יהודה בן סיגל חוה
ירין אליהו בן סיגל
ישראל בן ענבל אסתר
כפיר חיים בן מירה מרים
מיכאל בן פריידל
מישל בת אנג'ליקה
מנחם דוד חי בן מרים
משה אהרן בן לאה בילא
משה צבי בן עירית
מתן בן דבורה
ניר בן אורנה
עדי מנחם בן מורן מירה
עודד אפרים בן ויויאן
עוז חי בן סמדר
עידו בן ענבל
עמיחי בן סיגלית רחל
עמית יהונתן בן מאיה
רואי בן עופרה
רון בן אבישג
רון בן שרון
רועי חיים בן מירב
תום שאול בן דניאל
תומר בן צפורה

אבינתן בן דיצה תרצה (אור)
אביתר בן גליה (דוד)
איתן בן רות אדית (הורן)
איתן אברהם בן אפרת (מור)
אלון בן עידית (אהל)
אלקנה בן רוחמה (בוחבוט)
אריאל בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)
בר אברהם בן ג'וליה (קופרשטיין)
גיא בן מירב (גלבע דלאל)
גלי בן טליה (ברמן)
דוד בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)
זיו בן טליה (ברמן)
יוסף חיים בן מרים (אוחנה)
מקסים בן טלה (הרקין)
מתן שחר בן ענת (אנגרסט)
מתן בן ירדנה עינב (צנגאוקר)
נמרוד בן ויקי (כהן)
עידן בן יעל (אלכסנדר)
עמרי בן אסתר ורוניקה (מירן)
רום בן תמר נועה (ברסלבסקי)
שגב בן גלית (כלפון)
תמיר בן חירות (נמרודי)

Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza and Partial List of Injured Soldiers

(Updated: 26 Iyar)

INJURED SOLDIERS

Evyatar Menachem Chaim ben Zehava
Avraham Mordechai ben Yael
Aharon ben Sarah Hendel
Ofek ben Elinor
Ori Avraham ben Hadassah
Eyal Eliezer ben Chana
Eitan Asher ben Devora
Alon ben Miriam
Elchanan Yair ben Devorah
Eliya ben Ravit
Elisha Yehudah ben Rut
Elad ben Sarit
Amir ben Ella
Binyamin ben Reina
Binyamin Yitzchak ben Sarah
Bar Chaim ben Nurit
Gilad Itai ben Efrat
David ben Ziva
Chaim Mordechai ben Sarah Itta
Tal Gershon ben Sarah
Yair Yonah ben Drora Tzipporah Malka
Yehuda Aharon ben Miriam Esther
Yehonatan Yoshiyahu ben Carmit
Yehonatan Yosef ben Shira
Yoel ben Ayala
Yochai Yehudah ben Sigal Chava
Yarin Eliyahu ben Sigal
Yisrael ben Inbal Esther
Kfir Chaim ben Mira Miriam
Michael ben Freidel
Michelle bat Angelika
Menachem David Chai ben Miriam
Moshe Aharon ben Leah Beila
Moshe Tzi ben Irit
Matan ben Devorah
Nir ben Orna
Noam Avraham ben Atara Shlomit
Adi Menachem ben Moran Mira
Oded Efraim ben Vivian
Oz Chai ben Smadar
Ido ben Inbal
Amichai ben Sigalit Rachel
Amit Yehonatan ben Maya
Roi ben Ofra
Ron ben Avishag
Ron ben Sharon
Roi Chaim ben Meirav
Tom Shaul ben Danielle
Tomer ben Tzipporah

Avinatan ben Ditzza Tirtza (Ohr)
Evyatar ben Galya (David)
Eitan ben Ruth Idit (Horen)
Eitan Avraham ben Efrat (Mor)
Alon ben Idit (Ohel)
Elkana ben Ruchama (Buchbut)
Ariel ben Sylvia Monica (Konyo)
Bar Avraham ben Julia (Cooperstein)
Guy ben Meirav (Gilboa Dalal)
Gali ben Talya (Berman)
David ben Sylvia Monica (Konyo)
Ziv ben Talya (Berman)
Yosef Chaim ben Miriam (Ochana)
Maxim ben Talleh (Herkin)
Matan Shachar ben Anat (Angrest)
Matan ben Yardena Einav (Tzangauker)
Nimrod ben Viki (Cohen)
Idan ben Yael (Alexander)
Omri ben Esther Veronica (Miran)
Rom ben Tamar Noa (Braslevsky)
Segev ben Galit (Chalfon)
Tamir ben Cheirut (Nimrodi)