

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Aryeh Kerzner

Your Shoe, Your Size

Rav Zusha of Anipoli once asked his students a question that is of daily relevance.

The Gemara (Berachos 60b) tells us that the morning blessing of She'asah Li Kol Tzarki, "Who has provided me with all my needs," was instituted as an expression of gratitude for Hashem granting us shoes and is to be recited when we put on our shoes. What is the connection between shoes and the idea that Hashem provides all of our needs?

Rav Zusha explained that shoes embody a lesson about life.

If a person owns a garment—a shirt, a coat, or a robe—and someone else wishes to wear it, the garment can often be altered. A tailor can adjust it, resize it, and make it suitable for another individual. Most clothing can be modified to fit a different person.

Shoes, however, are different. They are designed for a specific size and are not easily transformed from one size into another. They are created to fit a particular foot, and that size remains their defining characteristic. A shoe that fits one person perfectly may be entirely unsuitable for someone else.

That, said Rav Zusha, is the message behind She'asah Li Kol Tzarki.

Hashem indeed provides each person with everything he needs, but not according to someone else's needs, circumstances or mission.

He provides precisely what is necessary for your life, your purpose, your challenges, and your potential. One person may possess a larger home, whereas another may enjoy greater financial success. A third may have more wealth, influence, or opportunity. Yet that has nothing to do with what Hashem has determined that you require in order to fulfill your unique task in this world.

The lesson is found in the shoes.

Just as shoes are crafted for a particular size, so too the blessings, opportunities, and even limitations that Hashem gives each person are tailored specifically for him. They are measured according to his mission and designed for his growth.

Happiness and fulfillment become possible only when we internalize this perspective. When we understand that whatever Hakadosh Baruch Hu has granted us is exactly what we need to become the person we are meant to be, comparison loses its grip and gratitude takes its place. And if, at a given moment, we do not even have enough money to buy a pair of shoes, that too is included within kol tzarki. For just as a shoe fits the foot for which it was made, every circumstance in life has been fashioned by Hashem with perfect precision.

It is this mindset which enables a person to walk through life with serenity, confident that whatever Hashem has given us fits us perfectly.

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Rabbi Aron Litwin

The Rod of Asclepius

The symbol displayed on an ambulance or medical professional uniform is a star with six points, along with a staff entwined by a serpent at its center. This symbol is commonly known as the Rod of Asclepius.

There are many theories regarding its origin. Some suggest it traces back to ancient physicians who treated parasitic diseases by extracting worms with a rod. Others attribute it to Asclepius, the Greek god of healing. Historians continue to debate its precise beginnings.

Yet perhaps the oldest and most compelling explanation lies in this week's Parsha. The Torah describes a devastating plague that struck Klal Yisrael. People were dying. And in response, Moshe Rabbeinu cried out to Hashem on behalf of the nation. Hashem then instructs Moshe: "Make for yourself a fiery serpent and place it upon a pole. Whoever has been bitten shall look upon it and live" (Bamidbar 21:8).

At first glance, the command is puzzling. The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 29a), no less, asks, "Does a snake kill? Does a snake give life?" How could gazing at a copper snake cure a plague? The Gemara answers that it was never the snake that healed. Rather, when the people looked upward, they directed their hearts toward their Father in Heaven. The snake merely caused them to raise their eyes, but their healing came from Hashem.

The question though, says the Sfas Emes, remains.

If the entire purpose was simply to encourage the people to look upward, why place a snake on top of the pole at all? Why not an arrow pointing heavenward? Why not some other symbol that would

direct their attention to the sky? In fact, the snake seems counterproductive. It risks becoming a distraction, as people might mistakenly attribute the healing to the snake itself. Why introduce the very possibility of confusion?

Perhaps the answer can be illustrated through a story.

A man was trapped during a catastrophic flood. The waters rose rapidly, engulfing the first floor of his home. Standing in the midst of the chaos, he lifted his eyes heavenward and prayed. "Hashem, save me!" he called out. But the waters continued to rise. Soon an emergency rescue boat arrived. "Climb aboard!" they shouted. "No," he replied confidently. "Hashem is going to save me."

A short time later, a helicopter hovered overhead and lowered a rescue line. Again, though, he refused. "Thank you," he said, "but Hashem is going to save me." The helicopter left, as the waters rose further. Tragically, the man drowned.

When he arrived in Heaven, he protested. "Ribono Shel Olam, I trusted You. Why didn't You save me?" "What do you mean?" Hashem replied. "I sent you a boat. I sent you a helicopter. What more were you waiting for?"

That story captures a profound truth.

In this world, Hashem rarely reveals Himself openly. He operates through the ordinary workings of life, with His hand being concealed within what we call nature, coincidence, circumstance, and human intervention.

The Sfas Emes explains that this is precisely why the snake was necessary.

Hashem deliberately chose a symbol that could be misunderstood. People might have been tempted to believe that the snake was responsible for their recovery. Yet that was the challenge. They had to see beyond the apparent cause and recognize the true source of their healing. The snake was not the obstacle to faith; it was the test of faith.

Can you perceive Hashem even when something else appears to deserve the credit? This challenge confronts us every day. A doctor prescribes medication, and the treatment works. Or a business opportunity succeeds or a fortunate circumstance opens a door. It is easy to conclude that these are the causes of our success.

The Torah teaches us otherwise.

The doctor and medication is an instrument. The opportunity is an instrument. The friend is an instrument. And behind every instrument stands the One who orchestrates it all. The snake on the pole teaches us to see beyond the visible cause and recognize the invisible Source.

We live in a world filled with countless distractions that seem to demand the credit. The challenge is to look beyond them and lift our eyes heavenward. Perhaps that is why the symbol of the serpent on the staff remains associated with healing to this very day.

So, the next time you see it on an ambulance or a medical uniform, remember the lesson of the Copper Snake. Remember that while healing may arrive through doctors, medicine, and human effort, the ultimate source of every blessing remains Hashem.

Rabbi Yonoson Roodyn

The Gift of Mortality

Parshas Chukas is, in many ways, a confrontation with mortality.

It begins with the Parah Adu-mah, the ritual associated with death and impurity and continues with the passing of Miriam. Moshe then strikes the rock and is informed that he will not be the one to lead the people into the Promised Land. Shortly thereafter, Aharon dies as well. Again and again, the Parsha reminds us of a reality from which none of us can escape.

We do not live forever.

But in a certain sense, that is a blessing.

If life were endless, why would we ever feel the urgency to accomplish anything today? There would always be tomorrow, and then the day after that. As Chazal teach, "Do not say, 'When I am free, I will study,' for perhaps you will never become free" (Avos 2:5).

The awareness of our finitude creates purpose. The knowledge that our time is limited compels us to act while we can. Yet nowhere is this challenge more dramatically embodied than in the life of Moshe Rabbeinu.

No one had sacrificed more for the Jewish people than Moshe. He confronted Pharaoh, led the Exodus, split the sea, ascended Har Sinai, transmitted the Torah, and guided the nation through forty difficult years in the wilderness. If anyone deserved to enter Eretz Yisrael, it was Moshe. Yet he

is told that he will not be the one. One can scarcely imagine a greater disappointment. At that moment, Moshe could have withdrawn. He could have concluded that the next stage belonged to his successor. He could have said, "My role is over." Yet he does the opposite.

Immediately afterward, he continues to lead. He sends messengers to Sichon requesting passage through his land (Bamidbar 21:21-23) and remains fully invested in the future of the nation. As Rav Zalman Sorotzkin notes, many leaders would have resigned emotionally at that point. Moshe does not. Until his final day, he never ceases working on behalf of Klal Yisrael. Why?

Moshe understood a profound truth. For a Jew, immortality is not achieved by living forever. It is achieved by attaching oneself to something that endures beyond oneself. When we connect our lives to the mission of Klal Yisrael, we become part of a story that transcends our individual existence.

Yes, Judaism believes in Olam Haba and Techiyas Ha'Meisim. But remarkably, those are not the Torah's primary emphases. The Torah is concerned with a more immediate question: how does a human being achieve a measure of immortality in this world? The answer is through contribution. Through attaching ourselves to a cause greater than ourselves; through building something that will outlive us; and through investing our energies, talents, and years in the mission of the Jewish people.

That is how Moshe lives forever. His physical life ended, but his influence did not. His teachings endure. And therefore, every Jew who studies Torah today is still, in some sense, a student of Moshe Rabbeinu.

Perhaps this, too, is part of the mystery of this week's Parsha. Regarding the Parah Adumah, Shlomo HaMelech declared, "I thought I was wise, but it remained distant from me" (Koheles 7:23). Not everything can be understood. Not every decree can be justified within the limits of human reason. But faith means recognizing that there is a larger picture, even when we cannot fully see it. And when we attach ourselves to that larger picture, something extraordinary happens. We cease living merely as isolated individuals and become part of an eternal people and an eternal mission.

That may also explain why Moshe is described as an eved Hashem (Devarim 34:5). He never surrendered to disappointment. He never became consumed by his own mortality. Every day, until his very last breath, he lived with a profound sense of purpose, responsibility, and commitment to Klal Yisrael. And in doing so, he achieved a form of immortality.

And to the extent that we dedicate ourselves to a mission greater than ourselves, we achieve it too.

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Rabbi Ephraim Eliyahu Shapiro

When Fraternity Meets Identity

The Torah describes the Jewish people's journey along the border of Edom (Bamidbar 20:14-21). Rashi notes that the verse deliberately emphasizes the border of Edom in order to highlight a failing on the part of the Jewish people: they sought closeness with the descendants of Esav, a nation whose values stood in opposition to their own (Midrash Tanchuma 14).

The Shem MiShmuel offers a remarkable insight into the nature of that failing.

When the emissaries of the Bnei Yisrael approached the king of Edom, they delivered Moshe's message with the words: "Ko amar achicha Yisrael—Thus says your brother, Israel" (Bamidbar 10:14).

The Shem MiShmuel explains that the problem lay in the word Achicha, "Your brother." The Jewish people sought to evoke a sense of kinship and fraternity with Edom, as though they were merely reconnecting with long-lost family. And Edom was not to be viewed through the prism of bonding and brotherhood.

Yet this raises an obvious question. The Torah itself later com-

mands: "Lo teta'ev Edomi ki achicha hu—Do not despise an Edomite, for he is your brother" (Devarim 23:8). If the Torah itself describes Edom as "your brother," why were Bnei Yisrael faulted for doing the very same thing?

The Shem MiShmuel answers with a profound distinction. Yes, Yaakov and Esav were brothers who share the same parents. In that historical and biological sense, the Torah indeed says, "Ki achicha hu—He is your brother." But that is not what Bnei Yisrael said. They did not say, "Thus says your brother, Yaakov." They said, "Thus says your brother, Yisrael." And therein lies the mistake. Yaakov and Esav may be brothers. But Yisrael and Esav can never be brothers.

The name Yaakov refers to our origins. The name Yisrael refers to our destiny.

Yisrael is the name given after the struggle with the angel (Bereishis 32:38). It represents spiritual aspiration, overcoming adversity, wrestling with challenges, and emerging transformed. It signifies man's capacity to grow, to strive, and to become greater than he was yesterday.

Esav represents a fundamentally different worldview.

Our Sages note that the name Esav is associated with the word asui—made, complete, finished (see Rashi, Bereishis 25:25). Esav emerges to the world appearing fully formed, as though there is nothing left to accomplish. Yisrael, by contrast, is never finished. He lives in the world of growth, believes in potential and sees life as a journey of becoming. One therefore sees life as complete, while the other sees life as a call to continual growth. One is satisfied with what is, while the other is driven by what could be.

The mistake of Bnei Yisrael was not acknowledging a familial relationship with Edom. The Torah itself recognizes that relationship. Their mistake was forgetting that the identity of Yisrael is singular and unique. And to this day, the challenge for every Jew is to live up to the name Yisrael and to embrace growth over complacency, striving over stagnation, and potential over comfort.

May we be worthy of that great name, and may we continually rise to become all that Hashem knows we can be.

Rabbi Don Jarashow

The Chumash in the Dumpster

Rabbi Avigdor Miller zt"l once recounted how his journey into Torah learning began. As a young boy, he was walking down the street when he came across a Chumash. It was not in a beis midrash, though, nor was it on a bookshelf. It was not even lying on the sidewalk. He found it discarded in a garbage dump.

Curious, he picked it up and noticed the Hebrew letters. He then

opened it and saw a simple inscription: "Fred."

He brought the Chumash to his mother and asked, "Ma, what is this?" She looked at it and replied, "This is the Torah."

At that moment, she encouraged him to acquire a Hebrew-English dictionary. She purchased one for him, and from there an extraordinary journey began. With that Chumash and that dictionary, he slowly

unlocked the world of Torah. One step led to another, one discovery led to the next, until that young boy grew into Rabbi Avigdor Miller.

Ultimately, it was the Ribbono Shel Olam who guided his path. Yet the catalyst was found in no place other than a dumpster. And from there, it traveled to the home. And there, a mother recognized a spark of curiosity and nurtured it. She pointed her son toward Torah, and from that small act emerged greatness.

From such moments, worlds are built.