

Ethics of the Fathers

It is customary to study *Pirkei Abot* (Ethics of the Fathers) during the six weeks between Pesah and Shabuot, one chapter every Shabbat.

“Hashem shall reign for ever and ever” (*Abot* 6:11) “ה' יִמְלֹךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד”

Midrash Shemuel finds this verse a most fitting close to *Pirkei Abot*. Our text first tells us that all has been created for Hashem’s glory. A cynic could be sorely tempted to retort that the world today hardly looks it. It shows evidence aplenty of sin and evil, treachery and hate, chicanery and fear; but it reflects precious little glory on its Creator.

Never fear, says our text: “Hashem will reign for ever and ever.” However dark and twisted the world seems today, however worse the mess and blunder of mankind seems to get, mankind moves on to its destiny. By a thousand ways we can hardly surmise, mankind inches forward to its “spiritual breakthrough,” when Hashem will reign.” That day will come. It is inherent in a creation that was wrought originally to bring Him glory.

Here in turn is a mighty affirmation of Jewry’s task in this world: to live by His Torah, and so contribute ceaselessly to His honor. Never fear if that makes you seem an outlandish member of an impossible minority. Say every morning, “Hashem reigns” – now – and live every day accordingly. Thus will you follow the only sure course to His glory, and to your own. (Ethics from Sinai)

Financial Aid

Joel Leitner had everything a person could have wanted in the way of materialism. His life was exciting; he traveled the world and made big money. All he was missing was a feeling of satisfaction. His life did not have any real meaning. Then he went to Israel on business. A tourist visit to Jerusalem brought him in contact with an outreach professional, and before long Joel was studying at an Israeli yeshivah for *ba’alei teshuvah*.

As time went on and his progress increased, so did his love and devotion to his learning. Eventually, he married a fine young woman and the two settled in *Eress Yisrael*, where Joel, now known as Yoel, studied in a *kollel* while his wife worked to support them.

Her earnings were rather meager and they could barely afford basic necessities. Nevertheless, they were both quite content with their material situation.

Late one night, a neighborhood man who took pleasure in helping needy scholars entered the *Bet Midrash* and found Yoel deeply immersed in his studies. The man made some inquiries and was told that while the Leitners certainly qualified for his list, they were known not to accept assistance on principle. The man, however, was not perturbed. He approached Mrs. Leitner’s employer and arranged to give her a sum each month which would be given to Mrs. Leitner as a “raise.”

A few weeks later, the man was visited by none other than Yoel. “I understand that you help needy people. Well, my wife works for a woman with a large family who really could use some extra money. A few weeks ago, for reasons that we don’t understand, she gave my wife a significant increase in salary. But we really don’t need this extra money; *Baruch Hashem*, we have everything that we need.

“Do you think that if we gave you this additional money, you could find a way to get it back to my wife’s employer...? (More Shabbos Stories)

The Lorraine Gammal A"H Edition

לְעִילּוֹי נִשְׁמָת לְאָה בֵּת בְּהִיָּה

בס"ד

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SHABBAT BEMIDBAR ☆ שַׁבַּת בְּמִדְבָּר

Haftarah: Hoshea 2:1-22

MAY 22-23, 2020 29 IYAR 5780

Candlelighting: 7:53 pm

Shabbat ends: 8:52 pm (R"Y 9:24 pm)

See enclosed sheet for full Shabbat schedule

Rosh Hodesh Sivan will be celebrated on Sunday, May 24. Yehi Shem (no Tahanun) will be said from Sunday, May 24 until Friday, June 5.

A Message from our Rabbi

”לְמִשְׁפּוֹתֵם לְבֵית אֲבוֹתֵם”

“According to their families, according to their father’s house” (*Bemidbar* 1:2)

Rabbi Moshe Kestenbaum writes, “*Baruch Hashem*, we can still take walks on Shabbat, and it’s nice to see people out on the streets. When I see from afar a few people clustered together, I know that it must be a family, for everyone else is practicing social distancing. This is a powerful visual for the importance of family. You cannot get too close to another person, let alone let him into your house. But your family, you are all in it together. With family, there is no social distancing.

Rabbi Hisiger has a touching story to tell. Two years ago, Rabbi Braun (name changed) passed away. His wife, Sarah, was grief-stricken and alone. The ensuing two years were quite difficult for her, and then the COVID-19 virus hit. The lockdown was put in place and Mrs. Braun soon realized that she would have to spend Pesah in quarantine at home – alone.

It was hard enough not having her husband at her side. Now she wouldn’t get to be with her children either. She had never spent the holiday alone in her life. She was inconsolable.

Mrs. Braun’s neighbor, Rabbi & Mrs. Farcas, got wind of her distress and called her. “We have a great idea,” they told her. “Since our houses are so close to each other, we are going to move our dining room table next to our open window, and you do the same. This way you will be able to join in our Seder. You will follow along, step by step, and you will spend the Seder with us!” And so it was.

After the first days of the holiday, Mrs. Braun immediately called her children to report on her remote Seder experience. She was ecstatic. “I can’t begin to tell you how

beautiful the Seders were!” she gushed. “The Farcas family was wonderful. I enjoyed every second. And the best part was all the songs they sang! They have the same customs as ours and they sang the same tunes that Daddy always sang! While I missed you all so much, it felt so familiar and was so special.

What Mrs. Braun did not know was that prior to the holiday, after inviting her to “join” their Seder, Rabbi & Mrs. Farcas called each of her children and asked them to sing for them the words and the songs that Rabbi Braun would use each year during his Seder. The Braun children sent recorded messages of all the songs, which the Farcases proceeded to learn and memorize in time for the Seder night. It was thus that a widow spending the holiday alone felt freedom, joy and familiarity of the Seder.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Reuven Semah

Reward for Keeping Quiet

When we read *Parashat Bemidbar*, we find something peculiar. Sometimes the Prince of the Tribe of Gad is referred to as Elyasaf son of Reu’el and sometimes he is referred to as Elyasaf son of Deu’el. The *Hidah* (Rav Chaim Yosef Dovid Azulai), the prolific Sephardic *posek* who authored sixty or seventy volumes, writes in one of his *sefarim* (*Chomat Anoch*), the following explanation in the name of a *Sefer Imrei Noam*:

The reason the Tribe of Gad merited that Moshe *Rabenu* was buried on *Har Nebo*, in their portion of *Eress Yisrael* (i.e. – Transjordan), was that Gad could have advanced a claim to Moshe *Rabenu*: Listen, I am the *Bechor* [firstborn] of Zilpah and Dan is the *Bechor* of Bilhah. Dan was made the leader of a whole three-Tribe configuration in the Wilderness travels (“*Machaneh Dan*”) while I am just an add-on to some other Tribe’s “*Machaneh*.” What am I – a second-class citizen? Yet, Gad did not make such a protest. Because of that, says the *Hidah*, Gad merited two privileges: First, his Prince (who real name was Elyasaf ben Deu’el) was called Elyasaf ben Reu’el, which means the friend (*Reya*) of G-d (*E-l*) (i.e. – friend of Hashem or of Moshe *Rabenu* for not complaining to him with a valid complaint). Secondly, for the same reason, he merited that Moshe *Rabenu* was buried in his portion of *Eress Yisrael*. Those are the words of the *Hidah*.

I saw an interesting observation in a *sefer*, *Otzrot HaTorah*. What would have happened if the Tribe of Gad would have spoken up and advanced a claim against Moshe *Rabenu*: How is it fair that Dan leads a whole three-Tribe configuration and we are just followers?

We do not know if such a claim would have been accepted or not. However, one thing is certain – today it does not really make a difference if there had been a *Degel Machaneh Gad* (A Leadership Role in the Wilderness Camp Configuration for the Tribe of Gad) or not. However, the fact that Moshe *Rabenu* is buried in his portion and the fact that he is called *Reu’el* – “the friend of G-d” – is something that is eternal. Why did he merit that? It is because he kept his mouth shut when it came to a matter that was very transitory in nature.

“I have found nothing better in life than silence.” [*Abot* 1:17]. Because he had the ability to silently accept a situation that could have been seen as unfair to him, and be quiet – which we all know is sometimes very difficult – for that he merited having the greatest leader in the history of the Nation of Israel buried in his portion.

This is the attribute that Elyasaf ben Deu’el / ben Reu’el had. He kept his mouth shut and he merited eternal reward: The name “Friend of G-d” (*Reyah shel Kel*) and having Moshe *Rabenu* buried in his portion of *Eress Yisrael*. (Rabbi Yissocher Frand)

I Am Great

The word *Bemidbar* literally translates as “in the desert.” A desert is a place that is barren, *hefker*, ownerless., with miles and miles of empty sand. The Torah was given in the desert on *Har Sinai* to impart the lesson that the key to *Kabalat Hatorah* is the *midah* of *anavah* – humility. Only when a person is humble and sees himself as *hefker*, ownerless, and not deserving of anything, can he possibly connect to Hashem and His Torah.

Many people, however, misconstrue the meaning of humility. They believe that one must consider himself worthless in order to achieve pure *anavah*. This is so wrong! In fact, it is not humility; it is actually *ga’avah*, conceit, the exact opposite of true humility. Humility is the knowledge that: I am special, even great – but that it all comes from Hashem, and I must utilize my G-d-given talents for the service of Hashem. Conceit is the knowledge that: I am special, even great – therefore I deserve honor, praise, and how dare anyone treat me in a manner that does not befit my level of social standing or other perceived reason for honor! But the way I will get praise is by making myself appear worthless so that others will think I am great!

“If you learned much Torah (or any other worthy endeavor), don’t take the credit for yourself because it was for this that you were created” (*Abot* 2:9). Rav Noach Weinberg zt”l once said, “When I come up with a great *hidush* in Torah, I feel so good about myself. Although I can’t take the credit, I can take the pleasure!”

A human being must not have low self-esteem. On the contrary, we should feel good about ourselves and our achievements. The key to humility, though, is to remember that credit, praise, and glory go to Hashem, the Creator, Who made our accomplishments possible. (*Torah Tavlin* II)

All Accounted For

“וַיָּאֵת כָּל־הָעֵדָה הַקְּהִילִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי...בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת”
“And they gathered the entire nation on the first of the second month...according to the number of names” (*Bemidbar* 1:18)

Moshe was enjoined to take a census of *B’nei Yisrael* by counting the “number of names.” *Ramban* explains that the concept of counting the “number of names” is specifically emphasized in order to preserve the honor and dignity of each individual Jew. It would have been easier for each head of household to provide the number of people in his family. This would have denied the individual, however, his opportunity to pass before Moshe to receive his due honor. The census has a practical purpose, to count a nation’s population. The most efficient method is to gather together the data provided by each group leader and calculate it into one cumulative total. For Moshe personally to count each individual is not only impractical, but also extremely laborious.

Hashem chose this latter strenuous method in order to teach us an important lesson concerning interpersonal relationships. We must always be cognizant of the unique value of each individual. No person should ever be viewed merely as a number. Even when we deal with a large group, we should be aware that every group consists of individuals, each with his own emotions and sensitivities. *Hazal* teach us that Hashem has created the entire world for the sake of each individual person. Consequently, Hashem views each individual to be worthy of His boundless *hesed*. The notion of Hashem’s overwhelming love for each of His children should serve as the prime motivating factor for seeking to emulate this attribute. (*Peninim* on the Torah)