



RABBI SACKS

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לעילוי נשמות: פינחס בן יעקב אשר איז ז"ל, עזריאל בן אריה לייב שרטר ז"ל

The Second Mountain

What do you do when you have achieved it all, when you have risen to whatever career heights fate or providence has in store for you? What do you do as age lengthens its shadow, the sun sinks, and the body is no longer as resilient or the mind as sharp as it once was?

That has become a major problem as life expectancy has increased in most parts of the world. There has been nothing quite like it in history. In America, in 1900, average life expectancy was around 41 years, in Europe 42.5. Today in Britain, for men it is 79, for women 83. Much of that has to do with a huge reduction in infant mortality. None the less, the sheer pace in the rise in longevity - every decade since 1900, life expectancy has risen by about three years - remains remarkable. What will keep you young in spirit even if the body does not always keep pace?

The biblical case study is Moshe, of whom we are told that even at the end of his life, "his eye was undimmed and his natural energy unabated." At the opening of Parshat Vayeilech he says, "I am now a hundred and twenty years old. I can no longer come and go, and the LORD has told me, 'You shall not cross this Jordan.'" Rashi points out that the "I can no longer" does not mean

that he lacked the strength. It means that he no longer had permission. The moment had come when he had to hand on the role of leader to his successor and disciple, Yehoshua. He himself stayed full of vigour, as the passion of his speeches in the book of D'varim, delivered in the last month of his life, testify.

To understand what Moshe epitomises at the end of his life, two closely related concepts are helpful. The first is Erik Erikson's idea of generativity, the seventh of his eight life stages. Relatively late in life, he argues, many people's perspective changes. They begin thinking about legacy, about what will outlive them. Their focus often shifts from self to others. They may devote more time to family, or community, or care or voluntary work. Some mentor young people who are following in their career path. They make commitments to others. They ask themselves, how can I contribute to the world? What trace will I leave on those who will live on after me? What, in the world, is better because of me?

The second and related idea is David Brook's concept of the second mountain. Speaking to people over 70, he found that early in their lives they had identified the mountain they were going to climb. They had specific aspirations about family and career.

They had a vision of the self they wanted to become. By age 70, some had achieved it and were happy. Others had achieved it only to find it not entirely satisfying. Yet others had been knocked off the mountain by misfortune.

At a certain age, though, many identified a second mountain they wanted to climb. This mountain was not about achieving but about giving. It was less about external accomplishment (success, fame) than about internal accomplishment. It was spiritual, moral; it was about devoting yourself to a cause or giving back to the community. It is often, he says, a yearning for righteousness, an inner voice that says, "I want to do something really good with my life." This second peak, associated with later life, may well prove more significant to our sense of self-worth than the ego-driven ascent of the first mountain.

The case of Moshe sets all this in dramatic perspective. What do you do if you have already achieved what no human being had ever done before or would ever do in the future? Moshe had spoken to God face to face. He had become His faithful servant. He had led his people from slavery to freedom, put up with their complaints, endured their rebellions and prayed for - and achieved - their forgiveness in the eyes of God. He had been the agent through which God had performed His miracles and delivered His word. What else is left to do after such a life?

His closest friends and allies, his sister Miriam and brother Aharon, had already died. He knew that the decree had been sealed that he would not cross the Jordan and lead the people on the last stage of their journey. He would not set foot in the Promised Land. Unlike Aharon, whose children inherited his Kehuna to eternity, Moshe had to live with the fact that neither of his sons, Gershom and Eliezer, would become his successor. That role would go to his assistant and faithful servant Yehoshua. These were, surely, huge disappointments to set alongside the momentous achievements.

So, as Moshe faced his own life's end, what was there left to do? The book of D'varim contains and constitutes the answer. As it says in its opening chapter: "In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moshe spoke to the Israelites ... On the east bank of the Jordan, in the land of Moav, Moshe began expounding this law ..." No longer the liberator and miracle-worker, Moshe became Rabbenu, "our teacher", the man who taught Torah to the next generation.

The way he does so in D'varim is stunning. No longer, as before, does he simply articulate the law. He explains the theology behind the law. He speaks about the love of God for Israel and the love Israel should show to God. He speaks with equal power about the past and the future, reviewing the wilderness years and anticipating the challenges ahead.

Above all, coming at the subject from every conceivable direction, he warns the young people who will enter and inherit the land, that the real challenge will not be failure but success; not slavery but freedom; not the bread of affliction but the temptations of affluence. Remember, he says again and again; listen to the voice of God; rejoice in what He has given you. These are the key verbs of the book, and they remain the most powerful immune-system ever developed against the decadence-and-decline that has affected every civilisation since the dawn of time.

That last month in Moshe's life, which culminates in the Torah's last portions, as he finally hands over the reins of leadership to Yehoshua, is one of the supreme instances in Tanakh of generativity: speaking not to your contemporaries but to those who will live on after you. It was Moshe's second mountain.

And perhaps the very things that seemed, at first sight, to have been disappointments, turned out in the end to have played their part in shaping this last chapter in that great life. The fact that he knew he would not accompany the people into the land, and that he would not be succeeded by his sons, meant that he had to turn into a teacher of the next generation. He had to hand on to them his insights into the future. He had to make the people his disciples - and we have all been his disciples ever since.

All of this suggests a powerful and potentially life-changing message for all of us. Whatever our life has been thus far, there is another chapter to be written, focused on being a blessing to others, sharing whatever gifts we have with those who have less, handing on our values across the generations, using our experience to help others come through difficult times of their own, doing something that has little to do with personal ambition and much to do with wanting to leave some legacy of kindness that made life better for at least someone on earth.

Hence the life-changing idea: Whatever your achievements, there is always a second mountain to climb, and it may turn out to be your greatest legacy to the future. 🕯

Ed. note: Rabbi Sacks wrote this article for Parshat Valeilech - why is it in the Torah Tidbits that came out after that sedra? (1) It quotes from V'zot HaB'racha, which is still to come; (2) It's message is not sedra-dependent; (3) It is a beautiful piece with a timely message, well-written and inspiring. Great to start your new year, 5779...

Ed. note: For your information... Because of the middle- of-the-week timing of the Chagim and because of the crazy, pressured schedule at our printer's in Rishon Letzion, this issue of Torah Tidbits is being prepared by us on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Motza'ei Shabbat, September 5-8. That's before Rosh HaShana! When we started working on TT 1291, we had Rabbi Sack on Vayeilech (see pp. 18-21), so we went with it. And then on Friday, we received his Haazinu, which we now present. Putting in both is a tribute to his well-written and thought-out articles.

We wish all TTreaders and Klal Yisrael a Shana Tova Umtuka - even though that is the usual bracha before Rosh HaShana (which it is as I type these words). Your reading this bracha after Yom Kippur doesn't make them any less heartfelt. It's never too late to wish each other a Good and Sweet Year.

Emotional Intelligence

In March 2015 I had a public conversation at Yale with the University's President Peter Salovey. The occasion was quite an emotional one. It celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the Marshall Scholarships, created by the British parliament as a way of expressing thanks to the United States for the Marshall Plan, that helped Western Europe rebuild its economies after the Second World War. The scholarships fund outstanding young Americans to study at any university in the United Kingdom. So the gathering that evening was about the links between Britain and the United States, and the role of universities in cultivating that generosity of spirit, epitomised by the Marshall Plan, that understands the need to build peace, not just wage war.

But it had another emotional resonance. Yale is one the world's great universities. Yet there was a time, between the 1920s and 1960s, when it had a reputation for being guarded about, even quietly hostile to, the presence of Jews among its students and staff. Happily that has not been the case since 1960 when its President, A. Whitney Griswold, issued a directive that religion should play no role in the admissions process. Today it is warmly welcoming to people of all faiths and ethnicities. Noting that fact, the President pointed out that not only was Yale that afternoon hosting a rabbi, but he too - Salovey - was Jewish and the descendant of a great rabbinic dynasty. Salovey is an Anglicisation of the name Soloveitchik.

Thinking back to that occasion, I wondered whether there was a more than merely family connection between the university president and his great distant relative, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the man known to generations of his students at Yeshiva University as simply, "The Rav". Was there an intellectual and spiritual link also, however oblique?

There is, and it is significant. Peter Salovey's great contribution to the thought of our time is the concept he formulated together with John Mayer in a landmark 1989 article, namely Emotional Intelligence - popularised in 1995 by Daniel Goleman's best-selling book of the same title.

For many decades, IQ, or intelligence quotient, focused attention on a set of

cognitive and reasoning tests as the primary measure of intelligence, itself considered as the best indicator of ability as, for example, a military officer. It took another brilliant Jewish psychologist of our time, Howard Gardner (of Harvard), to break this paradigm and argue for the idea of multiple intelligences. Solving puzzles is not the only skill that matters.

What Salovey and Mayer did was to show that our ability to understand and respond to not only our own emotions but also those of others is an essential element of success in many fields, indeed of human interaction in general. There are fundamental elements of our humanity that have to do with the way we feel, not just the way we think. Even more importantly, we need to understand how other people feel - the gift of empathy - if we are to form a meaningful bond with them. That is what the Torah is referring to when it says, "Do not oppress a stranger because you know what it feels like to be a stranger" (Sh'mot 23:9).

Emotions matter. They guide our choices. They move us to action. Intellect alone cannot do this. It has been a failing of intellectuals throughout history to believe that all we need to do is to think straight and we will act well. It isn't so. Without a capacity for sympathy and empathy, we become more like a computer than a human being, and that is fraught with danger.

It was precisely this point - the need for emotional intelligence - about which Rabbi Soloveitchik spoke in one of his

most moving addresses, 'A Tribute to the Rebbetzin of Talne'. People, he said, are mistaken when they think there is only one Mesorah, one Jewish tradition handed on through the generations. In fact, he said, there are two: one handed down by fathers, the other by mothers. He quoted the famous verse from Proverbs 1:8, "Listen, my son, to the instruction of your father (mussar avicha), and do not forsake the teaching of your mother (torat imecha)." These are two distinct but interwoven strands of the religious personality.

From a father, he said, we learn how to read a text, comprehend, analyse, conceptualise, classify, infer and apply. We also learn how to act: what to do and what not to do. The father-tradition is "an intellectual-moral one". Turning to "the teaching of your mother", Soloveitchik became personal, speaking of what he learned from his own mother. From her, he said:

I learned that Judaism expresses itself not only in formal compliance with the law but also in a living experience. She taught me that there is a flavour, a scent and warmth to mitzvot. I learned from her the most important thing in life - to feel the presence of the Almighty and the gentle pressure of His hand resting upon my frail shoulders. Without her teachings, which quite often were transmitted to me in silence, I would have grown up a soulless being, dry and insensitive.

To put it in other words: Torat imecha is about emotional intelligence. I have

long felt that alongside Rabbi Soloveitchik's great essay, Halachic Man, there was another one he might have written called Aggadic Woman. Halachah is an intellectual-moral enterprise. But aggadah, the non-halachic dimension of rabbinic Judaism, is directed to the broader aspects of what it is to be a Jew. It is written in narrative rather than law. It invites us to enter the minds and hearts of our spiritual forebears, their experiences and dilemmas, their achievements and their pain. It is the emotional dimension of the life of faith.

Speaking personally, I am disinclined to think of this in terms of a male-female dichotomy. We are all called on to develop both sensibilities. But they are radically different. Halachah is part of Torat Kohanim, Judaism's priestly voice. In the Torah, its key verbs are l'havdil, to distinguish / analyse / categorise, and l'horot, to instruct / guide / issue a ruling. But in Judaism there is also a prophetic voice. The key words for the prophet are tzedek umishpat, righteousness and justice, and chessed v'rahamim, kindness and compassion. These are about I-Thou relationships, between humans, and between us and God.

The kohen/judge thinks in terms of universal rules that are eternally valid. The prophet is attuned to the particularities of a given situation and the relationships between those involved. The prophet has emotional intelligence. He or she (there were, of course, women prophets: Sarah, Miriam, Devorah, Chana, Avigayil, Chuldah and Esther) reads the mood of

the moment and how it relates to longstanding relationships. The prophet hears the silent cry of the oppressed, and the incipient anger of Heaven. Without the law of the kohen/judge, Judaism would have no structure or continuity. But without the emotional intelligence of the prophet, it would become, as Rav Soloveitchik said, soulless, dry and insensitive. Which brings us to our parsha. In Ha'azinu, Moshe does the unexpected but necessary thing. He teaches the Israelites a song. He moves from prose to poetry, from speech to music, from law to literature, from plain speech to vivid metaphor:

Listen, heavens, and I will speak;

and let the earth hear the words of my mouth.

May my teaching fall like rain,

my speech flow down like dew;

like gentle rain on tender plants,

like showers on the grass.

(D'varim 32:1-2)

Why? Because at the very end of his life, the greatest of all the prophets turned to emotional intelligence, knowing that unless he did so, his teachings might enter the minds of the Israelites but not their hearts, their passions, their emotive DNA. It is feelings that move us to act, give us the energy to aspire, and fuel our ability to hand on our commitments to those who come after us.

Without the prophetic passion of an Amos, a Hoshei'a, a Yeshayahu, a Yirmiyahu, without the music of the

Psalms and the songs of the Levites in the Temple, Judaism would have been a plant without water or sunlight; it would have withered and died. Intellect alone does not inspire in us the passion to change the world. To do that you have to take thought and turn it into song. That is Ha'azinu, Moshe's great hymn to God's love for His people and his role in ensuring, as Martin Luther King put it, that "the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice." In Ha'azinu, the man of intellect and moral courage becomes the figure of emotional intelligence, allowing himself to be, in Yehuda Halevi's lovely image, the harp for God's song.

This is a life-changing idea: If you want to change lives, speak to people's feelings, not just to their minds. Enter their fears and calm them. Understand their anxieties and allay them. Kindle their hopes and instruct them. Raise their sights and enlarge them. Humans are more than algorithms. We are emotion-driven beings.

Speak from the heart to the heart, and mind and deed will follow. 🕯