



## Pesach Second Days 2022

### Onward

4 minute read | Straightforward

The Torah's stories have captured the awe of audiences for three millennia, and rightly so.

The Torahs tell us of explosive moments, like the crossing at the Red Sea, where the defenseless Jewish People desperately fled their oppressors, with the most advanced and formidable army in the world in hot pursuit. In a defining moment, Moshe holds out his staff, and God parts the waters, and the Jewish People walk through the dry ocean floor. The Egyptian army attempts to follow, but once Moshe's people have crossed safely, the sea suddenly reverts back to normal, and the Egyptians are drowned.

The Torah tells us of the theophany at Sinai, where the people gathered at a mountain enveloped in cloud and smoke, quaking, with fire and lightning flashing overhead, amid the sound of booming thunder and shofar blasts; and then the Jewish People hear the voice of God through the uproar.

These are some of the defining stories of our history and exhibit the dizzying heights of the supernatural. They showcase what is fundamentally magical about the Torah.

But despite the power of these moments to captivate us, the Torah doesn't indulge us by dwelling on them even a little. Just like that, with the stroke of a pen, the Red Sea is old news, Sinai is history, and it's time to move onward:

וַיֵּסַע מֹשֶׁה אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּם-סוּף, וַיֵּצְאוּ אֶל-מִדְבַּר-שׁוּר; וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת-יָמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר, וְלֹא-מָצְאוּ מַיִם  
Moshe and the Children of Israel set out from the Red Sea. They went on into the wilderness of Shur; they traveled three days in the wilderness and found no water. (15:22)

רַב-לָכֶם שָׁבַת, בְּהַר הַזֶּה. פָּנּוּ וְסַעוּ לָכֶם – You have stayed long enough at this mountain. (1:6)

We have these distinctly unique stories of the Divine manifested in our universe, and then the Torah just moves briskly onward – רַב-לָכֶם שָׁבַת, בְּהַר הַזֶּה. פָּנּוּ וְסַעוּ לָכֶם / וַיֵּסַע מֹשֶׁה אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּם-סוּף.

The starkness of the Torah's almost dismissive continuity is jarring, and there is a vital lesson here. It suggests that even after the greatest of heights, the most momentous achievements, and the most incredible successes, the Torah simply notes that once you get there, you can't stay long, and before you know it, it's time to continue the journey and move onward.

Onward is an interesting word – positive and proactive, meaning going further rather than coming to an end or halt; moving in a forward direction. As the Izhbitzer explains, part of growth is walking



away from the place you stood. We can't stay because the moment is gone – it's gone in time, irretrievably behind us, and it's our responsibility to realize that distance in mental and physical space too.

It's true to life as well; the world does not stop to wallow in magical moments. Whether you ace the test, get the girl, close the deal, buy the house, sell the business, have the baby, or whatever the great achievement is; it's still Tuesday, you're still you, you still have deadlines, you still have to get into better shape, your siblings still get on your nerves, and your credit card bill is still due. And so, by necessity, we must move onward.

This lesson is challenging enough, but the Ishbitzer takes us further and forewarns us that what follows the heights of success is rarely smooth and straightforward lulls and plateaus of accumulation and consolidation to catch our breath; the miraculous rescue at the Red Sea is mundanely followed by the people's complaints about the local water being too bitter.

In the boring and dull moments, we may well find ourselves thirsty with nothing to drink. But this, too, as the Izhbitzer teaches, is part of the process of growth. Eventually, those bitter waters can transform into a sweet oasis, and what appeared to be downtime is integrated into the journey forward.

And actually, all too often, great heights are followed by sharp declines and drawdowns, troughs and valleys; the Golden Calf debacle doesn't just happen after the extraordinary events at Sinai – it literally happens while they're camped at the foot of the hallowed mountain!

But even the Golden Calf story has redeeming elements; apart from the important teaching that using iconography to worship the One God is still idolatry, it decisively highlights God's propensity for forgiveness and paves the way to the Mishkan and all the resultant forms of interacting with the Divine.

Do not fool yourself into thinking that what got you here will fuel you on to further heights; that energy does not simply overflow into everything else. Success is not final, and failure is not fatal; the proper response to both is the same – onward.

The Torah is a guide to life – תורת חיים – and one of the defining features of living things is motility – they move independently. We shouldn't be so shocked by the ebbs and flows of life itself, moving and changing, with concomitant ups and downs. When living things don't move, they quickly atrophy, stagnate, wither, and before long, they die. Living things must move and push to grow healthy and strong. You can fall down and run out of breath plenty of times along the way, but that's part of it, so long as you, eventually, get back up and keep moving onward.

As R' Shlomo Farhi explains, if you look at stock market performance over a century, the zoomed-out time frame looks like a smooth and steady incline; and yet, when you zoom in to years, months, weeks, days, and hours, the amount of choppiness and volatility increases. On an extended time



frame, each individual part matters less. The bouncing highs and lows blend into a smooth line that only goes one way – onwards and upwards.

The past is not gone or forgotten; it forms the basis and foundations of today.

Although we can't dwell in the moments of achievement, perhaps there is a part we can carry in our hearts and minds.

And as we go, it comes with us, ever onward.

## The Water of Life

5 minute read | Straightforward

Symbolism plays an essential role in human consciousness. Through symbols, we find meaning in the world, which becomes transparent and reveals the transcendent.

As the Torah draws to a close, Moshe knew his time was almost up, and he laced his timeless words heavy with metaphor and symbolism. Some symbols are more accessible because they use archetypes that are universally understood, like water:

יֵעָרַף בְּמָטָר לְקֹחַי, תִּזְלַח כַּטַּל אֶמְרָתִי, כְּשִׁעָרִים עָלֵי-דְשָׁא, וְכַרְבִּיבִים עָלֵי-עֵשָׂב – May my discourse come down as rain; my speech distill as dew; like showers on young grass; like droplets on the grass. (32:2)

The ancients understood that water is the source of life, that rain and water are life-giving, and that water symbolizes cleansing, regeneration, renewal, fertility, birth, creation, and new life, all of which is plain from Moshe's usage.

What's more, water symbolizes the universal reservoir of all possible existence, and supports every creation, and precedes their form. In the Torah's creation myth, there is primordial water everywhere, from which everything subsequently emerges:

וְהָאָרֶץ הִיְתָה תְהוֹ וְבָהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם – The earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep, and the spirit of God hovered over the waters... (1:4)

The Mikvah ritual that is so central to Judaism draws heavily on this archetype, symbolizing rebirth and renewal. Moreover, with our knowledge of the water cycle, we have learned the literal truth of water as life and regeneration; and in fact, the search for liquid water elsewhere in the universe serves as a close proxy to the search for life beyond our planet.



## TorahRedux

Moshe compares the Torah to rain – יַעֲרֹף כַּמָּטָר לְקִחֵי – and sure, the Torah has lots in common with rain! Life-giving, cleansing, regenerative, restorative. And like rain, it came from the sky and affirms and sustains us. So sure, the Torah is like rain!

But Moshe doesn't say the Torah is like water, and he doesn't just say the Torah is like rain; he says it's also like dew.

But what is dew, if not just another form of rain and water?

To unlock the symbol and discover the meaning, we must establish the technical difference between rain and dew.

Dew occurs when there's a cold object in a warm environment. As the object's exposed surface cools by radiating its heat, atmospheric moisture condenses faster than it evaporates, resulting in the formation of water droplets.

In other words, a cold object in a warm environment can draw water out of the ambient surroundings.

There's a Torah that's like rain, that comes from the sky, and that hopefully, you've experienced at times, perhaps a flash of inspiration that came out of nowhere. But that doesn't happen to everyone, and even when it does, it doesn't happen all the time. To borrow rain's imagery, this kind of inspiration is seasonal only. If you're counting on the rain to get by, what happens when the rain stops?

Perhaps precisely because of this problem, there's a Torah that we can experience that feels more like dew. A warm environment that doesn't come from the sky, that we generate and cultivate ourselves, which draws out the life-affirming properties from within and around us.

R' Simcha Bunim m'Peshischa notes that we can't expect our efforts and interactions with Torah to have an instant magical transformational effect; it's far more subtle, like rain and dew. A morning's dew is not enough to nourish a plant, but with the regular appearance of dew every day, the days stack up, and despite no noticeable daily effect, the plant will grow.

As R' Shlomo Farhi points out, dew is gentle, not overwhelming. Plants can't survive forever on dew alone, but it can be enough to tide them over until the rains come back. When you are running cold, a warm atmosphere will nurture and sustain you, but you should remember that it can't take you all the way; there will come the point that you need to proactively follow through with renewed drive and desire to grow once more.

One of the few explicit promises in the Torah is rain in return for good choices:

וְהָיָה אִם-שָׁמַעַתְּ שְׁמֵעוּ אֶל-מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת-ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם. וְנָתַתִּי מִטָּר-אֲרָצְכֶם בְּעֵתוֹ – If then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the Lord



your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul, I will grant the rain for your land in season... (11:,13,14)

The Ishbitzer suggests that rain reflects our outward effort, as reflected in this promise; but dew is a product of our hearts and minds. Subconsciously, our hearts and minds hope and pray, day and night, without stop. When you so much as hope for the best, or that things turn out okay, or even whisper “Please, God,” those thoughts bring wisps of warmth into the world that affirm and sustain, that things can and will eventually grow from. Given the mythical potency of dew and its connection to humble yet persistent origins, our sages suggest that dew has the latent power to resurrect the dead at the End of Days.

There are times you’ll have flashes of divine inspiration, but at some point, it will dry up. Reassuringly, as Moshe said so long ago, it doesn’t just come from the sky; it can emerge slowly with determination and environmental support. Perhaps then, dew is the symbol of human-driven inspiration – אתערותא דלתתא.

Half the year we pray for rain, but half the year we also pray for dew; remember that you are more like a plant than a machine. You have fallow and fruitful seasons, needing different things at different times; a bit more sun today, a little less rain tomorrow. It is a design feature, not a flaw, and is a far healthier approach to adopt than perpetual sameness.

This isn’t cutesy wordplay; it is quite explicit. If Moshe’s words are the water, then we are the grass and leaves, the tree of life itself, encouraged to endure and grow strong – כְּשֵׁעִירִים עָלֵי-דְשָׁא, וְכַרְבִּיבִים – עָלֵי-עֵשֶׂב.

And although trees lose their leaves in the dark dead winters, they do not despair, secure in the knowledge that spring will return and they will blossom once again. You might be in the thick of winter, but hold on; you will blossom once again – כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשֹּׁדֶה –

In fact, R’ Zohar Atkins notes that the Torah has a multitude of laws about cutting down trees because trees, unlike people, cannot run away. The imagery of a human as a tree is powerful, representing that we must stand tall and persevere in the face of cultural, political, spiritual, and technological upheaval.

When you go into the woods, you see all kinds of trees. One is stunted, another is bent; you understand it was obstructed or didn’t get enough light, and so it turned out that way. You don’t get emotional about it, you allow it; that’s just the way trees are. But humans are like that too. All too often, rather than accept ourselves and others, we are critical, whether self-conscious or judgmental, critical of a way of being other humans for the way they are. But humans are like trees; this one was obstructed like this, that one didn’t get enough that, so they turned out that way.

Moshe’s timeless blessing is hauntingly beautiful and refreshingly real. Moshe speaks through the ages and reminds us the Torah is not just water, the stuff of life. It is the water we need in good times



and hard times, and the metaphor itself acknowledges and validates that there are times the rains just won't come. But in those moments where the Torah won't be our rain, it can be our dew if we cultivate the environment for it.

If you're waiting for inspiration or a sign, it might be a while, it might not come at all, or this might be it.

Cultivate an environment around yourself with structure, systems, and people that will cultivate, nurture, and support your growth. You will not rise to the level of your goals; you will fall to the level of your systems. It's simply unsustainable to have big goals with no supporting infrastructure.

Your goal should not be to beat the game but to stay in the game and continue playing so that you can in turn foster a gentle and nurturing environment that will warm others too.

## **This Cannot Be How It Ends**

3 minute read | Straightforward

As the Exodus reaches its crescendo, the Jews are cornered. They make it to the shores of the ocean, wading in the reeds, the open sea in front of them, a cloud of the onrushing Egyptian army on the horizon. Trapped, the people despair.

Yet before God talks to Moshe, Moshe already knows how to proceed:

אל-תִּירָאוּ-הַתִּנְצְבוּ וְרָאוּ אֶת-יְשׁוּעַת ה', אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה לְכֶם הַיּוֹם – “Do not be afraid! Stand and wait, and you'll see God's salvation...” (14:13)

At this juncture, the Torah does not record a discussion where God preps Moshe or gives him a heads up about what to do. Moshe seems to know what to do based solely on his intuition.

But how could he know?

After the Jewish People are saved, they sing the Song of the Sea. Curiously, the Torah separately records how Miriam led a separate rendition of gratitude, and the Jewish women follow her. It's curious because it seems to indicate that the Song of the Sea was not enough, that her activity was something separate, over and above what everyone else did, and it's curious because the Torah identifies her in a highly unusual way:

... וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אֶחֻזַּת אֶהָרֹן, אֶת-הַתֵּף-בְּיָדָהּ; וַתִּצְאֵן כָּל-הַנְּשִׂיִם אַחֲרֶיהָ, בְּתַפִּים וּבַמְהַלְלִת. וַתַּעַן לָהֶם, מִרְיָם – Miriam the prophetess, sister of Aron, took an instrument in her hand, and led the women with instruments and dancing. And she sang to them... (15:21)





She needs no introduction; we know exactly who she is. The specific identifications, the prophetess, sister of Ahron, are odd – הַנְּבִיאָה אֲחוֹת אַהֲרֹן. She was also sister to Moshe, and what of her capacity as a prophetess? וַתַּעַן לָהֶם suggests she was responding – but to what?

Sensitive to these irregularities, Rashi suggests that the Torah is alluding to the prophecy she channeled when she was Ahron's sister, and not yet Moshe's; the prophecy of Moshe's birth.

In the months preceding Moshe's birth, already foreseen by Pharaoh, he launched a campaign of infanticide against Jewish boys. The Midrash records how Amram and Yocheved, the Jewish leadership of that time, had separated, so as not to suffer this terrible fate. Miriam experienced this prophecy and persuaded them to get back together by saying that they were worse than the decree itself, as they were preventing the birth of girls too.

When Yocheved fell pregnant, the Egyptian government kept tabs on her – but Moshe was born early. When he was born, the Torah describes his appearance as brilliant – וַתֵּרֶא אֹתוֹ כִּי-טוֹב הוּא – which the Midrash suggests is the same brilliance as the light of Creation – כִּי-טוֹב – and the entire house shone.

But in spite of such an auspicious sign, the moment came where she could hide him no longer – וְלֹא-יִכְלֶה עוֹד, הַצְּפִינוּ. After three more months, which would have been a full-term pregnancy, the Egyptians came for her to inspect the child she was due to give birth to. She knew she had to abandon the child prophesied by her daughter. She placed the boy into a basket and placed him in the river. The Torah implies she could not bear to watch – and who could? What chances would one give a child in a box in a crocodile infested river, in the Egyptian heat, with an army looking for him no less:

וַתֵּצֵב מִרְיָם מֵאֵלָּהּ, לְדַעַה, מֶה-יַעֲשֶׂה לּוֹ – Miriam stood and waited from afar, to know what would be of him...(2:4)

The emphasis is on Miriam; Miriam stayed when Yocheved could not. She had not experienced a new prophecy, and she was only a child herself. Perhaps, holding on to her prophecy, one thought guided her, that this cannot be how it ends. And she was vindicated!

The daughter of the Jewish People's oppressors showed up, which would ordinarily be the absolute worst thing that could happen, but in a stunning reversal, she displays compassion for the boy and takes him in; ultimate victory seized from the clutches of total defeat.

As R' David Fohrman explains, years later, Moshe knew what to tell the Jews at the shore of the Red Sea, because this had happened before; it was the same story!

Jew cornered by Egyptian among the reeds, at the water's lips, all hope fading. So this could not be how it ends! Moshe had been in this exact situation before; so he understood to tell them to watch what happens.



Once they were safe, so many years after her prophecy, Moshe had finally saved their people, and it is Miriam's celebration more than anyone else's because this is the ultimate fulfillment of her prophecy – the promised child has saved their people from Egypt for good.

You probably haven't experienced prophecy of salvation. But all the same, in the bleak moments that look like all is lost, you can invoke the power of Miriam, and hold on just a little longer.

This cannot be how it ends.

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## Prayer Redux

6 minute read | Straightforward

One of Judaism's essential and fundamental practices is prayer.

Through prayer, we commune with the Creator, affirming our connection, dependency, and gratitude to the Source of all life.

The theurgy of prayer – the metaphysics of how prayer works and what it does – is complex, and in all likelihood, fundamentally unknowable. It's not obvious at all what the postulate of prayer working would even look like!

What we do know is that at all times and all places throughout our history, the Jewish People have always turned to God in prayer for health, success, and salvation. It is almost universally understood that prayer plays a prominent role among the efforts and energy we must expend to get the outcomes we want – as well as the ones we don't.

The crescendo of the Exodus came with the decisive miracle at the Red Sea. The ocean parted gave the desperate Jewish People safe passage, while simultaneously obliterating their great tormentors in one fell swoop. The Splitting of the Red Sea is one of the most captivating and magical moments in the entire Torah, and prayer plays a prominent role in the build-up:

וּפְרַעַה הַקָּרִיב וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־עֵינֵיהֶם וַהֲגִהוּ מִצְרַיִם נֹסַע אֲחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּירָאוּ מְאֹד וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יְהוָה – As Pharaoh drew near, the Jewish People caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them. Greatly frightened, the Jewish People cried out to the Lord. (14:10)

But surprisingly, and quite unlike how we might expect, this prayer is not well received:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה מַה־תִּצְעַק אֵלַי דְּבַר אֶל־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסְעוּ – Then the Lord said to Moshe, “Why are you crying out to Me!? Tell the Jewish People to get going!!” (14:15)





With righteous outrage, we might wonder why God gets annoyed that the people cry out. The Jewish People have made it to the beaches with their children and luggage. They have no boats and cannot swim. There is an army approaching on the horizon, and they are out of time and out of options. They are desperate, so obviously, they cry out to God for help! Isn't that what we do? Isn't that what we've always done?

Moreover, the Gemara imagines that Heaven has gateways for prayers, suggesting that prayers are evaluated and then admitted or refused based on timing and circumstance. The Neila service on Yom Kippur extensively utilizes this imagery to create a sense of urgency – we need to squeeze a final prayer in because the doors are closing! The Gemara concludes that regardless, the gate of tears is always open; presumably, because tears are heartfelt and sincere, and the pain that generates tearful prayers loads them with a potency that Heaven cannot refuse.

The Jewish People were desperate, and they cried out for help. Why would God get annoyed?

The imagery of gates in Heaven is powerful and compelling, but it appears to have a flaw. The metaphor doesn't work for a gate of tears because a gate that doesn't close is no gate at all!

The Kotzker Rebbe sharply teaches that the gate of tears is still a gate because some tears are turned away; the gate is shut to crocodile tears, sorrow that is insincere, like when people attempt to use grief to excuse inaction.

In the story of Pinchas, Balak and Bilam successfully schemed to hurt the Jewish People by sending the young women of Midian into the Jewish camp to seduce the men; and most of the young men found it impossible to resist. The camp succumbed, sparking a devastating plague.

But the Midianite women were not successful at drawing in all the Jews; some of them resisted the obvious temptation, and, unsure what to do, they went to the holiest man, their leader Moshe, at the most sacred spot they knew, the Mishkan, to cry and pray – וְהִמָּה בְּכִים, פָּתַח אֱהֶל מוֹעֵד.

These people of moral fiber cried and prayed for help, but that didn't save the day.

R' Moshe Sherer highlights how the Torah explicitly credits Pinchas's assassination of the provocateurs for stopping the plague, and not anyone's prayers – וַיִּדְקֹר אֶת-שְׁנֵיהֶם-אֶת אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאֶת-הָאִשָּׁה – אֶל-קַבְּרֹתָהּ; וַתַּעֲצֹר, הַמַּגֵּפָה / הַשִּׁיב אֶת-חַמְתִּי מֵעַל בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּקִנְאוֹ אֶת-קַנְאָתִי.

When something is wrong and we respond only with thoughts and prayers, they are crocodile tears, lip service, pearl-clutching, and window dressing. The pain may be real, but prayers can't help if your approach to problem-solving is fundamentally broken.

There may be stories of people praying for magical solutions that materialize out of thin air with no human input. Still, the Torah seems to dismiss the notion of thoughts and prayers as a substitute for action.



At the Red Sea, God snaps at Moshe to tell the people to get a move on. The Midrash further expands that God told Moshe that it was not the appropriate time for lengthy prayer; danger was at hand, and it was time to act!

Rashi suggests that God was annoyed at the prayer at the sea because they seized their ancestral craft – תפשו אֲמִנוֹת אֲבוֹתָם. The Maharal explains that prayer isn't craftsmanship, like carpentry or plumbing. Prayer is supposed to be heartfelt and soulful! But they cried out to God as the last resort of their ancestors; a weak effort that betrayed deep fear and insecurity and the cynical despair of helplessness, that all was lost. It was an inferior, or at least suboptimal prayer, an immature prayer that betrayed a lack of belief, both in God and in themselves, that there was nothing they could do!

Only they were wrong to think that there was nothing else they could do, and we'd be wrong for thinking prayer could work in a vacuum.

As R' Shlomo Farhi explains, they should have believed enough in their prayer to stop praying and get moving, but they were frozen and paralyzed.

In sharp contrast, our ancestor Yakov prepared to reunite with Esau years after wronging him and meticulously prepared for their meeting. He prepared for peace by sending waves of lavish gifts to Esau; prepared for battle and victory, arming his young family and training them; prepared for defeat and death, dividing his family in two, in the hope that the second camp might escape without Esau ever knowing they existed; and then finally, he prays that God be with him and that his family should survive.

As R' Noach Weinberg highlights, Yakov prepares for peace, victory, and death; which is to say that he did no less than everything possible to prepare for all eventualities before prayer, even though God had already promised to be with him and that his children would inherit the land and his legacy.

Maybe that's what our efforts have to look like to give our prayers a hook to latch on to – even when God promises.

God didn't want their prayers at the Red Sea. It wasn't time to pray; it was time to act! But they couldn't, because they had given up, and were consumed with fear. Perhaps that lends enduring power to the legacy of Nachshon ben Aminadav, whom the Midrash heralds for clambering into the water when he could not yet know what would happen, because just maybe there was one last thing to try before giving up, finding room for a ray of hope amid the clouds of despair – crucially, a hope that drove him to act.

R' Shlomo Farhi suggests that the biggest challenge to our faith and belief is time; that we give up prematurely.

By wading into the water, Nachshon showed people who thought they had reached the outer limit of what they could do and revealed to them that the boundary was just a little further than they'd



thought. They'd stopped at the shore, but he boldly and bravely stepped into the impossible and waded up to his neck, without waiting for instructions, leading by example in the face of uncertainty, the quality of his tribe, Yehuda. And when he did that, he sparked salvation, and the ocean split for all.

Perhaps that underpins God's irritation, and we can almost hear the reverberation of an answer to the rhetorical question of "What do you expect Me to do?!" with God begging for something to work with. Get in the water, dummy!

We should not judge them too harshly for being afraid. The fight, flight, or freeze response is hardcoded into our DNA and predates human consciousness; people tend to freeze when their families are about to get massacred.

But God speaks through them to us, and we should ask ourselves if our prayers are corrupted by fear or despair and yet still wonder why our prayers go answered. We need to audit our lives, soul searching about whether we truly mean our prayers. Does the way you spend your life align with what you claim to want? Does what you pay attention to and devote time to reflect that? We should wonder if God might give us a similarly terrifying answer – "What do you expect Me to do, exactly?"

If we're crying crocodile tears, we need to confront the reality that our prayers are mediocre, and it shouldn't be surprising that they don't seem to be working.

You won't get the dream job you don't apply to. You won't get healthy if you don't diet and exercise. You won't pass the test if you don't study the material. You won't get rich if you don't invest. Your relationship won't go anywhere if you don't give your partner attention. You won't succeed if you don't try. If you expect your prayer to change that fundamental reality, you will likely continue to be disappointed – the world has never worked that way. You absolutely have to try, and even then, you have to try very hard indeed.

We need to animate our lives with action and hope, like our ancestor Yakov, like our hero Pinchas, and invoke the incredible bravery of Nachshon. God desperately wants to shower us with blessing, but humans must build the vessels that will contain those blessings.

There's plenty to be scared of; the uncertain path that lies ahead is shrouded in the darkness of the unknowable. But we can illuminate it with decisive action, taking bold steps that brighten the way forward. And with each step along the way, pray to meet with good fortune and success.

Miracles do happen, but they start with your level of effort and dedication towards your dreams. Thoughts and prayers are not a substitute for action.

You must believe in a positive outcome enough to invest real effort into making it a reality.



## Thought of the Week

Every person who wants something different from their performance than what they're getting, is doing something to perpetuate that.

Find the areas you don't like, and ask yourself bluntly - what could I be doing better here?

— Dr. Julie Gurner, @drgurner

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## Quote of the Week

I am descended from those who wrestle angels and kill giants.

— Elsa, Jojo Rabbit

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*I present TorahRedux l'ilui nishmas my late grandfather, HaGaon HaRav Yehuda Leib Gertner ben HaRav HaChassid Menachem Mendel.*

*I hope you enjoyed this week's thoughts. If you have questions or comments, or just want to say hello, it's a point of pride for me to hear from you, and I'll always respond. And if you saw, heard, read, or watched anything that spoke to you, please send it my way - Neli@TorahRedux.com.*

Neli

*PS If you liked this week's edition of TorahRedux, why not share it with friends and family who would appreciate it?*

**Redux:** *adjective* – resurgence; refers to being brought back, restored, or revived; something familiar presented in a new way. Not to see what no one else has seen, but to say what nobody has yet said about something which everybody sees.