



## Mattos Massei 2022

### Sharing the Load

5 minute read | Straightforward

The Torah's story traces the origin of the Jewish People, from the dawn of humanity, through our first ancestors and their families, to their eventual subjugation in Egypt. These stories revolve around the struggle to realize God's promise that their children would live peacefully and securely in their homeland.

The Promised Land is a core driver of the Torah's entire story, it's where the story has been heading from the beginning. With the people stuck in Egypt, God rescues them by sending Moshe to overthrow the world's most powerful civilization and empire with the aid of transparently magical and supernatural forces, which sustain the Jewish People through years of wandering through a barren wasteland, until they finally make it to the border of the Promised Land. This is the culmination of the Torah's story, and there is going to be a profound transition.

They'll have to fend for themselves to a much larger extent, and Moshe won't be able to join. They won't be wanderers anymore; they will be colonists and settlers. It's been a long ride, but they have finally made it.

The trouble is, no sooner than they're even in sight of the place when a good twenty percent of the people decide that after all that, they don't really want the Promised Land after all.

Clans from Reuven, Gad, and Menashe take a fancy to the wrong side of the border, which is just too perfect for all their sheep and cattle. So they ask Moshe if they can settle there and relinquish any claim to the Land of Israel, a request that seems as breathtaking in its audacity as its stupidity.

They turn their back on the literal Promised Land God had promised them and their ancestors. They turn their back on the fulfillment of their ancestors' hopes and dreams, the promise that was an essential part of their heritage and identity. They even turn their back on respectable values – the Midrash observes that they asked to build stables for their cattle before mentioning settlements for their children, suggesting that they cherished their money more than human life.

What's more, to refuse the Promised Land is not just to choose a different physical path but, by definition, a very different spiritual path as well; they arguably turn their back on God in a certain sense. Years later, the book of Joshua records a story where they have to prove that they still believe in the God of Israel – because that was in question to a certain extent.





This story is explicitly political; Moshe expressly rejects the individualistic mentality of self-interested autonomy and liberty. It is wrong to enjoy yours before helping your brothers get theirs; your duty and responsibility are to help them get theirs too, and when we organize our societies, people with a libertarian skew ought to remember Moshe's words.

The premise of Moshe's rhetoric is that it is selfish to take without giving back, that it is a self-evident dishonor and disgrace to abandon your brothers to their fates without facing the challenge alongside them. Regardless of your personal beliefs, this orientation is why Israeli citizens commonly take a firm stance on the central importance of national military service.

It is important to note that collective responsibility has an outer boundary; the notion of collective responsibility in guilt is fundamentally problematic and a critical ingredient in genocidal and totalitarian thinking – the Church used such reasoning to justify centuries of antisemitic oppression. The only proper basis for blame and fault is an individual's moral responsibility, but collective responsibility can still be a helpful concept regarding proactive direction. We didn't destroy the Temple; that's not our fault. But we're collectively responsible for why it hasn't been rebuilt yet, and we can channel our energies to do better.

Moshe's emphasis on the responsibility between brothers is the culmination of another central theme of the Torah; the Genesis stories open with Cain asking the existential, haunting, and unanswered question – “Am I my brother's keeper?”. Genesis tells the stories of generations of families that could not learn to keep each other until Yehuda breaks the cycle and risks everything to stand up and be a keeper for his brother Binyamin.

Moshe's rhetoric in this story is another firm indication that, yes, you are your brother's keeper. Remembering your brother might be one of the simplest rules in life, but it is certainly one of the hardest for us to practice.

The distorted spirituality and wayward values reflected in the choice to refuse the Promised Land were problematic but somewhat tolerable for Moshe. But disloyalty to their brothers, any loosening of the connection and identity with the greater Jewish People, was a bridge too far.

You might not want to be so observant, or you might not want to sign up for the Israeli army; those might be reasonable personal choices – אֶל תִּדּוֹן אֶת תְּבַרְךָ עַד שֶׁתִּגִּיעַ לְמִקּוֹמוֹ. But you can't choose to avoid your contribution to the Jewish People's well-being.

Make no mistake, there is a war out there. Our brothers and sisters are on the front lines battling the forces of assimilation, abuse, apathy, ignorance, illness, intermarriage, and poverty. You probably know your capabilities, and you may or may not have the skills and experience to be a front-line activist, advocate, educator, or fundraiser. But honestly consider what you have to offer the Jewish People on any of those fronts, small or large, and remember what one of Moshe's last teachings asks us.



Shall your brothers go to war while you remain over here?

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## **The Steward of Your Future**

2 minute read | Straightforward

As the Jewish People approached the borders of Israel, Moshe knew he didn't have much time left in this world.

It was important to prime the next generation for what would lie ahead. He retold their entire history, as recorded in the book of Deuteronomy, a Greek word literally meaning the restatement.

One of the first things he talks to them about is one of the last things he did; just before they got to Israel, he designated sanctuary cities where perpetrators of accidental crimes could flee and find refuge from the strict letter of the law.

Sure, it's an important law, but why is it a part of his ethics speech at all?

We all have dreams and goals of what we want to achieve and who we want to be. And we procrastinate out of fear of failure or even fear of the reality of our own potential greatness. We doubt we can succeed, and the future seems uncertain. What if we fail? And after all, if we fail, then what's the point of starting?

This line of thinking handicaps us all the time.

In sharp contrast, Moshe had no doubts about his future – and not for the better. He knew with as much certainty as a human could ever hope to have that he would not set foot into the Land of Israel, and he had gone as far as he could, and his time had come.

And he still made plans for a future he knew he would not participate in, a future that only others would ever be able to practice and enjoy.

It's at the beginning of his ethics speech because it's one of the most important things a human has to know, and Moshe knew it, which is why it's at the beginning of his last public address, imploring the people to uphold good ethics to build a future that would last.

We may not have accomplished what we set out to do; we may not have gotten where we thought we ought to be by now. But if there is something available to you to do, just do it.

Don't do it to succeed, do it because it's the right thing to do, and do it even if it's only a step in the right direction.



The future is a commons that is best cared for in the present.

You are a steward of the future whether you like it or not, and whether you participate in it or not; you are carrying the yoke of the future here and now, today. Every single thing you do, every single day, compounds into the future that materializes – for better and for worse.

The future is sensitive. Deferring progress or responsibility compounds building an inactivity debt that requires a lot of future effort to undo before you can progress.

How many people can give their all to a project they won't benefit from? Taking care of the future without self-interest is hard, but that's the mindset Moshe showed us thousands of years ago for a future he would not be a part of.

A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.

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## **An Eye for An Eye Redux**

4 minute read | Straightforward

One of the most bizarre and incomprehensible laws of the entire Torah was also one of the ancient world's most important laws – the law of retaliation; also called lex talionis:

עֵינַי תַּחַת עֵינַי שֵׁן תַּחַת שֵׁן יָד תַּחַת יָד רֶגֶל תַּחַת רֶגֶל: – An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot. (21:24)

The law of retaliation isn't the Torah's innovation; it appears in other Ancient Near Eastern law codes that predate the text of the Torah, such as the Code of Hammurabi. All the same, it appears three times in the Torah, and its words are barbaric and cruel to modern eyes, easily dismissed as unworthy of humane civilization.

People who wish to express their opposition to forgiveness, concession, and compensation, insisting on retaliation of the most brutal and painful kind, will quote “An eye for an eye” as justification, conjuring a vision of hacked limbs and gouged eyes.

This law is alien and incomprehensible to us because we lack the necessary context; we fail to recognize its contemporary importance to early human civilization.

The human desire for revenge isn't petty and shallow. It stems from a basic instinct for fairness and self-defense that all creatures possess; and also from a deeply human place of respect and self-image. When a person is slighted, they self-righteously need to retaliate to restore balance. It makes sense.



The trouble is, balance is delicate and near impossible to restore, so far more often, people would escalate violence, and so early human societies endured endless cycles of vengeance and violence. In this ancient lawless world, revenge was a severe destabilizing force.

This is the context we are missing. In such a world, societies developed and imposed the law of retaliation as a cap and curb violence by prohibiting vigilante justice and disproportionate vengeance. An eye for an eye – that, and crucially, no more. It stops the cycle of escalation, and tempers, if not neuters, the human desire for retribution. Crucially, it stops feuds from being personal matters, subordinating revenge to law and justice by inserting the law between men, a key political theory called the state monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force.

R' Jonathan Sacks observes that the same rationale underlies the Torah's requirement to establish sanctuary cities. The Torah inserts laws between the avenger and the killer, and a court must give the order. Revenge is not personal, and it is sanctioned by society.

This was familiar to the Torah's original audience. We ought to reacquaint ourselves with this understanding – the law is not barbaric and primitive at all; it's essential to building a society.

Even more importantly, our Sages taught that these words are not literal, and instead, the remedy for all bodily injury is monetary compensation. The Torah forecloses compensation for murder – לא תקחו כופר לנפש רוצח. The fact the Torah chooses not to for bodily injuries necessarily means compensation is allowed. And since people are of different ages, different genders, and in different trades, with discrete strengths and weaknesses; mirroring the injury isn't a substitute at all, so paying compensation is the exclusive remedy, in a sharp application of the rule of law – there shall be only one law, equitable to all – מִשְׁפָּט אֶחָד יִהְיֶה לָכֶם.

Before dismissing this as extremely warped apologetics, the overwhelming academic consensus is that no society practiced the law as it is written. Today, we readily understand that if we suffer bodily injury, we sue the perpetrators' insurance company, and the ancient world understood that tradeoff too.

How much money would the victim accept to forgo the satisfaction of seeing the assailant suffer the same injury? How much money would the assailant be willing to pay to keep his own eye? There is most certainly a price each would accept, and all that's left is to negotiate the settlement figure, which is where the court can step in. Even where the law is not literally carried out, the theoretical threat provides a valuable and perhaps even necessary perspective for justice in society.

It's vital to understand this as a microcosm for understanding the whole work of the Torah. There is a much broader point here about how we need to understand the context of the Torah to get it right, and we need the Oral Tradition to get it right as well. The text is contingent, to an extent, on the body of law that interprets and implements it.



Without one or the other, we are getting a two-dimensional look at the very best, or just plain wrong at worst. If we were pure Torah literalists, we would blind and maim each other and truly believe we are doing perfect like-for-like justice! After all, what more closely approximates the cost of losing an eye than taking an eye?! Doesn't it perfectly capture balance, precision, and proportionality elegantly? It holds before us the tantalizing possibility of getting divinely sanctioned justice exactly right!

But we'd be dead wrong. Taking an eye for an eye doesn't fix anything; it just breaks more things.

The original purpose of the law of retaliation was to limit or even eliminate revenge by revising the underlying concept of justice. Justice was no longer obtained by personal revenge but by proportionate punishment of the offender in the form of compensation enforced by the state. While not comprehensive, perhaps this overview can help us look at something that seemed so alien, just a bit more knowingly.

There's a valuable lesson here.

The literal reading of *lex talionis* is a vindictive punishment that seeks pure cold justice to mirror the victim's pain and perhaps serve as a deterrent.

With our new understanding, compensation is not punitive at all – it's restitutive and helps correct bad behavior. You broke something or caused someone else pain, and now you need to fix it – and you don't have to maim yourself to make it right!

There is nothing outdated about the law of retaliation. It's as timely as ever because we all break things. We hurt others, and sometimes we hurt ourselves too. Our Sages urge us to remember that one broken thing is bad, and two broken things are worse. We can't fix what is broken by adding more pain and hope to heal.

Taking it further, there is a wider lesson here as well.

In seeking justice for ourselves, we needn't go overboard by crushing our enemies and hearing the lamentations of their women. We can and should protect ourselves and our assets, but we needn't punish our adversaries mercilessly such that they never cross us again. In a negotiation, don't squash the other side just because you can. It's about making it right, not winning. Channeling the law of retaliation, don't escalate. Think in terms of restitution, not retribution.

Do all you must, sure, but don't do all you could.



## Not All Those Who Wander Are Lost

3 minute read | Straightforward

There are parts of the Torah that we all love, with fond memories of the wonder of learning them for the first time, like the Creation story, Avraham's first encounters with God, the Ten Plagues, and Sinai. Hopefully, it's not sacrilegious to observe that some parts are a little less riveting, like the Mishkan's design-build, the laws of sacrifices, and the 42 locations in the wilderness the Jewish People visited on their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land:

אֵלֶּה מַסְעֵי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יָצְאוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְצִבְאָתָם בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן (33:1)

It's worth asking what the point of this is. The Torah is not a history journal; it exists to teach all people for all time. Here we are, 3000 years later, tediously reading about rest stops.

Why does it matter at all?

In a sense, it's the wrong question to ask, and it betrays the kind of thinking we are all guilty of.

We have this expectation and perception of linear progress, consciously or not, that our lives should be a straight road, leading directly and smoothly to our destination. What's more, we are relentlessly focussed on the outcome, where we are going. And then we get frustrated and feel sabotaged when invariably, it doesn't pan out that way!

But this is a stiff and unrealistic view of not only progress but life itself. Progress is incremental and organic, not linear or mechanical.

If you've ever driven long-distance, there are a few things you just know. You can't go straight as the crow flies, so you know you're going to have to follow the signs that guide your way carefully to get to the right place. You know you will probably miss an exit when you're not paying attention, and it'll cost you 15 minutes rerouting until you are back on track. You know you will need to stop for gas and bathroom breaks. You know there will be long stretches of open road where you can cruise, and there will be times you will get stuck in traffic. You know you will have to get off the highway at some point and take some small unmarked local streets. We know this.

We trivialize the journey, and we really mustn't. Sure, there are huge one-off watershed moments in our lives; but the moments in between matter as well – they're not just filler! While they might not be our final glorious destination, the small wins count and stack up.

The Sfas Emes notes how the Torah highlights each step we took to put Egypt behind us – מַסְעֵי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יָצְאוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. We might not get where we're going so quickly – but if Egypt is behind us, then that means we must still be moving forwards. As we get further away from our point of origin, we





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should keep it in the rearview mirror to orient us as a reference point to remind us that we're headed in the right direction. However long it takes to get where we're going, and however bumpy and curved the road is, it's important to remember why we got started in the first place.

The 42 stops along the way were not the optimal way to get from Egypt to Israel. It doesn't take 40 years to travel from Egypt to Israel. But it happened that way, and the Torah tells us this for 3000 years and posterity because that's the way life is, and we can disavow ourselves of the notion that progress or life should somehow be linear. The process is not a necessary evil – it is the fundamental prerequisite to getting anywhere, even if it's not where we expected, and it's worth paying attention to.

We put Egypt behind us one step at a time. We get to the Promised Land one step at a time. Any step away from Egypt is a substantial achievement – even if it's not a step in the physical direction of the Promised Land, it truly is a step towards the Promised Land.

The journey is anything but direct, and there are lots of meandering stops along the way. It might seem boring and unnecessary – I left Egypt, and I'm going to Israel! But that's the kind of thinking we have to short circuit. It's not a distraction – it's our life.

Life isn't what happens when you get there; life is every step along the way.

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## Language Redux

3 minute read | Straightforward

Humans are the apex predator on Earth.

We share this planet with thousands of species and trillions of organisms, and none but humans carry a lasting multi-generational record of knowledge of any obvious consequence. And yet, a feral human being left alone in the woods from birth to death kept separate and alive, would be not much more than an ape; our knowledge isn't because humans are smart.

It's because we speak – **מְדַבֵּר**.

We communicate and cooperate with others through language, giving us a formidable advantage in forming groups, sharing information, and pooling workloads and specializations. Language is the mechanism by which the aggregated knowledge of human culture is transmitted, actualizing our intelligence and self-awareness, transcending separate biological organisms, and becoming one informational organism. With language, we have formed societies and built civilizations; developed science and medicine, literature and philosophy.



With language, knowledge does not fade; we can learn from the experiences of others. Without learning everything from scratch, we can use an existing knowledge base built by others to learn new things and make incrementally progressive discoveries. As one writer put it, a reader lives a thousand lives before he dies; the man who never reads lives only once.

Language doesn't just affect how we relate to each other; it affects how we relate to ourselves. We make important decisions based on thoughts and feelings influenced by words on a page or conversations with others. It has been said that with one glance at a book, you can hear the voice of another person – perhaps someone gone for millennia – speaking across the ages clearly and directly in your mind.

Considering the formidable power of communication, it follows that the Torah holds it in the highest esteem; because language is magical. Indeed, the fabric of Creation is woven with words:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים, יְהִי אוֹר; וַיְהִי-אוֹר (1:3)

R' Jonathan Sacks notes that humans use language to create things as well. The notion of a contract or agreement is a performative utterance – things that people say to create something that wasn't there before; a relationship of mutual commitment between people, created through speech. Whether it's God giving us the Torah or a husband marrying his wife, relationships are fundamental to Judaism. We can only build relationships and civilizations with each other when we can make commitments through language.

Recognizing the influential hold language has over us, the Torah emphasizes an abundance of caution and heavily regulates how we use language: the laws of gossip and the metzora; and the incident where Miriam and Ahron challenged Moshe; among others. Even the Torah's choice of words about the animals that boarded the Ark is careful and measured:

מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה, תִּקַּח-לָךְ שִׁבְעָה וְשִׁבְעָה –אִישׁ וְאִשְׁתּוֹ; וּמִן-הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא טְהוֹרָה הִוא, שְׁנַיִם-אִישׁ וְאִשְׁתּוֹ – Of every clean creature, take seven and seven, each with their mate; and of the creatures that are not clean two, each with their mate. (7:2)

The Gemara notes that instead of using the more accurate and concise expression of “impure,” the Torah utilizes extra ink and space to articulate itself more positively – “that are not clean” – אֲשֶׁר לֹא טְהוֹרָה הִוא. While possibly hyperbolic, the Lubavitcher Rebbe would refer to death as “the opposite of life”; and hospital infirmaries as “places of healing.”

The Torah cautions us of the power of language repeatedly in more general settings:

לֹא-תִלְךָ רֵכִיל בְּעַמֶּיךָ, לֹא תַעֲמֹד עַל-דַּם רֵעֶךָ: אָנֹכִי, ה' – Do not allow a gossip to mingle among the people; do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor: I am Hashem. (19:16)

The Torah instructs us broadly not to hurt, humiliate, deceive, or cause another person any emotional distress:



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וְלֹא תוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת-עֲמִיתוֹ, וְיִרְאַתָּ מֵאֱלֹהֶיךָ: כִּי אֲנִי ה', אֱלֹהֵיכֶם – Do not wrong one another; instead, you should fear your God; for I am Hashem. (25:27)

Interestingly, both these laws end with “I am Hashem” – evoking the concept of emulating what God does; which suggests that just as God constructively uses language to create – שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָה בְּדַבְרֵוֹ – so must we – אֲנִי ה'. The Lubavitcher Rebbe taught that as much as God creates with words, so do humans.

The Gemara teaches that verbal abuse is arguably worse than theft; you can never take back your words, but at least a thief can return the money!

The idea that language influences and impacts the world around us is the foundation of the laws of vows, which are significant enough that we open the Yom Kippur services at Kol Nidrei by addressing them.

Of course, one major caveat to harmful speech is intent. If sharing negative information has a constructive and beneficial purpose that may prevent harm or injustice, there is no prohibition, and there might even be an obligation to protect your neighbor by conveying the information – לֹא תִעְמָד – על-דַם רֵעֶךָ.

As R' Jonathan Sacks powerfully said, no soul was ever saved by hate; no truth was ever proved by violence; no redemption was ever brought by holy war.

Rather than hurt and humiliate, let's use our language to educate, help and heal; because words and ideas have the power to change the world.

They're the only thing that ever has.

## Attitude Redux

5 minute read | Straightforward

During the Jewish People's time in the desert, God gave a variety of commands.

We expect God to give commands, it comes with the territory, that's what God does, it makes sense. They'd only just left Egypt and stood at Sinai; there was a new religion with new procedures and protocols to implement. And after all, there's no way to know what God wants unless God says so!

What God says, we expect the audience to do, which the Torah dutifully records – וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן.



But what we might not expect is that the Torah reports with meticulous regularity, each and every time, not just that people obey, but that people carry out their task as per God's command – וַיַּעַשׂ כִּן – כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה'. The Torah uses this phrase tens, if not hundreds of times!

If you think about it, apart from the repetitiveness, it's almost entirely redundant. It's not at all obvious what doing something per God's command adds, because, in almost every example, there is literally no other conceivable way to do the thing.

When God says to light the Menora, there is only one way to light a Menora. When God says to take a census of how many people there are, the only way to fulfill the command is to count people. When God says to bring a Korban Pesach, or how to do the Yom Kippur service, or any of the Mishkan-related workflows, or to go to war with Midian, or to execute somebody, there isn't any other way to do any of those things! And yet each time, the Torah doesn't say people followed their instructions; it says that the people followed their instructions faithfully as per God's command – 'וַיַּעַשׂ כִּן כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה'.

Each time people follow instructions, why does the Torah add that they followed the instructions per God's command?

Perhaps the Torah isn't telling us that they did it; it's telling us how they did it.

R' Shlomo Farhi explains that even when there truly is only one way to do something, there is still a right and wrong way. When the Torah adds that people followed instructions faithfully – כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' – it's not saying that they did just like they were told; it means that people follow instructions just like when they were told, capturing the snapshot of sentiment or feeling of a particular moment.

When you do anything, even if there's no other way, you can still do it with energy, focus, and joy; or not – a right way and a wrong way, even when there's only one way.

Our sages were sensitive to this subtle but universal nuance.

Rashi quotes the Sifri that Ahron lit the Menora every day, precisely the way Moshe told him for the rest of his life, and never changed or deviated in any way – כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה'; the Sifri suggests that our everyday approach to Torah should similarly be with freshness and excitement – וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר – אֲנֹכִי מִצְוָה הַיּוֹם עַל־לִבְכֶּדָה.

R' Simcha Bunim of Peshischa notes that as much as the comment is about Ahron not changing how he performed his duties, it's equally a comment about how his duties didn't change him. Some people let privilege and honor get to their heads – but not Ahron.

The Sfas Emes notes that lighting the Menora wasn't a particularly prestigious ceremony in that any Kohen could kindle the lights. Still, Ahron took it seriously enough that he insisted on doing it himself every day for the rest of his life – every day, he did it like the moment he received the command.



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The Ishbitza notes that the highest praise for Ahron is that he retained that initial desire, that things never got stale or boring for him. He kept challenging himself to find something new and exciting, so he lit the Menora his last time with the same enthusiasm as the first.

The Shem mi'Shmuel notes that the word for training, which means practice repetitions, is cognate to the word for inauguration, the first time you do something – חינוך / חנוכה. This suggests that training is not simply a repeat of past performance but the repetition of newness, with each repetition inviting an opportunity to introduce a fresh aspect or dimension.

Attitude and mentality are everything; the mental and emotional components heavily influence the substance of any interaction. Prayer and sacrifice require proper intent to have any substance to them; there is a vast difference between giving someone a hand because you care and giving someone a hand out of pity.

A Torah scroll is quite clearly and obviously a religious article, and yet it has no inherent sanctity from its perfect script and spelling. A Torah scroll is kosher and sacred exclusively if they were written with the express intent of imbuing the words and scroll with sanctity; which is to say that its utility and value as a holy object are solely determined by the mentality of the scribe.

The Mishkan had plenty of unique artifacts like the Menora, but it had some pretty ordinary implements that everyone owns; a shirt, a hat, a cup, and a spoon. What designated these as sacred and distinct is the intention with which they were crafted.

This is a universal truth in all walks of life, from Judaism to art to cooking. A great cook will say their secret ingredient is love; a great artist or sage will say their secret technique is heart and soul.

In the words of Martin Luther King Jr., if a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michelangelo painted, Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'

Mastery is typically boring. Finishing your fiftieth marathon is probably less special than your first.

It's normal.

The more we experience something, the more our enthusiasm and attention typically wane. Predictability and comfort put an end to fresh euphoria; when we know what to expect, our excitement wears off, and boredom sets in. That's why we need to keep things fresh if we're focused on a long-term project or goal; cruise control is a killer.

It's something often seen with young athletes or scholars who lose their way – they think they've made it and stop putting in the work that would take them to the elite tier. The seasoned pros always comment on how essential it is for youngsters to maintain their concentration and focus to stay on



track; to be fully present in each moment and devote their full and undivided attention so things don't get boring.

In all walks of life, the highest form of mastery is in valuing each repetition and finding the novelty and excitement in it.

It's not redundant for the Torah to say each time that people did the right thing in the right way for the right reason. It is ubiquitous because it reflects a truism of life, a constant reminder that is universally true.

The way you do things matters.

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### Quote of the Week

“The source of wisdom is pain.”

– Naval Ravikant

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### Thought of the Week

“Man is fond of counting his troubles, but he does not count his joys. If he counted them up as he ought to, he would see that every lot has enough happiness provided for it.”

– Fyodor Dostoyevsky

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*I present TorahRedux 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](mailto:Neli@TorahRedux.com).*

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

Neli



## TorahRedux

*PS - TorahRedux is my pride and joy, the product of thousands of hours of learning, research, writing, editing, and formatting. I have a niche business that allows me to spend substantial time on TorahRedux, and I welcome your assistance in furthering my goal to keep publishing quality content that matters. I help NY home care companies implement compliant Wage Parity plans that enhance recruitment and retention; whether or not that was comprehensible, if you know anyone in the New York home care field, please introduce me!*

*PPS - Several of my home health clients are hiring at all levels from entry-level to management. Please send me a resume and a one-line explanation of what kind of role would be the best fit and I'll make some introductions.*

**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.