

Va'eschanan 2023

Humility Redux

2 minute read | Straightforward

We take for granted that humility is an admirable virtue, but it's worth taking a moment to consider what humility is and also what it is not.

Humility is commonly understood to mean a low estimate of oneself and one's accomplishments. The Oxford English Dictionary defines humility as "the quality of being humble: having a low estimate of one's importance, worthiness, or merits."

But this doesn't ring true with what Judaism teaches us about the value of humility.

The Midrash famously teaches that Mount Sinai was only a little mountain to show how instrumental humility is.

But suppose the educational purpose of giving the Torah in such a place is to illustrate the value of humility. In that case, you'd assume a valley would be a more appropriate geological feature to teach the lesson!

So why give the Torah on a mountain at all?

The Shem Mi'Shmuel states that to accept the Torah and live its ideals, you must be like a mountain, not a valley; or as Pirkei Avos puts it, if I don't stand up for myself, what am I?

As important as the quality of humility is, people who accept the Torah upon themselves must consider themselves important and deserving of the Torah.

R' Jonathan Sacks teaches that humility is an appreciation of our talents, skills, and virtues. It is not meekness or self-deprecating thought but the dedication of oneself to something higher.

R' Shlomo Farhi notes that the Torah labels Moshe as the most humble of all men. If humility is simply a low view of oneself, then Moshe, the Lawgiver and single most significant authority on the Torah, would meekly cave to any challenge – which he obviously couldn't and didn't. But if humility is about being of service, then Moshe truly was the most humble of all men – Moshe singularly dedicated his entire life to public service. His achievements were never about him or his status; they were all in furtherance of rescuing and building the Jewish people.



It was no lack of humility for Moshe to acknowledge his authority and leadership. When a person believes they are nothing, the Torah itself will ultimately have little effect in elevating him. Although pride is a dangerous vice in large quantities, a small amount is still essential to living a good life.

Pride is about competing – that you are more intelligent than or richer than others; humility is about serving. Humility isn't the opposite of narcissism and hubris; it's the lack of them. In the absence of pride, you find humility, which sees no need for competition.

So perhaps humility is not that you are nothing; it's just that it's not about you anymore. In humility, you are no more and no less than other people. Humility is not about hiding away, becoming a wallflower or a doormat; it is about the realization that your abilities and actions are uncorrelated to others.

Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.

You are Worthy

3 minute read | Straightforward

The Exodus is an orienting event for the Jewish People, a founding moment in our history, with a daily duty to recall it. It's the first thing God has to say to humans at Sinai; God introduces Himself as the God who took us out of Egypt.

Remembering the Exodus is a perpetual mitzvah, and an astounding amount of our daily blessings, mitzvos, and prayers commemorate the Exodus – זָכַר לִיציאת מִצְרַיִם. It is ubiquitous to the extent we could miss the point entirely.

What do we mean when we say that we remember that God took the Jews out of Egypt?

It is essential to understand first principles because they are the foundational concepts that govern the systems built upon them.

If we unpack the story, the Jews in Egypt didn't deserve to be saved because they were so great or unique; they were quite the opposite. And that's the point we need to remember.

The Zohar imagines the angels arguing whether or not God should save the Jews, and the argument was that “this lot are just a bunch of idol-worshippers, and so are those!” The Haggadah admits as much – מִתְחַלְלֵה עֹבְדֵי עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה הֵייוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ –



When Moshe told the Jews to set aside and take one sheep per family, the Midrash says that “set aside” meant setting aside their idols before taking the sheep for the mitzvah!

Even when Moshe, already well on his way to greatness, intervened to protect Yisro’s daughters from bullies, onlookers mistook him for some random Egyptian!

The Midrash famously states that the enslaved Jews retained their names, clothing, and language. This is frequently – and mistakenly – framed as a point of pride when it seems the point is that apart from these narrow and limited practices, they were indistinguishable from Egyptians in every other conceivable way!

Moreover, the generation that left Egypt and stood at Sinai fought Moshe for the rest of their lives, begging to return to Egypt, and was ultimately doomed to wander and die in the wilderness.

The Zohar goes so far as to say that the Jews were on the 49th level of spiritual malaise, just one notch off rock bottom, the point of no return. Rav Kook notes that this adds a particular dimension to the imagery of God’s mighty and outstretched arm – it was a forceful intervention, an emergency rescue of a nation that had stumbled and was about fall off a cliff – בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֶרַע נְטוּיָה.

As R’ Shlomo Farhi explains, whenever God is characterized with strength, it indicates God is doing something undeserved. God does not require more power to move a grape than a galaxy, but God can force compassion to overwhelm what justice requires – גּוֹאֵל וְחַזֵּק אֶתֶּה.

That is to say that on a fundamental level, the Jews didn’t deserve rescuing at all.

And yet crucially, as R’ Chaim Kanievsky notes, God responded to their cries all the same – וְנִצַּעַק אֶל־יְהוָה – אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, וַיִּשְׁמַע ה’ אֶת־קִלְנוּ.

The Divrei Chaim notes that the very first Commandment is no command at all; God “introduces” himself as the God who took us out of Egypt – אֲנֹכִי ה’ אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים. It’s not a command but a simple statement of fact. We might not deserve redemption, yet God redeems us all the same.

R’ Tzadok haKohen writes that to remember Egypt is to remember God’s first declarative sentence; God rescues people from Egypt, whatever they have done and whoever they have become. Our God initiates the great Exodus before the Jewish People ever take a single step of their own to be better – אֲנֹכִי ה’ אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים.

The Ropshitzer quipped that תְּחִלָּה לְמִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ זָכַר לִיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם – the first step towards holiness is remembering that the same Exodus that rescued people from the abyss once before could be just a moment away.



So when we remind ourselves about Egypt, it's not just that it happened once, but that, as the Lubavitcher Rebbe put it, God's redemption is not contingent on our worthiness. As the Kozhnutzer Maggid reminds us, the Creator chooses us at our worst – *מִתְחַלֵּה עוֹבְדֵי עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה הָיוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ* –

Take this lesson to heart; it's one of the vanishingly few that the Torah specifically asks us to remember at all times – *לִמְעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת־יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ*.

And it's clear why.

You don't need to remember the simple historical events of the Exodus; you must remind yourself that every single last human is worthy of God's unconditional love.

Slept In At Sinai

3 minute read | Straightforward

Have you ever overslept for something important?

That early morning wakeup for the final exam, to catch a flight to the long-awaited vacation or the big wedding day.

For most people, it's pretty hard to oversleep the morning of anything important; it's hard to get any sleep on the eve of such anticipated moments. The anxiety that keeps you up is the same anxiety that gets you straight out of bed.

And yet, our sages teach us that that's precisely what happened to the Jewish People camped at the foot of Mount Sinai; they had been eagerly awaiting Moshe's return with the Ten Commandments, the culminating moment of Creation, and they overslept.

This anecdote is one of the sources of the treasured custom of staying up the night of Shavuot immersed in Torah study. When the Creator offers you a piece of eternity, so the thinking goes, who really needs to sleep? If you knew tomorrow was the second coming of the Creator or Moshiach, you wouldn't be getting any sleep. And yet, the Jewish People and humanity's spiritual awakening starts with a snooze.

Let's remember that in this multitude of millions of men, women, and children who overslept is the litany of greats and sages who appear in the Torah. Miriam, Elazar, Itamar, Nadav, Avihu, Pinchas, Caleb, the tribal chiefs, and the sages.



How did everyone oversleep?

The Arugas HaBosem suggests that our intuition that such a thing doesn't happen naturally is correct; it was a supernatural slumber, the kind the Creator sets on the first man – וַיִּפֹּל ה' אֱלֹהִים תְּרִדְמָה עַל־הָאָדָם – וַיִּישָׁן.

R' Meilech Biderman teaches that the Creator deliberately establishes the archetype of Torah at Sinai precisely this way, establishing for all generations that you can be late, tired, and still half asleep, but still be invited and expected to attend Mount Sinai.

You might think you're not ready, you might truly be unready, but readiness isn't a requirement.

But their unreadiness wasn't simply an internal function of tiredness or lack of preparation. When they woke and showed up at the foot of the mountain, they encountered an external environment shrouded in darkness and fog – עֲרָפֶל / עָנָן / חֹשֶׁךְ.

The darkness and fog over Sinai are the uncertainty, mystery, and awe that often accompany profound spiritual experiences, but the Chiddushei HaRim highlights how this is not just a possible feature of our spiritual experience or an obstacle to overcome; it is an integral feature and part of the essential nature of the work we are called to do. The mountain was obscured in the way the path of our spiritual journey is often obscured. But they showed up just the same.

In a world where it's all too easy to feel distant or disconnected from our heritage, our spirituality, or even from each other, the act of showing up can be a profound statement of commitment and engagement. The Jewish people overslept, but they still showed up to receive the Torah. They were there, ready to engage and participate, even if they were not perfectly prepared. We, too, can show up and engage with our spirituality, even in the face of uncertainty and mystery.

The people showed up despite oversleeping, and when they did, the mountain was obscured. Both teachings reject the notion of being perfectly prepared or fully awake to engage. They suggest that the act of engagement itself, of showing up, is valuable and meaningful, even if we are not perfectly prepared.

Uncertainty and mystery are often part of our spiritual journeys. We may not always feel fully prepared or awake. We may feel unsure, lost, tired, or even afraid. But the act of showing up, of being present and ready to engage, is the first and most important step towards connection, meaning, and growth.

And it's enough.

You might be late to the party, but you're still invited.



Taking God's Name in Vain

3 minute read | Straightforward

One of the Ten Commandments is the commandment against taking God's name lightly:

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹן כִּי לֹא יִנְקֶה ה' אֶת אֲשֶׁר־יִשָּׂא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ לְשׁוֹן – Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold guiltless the one that takes His name in vain. (20:7)

This law encourages people to treat God's name with reverence and respect, affirming that abusing God's name shows a lack of humility and gratitude and is a way of disdain the Creator's power and authority. Practically speaking, observant Jews today do not pronounce God's name as written and are careful in treating any document containing God's written name, using substitutes instead, like Creator, Hashem, Lord, or God.

But what does it mean to take God's name in vain?

Some people believe it to mean cursing. Others think it means casually swearing, like “I swear to God” or “God damn it.” Refraining from coarse and foul language is a good idea and a worthy struggle, but that doesn't capture the essence of this law.

To be sure, swearing, in the old-fashioned sense, is partly covered. In any matter of doubt, a person would hold a religious article and swear in God's name; the willingness to take an oath in God's name with the implied invitation of punishment if the oath-taker was lying is taken to support the truth of the statement being sworn to.

But this is not the commandment against false oaths – that's the Tenth Commandment.

To do something in vain is to do something without success or result; Rashi narrowly suggests that this law is about a pointless invocation of God's name, like swearing that the sky is blue. Everyone knows that – that would be taking God's name in vain.

The Ohr HaChaim suggests a broader and more profound meaning to this law. The verb of the mitzvah means to carry or to bear; the prohibition is on bearing God's name lightly, carrying it with you in deception. It means falsely invoking God to advance your own self-interest, being false with God or others in God's name, or in other words, holding yourself out as more pious and righteous than you are.



On Rosh Hashana, we read the story of Chana. Chana was married to a righteous man named Elkanah, who had another wife, Penina. Penina had children, and Chana did not. When it was time to bring a sacrifice in the Sanctuary, the whole family went to Shilo and enjoyed the festivities. Penina teased Chana about where her children were, and Chana cried and refused to eat. When Elkanah saw her crying, he tried to comfort her, but Chana would not be comforted. She went to the courtyard, silently poured out her heart in prayer, and was soon blessed with a son, the legendary prophet Shmuel.

We read this story in part because it illustrates the power of prayer, but it also illustrates something else.

Penina's behavior is striking in its shocking cruelty. Her only saving grace is that she had the best intentions, which is that she wanted to push Chana to the point that she'd pray and be answered. And the story bears this out – Penina is indeed the catalyst.

The Kotzker highlights how her behavior was so monstrously evil that it could only have been for the highest and most sacred purpose, or, in other words, bearing God's name in vain.

R' Jonathan Sacks notes how much religious extremism and violence are committed in the name of God. As the Dudaei Reuven notes, all the most terrible crimes against humanity are carried out under the cloak of truth, justice, and uprightness.

If only it were as easy as substituting an “Oh my goodness” for an “Oh my God.”

Whenever a calamity happens, the proper thing to do is introspect and repent. But there's always going to be a clown who says it's because of this or that; talking in shul, hair coverings, knee coverings, the gays, or whatnot. Next time you notice, note how they deceptively invoke God's name to establish an in-group and out-group dynamic, virtue signal, and manipulate people to advance their agenda and control others – all with the best intentions.

Don't tell a grieving family that it's part of God's plan. Do not say or do awful things to others and claim it's God's will or what God wants. That's using God's name in vain.

Taking God's name seriously demands that we audit and introspect ourselves for self-righteousness and any sense of self-serving holier-than-thou superiority. It is complex and requires us to live intentionally with decency, humility, and honesty toward others and ourselves.



Love's Truest Language

3 minute read | Straightforward

When we think of Mount Sinai, we think of Divine Revelation and all that it means. But apart from the obvious upheaval in spiritual terms, the Torah also describes a great upheaval in physical terms.

In Tanach, whenever there is a theophany, some manifestation of the divine in a tangible, observable way, there is an upending of the natural order. Moshe saw a burning bush that wasn't consumed; the Jews were led through the desert by pillars of fiery clouds. Sinai itself is characterized by fire from the sky, along with loud booms, thunder, and lightning, and the whole mountain quaked, enveloped in a haze of dark clouds and smoke. Our Sages even suggest that when people heard God's Word emerge from the darkness, they died for an instant.

This imagery demonstrates the absolute abnegation of the natural world, and rightly so!

Arguably, the ultimate purpose behind creation was to cultivate a conduit that could receive the Torah; all of existence culminated at that moment at Sinai, and creation achieved its intended goal when God reached into the universe to give the Torah to humanity, forming an intimate bond between Creator and creation. It follows that the imagery is stark and unnatural; this is the most extraordinary and supernatural event in human experience!

But there's one part that doesn't fit at all.

Among all the intimidating and scary goings-on, something else happened at Mount Sinai too. The little mountain in the desert burst into bloom, with beautiful plants and fragrant flowers sprawling up the hills and into the cloud, so tantalizing that the Jews had to be instructed to restrain their animals from grazing the lush greenery!

But why were there flowers on Mount Sinai at all?

R' Shlomo Farhi explains that the flowers demonstrate something that darkness, earthquakes, fire, thunder, and lightning do not. Those things demonstrate God's power, but flowers illustrate God's love.

There is another famous mountain in our tradition, Mount Moriah, where Avraham and Yitzchak famously stood together, the mountain on which the two Temples stood and where a third will stand once more. This famous mountain was also associated with flowers; the Zohar suggests that the mountain was named Moriah after the fragrant myrrh that grew there.



The legendary mountain is not named for the heroic acts and great deeds that took place there; it's not the Mountain of the Akeida, the Mountain of Commitment and Faith, or the Mountain of Sacrifice. It's named for the sweet-smelling plants that grew there!

There is an entire genre of romance that hugely impacts how many of us conceptualize love and relationships; a grand gesture is usually the crescendo of a great love story. Yet, as R' Shlomo Farhi teaches, a grand gesture or great sacrifice cannot define a relationship because it is only ever an anomaly.

Over time, love is communicated through many little things, not any particular one-time thing. What defines the quality of a relationship isn't the great deeds here and there; it's the small gestures, the consistent, subtle, and thoughtful acts that shape how a couple connects and interacts. These small gestures send powerful signals about who we are, what we care about, and why we do what we do.

It's called Mount Moriah because God wanted it to smell nice for all the great heroes and future pilgrims who would one day make their way there. It was wholly unnecessary, completely irrelevant, and entirely beside the main point of anything of consequence, but that's why it matters so much. The great epic of Avraham's ordeal is not impacted even slightly by the fact that God made it smell nice, but God did it anyway.

The flowers on the mountains are the most trivial detail, with nothing whatsoever to do with the tremendous meaning and significance of the events that took place at Sinai or Moriah. Still, those flowers say more than any commotion, and that's the part that we remember. To this day, when we celebrate the Torah we got at Sinai, we don't commemorate the darkness by turning out the lights or the earthquakes by shaking the tables; Shavuot is the festival of flowers! For centuries, it has been a near-universal custom to decorate our homes and shul with beautiful flower arrangements.

An employee will give you whatever you ask for, but a lover will give you everything they can. It's not about doing what you need to do; it's about doing all you can. That slight change in orientation elevates small and insignificant gestures into the most meaningful and loving relationship-affirming rituals.

Are you giving all you can to the ones you love?



Unanswered Prayers

4 minute read | Straightforward

Have you ever wanted something so badly that you just kept praying and didn't stop?

Most people have had a time they desperately wanted something, that if they got it, they'd never ask for anything again; to resolve the issue, find the right one, make a recovery, for the thing to work out okay. People pray hard in those moments, with more intention and hope than all the other times the stakes aren't so high.

Sometimes those prayers are fulfilled, and the perfect outcome materializes. There are countless books filled with such stories, and their popularity is a product of how inspiring they are and how they supply us with hope to not give up on our own dreams and wishes.

But what about all the other times when the hoped-for outcome doesn't happen?

No one writes those books; no one would read those books. But it happens all the time.

It even happens to the best and brightest of us, to no less than Moshe himself. In his parting words to his people, he tells them how he prayed and prayed for God's permission to enter the Land of Israel, the culmination of his life's work and the only personal indulgence he ever asked for, but God bid him to stop. It wasn't going to happen, and his prayers would remain unanswered; or at least answered in the negative, if that makes any difference.

Prayer isn't a wish fulfillment scratch card game; unanswered prayers are a corresponding aspect of prayer that we must acknowledge, that some of them probably aren't going to go exactly the way you'd like. For our intents and purposes, some prayers go to waste.

The Izhbitzer notes that all existence is wasteful. Entropy is part of all existence and our basic reality; the appearance of decay, randomness, uncertainty, and unwanted outcomes or outputs. Every interaction might have a desired or likely end goal or output, but there will be an inescapable by-product associated with it. Friction is a result of existing, where all effort takes a toll, the transaction tax of all things. In this conception, the Izhbitzer teaches, waste is not a bug; it's a feature we need to reorient ourselves to.

Fruit and nuts have peels and shells, which we consider waste in terms of our goal of what's edible; yet they're fully functional in fulfilling their natural purpose of protecting the fruit. In reality, they are not waste matter in any real sense of the word; Parenthetically, this example deliberately utilizes the imagery of the shells and husks spoken of in Kabbalah – קליפה.



reason, we pray on Rosh Hashana to be like heads, not tails. Memory and identity can be burdens from the past; you can live perpetually as yesterday's tail and never live freely in the present.

R' Shlomo Farhi teaches that there are places, people, and things that come into our lives and shape us for better and for worse; you can only move forward from the place and person you used to be. Those hard-won lessons are precious and something to be thankful for; uplifting of ashes. Be thankful, and let them go gently, so you don't get stuck; disposal of ashes. Hold on to the things that deserve to be held on to, but hold on out of a renewed commitment to today and tomorrow – not because of inherited commitments from the past.

The thing you prayed for might have been the right thing to pray for yesterday, but today's service calls for a fresh start or at least a fresh analysis.

We must cherish and honor our past hopes and dreams but ultimately let go and release them to face each day anew.

Killing Envy

5 minute read | Straightforward

If you had to sit in a room for a month and compile a top ten list of Judaism's most important concepts, most people would probably come out with something that looks like the Ten Commandments.

We'd probably start with the notion that there is a Creator and not to betray faith in the Creator by taking God's name lightly or praying to other deities. We'd all agree that humans should not kill other humans. Most of us would agree on the importance of observing Shabbos, which honors the Creator and the natural order of Creation, acknowledging the bounds of human creativity in space and time. We'd probably agree on the value of respecting our parents and honoring the people who raised us.

These laws are intuitive; they make sense – we understand why these are some of the most essential things the Creator has to say to humans.

But then there's one that probably wouldn't spring to mind for most people:

וְלֹא תִחְמַד אִשְׁתׁ רֵעִי. וְלֹא תִחְאַנֶּה בַּיִת רֵעִי שְׂדֵהוּ וְעַבְדוֹ וְאִמָּתוֹ שׂוֹרוֹ וְחִמְרוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעִי – You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not crave your neighbor's house, or his field, or his male or female slave, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's. (5:18)



Coveting. Envy. Jealousy. Wanting.

Is warning us off jealousy one of the most important things God has to say to humanity?

It's on the list, so we can conclude that the answer to that question is yes, and that we ought to consider why.

The destructiveness of murder and theft are obvious, as they utterly disregard the autonomy and integrity of other humans and their rights to life and property. But the destructiveness of envy and jealousy are deceptively subtle in comparison because it seems so harmless. It's a victimless crime – who are you hurting?

Perhaps it's precisely that line of thinking that allows it to slip under our radars stealthily, and we should be concerned because, in reality, there is a victim of jealousy, and you haven't noticed because it isn't someone else – it's you.

Envy suffocates you and slowly poisons your soul. Anger and hatred are occasionally justified – some things should not be tolerated and require our outrage to prompt decisive action. We should hate Nazis, and we should get angry when they march in public and express their ugliness; we then need to send them scurrying back to the dark crevasses they crawled out of.

Our Sages allow a very narrow form of jealousy towards someone highly accomplished. But even then, our Sages only permit a positive and productive form of action-oriented jealousy, where you use it as fuel to motivate you to raise your game and match their efforts. Are those excellent qualities replicable? Practice them, and you, too, can have those qualities. The unspoken premise here is that our Sages take it as a given that you cannot expect to be worthy of an equal opportunity to participate in the accomplishment without putting in the same effort that someone else did. This conception does not allow for armchair envy and everyday jealousy; you cannot expect to achieve your targets without paying your dues and putting in the work.

On the other hand, simple jealousy is the ultimate manifestation of entitlement, laziness, and a scarcity mindset – that there's not enough of something to go around, so if others have it, it means you can't. It's a mentality that creates a landscape of fear, and the world descends into a cutthroat competition of survival of the fittest, a vile manifestation of social Darwinism. It might be the nastiest emotion we can have!

But unless we're invoking envy to do better, it isn't just a dangerous sin; it's a stupid sin as well because it's one of the only ones you could never possibly enjoy. It's a severe hidden drawback to how we live today, with unlimited information at our fingertips, stoking feelings of inadequacy and jealousy by comparing what we have with the thin slice we see of other people's lives. All pain, no gain, and yet we wonder what the harm is!



You pass the test but compare yourself to the best student in class, without knowing they haven't met their friends for six months. You work long and difficult hours and compare yourself to the guy in the neighborhood who just made a fortune without knowing that his firm is under investigation and he is in serious jeopardy. You marry a complete human with flaws but compare them to people on social media in the top 1% of looks, smarts, or wealth without seeing their multiple flaws. You buy a house and discover issues but compare it to the nicest house on the block without knowing that the foundation is weak and needs to be torn down. Does any of this sound uncomfortably familiar?

So sure, maybe we know that envy is terrible, but you can't just change the way you feel, so what can we do, practically speaking?

Firstly, let's read the words.

“Do not kill” and “Do not steal” are simple two-word instructions, and we understand that we are to apply them broadly and generally. Unlike those and several others, envy, the one that doesn't spring to mind as quickly, is spelled out in explicit detail, with seven specific hypotheticals before the general rule.

Maybe it would be too hard to prohibit jealousy because we can't just stop feeling the way we feel. But God doesn't just tell us not to be jealous – God tells us how to avoid it entirely. Don't be jealous of this in particular; don't be jealous of that – וְהִמְרוּ / שוֹרֵר / וְאַמְתּוֹ / וְעַבְדּוֹ / שְׂדֵדוֹ / בֵּית רֵעֵךְ – you can't cherry-pick certain aspects of someone else's life. To have what they have, you'd have to be them, so, as the Sfas Emes notes, if you are going to be jealous of someone, you must be willing to swap your entire life for theirs – וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֵךְ.

Or in other words, if you're seeing someone's highlight reel, remember that you can't correctly judge the whole by a part.

But secondly, and more fundamentally, we need to reorganize how we see the world and remind ourselves that God's blessings are not finite. There isn't a fixed amount of happiness, health, love, or money in the world, so it's not a zero-sum game. Someone else's good fortune cannot subtract from yours and cannot diminish the pool of blessings available to you in the future. His is his – אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֵךְ – and yours is yours, and we need to respect that boundary down to the smallest detail scrupulously. God's blessings are abundant, not scarce. The Ibn Ezra suggests that the practice of this law requires that you refine yourself to have no interest in what is not meant for you.

As our Sages guided us, who is wealthy? One who celebrates and takes joy in what he has – אֵיזֶהוּ עָשִׂיר, הַשְּׂמֵחַ בְּתִלְקוֹ. One interpretation even inverts the plain reading, from celebrating what you have to celebrating what he has – בְּתִלְקוֹ. We should take this sage wisdom to heart, kill the scarcity mindset, and cultivate an abundance mentality. Someone else's prosperity and success don't make your own any less likely, so be happy when someone else wins because yours is no further away.



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So perhaps warning us against envy is one of the most important things God has to say to us; it might be the sin with the highest destructiveness to innocence ratio. It withholds you from your highest consciousness and prevents you from being you in all your fullness; it stops you from being happy and limits your ability to embrace your blessings.

So don't look at your neighbor to see if you have as much as them; the only time you should look at what your neighbor has is to ensure they have enough.

No person has the power to have everything they want, but it is within everyone's power not to want what they don't have and to cheerfully put what they do have to good use.

While you can't have everything you want, it's such a blessing to want what you have.

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.

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

Neli

PS - *TorahRedux is my pride and joy, the product of thousands of hours of learning, research, writing, editing, and formatting. My business, Hendon Advisors, allows me to dedicate time to TorahRedux, and I welcome your assistance in furthering my goal to keep publishing high-quality Parsha content that makes a difference. I source and broker the purchase and sale of healthcare businesses; I kindly ask for your blessings and prayers. If you are a buyer of healthcare businesses or can make introductions to healthcare operators who might buy or sell, just reply to this email to get in touch.*

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.