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component, and never for the commemorative anniversary aspect of Sinai; because the date that humans receive the Torah is specifically not located in the past – it's forever in the here and now. Quite arguably, it's more correct to say that Sinai was a thing that happened, but it's what we do with it now that is the main event.

So sure, Shavuot is just an anniversary; but Sefira is the effort we invest in the lead-up. If we think that Torah is something that just happens to us with no investment of effort or desire, we have fundamentally missed the nature of what the Torah asks of us. We have to search for it, desire it, and labor for it to become a part of us. It does not happen by kicking back to listen to a nice class or reading a good book.

If we believe that the Torah is ultimate wisdom, the handbook for making humans more human, the guide to living a good life, how badly do we want it? How lost are we without it? We know all too well how blind and stupid we can be, hurting ourselves and each other needlessly over the silliest nonsense. The Torah asks everything of us, yet returns everything richer and fuller. If we take it seriously, we can curb our worst excesses, draw out our finest qualities, honing and refining our character and personalities into the brightest fires that warm and light the lives of everyone we touch. But it's not the calendar date that anchors and orients us; because nothing happens; it's just Tuesday! It's our countdown that makes all the difference.

The sad reality is that even the best of us believe that just learning Torah improves our character by osmosis, but most of us know from lived experience that it doesn't; you actually have to put in the effort.

Count Me In

4 minute read | Straightforward

A fair amount of times, the Torah reports that the Jewish People conducted a census, breaking down how many men were in each tribe, and then adds up the subtotals for a total count. It occupies a lot of space in the Torah.

The Ramban explains that taking a census is a basic government function to organize logistics, safety, and military planning.

While that is accurate, the Torah's lessons are timeless and eternal. Of what value to us is the level of detail in the raw statistical data from each census?

The Ramban explains that the information itself is more relevant to daily government, which is probably why it only covered military-age men. But the lesson isn't in the data; it's in the method of counting.



The way they counted was that every individual would have to appear before Moshe and Ahron, and God. The requirement to appear before the entire generation's leadership tells us that those people were not just numbers; they were valuable individuals.

There is a constant interplay between individualism and collectivism. Individualism stresses individual identity and goals; collectivism focuses on group identity and goals, what is best for the collective group. The notion of collectivism and unity – אֶקְדוּת – is all too often propounded to squash individuality, and we mustn't tolerate that. You are not just a cog in a machine, with another human being at the ready to take your place. You are not the property of the state or any group or person.

And as the Lubavitcher Rebbe put it, people are not dollars. You are not fungible. You are not replaceable.

R' Jonathan Sacks highlights the Torah's choice of words for the count – שָׂאוּ אֶת־רֵאשׁ כָּל־עֵדוּת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל / כִּי – תִשָּׂא אֶת־רֵאשׁ בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל – literally, “lift the heads.” There are many ways to say “count” in Hebrew; this isn't one of the naturally obvious ones. Again, the Torah seems to be saying that even among the crowd, lift your head up high and proud. To this day, Jews do not count people directly, but instead, count heads.

There is a beautiful and uncommon blessing we say upon seeing a crowd of multitudes – חַכְמֵי הַרְזִים – the knower of secrets, which the Gemara explains as acknowledging God's greatness in knowing each of us in our individual hearts, despite our different faces and minds. This is a subtle but vital point – God is great not because of the glory and sheer size of the crowd, but because God can see each of us as distinct within the sea of all too forgettable faces; God can see the individual within the collective.

It is a blessing in praise of the God who creates diversity in our world, rejoicing in our different minds, opinions, and thoughts. It is a blessing over Jewish pluralism. It is one thing to tolerate our differences; it is quite another to acknowledge them as a blessing. It is one thing to love Jews because we are all Jewish, that is, the same; it is quite another to love Jews because they are different from ourselves.

We cannot tolerate factionalism, where one subgroup splinters from the main group, but we cannot afford to exclude individuals. The Torah makes incredible demands of us, and we mostly fall well short, some a little more, some a little less. We must hold ourselves to the highest standards, but we can never look down at our fellow.

To argue the other side, while we must celebrate individuality, we must not condone individualism. Our duty is to find a balance between being individuals while remaining part of the group. We need to maintain a tension between the need for individual freedom and the demands of others.

The whole idea of loving others is that they are not just like you; if you had to love people like you, that would just be loving yourself and would demand nothing of you. We must reinforce the notion of tolerance of heterogeneity, people not just like us.



Loving another is not that I care about someone in my circle who is just like me, and perhaps I have a duty to expand my conception of who is in the circle. That would be loving yourself and would demand nothing of you. Loving another means that someone else's problems bother me so deeply that I simply have to do something about it, and I will be lacking if I do not. The idea of loving another does not include circles – it has nothing to do with people's similarity.

Evolutionary theory teaches that co-operation is as important for survival as competition. You're irreplaceable and unique – but remember that we need you! The strength of the team is each individual. The strength of each individual is the team.

The idea that every Jew is worthy enough to be presented before God and the generation's leadership, that every Jew must lift their head high, is timeless and eternal. Moreover, it teaches a broader lesson that is portable to all and covers women, children, and the elderly as well. The Jewish People are something massively monumental, yet we each have our own significant role to play. We must celebrate each other's unique contributions while striving to do more ourselves.

This probably illuminates an interesting comment by Rashi, that the point of the census was to discern how many people had survived the plague that followed the Golden Calf debacle. The plague killed a small fraction of the total population figure given in the Torah, so it's strange to talk in terms of "survivors" when only a few succumbed. But if we consider each individual as a core component of the Jewish People, then the Jewish People as a whole really is damaged by the loss of any single person, and the remainder truly are "survivors".

The Baal Shem Tov taught that if the Jewish People are a Sefer Torah, then every Jew is a letter.

The Torah counts everyone. Because everyone counts.

You can be the best whistler in the world, but you can't whistle a symphony. It takes an orchestra.

Flags and Formations

< 1 minute | Straightforward

Wherever the Jewish People camped and traveled in the wilderness, the tribes were always positioned in a particular formation, which the Torah goes into lengthy detail about several times.

But we're one people! Why are there tribes, and why was there any kind of formation; and more importantly, what are we supposed to make of the specific logistics millennia after the fact?



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R' Norman Lamm notes that we read about the formations before Shavuot when we celebrate receiving the Torah. We might think that we're doing pretty great – we're in the camp of Torah after all!

The Torah gently reminds us that that's never been enough. The twelve tribes all had different characteristics, and each contributed in its own particular way. For example, Yehuda, the largest and strongest, tapped for leadership and monarchy, was the first in the formation and the first into battle.

We all have particular skills and functions useful at a particular time and place. It's not enough to be Torah-oriented in general – what is your individual place and purpose in particular? What do you stand for?

We need only remind ourselves of Bilam, a man whose belief in God's existence was as genuine and absolute as it gets and yet, remained an awful human.

Believing is step one only. The formations matter because we need a reminder that we can't hide in the crowd.

It's what we do that matters.

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 if the educational purpose of giving the Torah in such a place is to illustrate the value of humility, then 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?



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The Shem M'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.

Rabbi Lord 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.

Rabbi 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 greatest 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 own authority and leadership. When a person believes they are nothing, then ultimately, the Torah itself will have little effect in elevating him. Although pride is a dangerous vice in large quantities, a small amount is still an essential ingredient to living a good life.

Pride is about competing – that you are smarter than or richer than; 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 not better or less. They simply are.

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

A Legendary Relationship

2 minute read | Straightforward

Midrashim are cryptic and often misunderstood. They are metaphors, literary devices that encode perspectives on how Chazal understood stories in the Torah.

One popular Midrash teaches that before Creation, God approached every nation and offered them the Torah. Every nation responded to the offer with an inquiry into what they were signing up for and



declined the Torah for one reason or another until God offered it to the Jewish People, who accept without reservation.

What is this Midrash about?

The Midrash is probably not talking about some sort of metaphysical racial superiority, or that Jews aren't afraid of sin. We can speculate which answer might have turned them off if they had only asked; perhaps the response might have been about business ethics or gossip, and they'd decline the Torah just the same as anyone else!

R' Chaim Brown explains that the Midrash is about something else entirely – relationships.

If you get a call from an unknown number, and the caller claims he has the deal of a lifetime for you, but you just need to send all the money right now, you'd have a lot of questions to ask. Healthy natural skepticism should give rise to lots of sensible questions, like, who are you? How did you get my number? What's the deal? And crucially, what are the terms?

Before you agree to anything, it is absolutely reasonable to ask what you're getting yourself into. If you are used to accepting the Terms and Conditions without reading and signing anything with no review, you really shouldn't!

So the Midrash probably isn't speaking about a defect in the nations who ask the question; the question is eminently fair and reasonable – “what will this Torah require of me?”

But now, what if it's not an unknown caller; consider that it's your parent, sibling, or favorite cousin on the phone. They are launching a new venture imminently, but you can join too if you send the money right away.

Sure, there are risks – and you shouldn't make any financial decisions this way! – but in the context of the love and trust of a close relationship, you don't have the same kind of questions, and your natural skepticism is muted.

That's what the Midrash is about.

When it's our Father in Heaven offering us the deal, all the obligations are worthwhile to be in business together.



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 cloud. 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 cloud 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 purpose 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, there was something else that 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 actually 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 all 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!



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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 a multitude of 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 big 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, nor 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.

A waiter will give you whatever you asked 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 could do. That slight change in orientation elevates small and insignificant gestures into the most meaningful and loving relationship-affirming rituals.

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

Holding Us Over a Barrel

4 minute read | Straightforward

The moment God gave the Torah at Sinai is probably the most important in the Torah. It might be the most important moment in the history of creation. To take it even further, cultivating a channel to receive the Torah might even be the reason for existence itself.

Given the significance of this moment, it should come as no surprise that the Midrashic literature likens Sinai to a wedding ceremony and makes extensive use of the imagery of love and marriage,



demonstrating the powerful bond of commitment between God and the Jewish People, characterized by the all-important unanimous and unconditional acceptance of the Torah – **בְּעֵשָׂה וְנִשְׁמָע**.

However, there is another imagery our sages utilize. The Gemara imagines a scene where God lifts and holds Mount Sinai over the gathered crowd and tells them that if they accept the Torah, all will be well, and if not, they would meet an early grave there and then – **שִׁכְפָה הַקֶּב"ה עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת הַהָר כְּגִיגִית** –

This visual provides a stark contrast with the predominant and prevailing imagery that the Jewish People threw their enthusiastic consent behind accepting the Torah and its precepts. To engage the language of the metaphor, the bride loved the groom, and everything was agreed and resolved. Once the relationship had been firmly established on a bedrock of love and trust, the imagery of coercion and force seems entirely unnecessary, if not an outright oxymoron.

If the Jewish People were eager and willing to accept the Torah, why do our sages use the motif of coercive force at all?

The Baal Shem Tov acknowledges this idealized romantic view; the beginning of most relationships can be characterized by butterflies and excitement, feelings of elation and joy. But, as anyone who has experienced a mature relationship can attest, eventually, there comes a day that the good vibes and pleasant feelings aren't quite there; if the relationship is going to succeed, it needs more than good vibes alone – many relationships fail for not comprehending this notion in its fullness. A successful relationship requires its constituents to also maintain the relationship in the moments that don't feel so good.

The imagery of holding a mountain over the audience is not a literal death threat – the metaphor describes God imploring the audience that this is serious stuff. If that seems so obvious now, it wasn't readily obvious in the moment. Up to that point, being on God's team had been pretty cool and fun – they watched waves of supernatural plagues smite their oppressors; saw a literal ocean split and dry up to escape then obliterate the most powerful military force in the known world; ate magical food from the sky; drank from magic wellsprings in the desert; while protected day and night by miracle clouds that lit up the dark and followed them wherever they went. It's not so hard to guess which side you'd want to be on! But that's not really what accepting the yoke of Torah means or looks like in any material way, so God warns the people that this is a serious undertaking. As the Maharal explains, the Torah can not only be accepted for the glorious moments. It's like the unspoken part of a young couple getting married; no one really wants to tell them, and they probably aren't even equipped to hear it yet, but they have their work cut out to make it work, and it's a lifelong undertaking that will require an enormous amount of investment and sacrifice if they are to have a chance at happiness. They'll most probably learn that lesson for themselves eventually, the hard way.

It's not that the Gemara imagines God threatening to slaughter the Jewish People; it's a warning about what was at stake and how much it mattered. It's a comment on the naivete of thinking that the imagery of a happy wedding could ever be enough to make a relationship work. The happy beginning is an essential starting point of any relationship, but the relationship can only ever be superficial if



that's all there ever is. What the Torah demands from us is a serious commitment – the part that is not easy. It's not all sunshine, rainbows, and redemption – the blood-soaked pages of Jewish history speak for themselves.

R' Shlomo Farhi suggests that the Gemara specifically teaches this lesson by employing imagery of a barrel, a hollow object that confines and traps its contents instead of, say, a hammer or blunt instrument which would be used to flatten. The antidote to the immaturity of the excitement of happy beginnings is recognizing that there are times when commitment feels like being trapped. It's true of relationships, and it's true of religion. There's a moment we feel called and seen, and a moment we feel invisible and ignored; the things that can make it wonderful are part of what can make it so hard. There's no such thing as picking and choosing part of a person, or part of the Torah, for some of the time. It just doesn't work that way.

But while it's well and good to suggest the lesson of forceful imagery is to teach us the seriousness of the subject matter, it is almost universally understood that agreements entered into under coercion are not binding – we would never enforce a contract signed at gunpoint. Based on this intuitive reasoning, the Gemara questions the imagery of coercion and wonders if it compromises if not entirely undermines the basis of accepting the Torah – taking the imagery of the metaphor at face value, we wouldn't be partners with God; we'd be victims! The Gemara responds that to the extent this is a serious question, the Purim story remedied this, because the Jewish People accepted the Torah anew entirely of their own volition – קיימו מה שקיבלו כבר.

R' Jonathan Sacks observes that the Gemara concludes what we know intuitively – you cannot teach something that matters through coercion; you cannot impose truth by force. Even if God were to try, it simply doesn't work like that. We can only say that people accept ideas and beliefs to the extent people can freely choose and embrace them.

As important and exciting as the moment captured at Sinai was, the wedding is not the relationship. The people who stood there that day lacked context – the bigger picture that accepting the Torah fits into. After the Purim story, the people had learned that lesson the hard way. With this mature understanding, they could freely accept what had been accepted so long ago with newfound and hard-won insight.

A lack of problems cannot be the bedrock of a great relationship; it will only ever become great when its participants are invested enough to weather and work through difficult problems.

Killing Envy

5 minute read | Straightforward



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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 a lot like the Ten Commandments.

We'd probably start with the notion that there is One God, and not to betray faith in the One God by taking God's name lightly or directing attention towards 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 God and the natural order of Creation, acknowledging the bounds of human creativity in space and time. We'd probably agree on the importance of venerating our parents and honoring the people that raised us.

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

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

וְלֹא תִקְמֹד אִשְׁתּוֹ רֵעֶךָ. וְלֹא תִתְאָוֶה בֵּית רֵעֶךָ שְׂדֵהוּ וְעַבְדוֹ וְאִמָּתוֹ שׂוֹרוֹ וְחִמְרוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ – 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 really one of the most important things God has to say to humanity?

Well, apparently so. So let's take it seriously enough to consider why that might be.

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 actually allow a very narrow form of jealousy towards someone who is 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 good qualities replicable? Practice them, and you too can have those qualities. The unspoken corollary here



is that our Sages take it as a given that you cannot, without putting in the same effort that someone else did, expect to be worthy of an equal opportunity to participate in the accomplishment. 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, everyday 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 have any fun at. It's a serious hidden drawback to the way 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 that they haven't met their friends for six months. You work long and difficult hours and compare yourself to the guy in shul who just made an easy fortune, without knowing that his firm is being investigated 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 multitudes of flaws. You buy a house and discover issues but compare it to the nicest house on the block without knowing that the gorgeous-looking house has major deferred structural issues and actually needs a full gut renovation. 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 easily, 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 – וְחָמְרוּ / שׂוּרוּ / וְאַמְתּוּ / וְעַבְדּוּ / שְׂדֵהוּ / בֵּית רֵעֶךָ – 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 – וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ.



Or, in other words, if you're seeing someone's highlight reel, just 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 it 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.

As our Sages guided us, who is wealthy? One who celebrates and takes joy in what he has – אֵיזֶהוּ עָשִׂיר, הַשֵּׂמֵחַ בְּחַלְקוֹ. One interpretation even inverts the plain reading, from celebrating what you have, to celebrating what he has – בְּחַלְקוֹ. 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 gets a win because yours is no further away.

So perhaps warning us against envy really 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 make sure that 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 to good use what they do have.

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

Quote of the Week

“... but, in truth, thinking about God is already a prayer.”

– The Lubavitcher Rebbe

Thought the Week

“If you can't be happy with a coffee, you won't be happy with a yacht.”



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– Naval Ravikant, @naval

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.