

Lech Lecha 2023

The Covenant of Perfection

2 minute read | Straightforward

Covenants feature prominently in the Torah and Judaism. A covenant is the highest form of contractual agreement, a binding promise of far-reaching importance in the relations between parties, with legal, religious, and social ramifications.

In addition to the agreement itself, covenants typically have a physical and public display of the sign or symbol to remember the promise, such as how the Torah deems rainbows to signify God's promise not to flood the world again.

Judaism can directly trace its roots to God's covenant with Avraham, the first Patriarch, and the initiation into the religion for Jewish males is called the Bris, literally, "covenant."

As the exclusive rite of passage for formal admission into Judaism, it's hard to overstate the central importance of Bris, so it's worth understanding the covenant it invokes.

When God engaged Avraham to enter the covenant, God mapped out a vision for humanity, blessing Avraham's descendants with greatness and the land of Israel. They just had to do one thing:

וַיֵּרָא ה' אֶל-אַבְרָם, וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי-אֱלֹהֵי-שָׁמַיִם—הִתְהַלֵּךְ לְפָנַי, וְהָיָה תָמִים
"I am The Omnipotent.... Walk before me, and be perfect ". (17:1)

Like it's no big deal, the covenant requires us to be perfect. It doesn't take much trying before you quickly realize that perfection is impossible. While perfection is a worthy objective, it is an inherently unattainable one, and any who claim to have found it are deluding themselves.

How can God ask us to do the impossible?

The question betrays the kind of defeatist thinking we are all prone to at times. Perfectionism can be paralyzing – if we can't do it perfectly, then why try at all?

We should be very clear nothing and no one has ever been, currently is, nor will ever be perfect. Idealism can serve as a north star for direction, meaning, and purpose, but idealism alone is not an effective strategy for navigating day-to-day living, which necessitates some degree of flexibility and pragmatism.



We need to orient ourselves towards the process of perfecting, not the outcome of perfection, on the journey, not the destination. The Beis Halevi teaches that when we do our best, striving for better and more, we will find ourselves becoming more perfect over time – הַתְּהִלָּה לְפָנַי / וְהִיָּה תָמִים –

The Gemara teaches that the name Hashem introduced Himself with, אֵל שְׂדֵי, expresses the concept that the Creator withdrew from creating so that life had space to be and grow – שֶׁאֵמֵר לְעוֹלָמוֹ דִּי –

The Kedushas Levi notes that God forms this space for us to have any input by necessity because that input is precisely what God desires from us.

Rabbi Akiva taught that in the same way we consider a loaf of bread an improvement from raw stalks of wheat, humans can and must improve the world around us.

The Malbim explains that our active participation is the essential theme of the covenant. Circumcision is not just an extrinsic sign on our bodies; Judaism's initiation for men symbolizes the action we are called upon to take to enhance our world, a living articulation of the covenant itself.

The symbolism of modifying our bodies as soon as we are born is a powerful visual metaphor we carry with us, teaching us that our everyday lives can elevate, refine, and improve the world around us.

You will never be perfect.

But the perfect is the enemy of the good.

Things That Matter

3 minute read | Straightforward

When we learn the history of Avraham, the first and foremost archetype of the Jewish People and one of the most significant figures who ever lived, we might almost be underwhelmed.

He came to understand that the pagan idol worship of his world was silly and deduced that there must be one unifying force animating the Universe – the One God.

But what's so remarkable about deciding there is One God and not several?

Avraham's breakthrough wasn't the simple math of reducing multiple fractional deities into one whole god.



The story of Avraham is about how he acted on the consequences of his breakthrough determination; not only is there One God, but that God has demands and expectations of humans, and as a result, no longer do humans struggle with just their own conscience, but inhabit a universe of moral objectivism, where there is a pre-determined concept of what is considered good or bad, determined by higher forces, and that humans only discover it, not create it. Avraham understood that there are better and worse ways to live, and he understood the imperative to align his actions with what he intuited that the One God would want.

And he was right.

R' Yitzchak Berkovits cautions us against being so dismissive of idolatry. The problem with idol worship isn't that it's ideologically deficient, primitive, or stupid. It's that people could spend their lives focusing on the wrong things. So rather than sneer and think we're better than primitives who dance for rain or shout at the moon, we should ask ourselves if we're focused on the right things and be quite shocked by the answer.

If we think Avraham's world was primitive and full of silly nonsense, perhaps we could excuse them. But our society, so educated and sophisticated as it is, is preoccupied with advanced nonsense just the same! Culture can change by the decade, but human nature hardly budes, even over millennia.

The Mesilas Yesharim warns us of the pernicious blindness that comes from comfort, desire, and habit. You can miss things, or just as bad, distort things, mistaking one thing for another. We have mental blind spots that stop us from thinking, and they can seem so virtuous! Hustle culture breeds hard workers, sure, but by the same token, lazy thinkers who don't have time to prioritize. How many of us would benefit from slowing down to devise an effective strategy?

Avraham decided that there was One God, and maybe we're right there alongside him. Great! But Avraham went on to give meaning to the world, actively seeking people out, bringing life to them, teaching kindness, caring and sharing, leading by example, and never arguing with anyone. And in a world where Sodom and self-interest were the dominant cultures, excluding the other and the outsider, Avraham's way won.

Too many of us are on cruise control, coasting by, and we need to wake up and ask what the point is. Avraham is the first archetype, the avatar of kindness. Are we as effective, kind, and loving as we can be? We know that the answer is a resounding no. There are so many people out there who need to be loved and looked after! And forget the world – there's undoubtedly plenty of low-hanging fruit among your family and friends.

People are too busy to think or prioritize – what are we doing? where are we going? What matters most? Do my actions reflect those values? Am I effective? Our calendars tell a revealing story about how we spend our time, and how we spend our time says everything about what we value, about what matters.



You have to break the cycle of busyness – literally, of being too busy.

Challenge yourself about where you're going, what matters, and whether you're as effective as you could be, but be tough on yourself before you're tough on others. High performers hold themselves to high standards.

You have time, but you don't have time to waste.

It's Not About Who You Are; But What You Do

3 minute read | Straightforward

The Torah speaks in human language, and storytelling is one of humanity's most powerful tools.

Some parts of the Torah are communicated in the forms of laws, and others in stories. Integral messages can be passed through the ages, each generation filtering it through its wisest minds, gleaned new insights in each telling.

Some say that our tradition's stories are not about ordinary people like us; they are about perfect saints who were qualitatively different from us.

This is not a universally held position, and with good reason. If the stories are about holy people who are different from us, how can their stories be relevant guidance for our lives?

As R' Shlomo Farhi observes, while the Torah's terse stories obviously do not capture the character of these great people in three dimensions, we also cannot ignore the Torah's deliberate characterization and presentation of these stories, emphasizing and highlighting specific actions and people frame their particular way. We should sit up and notice, wondering what we are supposed to learn from the parts that don't quite align with our picture of greatness.

When famine struck Avraham's new home in Israel, he decided that his family would have better food security in Egypt's fertile land, and they left Israel. While this was an eminently reasonable decision to have made based on his assessment of the facts, the way it worked out was that he placed Sarah in a highly compromising situation that required divine intervention after Pharaoh took her.

The Ramban criticizes Avraham for leaving Israel and not counting on God's promises and that by abandoning Israel, he directly jeopardized those promises and endangered his family.



The Maharitz Chajes notes that stories are often the Torah's medium for teaching us about morality because mature people understand that moral choices are often difficult and rarely black and white. While the law is made of words, those words have to be lived out, and only a story transmits the turmoil and weight of how those words and values interface with real life.

R' Jonathan Sacks suggests that the Torah's enduring hold is that our heroes are not gods or demigods; they are mortal men. God is God, and humans are human – and humans make mistakes.

R' Shmshon Raphael Hirsch notes that this kind of discussion is an essential feature of our rich heritage. Our ancestors are prototypes of what the ideal human acts like, but the Torah does not whitewash its heroes; excellent humans are still human.

Our role models cannot be idealized characters; they wouldn't be relevant if they weren't materially like us. What makes them great is precisely the fact that they weren't so different from us. They faced the same kinds of problems: how best to protect and provide for their families; and how to maintain their beliefs and practices while trying to do the right thing.

Avraham was not born holy and perfect, nor under extraordinary or supernatural circumstances. Avraham did not possess some innate characteristic that gave him a religious advantage. Avraham is first and foremost in our pantheon of great figures because, throughout his struggles, he maintained his integrity and persevered – sometimes rightly and sometimes wrongly. He is great because of the things he did, not because he was born that way.

The Torah speaks in whole truths to give a three-dimensional view of the people we look up to. The Torah is for and about humans; because it's ok to be human.

Some people suggest that focusing on our hero's misdeeds is disrespectful, but perhaps they have it backward. Their humanity does not undermine our respect for them; it is the very basis of our respect and veneration!

The Torah is replete with stories about how great people also make mistakes.

Adam eats the fruit; Noach doesn't save a single person; Avraham compromises Sarah; Yitzchak favors Esau; Yakov tricks his father; Yosef is vain, and his brothers engage in human trafficking. The generation that comes out of Egypt is doomed to die in the wilderness. Moshe doesn't get to the Promised Land. The Promised Land doesn't result in the Final Redemption. Failure is a core theme of almost every story in the Torah!

But crucially, here we are 3000 years later, learning those stories, still trying. Perfection is ever-elusive, and there is no finish line. The Torah's stories guide our way through the ages because they matter to us. They teach us that humans can fail, but if perfection is out of reach, greatness is not.



If all our greats are humans; then all humans possess the capacity to be great. That's why their stories matter to us.

Greatness isn't who you are; it's what you do that defines you.

God Needs Partners

3 minute read | Straightforward

Avraham was a powerful icon whose legacy has reverberated across the ages. The way the Torah sums up his life, you would think he had it all:

וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן כָּאֵלֶּים וְה' בֵּרַךְ אֶת-אַבְרָהָם בְּכָל
Avraham was old, well advanced in years, and God had blessed Avraham with everything. (24:1)

The Torah characterizes his death similarly:

וַיָּגֹעַ וַיָּמָת אַבְרָהָם בְּשֵׂיבָה טוֹבָה זָקֵן וְשָׂבַע וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל-עַמּוּ
Then Avraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an elderly man full of years; and he was gathered to his people. (25:8)

Along the same vein, Rashi notes that the Torah describes the years of Sarah's life as equally good and full of life as well – שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה –

These serene descriptions have one flaw, however. They're just not true! Let's recap.

God promised Avraham and Sarah land and children – yet they had to fight tooth and nail to get anywhere! They were told to leave everything they had ever known for some unknown foreign land, but as soon as they'd arrived, they were forced to leave because of a devastating famine. Then, on their travels, Sarah was twice targeted by despotic leaders with unwanted sexual advances; and Avraham had to endanger himself to protect his family. They waited desperately for decades to have a child; then, when the child finally arrived, it caused bitter strife in the family between Sarah and Hagar, resulting in Avraham sending Hagar and Ishmael from home. And after all that, Avraham was asked to murder his precious child, the one he had waited so long for.

One way or another, when we think of God's great promises of children and land, the reality fell far short of what Avraham and Sarah might have expected.

So why does the Torah sum up their lives as full of satisfaction and fulfillment?



Maybe the question is better than the answer.

R' Jonathan Sacks teaches that happiness does not and should not mean that we have everything we want or everything we believe we are due. Happiness can exist even when life falls short of our expectations. As one thinker put it, if you can't enjoy a cup of coffee, you won't enjoy a yacht.

R' Yitzchak Berkowitz notes that Avraham's life is the origin story for the Jewish people, and it doesn't go how we might expect. Avraham's story seems trivial – it's about his business ventures, travels, and family disputes. It's so ordinary!

But suppose our stories were about magical demigods riding flying unicorns wielding miraculous lightning bolts to vanquish their enemies and save the world from the clutches of evil. In that case, they couldn't be more silly or less relevant. Avraham's story matters precisely because it is so ordinary. It teaches us that God's grand mission for us comes without fanfare, with no red carpet and no grand celebration. Avraham is our heroic role model because the work God would have us do is in the mundane things of everyday living. It's in making a living, marrying off a child, and living in harmony. The plain and mundane can be celebrated and sacred.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos teaches that it is not for us to complete the work, but neither are we free to desist from it. It's not your job to do everything from start to finish, but we have a duty to do all we can to pave the way before passing the baton on to the next person or generation.

As only R' Jonathan Sacks can put it, God is waiting for us to act. We need God, and God needs us.

God could promise Avraham the land, but Avraham still had to buy his first field. God could promise Avraham countless descendants, but Avraham still had to identify a suitable partner for his son. God can promise, but humans still have to act.

Despite all the promises, God does not and will not do it alone.

He did not need to see the entire land in Jewish hands, nor did he need to see the Jewish People become numerous. He had begun, and he had perfect confidence that his descendants would continue. Avraham and Sarah were able to die at peace not only because of their faith in God but also because of their faith, trust, and hope that others would finish what they had started.

Avraham had taken those first steps and was satisfied. It was enough for Avraham and Sarah, and it must be enough for us.

Just do your best, and hope for the rest.



Looking Out for Yourself; for Others

3 minute read | Straightforward

Altruism is a core value of Torah and Judaism, the practice of being concerned with others' welfare. Altruism can and does intersect with self-interest, and there is plenty of philosophical debate about the how's and why's.

Closer to home, we rightfully laud Avraham as the first man to reach out to others with kindness and softness, demonstrating the way humans ought to live. Yet when God reaches out to him, God speaks in the language of self-interest, not the language of altruism:

ויאמר ה' אל-אברהם, לך-לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך, אל-הארץ, אשר אראך. ואעשה, לגוי גדול, ואברכה, ואגדלה שמך; והיה, לך-לך. – Hashem said to Avram: "Go for yourself; from your land, from your neighborhood, and from your father's house; to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those that bless you, and those that curse you I will curse; and in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed." (12:1-3)

Rashi explains that Avraham must go for himself, for his own sake; he must seek family, fame, and fortune because he desires them – לך-לך / להנאתך ולטובתך.

Why would God command Avraham, the paragon of altruism, to pursue self-interest?

Perhaps our understanding of altruism is slightly skewed. It seems like a good question because the conventional wisdom suggests that pure altruism requires one person to sacrifice for another with no personal benefit; that self-interest and altruism are antithetical to each other, diametrically opposed.

But they're not, and we ought to know that.

As the famous saying in Pirkei Avos goes, if I am not for myself, what am I...? Rabbeinu Yonah explains that extrinsic motivation is fleeting; we need to pursue our goals for our own purposes – אין אני לי, מי לי.

In practice, we rightly admire people who create or contribute opportunities in our communities. We have no respect for people who let others walk all over them, which amounts to a lack of self-respect, not altruism.

God tells Avraham to go on the journey for intrinsic purposes because it will be personally rewarding. The Rambam says that wise people do the right thing because it is the right thing to do; any optimistic hopes about what may follow will always be secondary to doing the right thing.



The Lubavitcher Rebbe teaches that only once we value ourselves can we learn to value others.

For Avraham to open his home to the world, he needed to have a house large enough to share with others and something to share with them. He had to establish himself in order to help others – וְקִשְׁעָנִי לְעַצְמִי, מָה אֲנִי.

Avraham is altruistic, but he is not selfless, which is extrinsic and other-focussed. Extrinsic motivation is outcome-oriented, so it cannot last – when we win the deal, marry the person, or build the school, what happens next? And what if we don't get the outcome we hoped for?

In contrast, intrinsic motivation is process-oriented, which is more reliable in the long run because it is objectively fulfilling and meaningful.

The Torah does not expect or condone selflessness. Selflessness is not sustainable, and it's not an ingredient that leads to a lasting legacy. Hashem says to Avraham that he must take the journey for his own sake, not for God and not for others. His approach would only endure if it weren't contingent on something extrinsic. Altruists do not seek other people's approval.

The Seforno notes that Hashem promises Avraham that on this journey of self-fulfillment that takes care of others, he will not only be blessed; he will literally become a blessing – וְאֶגְדְּלָהּ שְׂמֵדָה; וְהָיָה, בְּרָכָה –

As the saying in Mishlei says, a kind man cares for his well-being, and a cruel man afflicts himself – גִּמְלַל נַפְשׁוֹ, אִישׁ חֶסֶד; וְעִבֵּר שְׂאֵרוֹ, אֶכְזָרִי. Altruism is possible, and altruism is real, although, in healthy people, it intertwines with self-care and personal well-being; our actions express and promote our values.

It's ok to establish and stand up for yourself. The balance to strike is that we utilize our blessings to help others. For example, it can be perfectly fine to have or want lots of money, but the qualifier is what we do with it.

Are you utilizing your blessings as best as you can?

Fear Redux; Faith Redux

6 minute read | Straightforward

In the context of religion, faith is a natural consequence of professing to believe in God. If there's a Creator, there must be some plan, and so the thinking goes, we should have faith in it.

Faith means the notion of confidence or trust in a person, thing, or concept; in this case, the Creator –
אמונה / בטחון.

But how we talk about faith doesn't always make sense.

People get afraid and worried about everyday life, like whether they can afford to pay their bills or if their loved one will recover from sickness. The root of every human fear is the notion that we are fundamentally powerless against the forces of the universe.

There can sometimes be a toxic Emunah culture that stifles, suffocates, and squashes real people with real feelings. That sounds like when people say things like don't worry, God has a plan, or it's for the best, trust God, and have faith that everything will work out. As the famous song goes, the main thing is to have no fear at all – והעיקר לא לפחד כלל –

Whether spoken or unspoken or even in your own thoughts, there is an invalidation or judgment here; to the extent you feel doubts or fears, you really have to work on your faith because if you had faith in God, you wouldn't feel afraid – because faith and fear are incompatible and mutually exclusive.

But is that so true?

Firstly, there is a basic problem with the notion that fear is intrinsically wrong. Although many fears are learned, the threshold capacity to fear is part of human nature, a subconscious instinct, which, like desire, does not lend itself to moral judgment; it's simply the basic reality of our lived experience.

Fear is our response to a stimulus occurring in the present or in anticipation or expectation of a future threat perceived as a risk. The fear response arises from the perception of danger leading to a confrontation with or escape from or avoiding the threat, also known as the fight-or-flight response, which in extreme cases of horror and terror can be a freeze response or paralysis.

Fear is visceral and instinctual, hard coded into our DNA, predates human consciousness, and results from an external stimulus, not a character flaw. The survival instinct originates in the most primal parts of the brain – נפש בהמית –

This is a complete defense of feeling our fears.

Moreover, fear is one of the tools the Torah uses to obtain compliance from its readers – וְתָרָה אֶרְיָהּ בְּכֶם –
וְעָצַר אֶת־הַשְּׁמַיִם וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה מָטָר וְהִאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת־יְבוּלָהּ וְאֲבָדְתֶם מִהֲרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטְּבֵה אֲשֶׁר ה' נָתַן לָכֶם.

Fear is arguably why many people practice religion; Pascal's wager argues that a rational person should live as though God exists because if God does not exist, a person only loses a little luxury or pleasure. In contrast, if God exists, a person stands to receive infinite pain or gain in Heaven and Hell.



But far more powerfully, the greats experienced fear too, as the Torah and our prophets testify, which should demolish any misguided self-righteous attempts at invalidating fear.

Fear is not a negative emotion; it is not something we should avoid associating with our great ancestors. Fear is a human emotion, and our great ancestors were humans who felt fear and responded to those fears in ways we can learn from.

When God promises Avraham a grand future, Avraham wonders what God is talking about because, as a childless older man, he naturally experiences doubt, fear, and insecurity about the future – *מה-תתן-לי / בְּמָה אֲדַע כִּי אֵירָשָׁנָה*. As beings bound by time, our existence is limited from one moment to the next; everyone worries about the future.

When Yakov and his family finally escape Lavan’s clutches, they are intercepted on the run by Esau with 400 warriors, and Yakov is afraid – *וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד*. He has good reason to be afraid – he can send gifts, give weapons to children, and send half the family a day ahead, but he understands the imminent reality that his family might get massacred – *הַצִּילְנִי נָא מִיַּד אָחִי מִיַּד עֲשׂוּ כִּי־יִרְאֶה אָנֹכִי אֹתוֹ פֶּן־יָבֹא וְהַכִּנִּי – אִם עַל־בָּנָיִם*.

When Yosef frames his brothers as part of his ruse to see if they regret his abduction and trafficking, they express fear when they begin to realize that they are entangled with a powerful person who poses a serious threat to them – *וַיֵּצֵא לָבֵם וַיִּתְרַדּוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו*.

When the young Moshe steps beyond the palace life of his childhood into the world of his people’s suffering, he steps in to save someone from an oppressive Egyptian officer, killing the Egyptian. Realizing that he has crossed the point of no return and stands alone against the might of the Egyptian empire, Moshe feels afraid – *וַיִּירָא מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּאמֶר אֶכֶן נֹדַע הַדְּבָר*.

When Mordechai sends word to Esther about the new legislation authorizing the genocide of the Jewish People, he tells Esther to intervene and go to the king. But Esther doesn’t go immediately; she responds that going to the king without summons is a death sentence. She is afraid to risk her life, and Mordechai must persuade her to overcome those fears to save the Jewish People.

Let there be no doubt that we are talking about giants here, the greatest of greats, heroes of heroes. And they felt fears we can easily recognize as familiar.

It is cruel, not to mention incredibly self-destructive, to idealize a lack of fear.

As one great writer had a child ask his father, can a man still be brave if he’s afraid? Says the father with piercing clarity; it is the only time a man can be brave.

Toxic masculinity is a cultural pressure that says men shouldn’t cry or get scared; our Torah says they do.



As Fred Rogers taught, anything human is mentionable, and the mentionable can become more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they can become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary.

A core part of the Jewish mission is the pursuit of wholeness – שלימות / תמימות. It is an act of psychological violence to kill off the emotional aspects of another, or in the case of yourself, self-mutilation. When you cut away the parts of the self capable of feeling a wide range of emotional responses, people wind up disconnected from themselves and the people around them. You get broken people not emotionally in tune with themselves or their surroundings. By definition, wholeness must be compatible with the full spectrum of human emotion; one of the most important tasks of our era is to reconnect with and reunite the severed parts.

The life of our greatest heroes was an emotional life that was visited by fear and doubt. The difference between the best of us and the rest of us is what they did about it. The Torah's stories reassure us that we're not alone and that our feelings are natural and normal.

Fear and faith are compatible, and they exist along the same spectrum. Faith is not blind or mindless; the Torah testifies Avraham's faith in the middle of his doubt and insecurity – וְהָאֱמֹן בֵּה' וַיִּחְשְׁבֶהָ לוֹ צְדָקָה.

As the Torah draws to the conclusion of its great story, Moshe hands over the reins to Yehoshua, and encourages him in front of the Jewish People, to be brave and strong in the face of fear; God tells Yehoshua the exact same thing – חֲזָקוּ וְאִמְצוּ אֶל־תִּירְאוֹ וְאֶל־תַּעֲרָצוּ מִפְּנֵיהֶם כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוּא הַהֹלֵךְ עִמָּךְ לֹא יִרְפֶּךָ וְלֹא יַעֲזֹבֶךָ' – / לֹא תִירָא וְלֹא תַחַת / וַיִּצְוֵ אֶת־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן־נוּן וַיֹּאמֶר חֲזָק וְאִמְצָן כִּי אִתָּהּ תָּבִיא אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לָהֶם וְאָנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ.

As the Abarbanel teaches, there is no contradiction between fear and faith. Faith in God cannot make a person immune to the powerful natural emotional instinct of fear. Faith means that despite those fears, you act with your highest faculties, guided by Torah, reason, and knowledge, not by fear.

What makes our greats great is that while they sometimes felt afraid, they didn't stay afraid. They didn't live in fear or act from a place of fear. In the high-stress moments, they felt it, but it is never mentioned again; they choose to act with confidence, faith, security, and trust that there is a divine plan, the difference between feeling afraid and being afraid.

We see this played out in the aftermath of the scout report of the Land of Israel; the Jewish People are consumed with fear and terror that they will be massacred, that their women and children will be captured, and they want to flee back to Egypt. Too afraid to listen, Yehosua and Caleb's reassurances fall on deaf ears – וְאַתֶּם אֶל־תִּירְאוּ אֶת־עַם הָאָרֶץ כִּי לֹחֲמֵנוּ הֵם סָר צִלָּם מִצְעֵלֵיהֶם ה' אֲתֵנּוּ אֶל־תִּירְאֵם.

Controlling your emotions doesn't mean avoiding or denying complex or difficult emotions. It means doing things with your emotions as the passenger, not the driver. When a moment of anger, fear, or sadness comes, feel it, recognize it, and understand it, but don't lose it.



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Avraham was right to be anxious about the future; Yakov was right to be scared his family would be massacred in the morning; Moshe was right that one man can't resist an empire alone; Esther was right that going to the king without an invitation was a death sentence.

In more recent memory, the Jewish world of today is built on foundations laid by Holocaust survivors. These people experienced unthinkable horrors beyond even the greatest subject matter experts. It has been said of the generation that survived the terror of the Holocaust that it was perhaps the greatest act of faith by the Jewish People to trust God and have Jewish children once more.

When you're afraid, it means you take a threat seriously. It's pointless to try to stop feeling nervous. Instead, like our heroes, recognize it for what it is, a call to harness all your faculties on the task at hand. Like pain, worry when you don't feel it.

Judaism and the Torah are situated in the world of action. We bear the timeless and consistent legacy of people who faced their fears and acted with boldness and hope, who felt scared in their darkness yet persisted until the light.

Our great ancestors took action, hoping things would work out, but not with any knowledge or certainty. As our sages point out, they often fear their sins and shortcomings. Their extraordinary acts of faith look like people who feel afraid but do their best to bring about a better outcome, which is well within our reach.

Courage is not the absence of fear but the triumph over it.

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.

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



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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.