



Devarim 2022

Building the Future

3 minute read | Straightforward

The Jewish People left Egypt and slowly made their way to the Promised Land. But the Promised Land had been settled already, and the Jewish People had to do some planning, so they sent scouts.

When the scouts got back from Canaan, they delivered a bleak report about the battles that lay ahead, and the Jewish People were devastated. They rued the day they ever left Egypt, that the arduous journey had been a colossal waste. If they were just going to die attempting to take the land, the thinking went, they'd be better off going back to Egypt with a new leader who was a little more realistic.

The aftermath of their poor response was that this lost generation would aimlessly wander the wilderness for nearly 40 years. Once these adults had all died, their children would have another go at conquering and establishing a new nation in the Land of Israel.

But something doesn't quite add up.

The wrongdoers in the story are the scouts, who conspire to paint the Land of Israel as an impossible goal when it's not. But while that's the catalyst for the story going off the rails, the Torah is explicit that God's punishment is not directed at the scouts but towards their audience:

“In this wilderness shall your corpses drop, all of you who were recorded in the lists from the age of twenty years up, you who have complained towards Me.” (14:29)

The people believed the scout report, coming as they did from established and trusted leaders, that the task ahead was impossible. The scouts ought to have known better, but how should the people have reacted to their leaders saying they were doomed? Bad news is bad! When people hear bad news from reputable sources, it is quite normal – expected, even – to react negatively. That's why it's called bad news!

Even if we say they overreacted and took it too far, how does the punishment fit the crime?

There have been many empires, nations, and states. Many had come before this story, and many have come since.

But the Jewish People are not just another member of that category; the Jewish People are in a class by themselves and unique in at least one respect.



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The Jewish People in the Land of Israel, observing the Torah and living in the Divine Presence, are fundamentally and qualitatively different, with goals and values unlike any other. It is the culmination of a centuries-old hope and vision, with many careful and deliberate steps along the way. From Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, through Canaan, Egypt, and Sinai, the Torah call us to build something that no one had seen or done before.

Yet even after witnessing the events of Egypt, the Red Sea, Sinai, the clouds, the manna, and the water, cared for daily as much as anyone can be by the hand of God Himself; in the face of even the slightest adversity, their worst inclinations get the best of them, revealing that these people never really left Egypt at all. Here they are on the threshold of greatness, and they only want to turn around and go right back!

God is so let down to the extent that God considers killing them all, even the children, illustrating the severity of this misstep. Not believing in their great mission was a failure they could not recover from, and the result was a catastrophe.

Building a new model for a Torah society cannot happen by itself, or it would! Then and now, it requires pioneers with hope and vision.

If that's the attitude and perspective it takes to achieve the goal of establishing the Jewish People in the Land of Israel, how could these people ever hope to succeed?

They weren't ready, but maybe their children could be.

To accomplish something that no one has ever done before takes a certain character, perspective, and resiliency; anyone who's ever taken on something bold and ambitious knows it. If it were easy, someone else would have done it – but just because no one else has done it yet, that doesn't mean it can't be done.

A great vision can never come to fruition with half-hearted execution; you need to believe before you can achieve.

Who can do it? The people who want it badly enough.

Onward

4 minute read | Straightforward

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

The Torahs tell us of astonishing moments like The Binding of Isaac, the ultimate test of human commitment with the future in the balance, and salvation averts tragedy through transparently divine intervention at the very last moment.

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

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

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

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

וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם אֶל-נְעָרָיו וַיִּקְמוּ וַיֵּלְכוּ יַחְדָּו – Avraham returned to his stewards, and they got up and left together... (22:19)

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

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

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

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



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Onward is an interesting word – positive and proactive, meaning going further rather than coming to an end or halt; moving in a forward direction. As the Izhbitzer explains, part of growth is moving on and walking away from the place you once stood. We can't stay because the moment is gone – it's gone in time, irretrievably behind us, and it's our responsibility to realize that distance in mental and physical space too.

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

This lesson is challenging enough, but the Izhbitzer takes us further and forewarns us that what follows the heights of success is rarely smooth and straightforward lulls and plateaus of accumulation and consolidation to catch our breath; we can often expect an inverse experience in short order. The miraculous rescue at the Red Sea is directly followed by the people's complaints about the local water being too bitter.

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

And actually, all too often, great heights are followed by sharp declines and drawdowns, troughs and valleys; Avraham gets home to find his wife has died, and the Golden Calf debacle doesn't just happen after Sinai – it happens at the hallowed mountain itself!

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

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

Quite arguably, a failure to move on was the mistake at the heart of the debacle of the scouting mission to Israel – the spies just wanted to stay put in the safety of God's embrace in the desert. They weren't wrong; the road ahead was fraught with danger! But that's not how the world works; stagnation is not God's design for us or the universe – life changes, moves, and evolves.

The Torah is a guide to life – תורה חיים – and one of the defining features of living things is motility – they move independently. We shouldn't be so shocked by the ebbs and flows of life itself, moving and



changing, with concomitant ups and downs. When living things don't move, they quickly atrophy, stagnate, wither, and before long, they die. Living things must move and push to grow healthy and strong. You can fall down and run out of breath plenty of times along the way, but that's part of it, so long as you, eventually, get back up and keep moving onward.

As R' Shlomo Farhi explains, if you look at stock market performance over a century, the zoomed-out time frame looks like a smooth and steady incline; and yet, when you zoom in to years, months, weeks, days, and hours, the amount of choppiness and volatility increases. On an extended time frame, each individual part matters less. The bouncing highs and lows blend into a smooth line that only goes one way – onwards and upwards.

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

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

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

Chazon; Vision Through Frosted Glass

6 minute read | Straightforward

The Jewish calendar associates certain times and places with different events and emotions. In the summer, the Jewish calendar marks several days and weeks for mourning in general, and in particular, the loss of sovereignty in the land of Israel, and especially the destruction of the religious order of the Temple.

Believing that history is written by God's hand alone, our sages do not accept the notion that the Roman Empire went up against the God of Israel and won a victory; rather, our sages teach that there was a fatal flaw in the Jewish People's religious observance that gave rise to a weakness the enemy could exploit. In the instance of the loss of the Second Temple, our sages attribute the weakness to baseless hatred and internal strife. People talk about this a lot, that working on this weakness is the mechanism to right all wrongs and restore the Temple and Jewish sovereignty and invite a new utopian era of history.

But not enough people talk about why the First Temple fell, which ought to be surprising because the reasons are extremely well documented.

While our sages can only speculate why the Second Temple fell, the reasons the First Temple fell is crystal clear for the simple reason that it took place in the age of the last prophets.



If we wanted to know what issues plagued a society to the extent it could destroy or prevent a Temple from existing, God’s prophets have some thoughts on the matter.

We ought to want to understand the issues that cause the loss of a Temple because they are the issues that preclude a new one from materializing. Our Sages suggest that each generation that does not see it rebuilt has participated in its destruction; a generation that hasn’t resolved the issues that cause the loss of a Beis HaMikdash isn’t ready for one. In other words, if we don’t have a solution, we are part of the problem.

The crescendo of the days of mourning is Tisha b’Av, and the Shabbos before is always Parshas Devarim, also known as Shabbos Chazon, named for the opening words of the Haftara, Isaiah’s Vision – תזון ישעיהו –

Isaiah’s words are so clear and sharp they need little embellishment or explanation. He speaks through his doomed audience in words that reverberate through the ages in the hope that one day we might actually pay attention:

שמעו דבר-ה קציני סדם האזינו תורת אלהינו עם עמרה. למה-לי רב-זבחיכם יאמר ה שבעתוי עלות אילים וחלב מריאים ודם פרים וכבשים ועתודים לא תפצתי. כי תבאו לראות פני מי-בקש זאת מידכם רמס חצרי. לא תוסיפו הביא מנחת-שןא קטרת תועבה היא לי החדש ושבת קרא מקרא לא-אוכל און ועצרה. חדשיכם ומועדדיכם שנאה נפשי היו עלי לטרה נלאיתי נשא. ובפרשכם פפיקם אעלים עיני מכם גם פי-תרבו תפלה אינני שמע דיכם דמים מלאו. רחצו הזכו הסירו רע מעלליכם מנגד עיני חדלו הרע. למדו היטב דרשו משפט אשרו חמוץ שפטו יתום ריבו אלמנה

“Listen to Hashem, you leaders of Sodom. Listen to the law of our God, people of Gomorrah!”

“What makes you think I want all your sacrifices?” says Hashem. “I am stuffed from your burnt offerings and sacrifices of rams and the fat of cattle. I get no pleasure from the blood of bulls, lambs, and goats. When you come to worship me, who asked you to parade through my courts with all your ceremony? Stop bringing me your meaningless gifts; the incense of your offerings disgusts me!

“Your celebrations of Rosh Chodesh and Shabbos and your fast days are all sinful and false. I want no more of your pious meetings! I hate your new moon celebrations and your annual festivals. They are a burden to me. I cannot stand them! When you raise your hands in prayer, I will not look. Though you might offer many prayers, I will not listen because your hands are covered with the blood of innocents!

“Wash yourselves and become clean! Get your sins out of my sight. Give up your evil ways; learn to do good. Seek justice! Help the oppressed and vulnerable! Defend the cause of orphans! Fight for the rights of widows!” – (1:10-17)

There were many prophets and prophecies whose names and stories are lost; they were not included in the canon of Tanach. The ones that were selected were included because of their resonance beyond their time.



The prophet rails against bribery, broken institutions, corruption, and perversion of justice as the ultimate crimes. If a society's institutions are too crooked to protect the people who need them, those people can be stepped on with impunity. That society, in a subtle, but very real way, endorses and protects criminals and predators, that society is morally bankrupt and not fit for purpose.

These aren't relics of the past; they're part and parcel of the world we live in, a constant specter we must battle against. A permanent victory that vanquishes evil forever is childish fantasy; even the most ideal world would still require a justice system. It's not a flaw; it's a feature of human choice.

But when our society is challenged, when evil rears its ugly head, how do we respond? Do we respond decisively and with finality? Or with denial, hesitancy, and lip service?

The prophet is emphatic that the individuals in his society did not personally take up the fight for the vulnerable people who needed someone in their corner:

– רְחֲצוּ הַזְּכוֹת הַסִּירוּ רָע מֵעַלְלֵיכֶם מִנְגֵד עֵינַי הַדְּלוּ הָרָע. לְמַדּוּ הַיָּטֵב דְּרָשׁוּ מִשְׁפָּט אֲשֶׁרוֹ תְּמוּץ שְׁפָטוֹ יְתוֹם רִיבוֹ אֶלְמָנָה – Wash yourselves and become clean! Get your sins out of my sight. Give up your evil ways; learn to do good. Seek justice! Help the oppressed and vulnerable! Defend the cause of orphans! Fight for the rights of widows!

The prophet's words are chilling.

You cannot hide behind institutions. How many vulnerable people do you know? Are they getting all the help they need? What are you doing about it? And are you so sure those institutions are doing everything possible?

How often do we learn of another aguna, another fraud, another molester, another scandal, and another cover-up. How many times have once-great institutions and leaders failed to remove malfeasors from their prey or even acknowledge them as the predators they are? It is the highest betrayal, and it is a crime against the victim and the Jewish People.

We are not a community if we do not protect and ease the burdens of our brothers and sisters. When individuals have been proven dangerous, whether on the balance of probabilities or beyond a reasonable doubt, we should not tolerate their influence or presence. If you're wondering which incident this is a veiled reference to, that says a lot about where we are and how much work we have to do.

A generation that does not see the Temple rebuilt has participated in its destruction.

It's crucial to understand the prophet's specific criticism correctly. Isaiah's words are not a polemic against leaders or the establishment, and nor is this. It was and is a call to action directly to each of us as individuals, not to hide behind or rely on institutions or anybody else to get help to the people who need it.



They and we need you.

Our society has much to be proud of today, but make no mistake; we cannot launder or buy off mediocrity in one area with excellence in another. The prophet acknowledges that the people of that time were diligent and meticulous in their prayer and sacrifice, yet awful at other things, and it wasn't enough to save them.

The quantity and quality of Torah study and charity in the world today are phenomenal and unprecedented in history; we should rightly be proud, but let's not kid ourselves that there's still lots more to do. We know precisely what God thinks when people need our help and go neglected and unassisted:

לְמָה-לִּי רַב-זִבְחֵיכֶם יֹאמֵר ה' שְׂבַעְתִּי עֲלוֹת אֵילִים וְחֶלֶב מְרִיאִים וְדָם פְּרִים וּכְבָשִׁים וְעִתּוּדִים לֹא תַפְצְתִּי
“I am stuffed from your burnt offerings and sacrifices of rams and the fat of cattle. The blood of bulls, lambs and goats does nothing for Me!” (1:11)

The lessons we ought to learn from history knock on our door regularly. In Moshe's parting address to the people he spent his life trying to save, he admonishes their refusal to be receptive:

אָדַבְרָ אֲלֵיכֶם וְלֹא שָׁמַעְתֶּם – “I spoke, yet you would not listen!” (1:43)

We see problems around us, and we do not do enough to fix them. If someone has financial issues, family issues, health issues, or can't get into school, you ought to know that thoughts and prayers are not the solutions those problems require.

If you see something wrong, do not make our ancestors' mistake of hiding behind false piety. Get involved and lend a hand in fixing the problems in your community. And if you have some money, open the checkbook – but don't forget to roll your sleeves up, or else you're just hiding behind other people in a slightly more sophisticated way.

How can we fast, weep, and pray when there are so many abused, hungry, poor, and other vulnerable people in our communities? Our wonderful charities and outstanding individuals and organizations lead the way for the rest of us, but they do not satisfy our personal obligations. If we had a Temple today, we couldn't be trusted to keep it; otherwise, it would be here by now.

If it's too hard to cry for tragedies we never experienced, tragedies we are thousands of years removed from, maybe that's fair enough. But then let's cry for now; for how far we are from where we could be, for the agony in our communities that's way too close for comfort. Cry for the injustices around you that you don't seem to do anything about.

צִיּוֹן בְּמִשְׁפָּט תִּפְדָּה וְשָׁבִיהָ בְּצִדְקָה – “Zion will be redeemed through justice; its restoration will be through righteousness.” (1:27)

It is easy to make that difference; resolve to be better in a meaningful and substantial way.



Help people find jobs and grow their businesses. Give more charity. Give food and clothes away. Volunteer more. Make sure no child is left without a school. Stop bullying in school, shul, and work. Get involved in your community's events and organizations. Use any influence you have, talk to influential people, and make that difference. Even if it's just you alone, take responsibility for some of the people around you who don't yet know that you are someone they can rely on for the helping hand they need.

If the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing, are you so sure you're not one of them?

The Bittersweet Symphony

7 minute read | Advanced

We've spent the best part of a year reading the Torah's greatest story, about how Yakov's family grew until they were duped into working on public infrastructure that slowly slipped into full-blown slavery; and about how God remembered His promises to their ancestors, and He sends Moshe to save them. We have followed this journey through all the adventures and detours, through the highs and lows, and we're approaching the end.

But it doesn't quite go how we might expect.

Spoiler alert: Moshe dies.

Actually, his brother dies too, and so does his sister, and come to think of it, so does every single soul that walked out of Egypt.

We've probably read it too many times to notice, but the protagonists do not get a happy ending for all their troubles. It almost feels like the opposite, like they utterly failed. Moshe just can't get this stubborn bunch over the finish line, and none of them ever get to the Promised Land; they all die in the wilderness.

Moshe didn't want the job, arguing that they wouldn't listen. He was spot on and spent the rest of his days fighting their worst inclinations. But he still only ever wanted to save them! After agreeing to take on the mission, he felt like God was taking too long to save his troubled and weary brethren, and in a quite shocking turn, confronts God and tells Him off – לָמָּה הִרְעַתָּה לְעַם הַזֶּה!

Maybe the people tried their best, and their best simply wasn't good enough. But even if we could accept that they were traumatized and, perhaps on some level, never truly left Egypt behind them, you need a heart of stone not to think that perhaps Moshe might have deserved a little better after all that – עֲבָדֵי מִלְּשָׁה בְּכָל בֵּיתִי נְאֻמָּן הוּא –



Right at the end of his life, he asks God to allow him to enter the Land of Israel, quite possibly the only instance of a personal indulgence Moshe ever asks for, and God declines his request.

Of all people, doesn't Moshe, God's most faithful shepherd, supremely trusted above all others, deserve a happy ending?

And before you dismiss the question as childish – because, after all, life isn't a fairy tale – perhaps the question is better phrased as a personal question on the journey our souls are on; how do we reconcile ourselves to the fact that not even the greatest of us gets a happy ending?

R' Shlomo Farhi teaches that we need to remind ourselves that perfection is elusive and perpetually out of reach; failure to achieve perfection is not failure, so perhaps we need to reconfigure our expectations. Even if the Jewish People would never shake their demons and were doomed from the start, that's not a failure; even if Moshe couldn't finish the job the way he'd have liked, he didn't fail.

There's no happy ending, but perhaps the expectation of a happy ending is our own baggage that we bring along and project as the outcome we'd prefer to see. We are making the error of imposing our expectations on the story, and the story confounds our expectations plain as day; that's just not how it works.

There is a separate physical and spiritual reality, and it's the world of spirit that matters most, where we find the battlefield of human achievement and sanctification. God did not want Moshe to lead the Jewish People from Egypt to Israel for reasons that are not only ultimately inscrutable; but, perhaps in a certain sense, don't matter to us at all. God does not ask us to cure cancer and secure world peace; those reach their conclusions in the physical world, and that is not given to us to control. Instead, God asks us to exercise our values and wisdom in the spiritual realm, where we can choose to act as best as we can under the circumstances – a moral victory.

God's hand is not directly perceptible to us; it's only apparent in hindsight as things unfold. It has to be that way, so God can influence the world without compromising the freedom of His creations. God's intervention does not remove the significance of our choices, but in many ways, it can redeem those choices. Or, to put it in another way, we are only responsible for our choices and not for the outcome of those choices; we are responsible for the means, while the ends are solely in God's hands.

And so, by necessity, we need to bifurcate moral victory from physical victory.

Physical victory is fantasy, and we all know it; when you get the job, pass the test, get married, buy the house, have the baby, and win the deal, there is never a glorious moment of victory. Life will go on just the same as yesterday and the day before, and you will still be you – and it's just as true if those things aren't going quite the way you'd like!

Moshe didn't struggle with this; he didn't have a savior complex. He did all he humanly could for his people, and no more, and he knew he had not let God or his people down. He did not live with our



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question about deserving a happier ending; he let go of the outcome he might have wanted – once it wasn't on the cards, getting there no longer mattered to him. He never thinks for even one moment that he deserves better, even if at certain points he gets overwhelmed. He was not bitter and died entirely at peace, with no qualms or regrets – מיתת נשיקה.

He demonstrated the stoic quality of outcome independence, faith played straight, fully accepting that this is how it has to be right now, and not shying away from it in any way. He was wholly in touch with the now, figuring out how to move forward with no questions about how he got there or why.

That's not just a story; it's a fact of life, the human condition, and because Moshe knew it, he could leave this world happy and fulfilled.

Despite the apparent lack of any obvious physical victory, Moshe's entire life was a living symposium on moral victory. He wanted to save them from suffering in Egypt, and he did. He wanted to give them a future, and he did. He gave all he had for as long as he had breath in him to secure a future for all of us.

It is not within human capacity to see all ends and decide our fates. Moshe gets to the threshold of the Promised Land, a dream centuries in the making, but never quite gets there; it leaves us no room for pride or self-righteousness, the way many happy endings do, but there is also no trace of failure or regret.

It's not a sad ending; it's bittersweet and true to life as we know it.

The conclusion of the Torah's greatest story is much more powerful than a patronizing and simple happy ending. It seems to emphasize that this is what even the greatest human successes and victories can look like, reinforcing a belief that ought to guide us through hard times; that, ultimately, no matter how bad things get, there is no darkness greater than the light, and there is always hope, and the future will shine bright.

Moshe deserves all honor because he led his people out of the fires of Egypt and spent every last reserve of body and will, which was sufficient to bring them to a destined point and no further. Moshe could not lead their journey to completion the way he set out to, but that's not what defines his greatness or success, and it does not make his life or story any less complete. It was his choice to give himself entirely to the cause that granted him his victory, his moral victory, and it's that choice that makes him worthy of the highest honors, with the unique title of Rabbeinu, Our Teacher, whose name we remember for eternity.

As R' Eytan Feiner sharply notes, who better than Moshe Rabbeinu to demonstrate this lesson? Moshe, the avatar of perfect loyalty and service, did all he could, and although he didn't get everything he wanted, what he got was enough for him.



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As our Sages remind us, we must ground ourselves. The ends are not given to us, and we don't always get to finish what we set out to do, but that mustn't stop us – ולא אִתָּהּ בְּן חוֹרֵיין לְבָטֵל – מִמֶּנָּה. Sometimes you'll get to save the day, and sometimes you'll only get to pass the baton on to the next generation. Other times, you'll collapse in sight of the finish line, and your work will remain unfinished; but the outcome does not determine the victory.

The Torah does not end with the patronizing and sickly sweetness of a great physical victory, with Moshe leading his people to a happily ever after. But if there's no happily ever after, there is still an ever after. His victory is bittersweet, but it lingers on in us sitting here three thousand years later learning about him and his battles; his moral victory stands forever.

The Torah doesn't end how we expect and instead ends with a transition; they're about to cross the border, and a new generation with new leaders will write new books for the challenges of a new era. Each story is incomplete, theirs and ours. But that does not detract from the achievements of Moshe and the Jewish People, and it does not dishonor the faith and trust our ancestors had in God.

This bittersweet ending reasserts the theme of moral victories being more important than physical victories by showing us what is within our power and what is not. Whatever the circumstances, and against all forms of adversity, it is within us to be great; to be brave, gentle, hopeful, kind, and strong, like our heroes Avraham, Yitzchak, Yakov, Yosef, Moshe, Ahron, and Miriam. We shouldn't expect a happily ever after ending because that's just not how it works.

Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yakov knew it, Moshe, Ahron, and Miriam knew it, and they lived in peace with it. Yet we struggle with it all the time, even though we are the living embodiment of things not going quite the way we'd expect, and even though it screams out of every single page of Jewish history.

So, perhaps rather than ask why the Torah doesn't give Moshe and the Jewish People the happy ending we expect, we ought to invert the question.

With all we know, why do we still hold on so tightly to our expectations of how things ought to be?

Thought of the Week

“You're likely already aware of the sunk cost fallacy... It can weigh on you heavily, especially when you're talking years of time and money.



One way I've looked past the fallacy is to remember that we don't owe our past selves anything. What is it that present-day us wants? Or in a couple of years?"

Quote of the Week

“True compassion is not just an emotional response but a firm commitment founded on reason. Because of this firm foundation, a truly compassionate attitude toward others does not change even if they behave negatively. Genuine compassion is based not on our own projections and expectations, but rather on the needs of the other: irrespective of whether another person is a close friend or an enemy, as long as that person wishes for peace and happiness and wishes to overcome suffering, then on that basis we develop genuine concern for their problem. This is genuine compassion.”

– Dalai Lama

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. I have a niche business that allows me to spend substantial time on TorahRedux, and I welcome your assistance in furthering my goal to keep publishing quality content that matters. I help NY home care companies implement compliant Wage Parity plans that enhance recruitment and retention; whether or not that was comprehensible, if you know anyone in the New York home care field, please introduce me!

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



TorahRedux

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.