



Eikev 2023

Good Fortune

3 minute read | Straightforward

We spend most of the Seder night talking about the Exodus story. But right towards the beginning of the Haggadah, we say something that almost casually dismisses the central theme of the night, the Exodus:

צא וְלִמַּד מֵהַבְּקִשׁ לְבֶן הָאֲרָמִי לַעֲשׂוֹת לְיַעֲקֹב אֲבִינוּ: שְׁפָרְעָה לֹא גָזַר אֱלֹהִים עַל הַזְּכָרִים, וְלְבֶן הַבְּקִשׁ לַעֲקֹר אֶת־הַכֹּל לָוָן – Go learn what Lavan from Aramean sought to do to our father Yakov; Pharaoh only oppressed the males, whereas Lavan tried to destroy it all!

But it doesn't quite resonate.

Pharaoh was a genocidal despot who cruelly enslaved an entire race and murdered children indiscriminately – לֹא גָזַר אֱלֹהִים עַל הַזְּכָרִים. He ticks every box on the villain archetype bingo card, which is, in large part, why the Exodus was such a big deal.

Our ancestor Lavan is characterized as a tricky swindler who provides refuge and safe harbor when Yakov is on the run with nowhere to go. Over time, Lavan gives him his family, a home, and tremendous wealth and resources.

In what universe can we plausibly say that Lavan was worse than Pharaoh? Moreover, doesn't that undermine Pharaoh's atrocities and perhaps the entire Seder?

R' Jonathan Sacks suggests that the Haggadah reminds us of Lavan as a warning that threats don't always look like the atrocities of Pharaoh; sometimes, they appear in the form of the kind person who took you in and gave you so much.

Nothing is surprising about our response to imminent danger. When calamity strikes in the form of a Pharaoh-type villain, we know what to do; across the ages, in the face of adversity, Jews have been resilient, doubling down on study, prayer, repentance, and enhanced observance – וְכִאֲשֶׁר יֵעָנֶה אֲתוֹ בֶן יִרְבֵּה – וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ.

The danger Lavan poses is far more insidious. Lavan doesn't hurt Yakov in the physical world; he hurts Yakov in the world of spirit, making Yakov forget who he was – לַעֲקֹר אֶת־הַכֹּל. Affluence, no less than genocide or slavery, threatens Jewish continuity by making us forget who we are.



For the many souls lost to pogroms, Crusades, the Inquisition, or the Holocaust, there are memorials and prayers, history books, and proclamations of “Never Again.” But, in the words of R’ Noach Weinberg, there is a spiritual Holocaust with no memorials or monuments; how many souls have been lost, assimilated to an open society that so warmly invites us in?

Before Moshe’s death, he warned of precisely this pitfall because humans are consistently prone to falling in:

הַשְׁמֵר לַיהוָה, פֶּן-תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת-ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, לְבַלְתִּי שְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו, אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּךָ הַיּוֹם. פֶּן-תֹּאכַל, וְשִׂבַעְתָּ; וּבָתִּים טִבִּים תִּבְנֶה, וְיִשְׁבַּת. וּבִקְרָה וּצְאֵנָה יִרְבּוּ, וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב יִרְבּוּ-לָךְ; וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-לָךְ, יִרְבֶּה-לָךְ; וְלִבְךָ, לִבְבָּה; וְשִׂכַחְתָּ אֶת-ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, הַמּוֹצִיאֶךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים – Take care that you don't forget the Lord your God and fail to keep His commandments, rules, and laws, which I instruct you today: when you have eaten, and you are satisfied and built fine houses to live in, and your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold have increased, and everything you own has prospered, be careful that your heart does not grow haughty and you forget the Lord your God—who freed you from the land of Egypt, home of slaves... (8:10-14)

The Beis Halevi highlights that Yakov prayed for God to save him from the hand of his brother, the hand of Esau – מִיַּד אָחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו – because each strategy requires different treatment – the destructive capacity for violence – מִיַּד עֵשָׂו – but also the warm embrace of brotherhood that is no less of a threat – מִיַּד אָחִי.

Perhaps that’s why the Haggadah reminds us that Lavan might be worse than Pharaoh. Faced with Lavan, people are oblivious to the threat, invisibly slipping away, silent, and without putting up a fight.

It is one thing to believe in God when you need His help. It is another thing entirely when you have already received it and are in a comfortable position.

The Haggadah and the Seder provide us the antidote – צַד וְלִמָּד. Hold on to your identity, your history, and where you come from.

When you know who you are, it’s harder to get lost.

What We Do With Broken Things

5 minute read | Straightforward

At Mount Sinai, Moshe ascended for forty days to receive the Torah. He didn't show up when the people expected, so they got nervous and clamored for a new religious focal point. In a moment of madness, they crafted a Golden Calf, and in a perplexing turn of events, identified it as the god that brought them out of Egypt.

As they celebrate their new object of attention and worship with a festival of dancing, song, and sacrifice, Moshe returns to our world with the original Ten Commandments, a mythical artifact with magical properties crafted by God's fingers. Moshe enters the camp only to witness these festivities and, utterly horrified, throws down the tablets, permanently shattering them.

With the first tablets broken, Moshe had to repeat the process in an attenuated form; the second tablets are almost second-rate in comparison. Whereas God had crafted the first ones, Moshe – a great human, but still a human – had to prepare the second. The first tablets contained a Torah that humans could never forget; the second ones contain a Torah we forget all the time.

The consequences of the Golden Calf were enormous; God threatened to destroy them all there and then, at least until Moshe intervened. Our sages suggest that the sin was so grave that every bit of human suffering pays down a sliver of the damage done by the Golden Calf.

A common thread people take from this story is the profound loss of what might have been; a more perfect world that never even got a chance to get started. Our sages teach that the letters began peeling off the surface and wafting back to the sky even before Moshe broke the tablets, which is how he understood that his people were no longer worthy.

The lessons of damage and loss are correct but miss something essential.

Moshe shattered the tablets, but what happened to the broken pieces?

When God told Moshe to craft the second set of tablets, God also tells Moshe what to do with them:

וְאָכַתְבָּ עַל־הַלְּחֹת אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל־הַלְּחֹת הַרְּאשֹׁנִים אֲשֶׁר שָׁבַרְתָּ וְשָׂמְתָם בְּאֲרוֹן – “I will inscribe on the tablets the commandments that were on the first tablets that you smashed, and you shall deposit them in the Ark.” (10:2)

Our sages read the instruction to put “them” in the Ark as not only referring to Moshe's second tablets, which are like the first tablets in content; but that the original shattered tablets were like the second tablets in what Moshe was supposed to do with them – וְשָׂמְתָם בְּאֲרוֹן / אֲשֶׁר שָׁבַרְתָּ.



The broken tablets are not buried, not forgotten, not hidden, and not lost. Instead, they are stored in the Ark, alongside the new, whole second tablets. As one writer beautifully put it, shattered remnants of the past still matter, persist in their importance, and deserve preservation and remembrance, just like something whole.

In this conception, the broken tablets are a striking symbol of brokenness and wholeness coexisting side by side at Judaism's most sacred site. The comprehensive picture of the Golden Calf story and its aftermath should reorient our attitude to broken things and setbacks. It's not a story about breaking things; it's a story about what we do when we break things, and the epilogue is that you pick up the pieces and move forward.

In Japanese culture, there is an art form of restoring broken pottery by gluing the cracks and seams distinctively, often with gold lacquer; breakage and subsequent repair are part of the proud history of the object, rather than something to disguise.

Perhaps the first tablets represent an idealism that crashes into reality and shatters into pieces. While admittedly easy to say, perhaps their example shows that these hopes aren't permanently lost to the ether. Rather than becoming cynical and jaded from traumatic experience and upheaval, discarding the vision of what could have been, you might be able to recover remnants that persist, integrating them with the real world you inhabit. It won't look quite how you thought, but maybe some parts can in certain ways. Sometimes we have to break or let go of what we hoped could be in order to make way for what is and can still become.

Moshe didn't break the tablets out of violent anger; his people and their world simply weren't ready for the first tablets. Letting go of them, however damaging and terrible, was a necessary part of the healing process, paving the way for his people to build a world on a foundation of broken ideals. There's nothing sad about that; that's just the way life is.

The Torah closes with a line of praise for Moshe, the faithful shepherd, endorsing his strength and valor – וְלִכְלֵל הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה וְלִכְלֵל הַמּוֹרָא הַגָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה לְעֵינֵי כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל. Our sages take this as a reference to some of the things Moshe intuited on his own, which God only endorsed after the fact, one of which is breaking the tablets – אֲשֶׁר שִׁבְרָתָ / יִישַׁר כְּתָבֶךָ שִׁבְרָתָ.

On Simchas Torah, after we complete the Torah with that line, we immediately begin again, a new beginning built on breaking, breaking that is holy, breaking that God endorses, and breaking that stands before us and alongside the best we have to offer. From the ashes of this colossal failure, God teaches Moshe how his people can make amends and gives him the formula that features so prominently in our prayers on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur. The healing from the rupture led to the Mishkan project, which all subsequent prayer, sacrifice, and worship center around. The remarkable quality of comebacks is not in spite of setbacks; it is because of them.



TorahRedux

The Megaleh Amukos notes that the season of repentance and making amends is Ellul, an acronym for the Ark, the tablets, and the broken tablet they sit alongside – אלוּל / ארון לוחת ושברי לוחת. More to the point, the second tablets are delivered on Yom Kippur itself.

We all break things, and we experience brokenness in different ways over the course of our journey. When we lose someone, that loss leaves a void with their shape imprinted in our hearts, and we carry that brokenness forever. After pain and loss, life goes on, only differently than before; we now live with two sets of tablets.

We might call forgetting and moving on from what we break bouncing back, but that's not how people are; that's not how the world works. Everything leaves its mark; a scratch, a bruise, or sometimes a deep scar or void that never entirely goes away.

Perhaps we're not supposed to bounce back at all; maybe it's better to bounce forward.

Take heart in the image of Moshe on his hands and knees, lovingly gathering the precious fragments, collecting every shard, then gently placing each sacred sliver one by one in the Ark, a brilliant glimmer of hope that lingers for posterity.

The shattered remnants of the past belonged in the Ark, and we ought to remember that the Ark wasn't a mere prop; it featured prominently in the Jewish People's travels and wars. It went out in front of them, leading the way, which is to say that any step forward was paved by the broken tablets as much as the whole tablets.

We live in a world of the second tablets. Although the first ones couldn't exist in their wholeness, they could exist in their brokenness, and maybe we can pick up some of those pieces and find a place for them to help shape our world.

There is no paradox of broken and whole; they coexist in a reciprocal interaction. We must find a way to marry the broken with the whole, hopeful idealism with gritty reality.

Brokenness is not something to conceal or deny; it is an essential part of being human. The moments that break us are as significant to our growth as the moments that make us whole. We can find sanctity not only in whole tablets; but in shattered ones, as well.

If we honor that brokenness and carry it with us, it can become sacred, Holy of Holies. In the words of the Kotzker, there is nothing so whole as a broken heart.

The Water of Life



5 minute read | Straightforward

Symbolism plays an essential role in human culture. Through symbols, we find meaning in the physical world, which becomes transparent and reveals the transcendent. Certain symbols are cultural universals, primal archetypes intuitively understood that derive from the unconscious and require no explanation, like mother and child or light and darkness.

As the Torah draws to its close, Moshe says goodbye with a timeless ballad laced with beautiful metaphor and symbolism:

יַעֲרַף בְּמָטָר לְקַחֵי, תִּזְלַל כַּטַּל אֶמְרָתִי, כְּשִׁעִירִים עַל־דְּשָׁא, וְכַרְבִּיבִים עַל־עֵשֶׂב – May my discourse come down as rain; my speech distill as dew; like showers on young vegetation; like droplets on the grass. (32:2)

Many ancient cultures believed that water is the source of life, that rain and water are life-giving, and that water symbolizes cleansing, regeneration, renewal, fertility, birth, creation, and new life. Water symbolizes the universal reservoir of all possible existence, supports every creation, and even precedes their form. The Torah’s creation myth aligns with this archetype, with primordial water everywhere, from which everything subsequently emerges:

וְהָאָרֶץ הַיְתוּמָה תְהוֹו וְבָהוּ וְחַשְׁךָ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם – The earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep, and the spirit of God hovered over the waters... (1:4)

The Mikvah ritual bath is central to Judaism and draws heavily on this archetype, symbolizing rebirth and renewal. Moreover, with our knowledge of the water cycle, we have learned the literal truth of water as the solvent of life and regeneration; and in fact, the search for liquid water in the universe serves as a close proxy to the search for life beyond our planet.

But Moshe doesn’t say the Torah is like water; he compares the Torah to rain – יַעֲרַף בְּמָטָר לְקַחֵי. They do have a lot in common; both are life-giving, cleansing, regenerative, restorative, and like rain, the Torah came from the sky to affirm and sustain us. So sure, the Torah is like rain!

But Moshe doesn’t simply say that the Torah is like rain; he says it’s also like dew – יַעֲרַף בְּמָטָר לְקַחֵי, תִּזְלַל כַּטַּל אֶמְרָתִי.

But what is dew, if not just another form of rain and water?

To unlock the symbol and discover the meaning, we must establish the technical difference between rain and dew.

Dew occurs when you have a cold object in a warm environment. As the object’s exposed surface cools by radiating heat, atmospheric moisture condenses faster than it evaporates, resulting in the



formation of water droplets on the surface. In other words, a cold object in a warm environment can draw moisture out of the ambient surroundings.

There's a Torah that's like rain, that comes from the sky, and that hopefully, you've experienced at times, perhaps a flash of inspiration that came out of nowhere, the moments you feel alive. But that doesn't happen to everyone, and even when it does, it doesn't happen all the time. To borrow rain's imagery, this kind of inspiration is seasonal only. If you're counting on the rain to get by, what happens when the rain stops?

Perhaps precisely because of this problem, there's a Torah that we can experience that feels more like dew. A warm environment that doesn't come from the sky, that we can generate and cultivate ourselves, and which draws out the life-affirming properties from within and around us.

R' Simcha Bunim m'Peshischa notes that we can't expect our efforts and interactions with Torah to have an instant magical transformational effect like a rain shower; it's far more subtle, like dew. A morning's dew is not enough to nourish a plant, but with the regular appearance of morning dew, the days stack up, and despite no noticeable daily effect, the plant will grow.

As R' Shlomo Farhi points out, dew is gentle, not overwhelming. Plants can't survive forever on dew alone, but it can be enough to keep them going until the rains return. When you are running cold, a warm atmosphere will nurture and sustain you, but you should remember that it can't take you all the way; there will come the point that you need to proactively follow through with renewed drive and desire to grow once more.

The Torah conditions timely rain on the product of outward effort:

וְהָיָה אִם-שָׁמַעְתָּ אֶת-קוֹל אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרָיִם אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מֵצִוְיָה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לְאַהֲבָהּ אֶת-ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְלַעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם. וְנָתַתִּי מִטְרֵ-אֲרָצְכֶם בְּעֵתוֹ
If then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the Lord your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul, I will grant the rain for your land in season...
(11:,13,14)

The Ishbitzer suggests that dew is a product of internal effort, a reflection of our hearts and minds. Subconsciously, our hearts and minds hope and pray, day and night, without stop. When you so much as hope for the best, or that things turn out okay, or even whisper "Please, God," those thoughts bring wisps of warm vitality into the world that affirm and sustain growth and life. Given the mythical potency of dew and its connection to humble yet persistent origins, our sages suggest that, of all things, dew contains the latent power to resurrect the dead at the End of Days.

There are times you'll have flashes of divine inspiration, but at some point, that's going to dry up. Reassuringly, as Moshe said so long ago, it doesn't just come from the sky; it can emerge slowly with determination and environmental support. Perhaps then, dew is the symbol of human-driven inspiration – אתערותא דלתתא.



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Half the year we pray for rain, but half the year we also pray for dew; remember that you are more like a plant than a robot. You have fallow and fruitful seasons, needing different things at different times; a light drizzle right now, a little more sun next week. It is a design feature, not a flaw, and is a far healthier approach to adopt than perpetual sameness.

This isn't cutesy wordplay; the metaphor is quite explicit. If Moshe's words are the water, then we are the grass and leaves, the tree of life itself, encouraged to endure and grow strong – כְּשֶׁעֵרָם עָלֵי-דְשָׁא, וְכִרְבִּיבִים עָלֵי-עֵשֶׂב.

When you go into the woods, you see all kinds of trees. One is stunted, another is bent; you understand it was obstructed or didn't get enough light, and so it turned out that way. You don't get emotional about it, you allow it; that's just the way trees are. But humans are like that too – כִּי הָאָדָם עָץ – הַשְּׂדֵה. All too often, rather than accept ourselves and others, we are critical, whether self-conscious or judgmental, critical of a way of being other humans for the way they are. But humans are like trees; this one was obstructed like this, that one didn't get enough that, so they turned out that way.

Trees lose their leaves in the cold dark winters, but they do not despair, secure in the knowledge that spring will return before long and they will blossom once again. You might be in the thick of winter, but hold on; you too will blossom once again.

If you're waiting for inspiration or a sign, it might be a while, it might not come at all, or this might be it.

Cultivate an environment around yourself with structure, systems, and people that will foster, nurture, and support your growth. You will not rise to the level of your goals; you will fall to the level of your systems. It's simply unsustainable to have big goals with no supporting infrastructure.

Your goal should not be to beat the game but to stay in the game and continue playing so that you can in turn foster a gentle and nurturing environment that will warm others too.

Moshe's timeless blessing is hauntingly beautiful and refreshingly real. Moshe speaks through the ages and reminds us the Torah is not just water, the stuff of life. It is the water we need in good times and the dew that gets us through hard times.

The metaphor itself acknowledges and validates that there are times the rains just won't come. But in the moments where the Torah won't be our rain, it can be our dew.

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 – ותרה ארצה בכם – ועצר את השמים ולא יגיה מטר והאדמה לא תתן את יבולה ואבדתם מהרה מעל הארץ הטבה אשר ה' נתן לכם.

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־תִּתֶּן־לִי / בְּמָה אֲדַע כִּי אֵיךְ־שָׂנָה*. 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־יִרְא אֲנֹכִי אֹתוֹ פֶּן־יָבוֹא וְהַכִּנִּי – אִם עַל־בָּנִים*.

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 לָבֶם וַיִּתְּרֵדוּ 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 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲכֵן נֹדַע הַדָּבָר –*

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.



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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 – וְהֵאֱמַן בְּה' 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 – הַזְקֵנוּ וְאִמְצוּ אֶל־תִּירְאוֹ וְאֶל־תַּעֲרָצוּ מִפְּנֵיהֶם כִּי ה' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם הוּא הַהִלֵּךְ עִמָּךְ לֹא יִרְפָּךְ וְלֹא יַעֲזֹבְךָ / לֹא תִירָא וְלֹא תַחַת / וַיִּצְוֵ אֶת־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן־נֹון וַיֹּאמֶר הַזְקֵנוּ וְאִמְצוּ כִּי אִתָּהּ תָּבִיא אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לָהֶם וְאָנֹכִי אֵהְיֶה 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



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captured, and they want to flee back to Egypt. Too afraid to listen, Yehosua and Caleb's reassurances fall on deaf ears – וְאַתֶּם אֲלֵי־תִירְאוּ אֶת־עַם הָאָרֶץ כִּי לְהַמְנוּ הֵם סָר צֶלֶם מַעֲלֵיהֶם ה' אֶתְנוּ אֲלֵי־תִירְאֵם.

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.

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. 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?



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Neli

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

Redux: *adjective* – resurgence; refers to being brought back, restored, or revived; something familiar presented in a new way. Not to see what no one else has seen, but to say what nobody has yet said about something which everybody sees.