

“You are a Jew like myself,” the rabbi continued. “Tonight is *Kol Nidrei* night. There is a small group of young Jews who do not want to transgress any of the thirty-nine main categories of labor. It means everything to them. It is the essence of their existence. Can you do something about it? Can you help?”

The rabbi noticed that a hidden shiver went through Schneeweiss as he listened to the rabbi’s strange request. The rabbi took Schneeweiss’s hand and said, “I promise you, as long as you live, it will be a good life. I beg you to do it for us, so that we may still find some dignity in our humiliating existence.” The stern face of Schneeweiss changed. For the first time since his arrival at Janowska, there was a human spark in it.

“There is nothing that I can do tonight,” Schneeweiss said. These were the first words he had uttered since the *Rebbe* had come to him. “I have no jurisdiction over the night brigade, but tomorrow, on *Yom Kippur*, I will do for you whatever I can.” The *Rebbe* shook Schneeweiss’s hand in gratitude and left.

That night, they were taken to work near the Lvov cemetery. To this very day, the *Rebbe* has scars from the beatings of that night. The next day he (Schneeweiss) took them to the S.S. Quarters in the camp, to a large wooden house: “You fellows will shine the floor without any polish or wax. And you, Rabbi, will clean the windows with dry rags so that you will not transgress any of the thirty-nine major categories of work.” He left the room abruptly without saying another word.

The *Rebbe* was standing on a ladder with rags in his hand, cleaning the huge windows while chanting prayers, and his companions were on the floor polishing the wood and praying with him. “The floor was wet with our tears. You can imagine the prayers of that *Yom Kippur*,” said the *Rebbe* to the *chassidim* who were listening to his tale while he was wiping away a tear.

At about twelve o’clock noon, the door opened wide, and into the room stormed two angels of death, S. S. men in their black uniforms. They were followed by a food cart filled to capacity. “Noontime, time to eat bread, soup and meat,” announced one of the two S. S. men. The room was filled with an aroma of freshly cooked food, such food as they had not seen since the German occupation: white bread, steaming hot vegetable soup, and huge portions of meat.

The tall S. S. man commanded in a high-pitched voice, “You must eat immediately; otherwise, you will be shot on the spot!” None of them moved. The rabbi remained on the ladder, the *chassidim* on the floor. The German repeated the orders. The *Rebbe* and the *chassidim* remained glued to their places. The S. S. men called to Schneeweiss. “Schneeweiss, if the dirty dogs refuse to eat, I will kill you along with them.” Schneeweiss pulled himself to attention, looked the German directly in the eyes, and said in very quiet tone, “We Jews do not eat today. Today is *Yom Kippur*, our most holy day, the Day of Atonement.”

“You do not understand, Jewish dog,” roared the taller of the two.

“I command you in the name of the Fuhrer and the Third Reich, *fress!*”

Schneeweiss composed himself, held his head high, and repeated the same answer: “We Jews obey the law of our tradition. Today is *Yom Kippur*, a day of fasting.”

The German took out his revolver from its holster and pointed it at Schneeweiss’s temple. Schneeweiss remained calm. He stood still, at attention, his head high. A shot pierced through the room. Schneeweiss fell.

The *Rebbe* and the *chassidim* stood as if frozen in their places.

They could not believe what their eyes had just witnessed. Schneeweiss, the man who in the past had publicly flaunted his transgressions, had just sanctified Hashem’s Name and died a martyr’s death for the sake of Jewish honor. “Only then, on that *Yom Kippur* day in Janowska,” said the *Rebbe* to his *chassidim*, “did I understand the meaning of the statement in the *Talmud*: ‘Even the transgressors in Israel are as full of good deeds as a pomegranate is filled with seeds’ (*Berachos* 57a).”

This man became a *baal teshuvah* of sorts for the best reason: he felt his kinship with the Jewish People, with Hashem. He was inwardly motivated. We do not know what impelled him to act so long in flagrant violation of tradition, but, apparently, the real *Pintele Yid*, the spark of Hashem which is in all of us, finally came to the fore. We might ask ourselves: How often do we ignore the potential of greatness in others and in ourselves. We are only as limited as our perceptions.

### Va’ani Tefillah

**Mechayeh Meisim... Someich noflim v’rofeh cholim.**

Why does *Techiyas Ha’Meisim* precede *someich noflim v’rofeh cholim*? In the scheme of things, supporting the fallen and healing the sick should precede resurrecting the dead. **Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita**, quotes *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 91b) who say that during *Techiyas Ha’Meisim* the dead will initially rise up with their deformities, so that the wicked living at the time will not have reason to deny that Hashem has resurrected the very same people who had died. Then, He heals them of their deformities. This is why *mechayeh meisim* precedes *someich noflim* and *rofeh cholim*, because, in fact, it does come first.

**Dedicated to the memory of  
Eliyahu Goldberg ז"ל  
whose life was devoted to harbotzas  
Torah, and who was instrumental in  
disseminating Peninim to the wider  
world community. His untimely passing  
has left a void in the hearts and minds of  
the many beneficiaries of his chesed.**

Peninim is published weekly by *Peninim Publications* in conjunction with the *Hebrew Academy of Cleveland*, 1860 S. Taylor Rd. Cleveland, Ohio 44118

©All rights reserved – prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum  
YOU TOO CAN SHARE IN SPREADING THE WORD OF TORAH

For a yearly subscription or Parsha sponsorship, please contact:

In Cleveland – Rabbi L. Scheinbaum (216) 371-7609 or (216) 321-5838 Ext. 165

Outside of North America – Mrs. A. Goldberg +972 2-569 5185

בית חינוך הרב דסלו-קליבלנד  
Hebrew Academy  
of Cleveland

Visit us at:  
<http://www.hac1.org>

Design  
by  
Kenny  
Fidler  
kfgraphics

PENINIM  
ON THE  
TORAH



פנינים  
התורה

Parashas Vayeilech

תשע"ז

פרשת וילך

### TORAH THOUGHTS ON THE PARSHA

ילך משה ויהושע ויחיצבו באהל מועד

**Moshe and Yehoshua went and stood at the Ohel Moed. (31:14)**

*Chazal* teach that *Moshe Rabbeinu* asked Hashem to transfer the reins of leadership to Yehoshua, his worthy disciple. Rather than insist that Yehoshua come to Moshe’s tent to study and hear the word of G-d, Moshe went to Yehoshua. Their roles were now reversed, as the student became the leader, and the *Rebbe* took the place of his student. The Pillar of Cloud descended over Yehoshua, separating him from Moshe. When the Cloud ascended, Moshe asked Yehoshua, “What did the Word (Hashem’s communication) say to you?” Yehoshua responded, “When Hashem appeared to you, did I know what you were told?” In other words, on face value, it appears that Yehoshua was intimating to Moshe, “When you were the *Rebbe*, you did not share with me everything that Hashem told you; now I am the *Rebbe*, and I cannot share with you what Hashem said to me.” Moshe cried, “One hundred deaths (I would rather die 100 times), but not one envy!” Apparently, Moshe could not live with being the student when once he had been the *Rebbe*.

Understandably, this is a very difficult *Midrash* and should not be read or understood at face value. Simply, it means that Hashem communicates with each *Navi*, Prophet, on his specific level, and it is accordingly understood by that individual prophet. It is a message conveyed to him and, thus, understood only by him. This is what Yehoshua meant when he said, “I cannot give over to you what was taught specifically to me.”

The question that is pressing concerns Moshe’s envy. A father and *Rebbe* are not jealous of the success of their son/student. Moshe should have been proud of Yehoshua – not envious of him. The **Imrei Emes** explains that this rule applies to innovation in which the son/student achieves in an area in which the father/*rebbe* had never been involved. When the son/student excels in areas which he received from his father/*rebbe*, however, it is different. A son who assumes his father’s position and is successful beyond that which his father accomplished will incur some envy. This is human nature. While the father/*rebbe* certainly takes pride in his son/student’s success, he still experiences a slight twinge of envy/regret that his son’s achievement has overshadowed that of his own.

ומצאוהו רעות רבות וצרות ואמר ביום ההוא הלא על כי אין אנכי בקרבי מצאוני הרעות האלה... ואנכי הסתר אסתיר פני ביום ההוא  
**And many evils and distresses will encounter it, it will say on that day, “Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?” But I will surely conceal My face on that day. (31:17,18)**

Our nation has suffered immensely throughout the millennia. Hounded and persecuted, physically and emotionally, no words can describe the travail that has often been our lot. The secular streams stick to their usual reneging by denouncing these “isolated occurrences” as an anti-Semitic reaction to the Jews’ refusal to assimilate into their host country’s way of life, religion, etc. They posit that, if we would be more like *goyim*, then they would treat us like *goyim* – not Jews. Any person with a modicum of intelligence understands the futility of this argument. We, who study Torah as our primer of faith, know the truth. It is there that we read the Torah’s portent for the future, for the End of Days. “The people will rise up and stray after the gods of the foreigners of the Land... and it will forsake Me... My anger will flare against it on that day and I will forsake them” (ibid 16:17). The Crusades, Inquisition, *Auto-De-Fe*, pogroms, and, most recently, the Holocaust, were not isolated occurrences as a result of anti-Semitism. They were manifestations of Hashem’s concealment, His *hester Panim*.

It was this *hester Panim* that led many of our people to declare that Hashem is no longer with us. What they either do not understand, or refuse to accept, is that we are not looking hard enough. Just because we do not see Him does not mean He is not there. To those who ask: “Where was G-d during the Holocaust?” we respond, “Where was He not?” This is why, explains the **Malbim, zl**, the Torah forthrightly writes exactly what would transpire, predicting the ensuing reaction. People will look to blame anyone and anything but themselves. It is all for the purpose of justifying their negative behavior. In this *parsha*, Hashem speaks to “our” generation. This is what is going to happen, and you will disavow yourself from any sort of blame. Indeed, you will say, “Bad things happen to good people because G-d does not care; He is not in control; He has no purview over the bad things.” Indeed, even if this ludicrous disavowal were true (which, of course, it is not) one might ask: What did we do to catalyze such a Heavenly reaction? Why did He forsake us? Why is He concealing Himself?

HEBREW ACADEMY OF CLEVELAND

Our Torah writes the “concealment” in a redundant manner, *Haster, astir*, “I will surely conceal myself.” The **Baal Shem Tov, zl**, observes that the double *hastarah*, concealment, refers to an instance in which the actual concealment is enshrouded. In other words, one does not even realize the truth: Hashem is concealing Himself. When one believes that he is living through a period of concealment he is able to maintain his faith that a benevolent G-d is doing good, only he does not see it – yet. When the concealment is obscured, however, he does not believe that he is going through a period of Heavenly concealment, thereby allowing him to fall into depression and give up on life as a Jew. This is why the *Baal Shem Tov* would say, “I have the greatest fear of the *haster, astir*, when the actual concealment is concealed.” When the hidden is hidden, we do not know where to look – or for what to look. Consequently, we do not bother looking, and we just throw in the towel. Why bother looking when the discovery might make us uncomfortable?

I believe it was **Horav Levi Yitzchak, zl, m’Berditchiv** who said: “One can be for Hashem, or (Heaven forbid) against Hashem, but one can never say that he is not with Hashem.” The Almighty never leaves us. If we do not see him, we should look harder.

The following story made the rounds of the various media sources. Even the non-observant crowd was moved by the incident. Sadly, they moved right back to their original position (in relationship with the Torah). Moti Dotan, the head of the lower Galilee Regional Council, had recently returned from a ceremony to honor the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Twin Cities pact between the Regional Council and the Hanover district in Germany. At the event, Dotan was approached by a member of the Hanover District Council, who said, “My father, Werner Herzig, recently died; before his death, he wanted to share a dark secret that had accompanied him for the major part of his life. He told me that as a young, healthy German male, he was drafted into the German Luftwaffe and fought in World War II. He was personally involved in some awful crimes against the Jews, whose only ‘sin’ was their being Jewish. One of those sins was the burning of a *shul* on the Russian front.” He quoted his father as saying, “It is important for me to tell you this, since today we are confronted with Holocaust deniers, who contend that it never happened. Well, let me affirm for you – it did happen!”

Then Herzig gave Dotan a piece of parchment which he had received from his father. Apparently, the German Luftwaffe officer had sliced a piece of parchment from a Torah scroll (that had been ensconced in the Ark of the *shul* prior to burning it) and fashioned it as a cover for his officer’s ID document! “My father asked me to find a holy man in the Lower Galilee and give it to him. Let this be proof that the atrocity did happen.”

Dotan was quite well aware of the work done by *Horav Yitzchak Dovid Grossman* of Migdal Ha’Emek; so, he delivered the parchment to him. When he related the story to *Rav Grossman* prior to giving him the parchment, the *Rav* began to cry. Seventy years had passed since that fateful day, and now that *Sefer Torah* remnant had come home.

The story in and of itself is powerful, but what follows is mind-boggling. *Rav Grossman* opened up the piece of parchment to see what part of the Torah the Nazi had selected as a cover for his ID. Clearly, it was a random choice, but we Jews understand that nothing is random; nothing is by chance; there is no such thing as coincidence.

*Rav Grossman* turned over the piece of parchment and began to read from the text. It so “happens” that it was from *Parashas Ki Savo*, the *parsha* which details the ninety-eight *kellalos*, curses, to befall our nation for its disobedience. Yes, the *Tochachah*, Rebuke, was the “chosen” text for the ID document. The *Rav* read, “In the siege and distress that your enemy will distress you in your own cities... then Hashem will make extraordinary your blows and the blows of your offspring – great and faithful blows, and evil and faithful illnesses. Even any illness and any blow that is not written in the book of this Torah... them will Hashem bring upon you until you are destroyed. You will be left few in number, whereas you were as the stars of the heaven in abundance” (*Devarim* 57-62).

Undoubtedly, this parchment bespeaks *Hashgachah pratis*, Divine supervision. After seventy years, this document made its way to *Eretz Yisrael* as a wake-up call. The Nazi could have cut out any other number of verses from the Torah. He was guided to cut out specifically the part that relates to the rebuke and punishment, but gives us hope for redemption.

There is so much to learn from this story. We see the embodiment of evil; how, after destroying a *shul*, the monster who destroyed it had no qualms about taking a Torah scroll and defacing it by using its parchment as a suitable way to preserve his document. Little did he realize that he was truly preserving the relationship that Hashem has with His children. It is all about concealment, but, after time, the ambiguity clears up, the veil is lifted, and we are able to see what many of us have always known: Hashem has always been there. He never leaves us.

#### ונחה כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת

#### So now, write this song for yourselves. (31:19)

*Chazal* derive from the above *pasuk* that each Jew is commanded to write a *Sefer Torah* – or, at least, participate in the writing of a communal *Sefer Torah*. As this is the last of the 613 *mitzvos*, we glean from here that the entire Torah must be recorded for the purpose of knowing and understanding its *mitzvos*. Without learning, there can be no knowledge; and, without knowledge, there can be no observance; and, without personal observance, we have nothing to transmit to the next generation. Why is the *mitzvah* to write a *Sefer Torah* enjoined to the individual as if to say that each and every Jew must write his own personal Torah scroll? This is ostensibly not a simple undertaking.

The **Melitzer Rebbe, Shlita**, explains the underlying lesson to be derived from this *mitzvah*. It is quite common in *frum*, observant, circles that a boy/son who is born into an observant home will usually go to the right day school/*cheder*, followed by *yeshivah/kollel*, thus allowing him to follow the prescribed path delineated for the Torah Jew. From the cradle throughout his life, this young man complacently follows the pattern set forth for him by his parents, *rebbeim*, community. Born *frum* – lives *frum* – it should be sufficient. No. Hashem wants effort, excitement, enthusiasm in *frumkeit*. Complacency means that one acts by rote, without meaning. Furthermore, posits the *Rebbe*, such observance will not ensure that the tradition will be transmitted to the next generation. When parents carry out their religious observance because “that is the way I was raised,” it is quite possible that their children will not feel it necessary to raise their children in a similar manner, because they themselves have had little to no feeling vis-à-vis observance. When a son sees his father go to *shul* as if it were a funeral which he has to attend: entering late; barely *davening*;

remaining long enough so that he can have breakfast with the *kiddush* club – is it any wonder that the son does not value *davening*?

Each and every Jew is enjoined to write his own *Sefer Torah*, to add to what his parents taught him, to innovate, to do more, act better, achieve greater heights in *Yiddishkeit*. Which father does not want to see his son overtake him spiritually? To write one’s own *Sefer Torah* requires commitment and money. One must be willing to spend. In order to have this attitude, one must appreciate the value of the *mitzvah*. This can only occur if he observes his parents’ willingness to spend for Torah. If a son grows up in a home where education takes precedence over the mundane and material expenditures which are currently the vogue, then he will follow suit and commit to a life of Torah values. Otherwise, his life will be one long cruise, in which glorifying the physical and venerating material excess is the new value system for determining success – and *frumkeit*.

Only one who appreciates and loves Torah to the point that it becomes the centerpiece of his life will write his own Torah, act in a manner that demonstrates that his religious observance is not something he inherited, but a life that he has chosen for himself.

#### כי לא תשכח מפיו ודעו

#### For it will not be forgotten from the mouth of its children. (31:21)

What is the secret of our continued survival? It is not as if we have acted perfectly as children of Hashem. Yet, we continue to survive, to endure the vicissitudes of life, until that day when we have completed our mission. Regardless how distant we have allowed ourselves to move away, how far we have fallen, how low we have sunken as a result of our collective sins, we still have one redeeming value, one merit, one blessing that accompanies us through the abyss of darkness that resonates through our life: the Torah. As soon as we return to the Torah, we are back home.

What if we have turned our backs on the Torah? It has happened. The secular streams have already denied the Divine Authorship of the Torah. Others have completely extirpated the Torah from their lives. It is not germane. The “progressive,” forward-thinking, Jew is held back by its archaic laws and beliefs. At the end of the eighteenth century, Germany was gravitating towards the tenets of the *Haskalah*, Enlightenment. Much of the Jewish population had already abrogated their relationship with Hashem. This was the religious scene that confronted *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, when he established his nascent *kehillah*, community, in Frankfurt. He countered that, even if the Jewish People reneged the Torah, they would still have the *shiras haTorah*, song of the Torah, the word of Hashem that attests to our nation’s calling and Divine mission. The song of the Torah is its inner spirit, the Divine spark which is inextinguishable. It is the song that connects to the Divine spark within each and every Jew that will turn him back to the Torah, thus enabling him to receive its inspiration and enthusiastically carry out its tenets.

This Divine spark will keep awake the vital spirit that will not allow our nation to die. It will keep it strong, so that we do not falter in the face of oppression from without, and we allow for it to maintain a clarity of vision when the challenges come from within. The promise of *ki lo sishochach mipi zaro* guarantees that our nation will never entirely forfeit its calling, never totally forget its mission, so that it will endure until the end

of time. There will always be a spiritual principle, which is protected by Hashem Himself, through which – again and again – we will be able to achieve spiritual revival.

After all is said and done, this is a difficult concept to acknowledge. Likewise, we find the *pasuk* in *Parashas Balak, Lo hitbit aven b’Yaakov v’lo raah amal b’Yisrael*, “He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov, and He has seen no perversity in Yisrael” (*Bereishis* 23:21). How do we understand this, given that we have coreligionists who have fallen into the abyss of sin and perversity to the point that it is hard to believe that there is anything about them that is “Jewish”?

Or **HaChaim Hakadosh** explains that the sin which we see may, indeed, taint the external fabric of the *neshamah*, soul, thereby distancing the Jew from Hashem, but, at its very core, the nucleus of the *neshamah*, the *Pintele Yid*, there is a spark that cannot be smothered. We see the *shmutz*, spiritual dross, but a holy person whose perspective is not sullied with the physical sees beyond and within. **Shem MiShmuel** explains that this is why *Yitzchak Avinu* embraced *Eisav ha’rasha*, whose iniquity was the source of evil which continues to plague us to this very day. *Yitzchak* saw only *neshamah*, soul, and, as such, he was able to delve beyond the iniquitous *Eisav* to see a holy *neshamah* which produced the many *geirei tzedek*, righteous converts, who have enhanced our nation.

While this sounds great on paper, and we have all been privy to instances of individuals whose religious observance was long ago at odds with Orthodoxy; yet, they came back – slowly at first, but, eventually, they returned. Spontaneity, however, whereby a *rasha meirushah*, one who is so devoid of *Yiddishkeit* that his self-loathing has translated itself into an animus for his own people which parallels – and often supersedes – the most depraved anti-Semite, who suddenly, in the spur of a moment, acts extemporaneously, such that the covert Jewish spark is revealed in all its brilliance – that is not common. I found such an incident, however, a story cited from *Yaffa Eliach’s, Chassidic Tales of the Holocaust*, which demonstrates this phenomenon.

It was shortly before *Yom Kippur* in the Janowska Concentration Camp, where the **Bluzhever Rebbe, zl**, and a group of staunch *chassidim* were under the immediate control of a notorious Jew, *Schneeweiss*, a cruel and flagrant Torah violator, who took special pleasure in persecuting his coreligionists. The Nazis took perverse pleasure in terrorizing the Jews, and even inflicting death, especially during the holiday season, since this had a powerful effect on breaking their spirit. These *chassidim* were acutely aware that every day could be their last, and that the upcoming *Yom Kippur* would probably be their final one on this world. They went over to the *Rebbe* and asked him to implore *Schneeweiss* that he and his group of *chassidim* not be relegated to carry out any of the thirty-nine *avos melachah*, primary categories of labor, which are prohibited on *Shabbos*. This way, their transgression of the law on *Yom Kippur* would not be major.

The *Rebbe* was impressed with their request. Their request was a double hurdle for him. As long as the Nazis were not aware of his noble lineage, he had a chance of remaining among the living. They took a particular pleasure in killing the Jewish leaders. Furthermore, he knew quite well that *Schneeweiss* had nothing but contempt for Jewish tradition. The *Rebbe* decided to take his chances.

“You probably remember me. I am the *Rav* of Pruchnik, Rabbi Israel Spira.” *Schneeweiss* did not respond.