



Parashat Beshalach



English version

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## KEEP CLIMBING

R' Abraham J Twerski - *"People often ask me, 'Is it true that you've written over fifty books? How did you find time, with your busy schedule, to write so many books?' I tell them that I did not really write fifty books. I wrote one book, in fifty different ways. Almost everything I write relates in one way or another to the theme of self-esteem. I define self-esteem as a true and accurate awareness of one's skills, capabilities and limitations."* (By now, he has authored over 60 books.)

There is so much written on self-esteem. What is the Torah's approach to self-esteem?

There are two sources of self-esteem; external and internal. Rabbi Noach Weinberg once said, "How great you are is not defined by how high you are on the ladder of success. It is defined by how many rungs you climbed." Some people built their concept of self-esteem on where they are on the ladder; others measure it by the rungs they have climbed.

Ben Zoma teaches, "Who is wise? One who learns from everyone. Who is mighty? One who overcomes his Inclination. Who is rich? One who is happy with what he has. Who is honorable? One who honors others." (Avot 4:1) What is the underlying thread tying these three seemingly unrelated lessons together?

Ben Zoma is teaching us that true success is internal. The more one's success is a product of his own input, the more meaningful it will be. For example. There are two ways to support one's self. A person can have money because he worked hard to get a PhD. And he feels self-esteem because of it. The other case is that in which a person never

earned his own money. He also has a PhD, but a different type. He is rich because Pappa Has Dough. Who feels better about his financial status? Who has a healthier self-esteem? The one who achieved, or the one who inherited? Ben Zoma teaches that what makes you great is not external achievements, blessings that were simply given to you. Rather, it is internal achievement that makes you great, that builds your self-esteem. How many rungs you climbed. Self-esteem must be earned.

The world does not respect effort without success. Because people only respect something that can be measured. But effort can't be seen; and people can measure only what they see. The Torah view is different from that of the world. According to the Torah, where you are on the ladder is not as important as how many rungs you have climbed. And this question is the most important question in your life, everyday of your life. *Are you climbing?*

Why is how much you climb more important than where you are on the ladder?

**וְהָאֱלֹהִים יִבְנֶה לָּהּ בַּיִת** *This is my G-d, and I will build Him a Beit Hamikdash.* The word "This" teaches that at the splitting of the sea, each and every Jew pointed to G-d. R' Chaim Shmulevitz brings out a principle of major importance for spiritual growth. "The maidservant prophesied and saw at the Sea what the prophet Yechezkel never saw his whole life!" (Mechilta Beshalach 15 2) *Even though she had a prophetic vision, even though she experienced great recognition of G-d's existence, the maidservant stayed a maidservant, while Yechezkel is of the greatest of prophets. Why?*

To become a prophet like Yechezkel requires a great deal of dedicated effort. Very high level of Torah knowledge and perfection of character. The maidservant did not work to achieve this high voltage of recognition of G-d's Might. So, after the experience, she returned to her Maidservant status. At the end of our Parasha, a very short while after the Jewish people experienced the great revelation of G-d at the Sea, they found themselves in the desert with no water to drink. They questioned G-d, הַיְיָ שָׂמָנוּ בְּקִרְבָּנוּ אֱמִיּוֹתָיו, Is G-d amongst us, or not? This caused Amalek to come and attack.

But, wait a second. Didn't they just have a revelation of G-d? One that was like no other revelation ever, before or after?! How could they question G-d???!!! The answer is that the maidservant remained a maidservant. She experienced a revelation on a high spiritual level, but because she did not "climb", herself, to get there, at the end of the revelation, she remained unchanged.

R Chaim Shmulevitz continues...This is how we can understand how Micha took his idol with him from Egypt, through the Red Sea, had it in his backpack at Har Sinai and never got rid of it. Because he never worked on himself. G-d put him on high levels, without his ever investing effort to achieve them, himself. He lacked the effort, so he never became great.

If we get to the top of the mountain without effort, it is much harder to stay on top. מִי־יַעֲלֶה בְּהַר־ה' וְיִיָּוֶה? *Who will go up on the Mountain of G-d?* But, *staying* on top is an entirely different question. *And who will stand in His holy place?* We say this in prayers, the first day after Shabbat, and at the end of our prayers on the High Holidays, when G-d puts us on high levels, even though we have not reached those levels through our own efforts. It is one thing to reach the top of the mountain. Staying on top is something entirely different. What you worked hard for stays with you forever.

The Me'am Loetz lists 15 miracles of the Mannah in the desert. It was truly the most amazing thing. Still, the Jews complained about it in parashat Behaalotcha. *We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt, free of charge, the squash, the watermelon, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.* What? Why were they complaining about these foods, if they had the Manna?

The answer is that they never reached, through their own toil and striving, the level that G-d put them on. They were still at the level of an Egyptian slave. G-d wanted them to be ready for Har Sinai and the Giving of the Torah. So, He put them on the top of the ladder. But really, they never acquired that high level through their own effort, so they did not "own" their spiritual status.

The Talmud teaches that the reason why the prayers of the earlier Rabbis were answered much faster than ours is not because they were greater Torah scholars, but because they were Moser Nefesh for their Torah (Berachot 20a). How great you are is not how much you know. How great you are is how much you are willing to give up for what is important...

*R Simlai taught that when the baby is in the mother's womb, he is taught the whole entire Torah. And these days are the best days of the baby's life. And once it comes to the air of the world, the angel comes and slaps him on his mouth, and the child forgets all of the Torah (Niddah 30b).*

Why does he forget everything he learns? Wouldn't it be great if we never forgot the Torah? The answer is that you never grew from Torah that you did not work hard to achieve.

But why did G-d make the climb more important than the rung?

The Talmud teaches us that in spirituality, in the world of your soul, there are rules to success. אמר רבי יצחק, אם יאמר לך אדם: יגעתי ולא מצאתי - אל תאמן, לא יגעתי ומצאתי - אל תאמן, יגעתי ומצאתי - תאמן. *R Yitzhak said, if a person tells you, I exerted effort*

and I did not find [success], do not believe it. I exerted no effort at all, and I found [succeeded] – do not believe it. [If he says] I exerted effort and I found [succeeded], believe it. (Megillah 6b).

G-d made the climb more important than the rung, because He wants your Emunah. When you are climbing, striving, working hard with your whole heart and soul - that is when you build your Emunah. יגיעת ומצאת תאמין. We connect with G-d the

## MY BELOVED, MY HORSE

There is a module I have discovered that is effective for change in any life area. I call it Triple A. Awareness. Acceptance. Action. First, we need to have awareness of the situation. The problem. The challenge. The options. The strengths and weakness. The powers that be. The ideal situation. Then, and only then, can we move on to step two. Acceptance. Accepting who I am, and accepting the other person or persons I am dealing with. Accepting the situation, accepting where G-d does not give us choice, accepting where He gives us choice. Accepting what G-d has given us or taken from us. Accepting the fact that we have not yet arrived at the ideal situation. And then, and only then, taking action. Something that will get us to the desired outcome. The best option for the present circumstance and people involved. You cannot skip stage two to get to stage three.

We have to learn to accept that not everything is picture-perfect. We have to learn to accept our kids the way they are, not how we think we want them to be. And we have to learn to accept the fact that sometimes in life, we don't understand G-d, and that whatever He did, does or will do, is for our best. Somehow. Somewhere. Sometime.

And when we first believe, when we first accept, not only can we then act, but G-d actually changes His Universe for His Children's sake. He lets us run the show, so to speak. לְסֹסְתִי בְרִכְבִּי פָרְעֹה דְמִיָּדָה רְעָתִי (Shir Hashirim 1;9) King Solomon, in his Song of Songs, the everlasting love-song between G-d and His People, mentions how G-d perceives His Beloved, The Jewish Nation. *To My mare*

most from our efforts and our struggles. And that is how we grow and build self-esteem, from our connection with G-d. If you achieved a goal without working hard for it, you never grew internally. You never built within yourself trust in G-d or in yourself. And if you do not grow internally, you will not make new goals, greater than the old ones you have reached. Because one goal leads to another.

*(female horse) in the horses of Pharaoh, I compare you, My beloved.*

Why does G-d call his beloved a horse? How would a woman feel if her husband said to her, you are the most amazing thing in my life, honey! To me, you are like a horse! Not any horse, but Pharaoh's horse! What is the meaning behind this?

R' Chaim Volozhin,(NH 1,9) Noam Elimelech,(L Shoshana) and R Levi Y Berditchev all learn that there is something HUGE here in this passuk. The unique horse of Pharaoh is referring to the episode at the Sea. The sea split, and the Jews went right in, through dry land. Behind them, the water came crashing down on the Egyptians who ran after them. So, Pharaoh's army of horseback riders tried with all their might to steer away from the sea. But G-d made it that the horses just went running straight into the sea, taking their riders with them. Usually, the rider guides the horse; but here, the horse guided its rider.

In His eternal love-song, G-d says to His Beloved People, I love you so much! For Me, you are like the horse of Pharaoh, in that sometimes I allow you, as it were - kivyachol - to guide Me, instead of Me guiding you. I am like the Rider of the horse, who sometimes lets the horse take control.

What, in the world, does this mean?!!!!

As deep as that idea was, there is something even deeper here. The Jews have just gone through an 86 year holocaust of Egyptian slavery. Where was G-d all this time? Why are such bad things



happening to good people? And why are good things happening to bad people? How does G-d let it all just go? Sometimes, the greatest praise to G-d is accepting Him without asking WHY. By remaining quiet. Accepting *לֵךְ גְּמִיָּה תְהִלָּה* (Tehillim 65;2) To You G-d, silent acceptance is considered praise. Not asking why. Not complaining. At the Sea, there was a tremendous revelation of G-d, and at that time, the Jews reached a level of tremendous emunah.. And in the merit of Emunah, G-d split the Sea. The word *דִּמְיִתִּיךְ* does not only mean that You, My beloved people, are *similar*, root being *דמיון*. It also means that you accepted with *silence*, from the root *דום* (S. Emet) And with that, with that level of Emunah, G-d allows us to control our fate, He makes things work our way, as if the horse now decides for the rider.

Sometimes in life, we need to accept. You are trying to run your business, but the phone is not ringing! You are trying to find your shidduch, or make your marriage happen, but there is "nobody home". You are trying to stay healthy, lose weight, sleep well, but you find yourself gaining weight and sleeping less. In order for G-d to make miracles for you, He waits for you to accept His Will, to reach a certain level of serenity, knowing that He is Boss. You may not feel Him, because He is not "bossy", but He is the BIG BOSS of all bosses.

This idea is so powerful!!! I recently used it in Mir, Jerusalem, when I gave a class. When I got to the room, I realized that it can be extremely useful to have the Sefer of R Chaim Volozhin, Nefesh HaChaim, handy, so that I can read word by word from it. The classroom where I was supposed to give my lesson did not have sefarim. So, I said to myself, I accept that whatever is going to happen, whether or not I find the Sefer, I accept that G-d has my best interest in mind. There was a side room there; I walked in, and found no Sefer in the room, other than the Nefesh Hachaim!

The power of acceptance of G-d's Will is the power that got us out of Egypt. Of believing in the dark times that things are beautiful, or can be beautiful, somehow. While the men sang the Shira of Az Yashir, the women followed Miriam, who had a drum in her hand, and sang their Shira as well. Where did the women have these bongos from? Rashi says *מובטחות היו צדקניות שבדור שהקדוש ברוך הוא עושה להם נסים והוציאו תופים ממצרים* The righteous women were SURE that G-d was going to perform miracles for them, so they took drums with them when they went out of Egypt. While they were in Egypt, they were making drums, in preparation for the time when G-d would make His Miracles. Because they believed, even in the darkest of times, that great things were going to happen.

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