



Parshat Vayechi: Tenacity, Truth

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
their weaknesses.

On his deathbed Yaakov gathered his sons and blessed them. He blessed Yehuda, "Your brothers will acknowledge you. Your hand will be at your enemy's neck. Your father's sons will prostrate themselves to you... From the prey my son, you withdrew. He crouched, rested, like a lion."

Rav Rice explains that when Yaakov gave his sons the blessings, he focused on their unique character traits. He gave them the gift of self-knowledge so that they could concentrate on developing their innate potential. The Zohar says that when a person leaves this world, Hashem shows him what he could have become during his sojourn in this world. The soul emits a primal cry of anguish for failing to fulfill its task. Every Jew is charged with a unique purpose. Unfortunately many of us fall short. How can we avoid this? From time to time, a person should make a *chesbon hanefesh* (soul accounting) to get a clear sense of where he's at. He should find a mentor to lead him on the right track and study the Torah, Hashem's guidebook for life. On Friday night, there's an age old custom to bless our sons to be like Efrayim and Menashe. Both Efrayim and Menashe exceeded their potential and were raised to the level of the tribes. We wish our children that they too exceed their potential with the hope that they'll at least meet it.

Yaakov showed each of his sons their strengths and failings so that they could reach perfection in *avodat hashem*. This is what Chazal meant, "*Chanoch lanaar al pi darko.*" (Educate a child according to his ways.) Parents and teachers are meant to give their children the gift of self-knowledge by helping them channel their abilities and improve on

The Lev Shalom asks, what is the meaning of the verse, "From the prey my son you withdrew?" He explains that Reuven never felt that Yosef was worthy of death, although Yehuda did. However, midway, Yehuda backed down and admitted that his original opinion was incorrect and that Yosef should be sold. This ability to publicly admit one's mistakes took an enormous amount of inner fortitude and Yaakov praised Yehuda for it. We see Yehuda displaying this strength again with the story of Tamar. Yehuda understood that veering off from truth even slightly is no longer *emet*. Am Yisrael are called Yehudim because the seal of Hashem is truth. *Klal Yisrael* are charged with acquiring this *middah*. It says, "*Emet m'eretiz tizmach.*" (Truth sprouts from the earth.) Why then is truth so difficult to find? The Baal Shem Tov explains that reaching truth requires bending down and most people find this hard. Owning up to one's mistakes takes tremendous humility.

The word *modeh* has a dual meaning, to admit the truth and to thank. Both have the same core notion, the realization that it's not about ego and perfection. People sometimes have difficulty saying thank you because it implies lacking in themselves and needing others. If you're always right and you let your pride overpower you, there's no room for any type of interpersonal relationship to grow and develop. The central quality of a Jew is humility. Yehuda's humility allowed him to admit the truth. His name spells out the letters of the name of Hashem, with an additional letter *daled*. *Daled* is *dal*, poverty and self-negation. It's recognizing how limited we are, expressing gratitude, and opening ourselves up to the beneficence of Hashem.

Rav Rice points out that Yehuda is described as a lion that crouches. The Chiddushei Harim notes that even when Yehuda was down, he maintained his strength and stature and admitted the truth. Rav Bunim M'Peshicsha further explains that after Yehuda instigated the sale of Yosef, he was estranged from his brothers. Yet he didn't wallow in self-pity. He got married and had children. When they all died he picked himself up and started again. Yehuda is a model for us on how to face challenges with courage. Instead of allowing his setbacks to pull him down, he used them to grow higher. Chazal understand the verse, "*Ki nafalti kamti, ki eshev b'choshech Hashem ohr li,*" as, "Had I not fallen I never would have gotten up. Had I not sat in darkness, Hashem would not be a light for me."

The Gemara tells a story of a man who came to Shammai and asked him to convert him while standing on one foot. Shammai pushed him away with a builder's rod. The Mezritcher Maggid explains that the man wanted to become a Jew only if he could be assured that he would remain upright. He didn't want to experience any of life's ups and downs. Shammai hinted to him that this is not Hashem's plan. We are put on this earth to rebuild and repair. The downswings are our greatest opportunity to ascend higher in *avodat Hashem*. It's like digging the foundations of a building. First we must go deep down in the earth. Only afterwards can the structure rise in all its beauty. A Jew, even when crouched down, remains strong as a lion. We may be in a state of *dalut*, but we must never forget that Hashem is holding us, giving us the strength to rise again ever higher.

Feminism & Judaism

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

In secular society, feminism is often interpreted as a woman's right to be like a man. This really isn't feminism at all. Suppose there is a university president who really likes the university football team and doesn't want to jeopardize its success by opening enrollment to everyone. But he has to keep to the university's equal opportunity policy. So he says, "Any person regardless of race, color, or religion, who is over six feet and weighs over two hundred pounds can qualify for the team."

How many Chinese women do you think would qualify? The university president isn't saying all people are equal, but that all people have the equal right to be what he idealizes. This really isn't equality at all. When people speak about the feminist issues in the Jewish world, they may talk about the right of women in the observant community to take on roles that have been traditionally male. This is really anti-feminist. If I would describe someone as pro-Israel, I would say that he believes Israel has the right to be like itself, self-defined and

determined. Being a *frum* woman means being acknowledged for what a woman is meant to be. What does this mean according to the Torah's view and what does it mean in terms of actual reality?

When Hashem created Adam He said, "It is not good for man to be alone." This raises many questions. If human function is to bring the spirit to the body, to take the soul and let it articulate itself through the sanctified body,

Continued on Page 2



Dedicated in memory of Rachel Leah bat R' Chaim Tzvi

אמך WOMEN'S TORAH WEEKLY

Feminism & Judaism

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Continued from Page 1

what is not good about being alone? And if there's something better, why wasn't it the first model? Rashi says it's not good for people to feel so perfected that they feel autonomous. The Ramban, the Maharal, and other commentators take a different approach. For people to grow spiritually they need to feel they lack something in order to avoid self-absorption. They need other people who are also lacking so they can become authentic givers. Why then didn't Hashem create the first model lacking? He created Adam perfect so that he would always have a picture in his mind of what the perfected state should be.

In *Eishet Chayil* the woman is presented as able, wise, and integrated. She is a mother and a wife. She has a strong, multifaceted role. She is not weak or passive as women are often painted in Western and Eastern ideology. "*Oz vehadar levusha*," her garments are strength and glory. Feminism should be the glorification of women as Torah presents them. Hashem didn't say, "Let's make man and women." He said, "Let's make man." He then takes out a part of Adam's insides and forms woman as *ezer kenegdo*. The *ezer kenegdo* provides help that is so essential that it equalizes the relationship.

Hashem has many attributes through which we experience His presence, but in the highest plane He is one. Women are more

attuned to *binah* and *malchut*. Men are more inclined to *chochma* and *tiferet*. *Binah* means empathetic understanding. The most primary expression of understanding is in relationships, and the deepest relationships are familial. We live in an anti-feminist society that tells us that *binah* is irrelevant and many of us pick up on it. *Malchut* is sovereignty. It's saying, "I'll be who I want to be and I won't be defined by the outside." When the Russian refusnik, Natan Sharansky, crossed the bridge to freedom the media asked him, "How does it feel to be free?" He answered, "I was always free." That's *malchut*. Rabbi Tauber tells how when he was a young child in the concentration camps his mother had him wear the one garment he had, inside out all week. On Shabbat, she would turn it so the right side faced out. That's *malchut*.

The second stage of *malchut* is, "I'll be what Hashem wants me to be and I'll transform the world around me to what Hashem wants it to be." Women are strong in *malchut* and in their ability to affect themselves and others. Yaakov was *tiferet*. He had the ability to see the whole true picture through the lens of Torah. Rachel, the ultimate mother, was *malchut*. The Torah says that when Yaakov met Rachel he kissed her. The Zohar explains that kissing symbolizes spiritual attachment. Yaakov recognized that his ability to see the whole picture would be concretized through Rachel's *malchut*.

Binah must be respected. Therefore, the Torah exempts women from many things which would take them away from relationships. Her responsibility to take care of her family takes priority over praying with a *minyan* (quorum). The whole concept of *tefilah b'tzibur* (praying with a quorum) is seeing oneself as a part of something larger. Men define themselves as a group because connecting to our tradition occurs on a group level. The Jewish nation is described as collective *binah* coming through individuality. Jewish law is structured to accommodate this. In fact women are stronger in *tefilah* than men because *tefilah* is a function of *binah* and *malchut*. A woman's personal prayers are significant and valued. We learn the laws of prayer, for both men and women, from Chana.

We can't fall in the trap of saying we have to do it the male way. Women who say that not praying *b'tzibur* equals no *tefilah* have bought into secular imagery. The same would hold true for other expressions that are by custom or law masculine. Women have to balance the tightrope of pride and affirmation in themselves against the message the world tells them that that affirmation is anti-feminist. It's a tightrope that we're fully capable of walking. It all depends upon us knowing how valued and respected we truly are and what an *eishet chayil*, the paradigm of a Jewish woman, is meant to be.

The Uniqueness of Am Yisrael

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

In Shaar Habechina, the Chovot Halevavot tells us that we can see the wonders of Hashem in the continuity of the Jewish people. Considering all the exiles the Jews have been through they should have vanished centuries ago. Yet Hashem promised, "*V'af gam zot b'erezt oyveihem lo m'astim v'lo g'alti et'hem l'chalostam*. Although you will be in the land of your enemies I will not abhor or reject you to destroy you. As much as the nations try to oppress us, not only will we never be annihilated, but we will continue to grow and flourish.

The great Rishonim and Aharonim spread Torah in *galut*. The Talmud Bavli evolved in the Babylonian exile. The Rambam in Hilchot Megilah says that when Mashiach comes all the holidays will be abolished except Purim. Purim celebrates the miracle of the Jewish people who continue to serve Hashem in

exile, despite the influence of the non-Jewish nations. The Torah can live in a world of physicality, science, and advancement. The Arizal says, *yom ki'purim*, Yom Kippur is like Purim. On Yom Kippur we repent with the mind. But the ultimate teshuva is Purim. When we are in an unaware intoxicated state of *ad d'lo yada*, when the emotions overtake logic, the true Jew comes out. At the end of time only Purim, the *yom tov* that celebrates our eternal existence will remain.

Another way that we can see the greatness of the Creator is in the fact that Hashem put in the minds of people the idea to unite under one leader and government. This creates protection, unity, and a community of people working together for one cause. A Jewish king connects the Jewish nation and shows them the right way to go in the ways of Hashem. The Chinuch mentions that through uniting

together we can come to the highest levels in *avodat Hashem*.

A third way to see the wonders of Hashem is in the system we call money. People would create the medium of money as a means to buy and sell and to acquire the necessities of life. In Parshat Beshalach it says, "*Arik charbi torishemo yadi*." The Egyptians wanted to kill the Jews because they had taken their gold and silver. Money has great power to build and destroy. It depends on how it's used. The desire for wealth can destroy a person. Yet with money, one can accomplish incredible things. Hashem purposely created poverty to give us the opportunity to help the needy. Money used for *mitzvot* fosters unity. Donations are what built the *mishkan*. Our responsibility is to use the material means that Hashem gave us to elevate and sanctify His name.

Help support Naaleh by searching the web! For more information visit www.iGive/Naaleh.com & www.iSearchiGive/Naaleh.com