



TIFERET HASHABBAT

This Week in Tiferet

Tiferet would like to express our appreciation to **Mr. and Mrs. Paul and Yali Packer**, parents of **Lauren Packer (5773)** for hosting an alumnae shiur by Rabbi Elie Mayer in their home this week. We are also so proud that our connections with our students have lasted for so many years.

On Monday, our students went to visit the newly-opened **Biblical Museum of Natural History**. The museum's director, Rabbi Natan Slifkin, gave our students a guided tour of the museum, which is devoted to the Biblical perspective on zoology and the natural world. It was both an educational and enjoyable experience for all of our students!

תורת תפארת

Rooting for Yourself Rav Elie Mayer Parshat Yitro - Tu Bishvat

As a child growing up in Canada, I was always confused on Tu Bishvat. Singing about the budding almond tree with three feet of snow outside and all of the trees dead didn't seem like the Chag Hallanot that my Morah purported it to be. I was equally confused about Rosh Chodesh. On the day that we celebrate the new moon, we look up at the evening sky and cannot even see it. I believe that Rosh Chodesh and Tu Bishvat share the same message.

Am Yisrael is compared to the moon. The moon wanes and looks as if it has disappeared but ultimately, becomes a full moon. So too, Bnei Yisrael have experienced trials and tribulations, making us appear small and weak but we will return to our full strength. Perhaps the same idea applies to Tu Bishvat. All the trees look dead with the exception of a few almond trees. However, on Tu Bishvat, we are acknowledging that these lifeless trees will soon become vibrant again and bear fruit. Thus, the lesson of Tu Bishvat is that even when things appear dark and waning, they will bloom and grow bright.

At Matan Torah, Bnei Yisrael saw the thunder and the flames, the shofar and the mountain full of smoke. They were afraid and despite Moshe's assurances, they stepped back but Moshe "stepped into the fog where there was Hashem". Rabbeinu Bachye explains that to the people there were flames, smoke and fog but for Moshe these fogs were really the clearest brightest light. The people were unable to withstand this supernal light and to them, it appeared as darkness.

In Likutei Moharan, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov teaches that we all encounter spiritual conflict and personal inhibition otherwise known as the yetzer hara. This is signified by 'fog' and 'flame'. When confronted with religious challenges, most people step back as did Bnei Yisrael at Sinai. The Moshes of the world are able to courageously step forward to tackle the spiritual challenge and it is there that they find Hashem and elevate themselves.

The Gemara in Mesechet Shabbat 88b describes a face-off between the malachim and Moshe, when Moshe ascended Har Sinai to receive the Torah. The angels were incredulous and protested, "Ribono Shel Olam, don't entrust Your holy Torah with mortal and fallible man! He will just take it to Earth and desecrate it." Hashem adjures Moshe to respond to their objection.

Why did Hashem want Moshe to answer the malachim as opposed to responding to them directly? Rabbi David Aaron suggests that in order to receive the Torah, you have to realize your worthiness

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תורת תפארת (המשך)

and be confident in your potential to excel in the spiritual realm. Without believing in ourselves, we are incapable of being a mamlechet kohanim and goy kadosh.

One of the greatest inhibitors of spiritual growth is not believing in our ability to become great and overcome difficulties. We stumble and make mistakes and then beat ourselves up by convincing ourselves that we are not worthy of becoming great. That erroneous belief is the smoke and the fog that Bnei Yisrael saw. Moshe was the one to receive the Torah because he was able to find the courage in himself to believe that he can achieve greatness and was worthy of being G-d's shaliach. Therefore, instead of fog and smoke, Moshe saw light. He recognized that man will sin and have ups and downs but by believing in his G-dly potential, man can rise from the depths of immorality to the loftiest of spiritual heights.

In our mystical tradition, every month is assigned a letter. The letter of Shvat is the tzadik. The Kabbalists associate the tzadik of Shvat to our tefilla: zoreiah tzedakot, matzmiach yeshuot - Hashem plants kindness and makes Geula floursih. Anyone unfamiliar with farming and agriculture might be unaware that out of a tiny seed can sprout an enormous fruit tree. One can see a little sapling and not believe that this sapling will become great. Yet, that is what happens. The lesson of Shvat is the same message taught by Rabbeinu Bachye and Rebbe Nachman. We cannot merely see things as they are, rather as they could be. This is especially true of ourselves. By being overly critical and harsh in judgement of ourselves, we only see fog and cannot grow. Like the trees in the winter and the moon on Rosh Chodesh, we may be down but not out. We may have had a bad week or an off month or even year but we will become great again. As Rebbe Nachman pleads - Do not despair.

Shabbat Shalom!

Future Investments Estee Miller (5775)

In this week's Parsha, we read about one of the most important moments in Jewish History: The giving of the Ten Commandments. Although there are countless Divrei Torah on the Ten Commandments, there is an interesting thought from another story that can easily be overlooked.

After hearing about the miracles that Hashem performed for Bnei Yisrael, Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, follows Bnei Yisrael into the desert. After seeing Moshe judge the people, aiding them in their various cases and dilemmas, he wisely questions the judicial system. Yitro suggests that Moshe appoint a hierarchy of judges to advise Bnei Yisrael. This new system would ease Moshe's burden and he would only need to judge the more complex cases.

Yet there is a deeper wisdom to his suggestion which merited his name to be the name of the Parsha. Yitro's suggestion teaches us a lesson that is applicable in every generation. Yes, Moshe was able to handle judging all of Bnei Yisrael's cases, but that was in the present - Yitro was thinking of the future. His question enabled Moshe to properly plan ahead and establish a system that would not leave Bnei Yisrael in a panic once he left.

We can learn from here that we must always be planning and thinking of the future. As a seminary student, I feel greatly impacted by this message. We must start thinking of our futures after we leave Tiferet and how we will continue to accomplish our goals and learn more about Judaism while we will not have as strong of a support system. Our decisions here will affect how our lives, as well as the lives of our descendants, will turn out. It is so easy to live in the present but we cannot lose sight of the future and must be aware that our decisions today will affect our lives tomorrow.

(Taam Ve Daas on Shemot.)