

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

DEBARIM

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DEDICATIONS: Happy Birthday to Little Chantelle

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Editors Notes From the Archives 5772 Mourning the Mikdash

In all of our offices, for my entire life, there has always been one painting on the wall. It is the painting of a fine, distinguished and handsome man, my great grandfather Joseph A Bibi. I guess all our related family companies find their American origins in him, so it's fitting that his image graces the wall. What I never noticed until I walked by my dad's desk and checked the Yahrzeit (or as I was corrected by Dr. Stevan Dweck of California, a few weeks back, I should as a Sephardic Jew be using the term Mishmar) list a few moments ago was that my great grandfather passed away in 1927. I always imagined that my father who bears his grandfather's name had a relationship with the man, but I am not sure how much of a relationship they had in 2 ½ years. I do know that Joseph A Bibi was a world renowned Artisan who traveled the globe more than a century ago. He was a talmid hacham who studied the sodot of the Torah and as the patriarch of the family, who sacrificed so much and helped design his community, we owe him much. But when the 19th of Elul comes around each year, aside from giving a class in his memory and saying a hashkava or memorial prayer, I don't really mourn his passing. The picture makes me think of him more than any of my other great grandparents and the stories I heard give me a connection, but its just a long distance connection. The Rabbis have a concept for this, its called aveylut yeshana – "old" mourning.

Chas VeShalom – heaven forbid – when someone passes away and a relative mourns for them, we call this "new" mourning or avelut chadasha. In halacha – Jewish Law – the closer one is to the tragedy the greater the level of mourning because we feel it. That person was here yesterday and now that person is gone. It's tangible. It's emotional. We have someone to mourn.

Hashem has created us so that over time following the loss of a loved one, we get over our mourning. We learn this from our forefather Yaakov's mourning

for his son Joseph. Our Rabbis teach us that we can only begin to forget someone, and start to feel relief from the pain of mourning, after the person dies. Yaakov continued to mourn his son Joseph, for a full 22 years, because Yosef his son, was not dead.

When referring to the Churban – the destruction of the Temple – the Rabbis again use the term, "old" mourning. The fact is that the churban is difficult to relate to. The vast majority of us cannot begin to conceptualize the significance of the loss. We cannot imagine the enormous quantity of animals being slaughtered, cut and burned on the alter as smoke rose up. Even those who have gone through Daf Yomi and have at least briefly reviewed the Talmud cannot understand the Ketoret or incense offering. The fact is that the entire chapter of Jewish Law relating to the Temple is relatively unknown.

How does one mourn for that which one finds difficult to imagine? I see my great grandfather's picture every day. I knew who he was, where he was born, where he lived, what he did and how it relates to me and still I acknowledge his passing, but without tears.

How are we to cry over a building?

Clearly, a mourner is sad because he has experienced a loss. In order for one to mourn the loss of the Bet haMikdash, one must realize what has been lost and how it relates to him individually, to the Jews as a nation and to the entire world.

And although the Gemarah is Sukkah writes, "one who has not seen the Bet HaMikdash has never seen a majestic building", we are certainly not mourning the loss of a building, per se. In fact one of the reasons Hashem burned the stones of the Mikdash was to teach us that it's not about the cover, it's about what the cover encases and represents.

Pirkei Avot teaches that ten miracles were performed for our ancestors in the Bet HaMikdash:

1. No woman miscarried from the smell of sacrificial meat.
2. Sacrificial meat never spoiled.
3. No flies were present where they sacrificed animals.
4. The Kohen Gadol never had an emission on Yom Kippur.

5. The fire on the Alter was never extinguished by rain.
6. The pillar of smoke was never moved by the wind.
7. The Omer, the Two Breads and Lechem HaPanim (left in the Sanctuary for a week at a time, and eaten on the following Shabbat) were never found to be invalid.
8. The people would stand crowded but have room to bow down.
9. Snakes and scorpions never hurt people in Jerusalem.
10. No one ever said to his friend that there is no place for me to stay in Jerusalem.

Why are these so important? I believe that they show us that the Bet HaMikdash was the place where the Jew encountered Hashem. Imagine walking towards Jerusalem and seeing the Temple on the mount in the distance, knowing it was windy but seeing a column of smoke go straight without wavering. Then stepping into the gates and witnessing people from all walks of life looking to connect. Each of the miracles brought Hashem to life. Imagine being packed in and then seeing there was room for everyone to lay down. You were in a place beyond the constraints of time and space. Each miracle experienced, made Hashem's presence real. They say that the time spent in Hashem's house was one of heightened consciousness to the point that we encountered Him just by being there.

If you could meet anyone in history, who would that be? Choose anyone and I have a better choice, G-d! So we mourn the disconnection from Hashem.

And I think part of the problem is that so many of us only mourn the event once a year. We don't take to heart, "If I forget thee Jerusalem". It's a song and a statement before breaking a glass and celebrating. We don't feel ourselves break with that glass. We need to think of Jerusalem and mourn the loss each time we pray the Amidah in the blessings of Boneh Yerushalayim and Masmiach Keren Yeshuah. We need to feel a bit of pain every time we see the Kotel with a golden dome behind it. We need to say Tikun Chasot reading the words, "remember Hashem what we had ... our inheritance has passed to strangers, our house to foreigners ... we are orphans ... why do you abandon us ..." And if not Tikun Chasot at some point in the day, stop and try to imagine what we had and what we lost and what we want.

Sadly too many of us who call for Mashiach would probably tell him upon his arrival, "wait we need to take care of things, give us some notice and come back when we are ready". We ignore the threats of

our enemies which should prompt us to recall that we want and need Mashiach,

We must remind ourselves daily because by nature we forget.

Rabbi Abittan's z'sl teacher, Rav Soloveitchik explained that a mourner is enjoined from crying too much for his relative because, as the Rambam writes death is part of the natural course of events in this world. But the destruction of the Bet HaMikdash was an unnatural event. The Temple was much more than a physical structure. It symbolized the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people. It was the focal point of spirituality in the world. When we mourn the loss of the Mikdash, we are not crying for the wood and the stones. We mourn the fact that we no longer see Hashem's presence as clearly in the world and that our relationship with Him is strained. We long for the day when the Jewish people will reunite with Hashem and feel his closeness once again. In other words, we hope for the day when the world will return to its natural state. That is why we are obligated to cry on Tisha B'Av (and commanded to remember our loss every day) and there is no limit to our mourning because the loss of the Bet HaMikdash is a reality we can never come to terms with.

Think about that, "the loss of the Bet HaMikdash is a reality we can never come to terms with".

We know that people are born and people die. We know we had ancestors, some we met, some we heard of and some who are both nameless and without story to us. We remember those we can, we respect them and mourn their loss.

But the loss of the Temple is not a loss of a building or even a relative. It's the loss of a connection. It's the loss of clarity. It's the loss of reality.

May we all merit to properly mourn the Bet HaMikdash each and every day and especially on Tisha BeAv and therefore be present to rejoice in its rebuilding.

Summary of the Perasha Devarim- Moshe rebukes Benei Israel recounting the sin of the spies and their stay in the midbar as a result

- 1- Moshe begins to indirectly rebuke Benei Israel before his death recounting the various places where Benei Israel sinned
- 2- Moshe recounts the appointing of judges and how they left Sinai poised to enter Israel
- 3- Moshe recounts the sin of the spies

4-Moshe recounts how they were forced to turn back into the midbar as a result of this sin

5- Moshe recounts when, in the 40th yr, Hashem told them to turn northward passing Seir and Moav towards the land of Sichon as they stopped circling and began back on their path towards Israel.

6- Moshe recounts how they conquered the lands of Sichon and Og on the way to Israel. And how Reuben, Gad and part of Menashe inherited this land.

7- Moshe recounts how he commanded Reuben and Gad to come conquer the land of Israel.

The Ninth of Ab Rabbi Yosef Bitton

Tish'a beAb is the day of National mourning for the Jewish people. Our rabbis mentioned five tragedies that happened on the 9th of Ab

1. HET HAMERAGELIM (ca. 1300 BCE): The Jews in the desert accepted the slanderous report of the ten explorers. They cried and complained to God for taking them out of Egypt. They also hinted that the Almighty won't be able to help them in conquering the Land of Israel and defeat so many enemies. HaShem decreed that all those who were 20 years or older would not enter the Promised Land. Rather, they will wander for forty years until that generation disappears. The night on which they cried and were condemned to die in the dessert was Tish'a be-Ab.

2. HURBAN HABAYIT HARISHON (586 BCE): In the times of King Hizqiahu, on the 10th of Tebet the Babylonian seized the city of Jerusalem. The siege persisted for two years and a half. People had no provisions, food or wood. Thousands died from starvation or epidemic outbreaks. On the 9th of Tamuz the Babylonians destroyed the wall and entered the city, pillaging, killing and destroying. Still, the Bet haMiqdash kept functioning, and sacrifices were offered. On the 17th of Tamuz, for the first time since the days of the Exodus, the daily sacrifice (qorban haTamid) was discontinued. On the 7th of Ab, the Babylonians entered the Bet haMiqdash and profaned it. On the 9th of Ab, close to sunset, the Babylonians ignited the fire which burned our Bet haMiqdash during that night and the whole following day. Thousands of Jews were slaughtered, enslaved or exiled to the Babylonian empire. The story of the destruction of Jerusalem and its desolation is narrated in Megilat Ekha.

3. HURBAN HABAYIT HASHENI (68 CE): On the year 68 of the common era, on the 17th of Tamuz the Romans broke the walls which protected Jerusalem. During the following three weeks they pillaged the

city, destroyed everything they saw and kill tens of thousands of Jews. On the ninth of ab, after desecrating the Sanctuary, Titus HaRasha destroyed our Second bet HaMiqdash. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed, sold into slavery or exiled. The rabbis explained that the Jews were divided and fighting among themselves (sinat hinam). They explained that the Romans destroyed a Bet haMiqdash that "was already destroyed", because when the Jews are not united HaShem's presence does not rest within them.

4. NILKEDA BETAR (135 CE): In the year 135 of the common era, the jews revolted again against the Roman empire. This time with the approval of great Rabbis and jewish leaders, among them, rabbi Akiba. Bar Kokhba revolt was crushed by Roman Emperor Hadrian. The city of Betar (Sephardim call it "Bee-ter"), which was the Jews' last stand against the Romans, was captured by the enemy on Tish'a be-Ab. Over 100,000 Jews were slaughtered and their bodies left unburied (the Gemara in Guitin 57b mentions that Hadrian killed in Bee-ter 4 million Jews, אוביר תואמ עברא).

5. NEHERASH HAHEKHAL: Around the same period, also on a ninth of Ab, the Temple's holiest area and its surroundings was plowed by the Roman general Turnus Rufus. Jerusalem was turned into a pagan city, and renamed Aelia Capitolina. Access to Jerusalem was forbidden for Jews.

OTHER TRAGIC EVENTS that HAPPENED ON THE 9th of AB

1096: The First Crusade started on the 9th of Ab of 1096, killing 10,000 Jews in its first month and destroying Jewish communities in France and the Rhineland. 1.2 million Jews were killed by this crusade.

1290: The Jews were expelled from England on July 18, 1290 .

1492: In 1492, the Jews were expelled from Spain, after living there for more than 6 centuries. The edict of Expulsion forced the Jews to leave the country by the end of July. Tish'a beAb was august 1st. There are different versions regarding the number of jews who lived in Spain in the golden era, before the expulsion. There are those who mention that at least there were 250 thousand Jews in Spain. While the historian Juan de Mariana mentioned that there were 800 thousand Jews in Spain. Other sources stated that there were approximately 600,000 Jews in Spain. 200,000 remained there as "conversos". 200,000 were killed or died while fleeing

from Spain and Portugal (they were expelled from Portugal in 1497) and 200,000 managed to escape and establish themselves in Morocco, Alger, Tunis, Turkey (Turkey was the biggest colony of Spanish refugees), Greece, Egypt, Syria, Erets Israel (Safed and Jerusalem), etc.

IN MODERN DAYS: Germany entered World War I on August 1-2, 1914, 9 of Ab, which caused massive upheaval in European Jewry and whose aftermath led to the Holocaust.

On August 2, 1941, 9 of Ab, SS commander Heinrich Himmler formally received approval from the Nazi Party for "The Final Solution." As a result, the Holocaust began during which almost one third of the world's Jewish population perished.

On July 23, 1942, 9 of Ab, began the mass deportation of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto, en route to Treblinka.

On the 10th of Ab the following events took place: AMIA bombing of the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, killing 85 and injuring 300 on 18 July 1994.

Israel's unilateral disengagement plan, also known as the "Disengagement plan from Gush Qatif", the "Gaza expulsion plan", or haHitnatkut, began 10 Ab, 15 August 2005.

Tish'a beAb is a day of fasting and it is also a day of collective national mourning. During Tish'a beAb we behave as mourners grieving a loved one who just passed away. To express or reach this emotional state of grief, during Tish'a beAb (from Saturday night August 13th, after Shabbat is over, until Sunday 14th at nightfall) we avoid engaging in certain activities from which we derive a physical pleasure, activities associated with happiness or which would distract us from the mood of mourning.

Some examples

LIMUD TORA: On Tish'a beAb we refrain from studying Tora, because studying Tora is a joyous and pleasurable activity. We might read and study books or texts with a sad content, such as the book of Iyob or Ekha, some passages of the book of Jeremiah or some Psalms, masekhet mo'ed qatan, etc.

WORK: On Tish'a beAb it is not advised to work because working would divert our minds from the feeling of grief. Refraining from work on Tish'a beAb, however, is not a formal prohibition but rather a tradition some communities have adopted and some

have not (minhag hamaqom) and it also depends on each individual's financial or professional situation. In any case, if one would incur in significant losses or if one's job position will be compromised, it is permitted to work.

SHE-ELAT SHALOM: On Tish'a beAb we don't greet each other as usual, because our mood is, or should be, a mourner's mood. If someone greets us, we can discreetly and politely acknowledge the gesture.

SITTING ON THE FLOOR: The general custom is that during the reading of Megilat Ekha people don't sit on the Synagogue's benches but on the floor, like mourners do during the shib'a (the first seven days of Jewish mourning), while the lights are dimmed.

REHITSA (Washing) Same as Yom Kippur, taking a shower, bathing or washing for pleasure is forbidden on Tish'a beAb. However, if a part of the body is unclean we can wash it. Brushing our teeth or washing our mouth is not permitted on Tish'a beAb. Except in a situation of great distress. In such case, one should bend the head downward when washing the mouth to avoid swallowing any liquid (Rabbi Obadya Yosef z"l). It is permitted to use baby wipes to clean one's face, eyes, hands, etc. because this type of cleaning is not considered "washing". Technically we could wash our hands normally in the morning for Netilat Yadayim, because we do it for a Mitsva and not for pleasure. The standard Sephardic custom, however, is to wash only the fingers for Netilat Yadayim.

SIKHA (Using creams) Using creams or ointments for pleasure or comfort is not permitted on Tish'a beAb. Medical creams or oils are permitted. Using deodorant is permitted.

NE'ILAT HASANDAL (Leather shoes) Leather shoes are dress shoes and therefore they are considered a luxurious item. During the day of National mourning then, we don't wear leather shoes. We should wear sneakers or another type of footwear made of fabric, plastic, etc. Other leather items, like a leather belt or a leather Kipa could be worn.

TASHMISH HAMITA (Intimacy) Marital relations are suspended on Tish'a beAb. If the Mikve night falls on the night of Tish'a beAb, i.e., Saturday, August 13th at night, the Mikve has to be postponed for the following night.

TEFILIN: Some do not use Tefilin in the morning of Tish'a beAb. Tefilin is a signal of honor and pride, a

crown in our heads which declares that we are the people of God. In most Sephardic communities men wear Talit and Tefilin just in Minha. In Syrian communities, the tradition is that before going to the Synagogue in the morning one says Qaddesh Li and Shema Israel at home with Talit and Tefilin. In other communities, men wear Tefilin and Tallit normally in the morning (=minhag Yerushalayim).

RABBI ELI MANSOUR Tolerating Different Opinions

The first verse in Parashat Debarim lists the names of the places in which Moshe delivered his final rebuke to Beneh Yisrael. However, these places do not actually exist. The Midrash explains that these names are actually allusions to the major sins that Beneh Yisrael committed during their journey through the wilderness. For example, "Di Zahab" – which means "abundant gold" – alludes to the sin of the golden calf, and "Laban" ("white") refers to the people's complaints about the manna, which was colored white.

The Rabbis infer from this indirect method of rebuke the importance of preserving people's dignity when offering constructive criticism. Even in situations where it is warranted to criticize, it must be done delicately and respectfully. Our Rabbis teach us in numerous contexts that even sinners deserve dignity and respect. There are times when we need to point out mistakes, but this does not give us license to humiliate a fellow Jew, even if he does not properly observe the Torah. Thus, for example, the Midrash comments that God's angel killed the donkey that spoke with Bilam to criticize him, in order that it does not become a source of shame and humiliation for Bilam. Even Bilam, a heartless anti-Semite who sought to annihilate all of Am Yisrael, deserved his dignity. Certainly, then, we must be careful not to humiliate any of our fellow Jews – none of whom even approaches the sinfulness of Bilam.

And if we must avoid embarrassing sinners, then we must certainly exercise care in how we speak about observant Jews whose approaches and practices differ from ours. Needless to say, we cannot and must not tolerate ideas that are antithetical to Torah. But within the rubric of authentic Judaism, there is plenty of room for varying opinions on many different topics. Yeshiva students spend their days discussing and analyzing Mahalokot – differing views among the great Sages of the Talmud and later authorities. And they are all treated with equal reverence and importance. Different opinions exist among Torah scholars on a wide range of issues, and this is perfectly acceptable. We should each follow our own

Rabbis, and certainly there is nothing wrong with having strongly-held views. But this does not give us the right to disparage or insult those who follow Hachamim who advocate different opinions.

The Gemara describes certain negative qualities that will characterize the generation before the arrival of Mashiah, one of them being "Ha'emet Tiheye Ne'ederet." Literally, this means that "truth will be obscured," meaning, truths that should be and always had been obvious and self-evident will become questionable. In our times, for example, low standards of modesty and integrity which would have been rejected without a second thought generations ago are now considered valid options. This is one manifestation of "Ha'emet Tiheye Ne'ederet." Additionally, however, the term "Ne'ederet" refers to the phenomenon of "Eder" – "flock." The Jewish people will form small, independent "flocks" that stay away from one another. Each "flock" will follow its "shepherd," its Rabbi, and show no respect or regard for anything else. The prevailing attitude will be one of "It's my way, or you're out!" There will be little or no tolerance for differing views and opinions.

Unfortunately, this is happening in our generation. We have lost the message of the first verse of Sefer Debarim, which demands showing respect even for those with whom we rightfully disagree. We are entitled to hold our opinions, but without disparaging people who think and act differently.

The period before Tisha B'Ab is the opportune time to improve ourselves in this area, to recommit ourselves to respecting and preserving the dignity of all people, especially of those with whom we do not agree on important matters. It is through this tolerance for people who are different from us that we correct the flaw of "Sin'at Hinam," the baseless hatred for which the Mikdash was destroyed, and we will then be deserving of the Temple's restoration and the unfolding of our final redemption, speedily and in our days, Amen.

VICTOR BIBI SOD HAPARASHA

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Rabbi Wein TISHA B'AV

The Talmud traced the causes for the destruction of the First and Second temples to the spiritual failings and sins of the Jewish people. As those assessments are undoubtedly correct, they are observed in the popular view of the events to be the sole and only

causes for these national tragedies. However, it should be obvious to all that failed policies, false assessments of the military and diplomatic situations of the times and a certain amount of foolhardy bravado certainly were also involved in destruction of the First and Second Commonwealths.

In both instances the Jewish rulers of the times pursued irrational policies, in the mistaken belief that somehow they would prevail and that Heaven would overlook their mistakes and national sins. As is often the rule in human history, when caution and good sense are substituted for emotion and personal calculations, disasters are likely to follow.

And so it was in the case of our first two attempts at Jewish national sovereignty in the Land of Israel. There is no escape for good or for better, from the consequences of national behavior and of governmental policies. Though the supernatural is always present in human affairs, no policies or strategic decisions should be made on the basis of mystical interference with the consequences of behavior and governmental policies.

Faith in supernatural help is a basic idea in Judaism. However, Judaism teaches self-reliance, wise choices in life and in diplomacy, and a realistic and rational outlook on unfolding events and prevalent societal forces. Heaven helps the wise and astute.

The mighty empire of Babylonia destroyed the First Temple. It did so after a rash and wholly irrational decision by the Judean king to rebel against its authority and ally himself and his small and weak country with Egypt, then the competing empire in the Middle East. This decision was opposed by the prophet Jeremiah. He warned the king and the people of the folly of this policy.

No one knows what would have been the result had the king listened to Jeremiah and not taken up arms against Babylonia. But no one can deny that the decision of the king to rebel was foolish. The prophet Jeremiah was certainly more practical and wise than the Judean king of his day. One would have thought that the prophet would have invoked the power of faith over the practicality and the reality of the situation. But that was certainly not the case.

The Jewish people then were simply unable to imagine that God, so to speak, would allow His own holy house to be destroyed. But the prophet warned them that they were mistaken in that belief and that disaster would follow their erroneous assessment of the situation. One of the bitter lessons of this period on the calendar is that practicality and wisdom are

necessary in order to insure Jewish national survival. Faith in God is everything in Jewish life. But the faith must be founded on the realities of the world and the circumstances of life that surround us.

The same lesson is to be learned from the story of the destruction of the Second Temple. Realistically, the Jewish Commonwealth had no chance or ability to defeat the then mighty Roman Empire. The great rabbis of Israel at that time, almost to a man, opposed the war of rebellion against Rome. They foresaw defeat and disaster. The Zealots, who fomented and fought the rebellion to its ruinous conclusion, proclaimed loudly and often that somehow Heaven would bless their efforts and provide them with miraculous victory. Again, this was a disastrous miscalculation on their part.

As above, there is no one that can know what the Jewish story would have been like if the Zealots would not have mounted their ill-fated rebellion. But, we do know that their actions led to a long and painful exile for the Jewish people. Everything is in the hands of Heaven but without the human execution and participation, the will of Heaven is never executed on this earth.

So, the Jewish world in our time also needs a heavy dose of practicality and reality in order to translate our limitless faith into concrete achievements and goals. Abandoning the worship of false idols, of immoral behavior and wanton murder, coupled with the mitigation of baseless hatred in our community are the spiritual and emotional weapons for our redemption. Added to these is the requirement for hard realistic thinking, wise policies and tempered utopianism. May we all be comforted, both nationally and personally in this difficult time.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks To 120: Growing Old, Staying Young

On 27 March 2012, to celebrate the diamond jubilee of the Queen, an ancient ceremony took place at Buckingham Palace. A number of institutions presented Loyal Addresses to the Queen, thanking her for her service to the nation. Among them was the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Its then president, Vivian Wineman, included in his speech the traditional Jewish blessing on such occasions. He wished her well "until a hundred and twenty."

The Queen was amused and looked quizzically at Prince Philip. Neither of them had heard the expression before. Later the Prince asked what it meant, and we explained. A hundred and twenty is stated as the outer limit of a normal human lifetime in

Genesis 6:3. The number is especially associated with Moses, about whom the Torah says, "Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were undimmed and his strength undiminished" (Deut. 34:7). Together with Abraham, a man of very different personality and circumstance, Moses is a model of how to age well. With the growth of human longevity, this has become a significant and challenging issue for many of us. How do you grow old yet stay young?

The most sustained research into this topic is the Grant Study, begun in 1938, which has tracked the lives of 268 Harvard students for almost eighty years, seeking to understand what characteristics – from personality type to intelligence to health, habits and relationships – contribute to human flourishing. For more than thirty years, the project was directed by George Vaillant, whose books *Aging Well* and *Triumphs of Experience* have explored this fascinating territory.[1]

Among the many dimensions of successful aging, Vaillant identifies two that are particularly relevant in the case of Moses. The first is what he calls generativity,[2] namely taking care of the next generation. He quotes John Kotre who defines it as "to invest one's substance in forms of life and work that will outlive the self." In middle or later life, when we have established a career, a reputation, and a set of relationships, we can either stagnate or decide to give back to others: to community, society and the next generation. Generativity is often marked by undertaking new projects, often voluntary ones, or by learning new skills. Its marks are openness and care.

The other relevant dimension is what Vaillant calls keeper of the meaning. By this he means the wisdom that comes with age, something that is often more valued by traditional societies than modern or postmodern ones. The "elders" mentioned in Tanakh are people valued for their experience. "Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you," says the Torah (Deut. 32:7). "Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?" says the book of Job (12:12).

Being a keeper of the meaning means handing on the values of the past to the future. Age brings the reflection and detachment that allows us to stand back and not be swept along by the mood of the moment or passing fashion or the madness of the crowd. We need that wisdom, especially in an age as fast-paced as ours where huge success can come to people still quite young. Examine the careers of recent iconic figures like Bill Gates, Larry Page, Sergey Brin and Mark Zuckerberg, and you will

discover that at a certain point they turned to older mentors who helped steer them through the white-water rapids of their success. *Asei lekha rav*, "Acquire for yourself a teacher", remains essential advice.[3]

What is striking about the book of Devarim, set entirely in the last month of Moses' life, is how it shows the aged but still passionate and driven leader, turning to the twin tasks of generativity and keeper of the meaning.

It would have been easy for him to retire into an inner world of reminiscence, recalling the achievements of an extraordinary life, chosen by God to be the person who led an entire people from slavery to freedom and to the brink of the Promised Land. Alternatively he could have brooded on his failures, above all the fact that he would never physically enter the land to which he had spent forty years leading the nation. There are people – we have all surely met them – who are haunted by the sense that they have not won the recognition they deserved or achieved the success of which they dreamed when they were young.

Moses did neither of those things. Instead in his last days he turned his attention to the next generation and embarked on a new role. No longer Moses the liberator and lawgiver, he took on the task for which he has become known to tradition: *Moshe Rabbenu*, "Moses our teacher." It was, in some ways, his greatest achievement.

He told the young Israelites who they were, where they had come from and what their destiny was. He gave them laws, and did so in a new way. No longer was the emphasis on the Divine encounter, as it had been in *Vayikra*, or on sacrifices as it was in *Bamidbar*, but rather on the laws in their social context. He spoke about justice, and care for the poor, and consideration for employees, and love for the stranger. He set out the fundamentals of Jewish faith in a more systematic way than in any other book of Tanakh. He told them of God's love for their ancestors, and urged them to reciprocate that love with all their heart, soul and might. He renewed the covenant, reminding the people of the blessings they would enjoy if they kept faith with God, and the curses that would befall them if they did not. He taught them the great song in *Ha'azinu*, and gave the tribes his death-bed blessing.

He showed them the meaning of generativity, leaving behind a legacy that would outlive him, and what it is to be a keeper of meaning, summoning all his wisdom to reflect on past and future, giving the young the gift of his long experience. By way of personal

example, he showed them what it is to grow old while staying young.

At the very end of the book, we read that at the age of 120, Moses' "eye was undimmed and his natural energy was unabated" (Deut. 34:7). I used to think that these were simply two descriptions until I realized that the first was the explanation of the second. Moses' energy was unabated because his eye was undimmed, meaning that he never lost the idealism of his youth, his passion for justice and for the responsibilities of freedom.

It is all too easy to abandon your ideals when you see how hard it is to change even the smallest part of the world, but when you do you become cynical, disillusioned, disheartened. That is a kind of spiritual death. The people who don't, who never give up, who "do not go gentle into that good night,"[4] who still see a world of possibilities around them and encourage and empower those who come after them, keep their spiritual energy intact. There are people who do their best work young. Felix Mendelssohn wrote the Octet at the age of 16, and the Overture to a Midsummer Night's Dream a year later, the greatest pieces of music ever written by one so young. Orson Welles had already achieved greatness in theatre and radio when he made Citizen Kane, one of the most transformative films in the history of cinema, at the age of 26.

But there were many others who kept getting better the older they became. Mozart and Beethoven were both child prodigies, yet they wrote their greatest music in the last years of their life. Claude Monet painted his shimmering landscapes of water lilies in his garden in Giverny in his eighties. Verdi wrote Falstaff at the age of 85. Benjamin Franklin invented the bifocal lens at age 78. The architect Frank Lloyd Wright completed designs for the Guggenheim Museum at 92. Michelangelo, Titian, Matisse and Picasso all remained creative into their ninth decade. Judith Kerr who came to Britain when Hitler came to power in 1933 and wrote the children's classic The Tiger who came to Tea, recently won her first literary award at the age of 93. David Galenson in his Old Masters and Young Geniuses argues that those who are conceptual innovators do their best work young, while experimental innovators, who learn by trial and error, get better with age.[5]

There is something moving about seeing Moses, at almost 120, looking forward as well as back, sharing his wisdom with the young, teaching us that while the body may age, the spirit can stay young ad meah vesrim, until a hundred and twenty, if we keep our ideals, give back to the community, and share our

wisdom with those who will come after us, inspiring them to continue what we could not complete.

[1] George Vaillant, Aging Well, Little, Brown, 2003; Triumphs of Experience, Harvard University Press, 2012.

[2] The concept of generativity is drawn from the work of Erik Erikson, who saw it – and its opposite, stagnation – as one of one of the eight developmental stages of life.

[3] Avot 1:6, 16.

[4] The first line of Dylan Thomas' poem of that title.

[5] David Galenson, Old Masters and Young Geniuses, Princeton University Press, 2007.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z"TL
QUESTION: Why was there so much bloodshed at the time of the destruction?

ANSWER: It's the same question as why was there destruction? We must learn a fundamental principle; that Hakadosh Baruch Hu reacts in this world. He doesn't hide in the spiritual world and refuse to show Himself. He is constantly asserting His presence, only it's incumbent upon men to be aware of these phenomena.

Now, when people observe the Torah and things were going well, then Hakadosh Baruch Hu demonstrated His favor to encourage them. Therefore despite the great nations that ringed them on all sides, our forefathers maintained their independence and they lived happily; as long as they were loyal to the Torah. But when a movement was started, in the times of the first Bais Hamikdash by Menashe, who caused a large part of the people to become depraved, in the second Bais Hamikdash by the Tzedukim and the Herodians who took over the sanctuary and used it as a nest for their wickedness, and a considerable number of the people were spoiled by them. Therefore, the time came for Hakadosh Baruch Hu to demonstrate His disfavor and we learned there-from that the wages of sin is suffering. It's always that result.

The same was before World War Two, when a great part of the Jewish people in Europe defected from the Torah, very many stopped observing the laws of the Torah, so Hakadosh Baruch Hu finally sent upon them a destruction.

That's the principle that repeats itself and which was foretold from the beginning. The Torah says that's going to happen! Therefore it's merely a fulfillment of the old prophecy that, v'im lo shim'u li vi'yosafti l'yasro eschem sheva al chatuseichem (Vayikra 26:18), and the principle has been a prophecy which has been fulfilled constantly.

Good Shabbos To All