

# בשבת

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## THE THIN LINE OF LIFE

**S**hemos just ended on a cliffhanger, with a distressed Moshe questioning his mission and its success. Indeed, it appeared that Moshe had not only failed, but caused his beloved brethren even more suffering than beforehand. Our *parshah* records Hashem's response, and his directive to approach Pharaoh yet again. As we know, this is the beginning of the true showdown between Pharaoh and Moshe, with *Moshe Rabbeinu* warning Pharaoh to let the Jewish nation leave — or face the consequences.

Almost inexplicably, though, the Torah then gives the genealogy of Moshe and Aharon.<sup>1</sup> Though it is important to know the lineage of these leaders of *Klal Yisrael*, why does the Torah tell us at this point?

R' S. R. Hirsch<sup>2</sup> (1808–1888) explains that the discussion of Moshe and Aharon's background is perfectly placed. Up until now, Moshe and Aharon had failed. However, now we are about to embark on a journey with these two great personalities, figures whose life's work still impacts us on a daily basis. These are individuals who brought the most powerful nation to its knees, guided the Jewish people across the desert, and led them for forty years. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that they were something more than human, that their origin was something more than flesh and blood. To combat this, the Torah stresses their background — they were mortal men, and the position is within the reach of all human beings.

However, R' Hirsch points out, it would be sufficient to simply discuss Levi and his progeny if our sole focus was Moshe and Aharon. However, the Torah includes the children of Reuven and Shimon to combat another erroneous idea. Once we see how mortals like Moshe and Aharon can attain greatness, one might think that all it takes is a burning bush and some luck for Hashem to make one His prophet. This, too, is false. The genealogy shows us that there were others, elders, who could have been the redeemer. However, Hashem chose Moshe as His emissary, for Moshe was deserving of this position and honor.

We walk a thin line in life. Every one of us is capable of greatness, and no one can take, nor can anyone give this greatness to us. But by using our thoughts and actions in *avodas Hashem*, we will bestow this greatness upon ourselves.

<sup>1</sup> Bereishis 6:14

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*.

**One might think that all it takes is a burning bush and some luck for Hashem to make one His prophet.**

### Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Though inspiration is important, we don't want to convince ourselves that no effort is needed. On the hand, while it is important to acknowledge the constant battle with the *yetzer harah*, one must be vigilant to ward off hopelessness.

With this tightrope of life ahead of us, how does one keep levelheaded?

An excellent strategy is to keep ourselves informed on what is going on inside our minds and in our hearts. How do we do this?

A form of *cheshbon hanefesh* can help. One can choose to focus on one's entire personality, or just a sliver, but the process is the same. With pen and paper, determine where we are in relation to any particular *middah*.<sup>1</sup>

For example, do we get angry often, or infrequently? When we do get upset, how do we react? Are there times we calm ourselves, and how do we do so?

Once we get a good understanding of our *middos*, we have a better idea of our accomplishments, and a good picture of what lies ahead.

<sup>1</sup> *Cheshbon HaNefesh*, no. 115

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Any Hour, pg. 247

# FALLING INTO SUCCESS

My beloved and precious one.<sup>1</sup>

Peace and blessings!

I have received your letter. Your words touch my heart. Know, my precious one, that your letter itself is a contradiction to the descriptions that it contains. I shall now proceed to explain the essence of the above statement.

We have a mistaken and damaging tendency, that when we discuss the aspects of spiritual perfection attained by our Torah leaders, we focus on their mature years. We talk of their ways as men of perfection, while we skip over the inner struggles that raged within their souls [in their early years]. Our discussions of *gedolim* leave one with the impression that they emerged from the womb as accomplished scholars and *tzaddikim*.

Everyone speaks of and marvels over the purity of speech of the Chofetz Chaim, of blessed memory — but who knows of the battles, struggles, pitfalls, failures and setbacks which the Chofetz Chaim met through the course of his war with the *yetzer harah*? This example is but one of thousands; a wise person such as yourself can apply it accordingly.

The result of this is that when the youth of spirit, of spiritual yearning and excitement, encounters pitfalls, failures and setbacks, he sees himself as not being, “*planted in the house of Hashem*.”<sup>2</sup> For, in this youth’s misconceptions, to be considered, “*planted in the house of Hashem*” means to dwell in spiritual serenity, amid the “*lush meadows of tranquil waters*.”<sup>3</sup>

However, know, my beloved, that the root of your soul is not in the tranquility of the *yetzer tov*, but specifically in its war against the *yetzer harah*. The wisest of men said, “*The righteous will fall seven times, but will arise*.”<sup>4</sup> Fools think that this means even though he will fall, nevertheless, he will rise. Wise men, however, know well that the intent is that the nature of the *tzaddik*’s rise is because of his seven downfalls.

I beg of you, do not picture *gedolim* as people whose beings and good inclinations are single indivisible entities. Rather, see the greatness of *gedolim* in the image of awesome battles against the various tendencies of lowliness. At a moment when you feel the *yetzer harah* storming within yourself, know that you are then much more akin to *gedolim* than when you find yourself amid the perfect tranquility that you desire.

With feeling for your situation, with trust that you will be victorious, with a prayer that you succeed,  
Yitzchak Hutner

1 Paraphrased from a letter from R’ Yitzchak Hutner to a student, *Pachad Yitzchak, Igros U’Kesavim* 217

2 *Tehillim* 92:14

3 *ibid.* 23:2

4 *Mishlei* 24:16

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Every individual has the ability to choose their path. They can become a force for the greatest good or the most terrible evil.<sup>1</sup>
- Though no one can reach the level of prophecy of *Moshe Rabbeinu*, we can still strive to reach the great heights of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.<sup>2</sup>

1 *Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva* 5:2

2 *Nefesh HaChaim, Sha’ar* 3, *Perek* 14