



Parsha Va-yishlach
Obadiah 1:1 - 1:21
November 15, 2013 / 12 Kislev 5774

Cultivating A Sense of Humility

There is a story about an admiral who, looking out from his command post on the deck of his ship saw lights in the distance, clearly heading straight for him. He radioed the message ahead: "Turn aside, 10 degrees starboard." The radio beeped back, "Negative. Advise you turn aside 10 degrees starboard." Furious, the admiral radioed back: "No, you turn aside. I am an admiral I am in command of a battleship!" The message was returned: "I am a private. And I am in charge of this lighthouse!" Too busy being in charge, the admiral was nearly blinded to the true nature of the situation and the inanimate object that was right in front of him.

Arrogance. It is a character trait that many of us encounter on a daily basis. Sometimes, we are to blame, but other times we encounter friends, family, or co-workers who are convinced that they are "God's gift to the world." The message of our Haftarah this week, and a central Jewish message in general, is that we are all God's gift to the world—all of us are equally holy, equally valuable and special. And when we come to the end of our lives, we are all buried in white shrouds and in plain pine boxes, a reminder that no one of us is better than the other.

Our Haftarah this week is no exception. Taken from the book of Hosea, it teaches of the dangers of walking through life thinking that we know everything. Living in the Northern Kingdom during the reign of King Jeroboam II in the 8th century B.C.E., and preaching through a historical lens going back to Jacob, the prophet Hosea warns of God's anger when faced with a people who are filled with arrogance. God, speaking through Hosea reminds the people (who seem to have forgotten the critical role God has played in their lives):

You have never had a helper other than Me. I looked after you in the desert, In a thirsty land. When they gazed, they were sated; when they were sated they grew haughty; and so they forgot Me. (13:4-7)

Fortunately, Hosea also preaches that God is a forgiving God as long as we can "return" to God and learn to get out of our own way. In other words, if we can make the time to continually remember that our blessings and good fortune in life are not solely the work of our own hands, then we will come to discover God's presence in our life. Only once we walk through life with humility, will be able to reap the benefits of a meaningful, purposeful and holy life. Through our humility,

God will be to Israel like dew... They who sit in his shade shall be revived; they shall bring to life new grain, they shall blossom like the vine (14:6,8).

Cultivating humility can be challenging. We often like to take credit for our successes, while making excuses for our failures. And when our pride causes damage to ourselves or to others, we often fail to take responsibility for our actions. But we must learn to catch ourselves in moments of arrogance in an attempt to cultivate a true sense of humility as we walk through our daily lives.

Rabbi Rafael of Barshad (1751-1827) taught: When I get to heaven, they'll ask me, why didn't you learn more Torah? And I'll tell them that I wasn't bright enough. Then they'll ask me why didn't you do more kind deeds for others? And I'll tell them that I was physically weak. Then they'll ask me, why didn't you give more to charity? And I'll tell them that I didn't have enough money for that. And then they'll ask me: If you were so stupid, weak, and poor, why were you so arrogant? And for that, I won't have an answer. (Morinis, Every Day Holy Day).

When was the last time that you took too much credit for something?

What blessings in your life are due to luck, circumstance, and God's grace as much as they are due to your hard work?

Who do you need to thank today for your successes in life?

May each of us strive to recognize those moments in life when our arrogance is unhealthy, and may we work to cultivate a sense of humility and gratitude as we acknowledge the many blessings that God continually brings into our lives.

From the editors: Add your answer to any one (or all three) of the questions raised in this week's Unraveller. Join the discussion of these questions in Mentschen, the FJMC's online forum.

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