



The Last Precious Day

Adapted from a Shmuess by Rabbi Stulberger

Parshas Vayeilech

By Elan Perchik

In the beginning of Parshas Vayeilech, the Torah relates how Moshe Rabbeinu informs Klal Yisroel that his time has come to leave this world at the ripe old age of one hundred and twenty. The Sforno commenting on this Pasuk makes an incredible remark:

Moshe Rabbeinu encouraged and stirred himself at this time. Having just detailed Klal Yisroel's covenant with Hashem, which included a whole litany of blessings and curses, Moshe inspired himself to focus on comforting the Bnei Yisroel as to his imminent passing. Concerned that this covenant which was intended to evoke simcha (joy) would be mixed with the sorrowful event of his demise, he wished to remind the Jewish people of their unique relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu and that His promise of their entering Eretz Yisroel would eventually be fulfilled.

The Sforno here appears to be providing two profound lessons. On this last day of his life, Moshe Rabbeinu needed to communicate a number of important messages to the Jews. Yet, at the same time, Moshe saw the need to insure that Klal Yisroel's state of *simcha* not wane in the least. True, his passing was something they would eventually get over, but he was concerned that presently their joy would be tainted. He understood that the Jewish people's mindset of *simcha* was of no small significance. If a Jew lacks *simchas hachaim*, positive and joyful feelings when performing mitzvos, the beautiful life of Yiddishkeit will begin to look dull and cumbersome. It is *simcha* which infuses color to the picture and allows for a smile of exuberance to take shape upon opening a *siddur* to daven or *sefer* to learn.

An additional point as emphasized by the Sforno is the importance of *hisorerus*, emotional stimulus relating to serving Hashem. Moshe roused himself to fulfill his responsibilities on the last day of his life with utmost exactitude and commitment. What seems odd, however, is why Moshe Rabbeinu felt the need to stimulate himself to act with zeal? Was Moshe lacking the *zerizus*, alacrity, necessary to carry out all his plans? Would an internal, fiery pep-talk really change anything?

And the answer is that it clearly would. Even for Moshe Rabbeinu, there is no limit to the positive benefits of stirring oneself to act with greater levels of passion and enthusiasm.

In essence, the study of mussar is predicated upon this very concept. Mussar is meant to translate into *hisorerus*, an awakening of one's *neshama*. Moshe Rabbeinu on his last day still needed to spur himself to fervently carry out the task at hand. He, so to speak, had to open the classics of the Mesillas Yesharim, Chovos HaLevovos and Shaarei Teshuva and learn a little bit. He knew he had much to do and needed to fortify himself with all the spiritual encouragement and motivation he could muster.

This is not only a message relevant for the Aseres Yemei Teshuva, but for the entire year as well. Taking a moment to contemplate where our lives are heading and how our relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu can improve, we will be surprised at how much potential lies dormant within us and awaits to propel us to ever higher plateaus of spirituality.

Chazal teach that although fish live in an unending ocean of water, when the rain falls and hits the water, they quickly swim to the surface to catch the drops. The analogy, says the Gemara, is that even if one is full of Torah knowledge, he is always eager to hear another Torah idea and is never satisfied with what he already knows.

In line with the above, the story is told of a man living in Eretz Yisroel who once made such an experiment. He dropped some food into his aquarium and waited for the fish to rush to the top. But nothing happened; the fish didn't move. Unable to solve the mystery, he went to Rav Chaim Kanievsky *shlita* to find a solution.

After hearing of this man's test, Rav Chaim explained to the man as follows: In the ocean, a fish lives in an endless body of water. It is overwhelmed by more water and more water, and learns to appreciate how every drop of water adds to the immense amount of water the ocean contains. Your little fish in the aquarium, however, is limited to its contained water tank. It does not see an ever-expansive breadth of water everywhere. "Water is not the only thing in the world," the fish thinks; "one more drop of water will not make too much of a difference." That is why, concluded Rav Chaim, your fish remained stagnant.

This is the meaning of the above Chazal. Those who are filled with Torah like a fish in the ocean appreciate every word of Torah. They value every small insight because every drop counts. It is only the one who is sated with Torah who can appreciate the beauty of every little idea he learns.

The same is true as it relates to *simcha* in life. The one who appreciates every moment of life will be the one who is happy with every moment. He will look to inspire himself, even on the last day of his life, because he knows that as long as he treads upon this earth, he is in possession of the greatest gift possible. He is swimming alive within the beautiful, vast waters of Hashem's world and he wishes to be nowhere else but where he is. He realizes that one day—even if it is the last—holds unbelievable opportunity and he must awaken and remind himself of its preciousness.

If we would integrate such a perspective into our daily lives, everyday experiences would be that much more meaningful and valued. With this attitude guiding our travels throughout the seas of life, we can happily coast along until we reach the long awaited shores of Olam Haba and rejoice with Hashem for eternity.