

THE TRUE LIFE OF MOSHE

GLOSSARY FOR THIS SICHA:

Tzaddik: A person who is entirely holy and does not sin.
(plural: *tzaddikim*)

Moshe Rabbeinu: Moses our teacher

The Torah says regarding the passing of Moshe Rabbeinu that G-d “buried him in the valley”. Yet the Talmud teaches that the life of Moshe did not end. In the words of our sages “Moshe did not die”. How can this be reconciled?

In this talk, the Rebbe analyzes the concept of eternity in several areas, including the everlasting life of Moshe, and the timelessness of the Torah.

The Rebbe begins with a passage in the Talmud describing the story of Haman’s evil plot to eradicate the Jews, and the merit which saved them.

HAMAN’S DEFEAT

It was the worst threat to the Jews in all of history. Achashverosh, ruler of the known world, had given Haman the signet ring with permission to kill every Jew in his empire, in a single day. There would be nowhere to run, and no time to escape.

What merit could possibly protect them?

The Talmud seems to answer this question with the story of Haman’s lottery, when he chose the day of execution.

TEXT 1

“When the lot fell on the month of Adar, Haman was overjoyed. He thought to himself, “The lot fell on the month when Moshe passed away!” He did not know that though on the seventh of Adar Moshe passed away, on the seventh of Adar he was born, as well.”

(Megilab 13a)

Haman was thrilled, thinking that the month chosen was an unlucky one for the Jews. The Talmud, however, points

out what Haman didn't know: that it was actually a month of good fortune, since it is also when Moshe was born.

The Talmud implies that this is what protected the Jewish people from Haman.

This would all make perfect sense to us, if not for this verse from Koheles, which seems to conflict with this idea:

TEXT TWO

“The passing day of (a holy) man is better than the day of his birth.”

Koheles 7:1

If the passing of a holy man, a tzaddik, is more special than his birthday, why does the Talmud imply that Moshe's *birth* saved the Jewish people? Shouldn't it have been his passing that protected them?

WHAT IS A BIRTHDAY?

There is something different about Moshe from all other tzaddikim. Something that makes Moshe's birthday different from all others.

What happens on a birthday?

When a child is born, his soul enters his body. Since the soul is literally a piece of G-d, when it enters the world, it fills the body and the entire universe with G-dliness. You can imagine the great holiness the soul of a tzaddik brings to the world!

This makes birth sound like a good

reason to celebrate. However, when a baby is born, the holiness of the soul, although present, is hidden. All the spiritual power of the soul lays in potential. It is only through hard work throughout our lifetime that the holiness of the soul is actually revealed. Only once we refine our character and polish our nature, does the body become a clear window through which the soul can shine and fill the world with light.

The day a tzaddik passes on, is, as the Medrash puts it, “A day appropriate for rejoicing.” Since G-d took his soul from the world, it must be that he completed everything he had to accomplish, and is no longer needed here. The day of his passing therefore tells us of his great achievements.

Furthermore, every year, on the day of his passing, he climbs great divine levels which he could not reach during his lifetime. As the Alter Rebbe of Liadi (author of the Tanya) says: “On the day of a *tzaddik's* passing, all his performance of the commandments, all his Torah study and all his G-dly service reaches completion. The day is a special time, that causes salvation in the world.”

It is for this reason that the verse in Koheles renders the passing day of a tzaddik greater than the birthday. The birth of a tzaddik is the day he was given a special energy to accomplish great things in this world. This energy, however, had to be put to use. It was only a package of potential, and his future remained undetermined. At the end of his lifetime it is apparent

that he met his greatest potential. He lived a life dedicated to G-d and to his family, the Jewish people. He completed his mission and was ready to leave this world.

WHAT ABOUT MOSHE?

Now that we understand the verse from Koheles, shouldn't this apply to Moshe as well? Shouldn't Moshe's passing also be more joyful than his birth? After all, his life was devoted to great spiritual conquests in this world. On the day of his passing, Moshe completed a selfless life devoted to G-d and to his fellow Jews, and a great G-dly light shone when Moshe passed away. Why does the Talmud imply that Moshe's birth was greater than his passing?

TEXT THREE:

"And Moshe's mother saw that he was good."

—*Shmos 2:2*

"The house was filled entirely with light."

—*The sages, Sotah page 12a*

Moshe's birth was unlike any other. When Moshe was born, he didn't just bring a G-dly soul with potential to change the world; he came beaming with light. This light did not depend on circumstance or spiritual levels Moshe was to attain throughout his lifetime. From the moment he was born, Moshe's soul shone openly, and everyone could see its light.

WHAT KIND OF LIGHT WAS THIS?

TEXT FOUR:

"Moshe our teacher, from the beginning of his life, was befitting of lighting up the entire world with the light of Torah."

—*Rabbeinu Bachyeh, Kad Hakemach*

How did Moshe shine with the light of Torah the moment he was born? Even tzaddikim have to do some work before they shine this way. Moshe was different. Not only did Moshe transcribe the Torah and bring it to us, he was intrinsically connected to it with his soul. Therefore, by analyzing the nature of Torah, we learn a lot about Moshe.

TORAH AND TRUTH

TEXT FIVE:

"A true tongue will be established forever, but a lying tongue, just for a moment."

—*Mishlei 12:19*

"Falsehood does not have feet."

—*Tikkunei Zohar, page 422*

"There is no truth but the Torah."

—*Taanis page 7b*

There is a halachic rule that anything that is true, is everlasting. Let us take

the example of the purifying waters. In the times of the Temple, people often had to be purified with what was called “mayim chayim,” waters of life. This water had to be drawn from a river—but not a false river. The sages considered any river that flows for less than seven years, to be a “false river.” A true river must always flow, at least for the seven year cycle, for then it is considered a complete cycle. (The number seven is, in fact, relevant to several cycles, like the seven days of the week and the seven year Shmitah cycle mentioned in the Torah.)

Truth lasts forever, but falsehood does not have feet. It has no foundation, and will ultimately fall.

When the Talmudic scholars say, “There is no truth but the Torah,” they’re describing the fact that Torah does not change. In every time period, every era and every place, Torah is just as true, just as applicable and has the same intensity.

You might think that Torah is out of place in this world. This physical world we live in is a world of decay and disintegration, and the Torah is an everlasting book of life. But the Torah was intended for this world from the start. When Moshe ascended up Mount Sinai to collect the Torah for us, the angels protested, claiming that the Torah should remain with them, in the Heavens. They demanded of G-d, “Give your glory to the heavenly creations.” Moshe responded to them saying, “What is written in the Torah? ‘Do not be jealous.’ Do you have an evil inclination, for which the Torah

must command you not to be jealous?”

On he went, listing proofs that the Torah was written for us human beings. Clearly, the Torah was always meant for the creatures of this world. The Torah is invested in this world. It relates to our tendencies and inclinations, and gives us instructions to live proper lives in this material world.

Although it is invested in a world which is constantly changing, the Torah itself does not change. The rules of Torah are just as applicable now as when it was given to the Jews at Mount Sinai three thousand three hundred and twenty six years ago. Truth is truth wherever it may be.

Our sages teach that when the Torah was given, the Jews became free of the Angel of Death. The Torah became a part of the Jewish people and their lives, and since the Torah is unchanging and true, the Jewish nation adopted those qualities, as well. The Torah affected them in a physical way, giving them each the ability to live forever.

Only once the Jews sinned by offering sacrifices to the golden calf, did they lose this quality. They became impure with sin, and inevitably caused themselves some degree of separation from the Torah.

Our job now is to purify ourselves so that we may once again be completely united with Torah. Ultimately, in the end of days, we will succeed. As the verse says, “I shall remove the spirit

of impurity from the land.” (Zecharya, 13:2)

We will, in fact, revert to that eternal state—free of the Angel of Death.

MOSHE AND TRUTH

Moshe is the manifestation of truth in this world. This does not mean the fact that he never lied or that he was honest. This means that he was the embodiment of G-d’s attribute of truth in this world. That’s why the sages say, “Truth, this is Moshe.” (Tan-chuma, Shmos 28)

For this reason we find that Moshe’s handiwork is everlasting, not only spiritually, but even in a physical way. The sanctuary which he built would never be destroyed - only hidden. Moshe was in tune with the truth of Hashem and so his achievements are true and everlasting, literally.

This is why Moshe was able to illuminate the world as soon as he was born. As we explained, truth is truth, regardless of circumstance. It will be true and always was true. Moshe being the embodiment of truth, illuminated the world immediately upon birth. It was not dependent on the circumstance of Moshe’s age or years of spiritual ascent.

That is why Moshe was the one to bring the Torah down to the Jewish people.

Moshe, being unified and in concordance with Torah was not only the one to give us the Torah, but from the very first moment of his soul’s

descent to this world, he was “...able to illuminate the world with the light of Torah.”

To the extent that the Torah is considered Moshe’s Torah. As the verse states, “Remember the Torah of Moshe my servant.” (Malachi 3:22)

MOSHE’S PASSING

Now that we understand how Moshe’s birth was unique, let us return to the subject of his passing. As mentioned earlier, since Moshe was the epitome of truth, his handiwork was everlasting, even physically. If it is so regarding his handiwork, surely it is so regarding Moshe, himself. In fact, the sages say, “Moshe did not die... Just as he served then, in his lifetime, so does he serve Hashem now.” (Sotah, 13b)

Tzaddikim, in general, are considered “alive” even after their passing. Furthermore, the Alter Rebbe, in his Igeres Hakodesh, epistle 27, explains that tzaddikim have a presence in this world after their passing even more than in their lifetime. “The life of a tzaddik is not a physical one,” he explains, “it is a spiritual one.” When a tzaddik passes on, his spiritual life does not leave the world. On the contrary, they are, in a sense more alive than they were in their physical life, since they are not held captive in a physical body.

What, then, is unique about Moshe? Why do the sages point out that Moshe, specifically, never died?

The difference is that when we say tzaddikim do not die, we refer to their

everlasting impact they make on their students, and anyone who studies their works. Regarding the physical life of the tzaddik, however, there is certainly a change—they are no longer physically alive.

When we speak about Moshe's eternal life, we mean something different. Since he was the epitome of truth, and was bound up so intimately with the Torah, everything about him is everlasting—even his physical life, in this physical world.

What does that mean? How does Moshe last forever?

TEXT SIX:

“An extension of Moshe resides in each generation”

—Tikunei Zohar, page 469

In every generation, a spark of Moshe's holy soul finds itself in the tzaddikim of the time. Specifically, it manifests in one tzaddik—the Jewish leader of the generation. In this way, Moshe's life continues, not only spiritually, but physically as well, within these leaders. True, his body passed on from this world, but his extended spirit still lives physically within these leaders. As the Midrash teaches, “There is no generation which does not have a Moshe.”

Based on all the above, we can understand the precision of the words of the foremost commentator on the Talmud, Rashi. Rashi explains that the Jews were saved from Haman's decree

in the merit of Moshe's birth, because “The birth is worthy of atoning and cleansing for Moshe's passing.”

When Moshe was born, he shone with the truth of G-d. This was not a result of his own work and did not depend on circumstances. That is the nature of truth; it is not confined to the limits of time. It is there from the beginning and lasts forever. So, when Moshe was born, the truth that shone from his soul was to last forever.

Moshe's birth saved the Jews from certain death because it brought truth to the world, cleaning away the concept of death. This also means that even physically, Moshe does not cease to exist, in any way.

It is no surprise then, that the Talmud emphasizes Moshe's birth as the merit that nullified Haman's decree. Moshe's birth not only nullified the decree of Haman, it atoned for it. The Jews of Shushan were now “atoned” and favorable in G-d's eyes. It even affected the holiday of Purim which is transcendent to any limitation. In fact, this holiday will still be celebrated when Moshiach comes when most holidays will lose their significance.

JACOB LIVES ON IN HIS CHILDREN

The sages taught that our forefather Jacob, too, was the embodiment of truth. A dialogue in the Talmud discusses Jacob's eternal life.

TEXT SEVEN:

“Jacob our father did not die.”

“But did they not embalm him? Did they not eulogize him? Did they not bury him?”

“Just as his children are alive, so too, he lives.”

—*Taanis 5b*

Jacob, an embodiment of the attribute of truth, lives on not only spiritually, but in a physical form, as well.

This is why the sages asked, “But did they not embalm him...” Surely he was alive, in a physical sense, too. So the first sage answered, “Just as his children are alive, so too, he lives.” He lives on forever, spiritually and physically, through his children who live on forever. In fact, because Jacob, the epitome of truth, is our father, we are destined to never be destroyed. Just as truth does not change form or cease to exist, so too, the Jewish people live on, eternally.

Based on Likutei Sichos 26, Shmos, reworked by Shimon and Chaya Dubinsky

ENDING THOUGHTS

The lesson we can take from this talk of the Rebbe, is to make the eternal Torah a part of our practical lives. We, the children of Jacob and Moses, are the emissaries of our forefathers to fan the eternal Jewish flame and to shine the world at large with its unlimited light. When we emulate our forefathers, Jacob and Moshe, living a life devoted to G-d’s Torah of truth and His eternal commandments, our actions, too, have an everlasting effect, because we are connected with the eternity of Judaism and the Torah.