

## A Weekly Byte... from Isralight

### (Portion of Devarim)

*Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality*

From Rav Binny

***Dedicated to the memory of Binyamin ben Daniel ve'Yehudit; Benji Hillman, h"yd, of blessed memory, a Company Commander in Golani's elite Egoz unit who fell in battle in Lebanon ten years ago. It seems like yesterday....***

*Sleep; such a precious commodity, and so hard to come by those days; I remember it was a glorious day, that Shabbat morning, and truth be told, if I had been left to my own devices, I probably would have slept all day. But he, of the mischievous eyes and a shy smile, could not leave well enough alone. He was sitting on the edge of the bed with his older sister Abigail, who could not have been more than six, and they were impatiently waiting for me to wake up so I could pad into the kitchen and reach high in the cupboard where their mother kept the Shabbos treats.... Even then, there was no stopping Benji when he was on a mission....*

*So many Shabbatot I 'd arrive at the Hillman doorstep, often unannounced from the army, with a pile full of dirty wash and a pair of dusty boots, and I always got that trademark shy smile from Benji when I walked in the door....*

*I remember how they loved to pick through my army gear, and how I had to hide my M-16 from two curious mischievous boys... and I remember how fine a picture they always were: Benji & Shimon, walking to shul with their father Danny....*

*But most of all I will always remember his wedding; we didn't know it then but the entire family got together and had a chance not just to see Benji one last time, but to see him at the highest moment of his life. At a wedding, all the different pieces of a person's life come together - the family and friends, the army buddies and the high school friends, the uncles and aunts who bounced him on their knees, and the cousins who knew his dreams from his earliest moments.*

*It was a storybook wedding; such a fine picture they cut, the handsome young Israeli officer in slacks and a white shirt, dancing with his young beautiful bride; it could have been a movie, only it was so much better than a movie, because it was real. They had been going out for so long, many of his friends did not even know Benji without Ayala in the picture, and the palpable joy that was etched into her smile was infectious.*

*There is a moment etched into my mind forever, of Benji, who decided to surprise his bride with a song that was part of their history together, and grabbing the mike began to sing, serenading her to the amusement of the hundreds of guests gathered around. And the image of him, with his shy smile and twinkling eyes standing in the middle of the dance floor, as everyone, and particularly Ayala, his bride, simply reveled in the moment, stayed with me long after the wedding was over. And I remember thinking: this is a poster....*

*And then, less than a month later, we had a chance to get together with the entire family all over again, only this time there was no dancing and no smiles, no twinkling eyes and no tinkling glasses. And Ayala was not smiling in a magnificent white wedding dress, she was broken, in black; Israel's latest young widow.*

*I have lost many friends to military funerals over the years, some of them my closest comrades, but it had never been family. There is something about losing a cousin that is entirely different, because it's not just a fallen soldier; its parents and siblings, uncles and aunts, cousins and grandparents and everyone in the entire family. It's every family get together that we will ever have, every wedding and Bar Mitzvah, funeral and Bris; and even every family barbeque and birthday; none of it will ever be the same.*

*It's every time I will ever see a shy smile like that anywhere, and every little boy jumping up and down in his uncle's lap, and every time I look into my cousins' eyes and know that they are not as bright as they used to be because he, Benji was that light....*

*And that is one family, and one boy who became man who is now legend. Multiply that by twenty thousand families, who all share that terrible price that seems too great to bear.*

*So how do you go on? How do you keep smiling? On the one hand, the question defies response, and yet, more than anything Benji represented to me the way our best and brightest have always responded: A shy smile, a determined look, a hug across the shoulders, and a load that has just gotten heavier.*

*Little Benji became a Company Commander in one of the elite commando units of the Israeli army, but he didn't talk much about it; he was not a talker; he was a do-er.*

Ten years ago as his family was just getting up from the shiva, we read the portion of **Devarim**, words, which are so named for the first verse:

*"Eleh ha'devarim asher diber Moshe el kol Yisrael be'ever hayarden bamidbar ..."*

*"These are the words Moshe spoke to the entire people of Israel on the other side of the Jordan River, in the desert...." (Devarim 1:1)*

Sometimes, you have to find the words, for that part of life for which there are no words....

There is an interesting idea that stems from a particular question in the portion.

*"Va'Omar aleichem, ba'et ha'hi' leimor: lo' uchal le'vadi se'et etchem."*

*(And I said to you at that time, saying, 'I cannot carry you alone'.)" (1:9)*

Now the word "*leimor*" (*saying*), is an interesting word which at first glance seems to be superfluous. For example, in its most common usage "*Va'yedaber Hashem el Moshe leimor*", "*And G-d spoke to Moshe saying*", many commentaries understand it to mean that G-d was not just speaking to Moshe, he was speaking to Moshe in order that Moshe pass on the message to the rest of the Jewish people. So the word "*leimor*" (*saying*), seems to be all about conveying the message and passing on an idea.

But in this instance (Devarim; 1:9), Moshe is already speaking to the Jewish people; so to whom were they meant to convey it? Furthermore, why was this particular message so important to pass on? Why was it important for Moshe to let the Jewish people know that they had become a burden? Especially considering that Moshe is standing here on the banks of the Jordan River, speaking to the second generation of Jews about to enter the land of Israel; why did they need to know their parents had been such a burden all those long years ago?

**Rashi** suggests that the word *leimor* here is Moshe's attempt to express the fact that these words are not coming from him as a complaint, but rather from G-d Himself. But of course, this just makes the question even more challenging! Why was it so important for the people to know their parents had been a burden, that G-d Himself wanted Moshe to express this idea?

In order to understand this, we need to know what it was that made the Jewish people a burden in the first place.

The commentaries are very clear on this matter (including **Rashi** here...): this burden is a reference to the fact that the Jews were standing before Moshe from morning till evening asking him to act as judge for their questions and legal cases; apparently, this was too heavy a load for one man to carry, so eventually a system of judges was set up so that people could bring their grievances before local and eventually regional and even tribal judges, before those rarest cases that were too difficult for anyone else could be reviewed by Moshe himself.

But this does not really resolve our difficulty, as **Rashi** points out. One wonders why Moshe, who was G-d's vehicle for splitting the Sea and bringing the ten (or most of the ten) plagues on Egypt, could not easily have been G-d's vehicle for judgement of the entire people?

**Rav Moshe Feinstein**, in his *Darash Moshe*,: Perhaps it was not that Moshe could not shoulder this burden, but rather, it was important that one man should not be responsible for such a burden on his own, precisely because this is a burden that needs to be shared. It was not that Moshe was unable to take on this challenge alone; it was that G-d did not want him to. But then we are left to struggle with the language that Moshe uses: '*I cannot carry you alone*', which seems to imply that Moshe could not shoulder this burden alone...?

Indeed, Rav Moshe suggests that 'I cannot' need not refer to a *physical* inability to complete a task, but rather a *spiritual* or psychological inability instead. Once Moshe knew it was not Hashem's will for him to do this, he was simply incapable of doing it, end of discussion. And perhaps the reason Hashem did not want Moshe fulfilling this task alone was not because he couldn't but rather because other people should.

It is a measure of a person's character to see what they are simply unable to do.

At Benji's funeral one of the many speakers was his Brigade Commander, who had become quite fond of this young company commander whom he described as a rising star, clearly headed for battalion command and endless possibilities.

On the evening Benji fell in combat in Lebanon, the Brigade Commander walked into the command center and heard Benji's deputy over the radio, leading the men, and directing the operation, at which point he knew something was wrong, because in his words, Benji was simply unable to be in such a situation and not lead his men into battle. And not out of pride or foolhardiness, but simply because he knew that in such moments it was his job, and what he simply had to do.

Over three thousand years ago, Moshe was teaching his people a lesson: we need to all share in the challenges that lie ahead: in the day to day, as well as in those trying times when leaders are called to carry the rest of us forward in the most trying of circumstances.

Benji Hillman, of blessed memory, died leading his men into battle and fell as he lived with actions that speak far louder than words ever could. And he leaves behind him a challenge and a legacy: few are those in this world who merit to live up to such a bold and shining example of what Jewish leadership is all about: carrying the Jewish people and the State of Israel on their shoulders.

This Shabbat we enter into the most intense period of mourning for our Temples that were destroyed thousands of years ago, and we remember all the living temples we lost since then, as a direct result. It remains to us to find the strength, each in our own way, of ensuring that at the least, the sacrifices he and all the young men and women like have made, are not in vain.

May the love we will carry for Benji forever be a small source of comfort to his family and to all the families, in their darkest moments.

Yehi Zichro' Baruch

Shabbat Shalom, from the Old City of Jerusalem

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