

2016 ALUMNI DVAR TORAH SNAPSHOTS

From: Looking for the Man behind the Curtain by Rabbi Jesse Abelman

Faith based on evidence is always subject to revision in the face of new evidence. In a time when the evidence for G-d does not come from signs and wonders which flout nature, but from the nature of the world as He created it we are, paradoxically, freed from asking “Is G-d the author of this particular wonder?”

From: Should We Always Have Perfect Faith? by Elliot Dine

This episode illustrates that for Abraham, and consequently for us, in some cases it remains an appropriate response to challenge G-d’s action even when our concern is personal and not universal.

From: Fear of Abandonment by Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

By expecting more natural, and therefore hidden, expressions of G-d’s will, rather than immediate and immanent ones, they learn to appreciate the benefits of a world where G-d leaves more room for humanity.

From: Flagrant Consecration and Sacred Conflagration: The Unholy Sin of Nadav and Avihu by Rabbi Shlomo Zuckier

The asymptotic striving towards the Holy One requires preparation. Increasing one’s proximity to sanctity only escalates the urgency of that need. Nadav and Avihu’s unholy failure teaches that we must constantly affirm our role as agents of God’s sanctity in this world, while avoiding the temptation of presumptuous overstepping.

From: The Right and the Good by Shira Krinsky

Everyone must follow all of the mitzvot that Gd has commanded; there is an objective, communal truth to Judaism. On the other hand, everyone must do what is right and good to them; there is a subjective, individualistic truth to Judaism as well.

From: Divine Intermediaries: The Holy and the Forbidden by Alex Zaloum

How can we determine if we are being offered something of true value or just ephemeral satisfaction? A simple test: when something in this world seems to say, “Look *at* me,” it is like an “idol,” with nothing real to offer us. On the other hand, when something calls to us as if to say, “Look *beyond* me,” it is like a “prophet,” pointing us towards the One who cannot be encapsulated in any form or experience. Whenever we encounter something or someone that captivates our attention, we can ask: to what is this pointing towards? Itself? Or something greater?

From: Korach and the Failure of Meritocracy by Rabbi Avraham Bronstein

Sometimes we’re like Moses, spending so much time in the clouds talking to God that we forget that the things we do and say impact real people. Sometimes we are like Korach, not realizing that the principled arguments we make against our leaders can all too easily be turned against us as well. The resolution of the episode teaches us, perhaps, that there is a value in institutional establishments and hierarchical leadership so long as it doesn’t take a Korach to get their attention.

From: Rebecca’s Pain by Ezra Newman

Maybe instead of large proclamations dealing with entire groups of people as monoliths, we need to traffic in recognizing the differences of the individual.

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From: The Way of the World is for a Man to Sacrifice Himself by Tobie Harris

This point might suggest that the greatest evil – the evil that breeds reciprocal selfishness – more than the sacrifice itself, is to take away the humanity of the one being sacrificed, to reduce them to an object whose value lies only in its utility.

From: From Purim to Pesach in Thirty Days by Rabbi Roy Feldman

Talmud Torah is a human-led activity: it must be initiated by people, and Torah must be learned, interpreted, analyzed, and argued by people. It is decidedly a this-worldly activity. Simultaneously, it is a G-d-led activity. What drives our learning is our desire to know G-d's will and understand His *mitzvot*; ultimately, it is His word that we are studying.

From: Asking Good Questions by Levi Mastrangelo

R. Yitzchak wants us to ask at every turn, “Why not just skip to the laws? For what purpose were God’s rest on the seventh day and the events of the flood and the chronology of the patriarchs’ lives included in the Torah?” And he wants us to engage in the exercise of finding the answers, of scouring Tanach for the right pasuk to contextualize these events and tease out theological truths.

From: Absolute Faith and Hard Truths by Rabbi Jason Strauss

The question is, how will we guide our children, in light of these tectonic shifts in information technology? Will we help them insist on the rigorous truth, instilling them with אמונה without sugar-coating reality? Will we allow them to ask questions to which we do not have answers, acknowledging the challenges while pushing forward? Or will we tell them not to listen to their doubts, push them to choose a particular perspective, and remind them to be resolute in their belief that Hashem will ensure that everything will be good in the end?

From: Rov Gufei Torah Tehujin Bah by Davida Kollmar

I find it telling that when discussing fundamental Mitzvot, and Mitzvot which shape a person’s worldview, all Jews, men, women, and children, are specifically included. Torah is for everyone, especially those parts of Torah which are so central to Jews’ lives.

From: Baal ha-Batim, the Avot, and the Imahot by Michael Pershan

I notice that perhaps I’ve shown bias in my search for Jewish role models. There are, in fact, Jewish heroes who are not painted by *Chazal* as scholars: the women of the Torah. They feel the feelings that I regularly do.

From: Shirat Ha’azinu and Moshe’s Final Message by Yakov Ellenbogen

Instead of Bnei Yisrael being at the mercy of history, Moshe assures them that human action in the form of following the Law has an effect on history.

From: Certain Countings by Avram Schwartz

The expectation we have is that just as today was basically the same as yesterday, so will tomorrow be as well. We cannot be at all sure of that with years. Major changes can take place from year to year, especially the political ones that are essential to the yovel. Counting years is actually, upon reflection, rather more akin to a zav or zavah counting clean days. We are aware of where we stand, and we certainly hope for a certain outcome tomorrow or next year, but to count would express a certainty that cannot be had.