

שיחה *Sicha*

Annual Day of Learning

February 15, 2015

What does the Lord ask of you? Only doing justice, loving compassion, and walking humbly with the Lord, your God (Micah 6:8).

The sages wondered: There are 613 commandments! What, therefore, does the prophet, Micah, mean when he says that God only asks three things—*doing justice, loving compassion, and walking humbly*?

Doing, loving, and walking must be general categories under which other obligations are organized.

The act of walking is literally our most grounded act. In terms of its mechanics, walking is really the fluid drama of falling forward, and successfully managing the fall. *Walking humbly* comes when we are mindful of the brink in the presence of which we have no statements as eloquent as our movement.

The sages say that when we accompany the bride and groom we *walk humbly* (and dance!) with joy deepened by a sense of vulnerability. When we accompany and carry the dead, we *walk humbly* with sadness elevated by loyalty and compassion. *Walking humbly* is our way of escorting individuals, families, and communities towards the next fullness.

Members of our Burial Societies should make it a point to accompany brides and grooms. We should also make it a point to carry with honor and pride the role of carrying entrusted to us.



Don't Distance Yourself

הַמְנַחֲמִים בָּאִים אֶל הַחֲצַר
הַחִיצוֹנָה
עוֹמְדִים עַל יַד הַשַּׁעַר
אֲשֶׁר פָּנָיו אֶל גֵּיא צְלָמוֹת
וְאִימָתוֹ סָבִיב סָבִיב.
עֹמֵדָה עַל יַד הַשַּׁעַר כֹּל יִכְלָתָם
שֶׁל מְנַחֲמִים לְשֵׁאת.
כֹּל נַפְשִׁי בְּמִרְחַק פְּרָסְאוֹת
מִן הָאָנִי שֶׁל הַבּוֹכָה. גְּזֵרָה הִיא.

The comforters who come to the courtyard
-the outer one-
stand near the gate
that faces the valley of the shadow of death
with its terror all around.
Standing near the gate is as much
as the comforters can bear.
Even my soul is miles away
from the crying I. It's a fact.

יוֹצֵר לֵילוֹת וְרוּחַ
הֵלֵא נִגְדָד בְּכִי אִים זֶה,
אַל תִּרְחַק-
לְעַמְדוֹ כְּחֵץ
מִלְיוֹנֵי שָׁנוֹת אוֹר
בֵּינָךְ וּבֵין אִיּוֹב.

Fashioner of nights and spirit
surely against you rises this awful cry,
don't distance yourself-
don't let millions of light years
stand as a barrier
between you and Job.

Zelda

Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

Bearing The Loss Of Words

The Sluice

Over all this
grief of yours: no
second heaven.

.....

To a mouth
for which it was a thousandword,
lost—
I lost a word
that was left to me:
Sister.

To
polygoddedness
I lost a word that sought me:
Kaddish.

Through
the sluice I had to go,
to salvage the word back into
and out of and across the salt flood:
Yizkor.

Paul Celan
Translated, John Felstiner

Bearing The Pain

הַסְטָלְגִיטִים פּוֹנִים לְסְטָלְגִיטִים	The stalactites turn into stalagmites
וְכֵן נוֹלָדֵת לְאֶטָה דְּמָעָה. כְּאֵב נֶצוּר	and so in its own slow time a tear is born. Pain locked
אָגוּר בְּסֵלַע שָׁנִים רַבּוֹת כָּל כָּךְ,	gathered in the rock for so many years,
עַד שֶׁהוּא נֶגֶר כְּדָם לְאֶרֶץ הָעֵמוּד,	until it flows like blood along the length of the column,
נוֹטֵף לְסֵלַע הַמַּמְתִּין בְּסִבְלָנוּת,	dripping on the rock that patiently waits,
קוֹלֵט וְנִבְנָה מִמֶּנּוּ.	absorbing and being formed.
זֶה הַכְּאֵב הָאֲצוּר בְּתוֹכֵנוּ.	This is the pain that is stored within us.
דְּמָעָה אֵינָה נוֹבֵעֶת כְּמַעְיָן,	A tear does not flow like a spring,
שָׁנִים רַבּוֹת הִיא מְזַדְדֶּכֶת בְּנוֹ	for many years it distils within us
בְּלֵילוֹת קִשִּׁים וּבּוֹדְדִים	through hard and lonely nights
וְנוֹצֶרֶת מֵהֶם	during which is shaped
דְּמָעָה	a tear
אֶחָת	just one
הַנוֹשֶׁרֶת לְעֶפֶר הַקָּשָׁה	that falls on the hard soil
מִמֶּנּוּ יִצְמַח פֶּרַח הַסֵּלַע	from which sprouts the rock flower
וְאוּלַי גַּם תְּבוֹא הַיְשׁוּעָה.	and perhaps salvation will also come.

Rayah Harnick
Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

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Bearing Sufficiently

תָּנוּ רַבָּנָן: מִבְּטָלִין תַּלְמוּד תּוֹרָה לְהוֹצִאת הַמֵּת וּלְהַכְנִסַת כֶּלֶה. אָמְרוּ עָלָיו עַל רַבִּי יְהוּדָה בְּרַבִּי אֶלְעָאי שֶׁהָיָה מְבַטֵּל תַּלְמוּד תּוֹרָה לְהוֹצִאת הַמֵּת וּלְהַכְנִסַת כֶּלֶה. בַּמָּה דְּבָרִים אָמוּרִים- כְּשֶׁאֵין עִמּוֹ כָּל צָרְכוֹ, אֲבָל יֵשׁ עִמּוֹ כָּל צָרְכוֹ- אֵין מְבַטְלִין. וְכַמָּה כָּל צָרְכוֹ? אָמַר רַב שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר אֲנִי מִשְׁמִיָּה דְרַב: תְּרִיסַר אֲלָפֵי גְבָרֵי וְשִׁיתָא אֲלָפֵי שְׁפוּרֵי. וְאָמְרֵי לָהּ: תְּלִיסַר אֲלָפֵי גְבָרֵי וּמִינֵיהוּ שִׁיתָא אֲלָפֵי שְׁפוּרֵי.

עוֹלָא אָמַר: כְּגוֹן דְּחֵיְצֵי גְבָרֵי מְאֹבּוּלָא וְעַד סִיכְרָא. רַב שֶׁשֶׁת וְאִיתֵימָא רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן אָמַר: נְטִילְתָּה כְּנִתִּינְתָּה, מַה נְּתִינְתָּה בְּשִׁשִּׁים רַבּוּא, אֶף נְטִילְתָּה בְּשִׁשִּׁים רַבּוּא. וְהֵי מְלֵי לְמֵאן דְּקָרֵי וְתֵי. אֲבָל לְמֵאן דְּמִתֵּינֵי, לֵית לֵיהּ שִׁיעוּרָא.

The sages taught: One sets aside Torah study in order to bring out the dead and to bring in the bride. They said concerning Rabbi Yehudah the Son of Rabbi Ilai that he would set aside Torah study in order to bring out the dead and to bring in the bride under the following conditions—when there is otherwise an insufficient number. But if there is a sufficient number—one does not set aside Torah study. And what is a sufficient number? Rav Shemuel bar Einee said in the name of Rav: Thirteen thousand people and six thousand with shofars. But some say thirteen thousand people among whom are six thousand with shofars.

Ulah said: Sufficient [for escorting the dead] is the number to line the way from the town gate to the cemetery. Rav Sheshet, and some say Rabbi Yohanan, said: Taking should be like giving; just as giving [the Torah] took place among six hundred thousand, so should taking [to the grave] require six hundred thousand. This applies to those who have learned Torah and Mishnah. But if one has also taught these things, there is no limit. (Ketubot 17a)

Carrying Forward

מי שמתו מטל לפניו פטור מקריאת שמע, מן התפילה, ומן התפילין. נושאי המטה וחלופיהן וחלופי חלופיהן, את שלפני המטה ואת שלאחר המטה: את שלמטה צרף בהן פטורין; ואת שאין למטה צרף בהן, חיבין. אלו ואלו פטורין מן התפילה.

One whose dead lies before him is exempt from reciting *Shema Yisrael*, exempt from formal prayer, and from the obligation to put on *Tefillin*. Concerning those who carry the bier, their replacements and the replacements of their replacements—those in front of the bier as well as those behind it: If the bier as yet has need of them, they are exempt from reciting *Shema Yisrael*. If the bier has no need of them, they are obligated to recite *Shema Yisrael*. In both cases, they are exempt from formal prayer.

(Mishnah Berachot 3:1)



כל הרואָה המת וְאינו מלווהו עובר משום "לועג לרש הרף עשהו." וְאם הללוהו מה שָׁכְרוּ? אָמַר רַב אַסִּי עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב אוֹמֵר "מלווה ה' חונן דל" וּמְכַבְּדוֹ חוֹנֵן אֲבִיוֹן."

Anyone who sees the dead and fails to accompany him transgresses the verse: *One who mocks the poor affronts his maker* (Proverbs 17:5). If he accompanies the dead, what is his reward? Said Rav Assi, concerning such a person the verse says: *One who is gracious to the needy makes a loan to/ accompanies the Lord* (Proverbs 19:17) and *one who honors God is gracious to the needy* (Proverbs 14:31).

(Berachot 18a)



המוליך עצמות ממקום למקום, הרי זה לא יתנם בַּדְּסָקִיָּא וְיִתְּנֵם עַל גְּבִי חֲמור וְיִרְכַּב עֲלֵיהֶם, מְפָנִי שְׁנוּהַג בָּהֶם מְנַהֵג בְּזִיוֹן. וְאִם הָיָה מְתִירָא מְפָנִי נְכָרִים וּמְפָנִי לְסֻטִים, מוֹתֵר. וְכַדְרָךְ שְׂאֲמָרוֹ בְּעֵצְמוֹת כַּךְ אָמְרוֹ בְּסִפְרֵי תוֹרָה.

One who transports bones from one place to another must not put them in a saddlebag, and drape them over the back of the donkey and ride on the donkey, for that is shameful treatment. But if he would be afraid of heathens or robbers, such behavior is permitted. And just as bones are to be treated, so also a Torah scroll.

(Berachot 18a)

Let Mt. Remembrance Remember

שְׁהַר הַזְכָּרוֹן יִזְכֹּר בְּמִקוֹמִי,
זֶה תִּפְקְדוּ. שְׁהַגֵּן לְזֵכֶר יִזְכֹּר,
שְׁהַרְחוּב עַל שֵׁם יִזְכֹּר, שְׁהַבְּנִין הַיְדוּעַ יִזְכֹּר,
שְׁבֵית הַתְּפִלָּה עַל שֵׁם אֱלֹהִים יִזְכֹּר,
שְׁסֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַמְתַגַּלְגֵּל יִזְכֹּר,
שְׁהִיזְכֹּר יִזְכֹּר. שְׁהַדְגָּלִים יִזְכְּרוּ,
הַתְּכָרִיכִים הַצְּבֻעוֹנִיִּים שֶׁל הַהִיסְטוֹרְיָה, אֲשֶׁר
הַגּוֹפִים שְׁעָטְפוּ הִפְכוּ אֶבֶק. שְׁהָאֶבֶק יִזְכֹּר.
שְׁהָאֲשֵׁפָה תִזְכֹּר בְּשַׁעַר. שְׁהַשְּׁלִיָּה תִזְכֹּר.
שְׁחַיִת הַשָּׂדֶה וְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם יֹאכְלוּ וְיִזְכְּרוּ,
שְׁכֹּלֵם יִזְכְּרוּ. כְּדִי שְׁאוּכַל לָנוּחַ.

Let Mt. Remembrance remember instead of me,
that's its role. Let the memorial garden remember,
let the street named in memory remember, let the famous building remember,
let God's prayer house remember,
let the rolling Torah remember,
let the prayer for remembering remember. Let the flags remember,
colorful shrouds of history, the
bodies they wrapped have turned to dust. Let the dust remember.
Let the garbage remember in the gate. Let the afterbirth remember.
Let the animal of the field and the bird of the sky eat and remember,
Let everyone remember. So that I can rest.

Yehuda Amichai
Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

Bearing Loss, Bearing Gain

And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph who had exacted an oath from the people of Israel saying: God will be sure to take notice of you: then you shall carry up my bones from here with you. (Exodus 13:18).

And Joseph's ark would travel next to the ark of the testimony through the wilderness. Other peoples would ask, what is the significance of these two arks? Israel would respond: This is an ark that contains the dead and this is an ark that contains unending life. And the nations would then ask: Is it normal for the dead to travel next to an ark that contains unending life? Israel would respond: The dead placed in this ark fulfilled everything inscribed in that one.

(Midrash Tanhuma Beshalach 2)

Bearing the Ark of the Covenant

As soon as the bearers of the Ark reached the Jordan and the feet of the priests bearing the Ark dipped into the water at its edge, the waters coming down from upstream piled up in a single heap...The priests who bore the Ark of the Lord's covenant stood on dry land in the middle of the Jordan while all Israel crossed over on dry land, until the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan (Joshua 3:15, 17).

When the last of the Israelites ascended from the Jordan, the waters returned to their place; as it is said: *As soon as the priests who bore the Ark of the Lord's covenant came up out of the Jordan, and the feet of the priests were moved onto the dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place (Joshua 4:18).*

Did the Ark and its bearers cross the river after all of the people had arrived at the far shore? No, the ark bore its bearers across the Jordan; as it says: *And when all the people finished crossing, the Ark of the Lord and the priests crossed over and stood before the people (Joshua 4:18).*

נִשָּׂא אֶרֶוֹן אֶת נוֹשְׂאָיו

The ark bore its bearers

(Sota 35a)

Bearing Loss Into Life

Our sages taught: When the Temple was destroyed for the second time, large numbers in Israel abstained from eating meat and from drinking wine. Rabbi Joshua engaged them: My children, why do you not eat meat or drink wine? They replied: Shall we eat meat which used to be brought as an offering on the altar now that the altar is gone? Shall we drink wine which used to be poured as an offering on the altar but is no longer poured?

Rabbi Joshua said to them: If that is so, we should not eat bread either, because the meal offerings have ceased. They replied: Well then, we can manage with fruit. Rabbi Joshua said: We should not eat fruit either because there is no longer an offering of first fruits. They replied: Well then, we can manage with other fruits. Rabbi Joshua continued: We should not drink water because there is no longer any ceremony of water pouring. To this they could find no answer.

He then said: My children! Come and listen to me. Not to mourn at all is impossible because the blow has fallen. To mourn overmuch is also impossible because we cannot impose on the community a hardship which the majority cannot endure...

The sages therefore have ordained: A man may stucco his house, but he should leave a little bare. How much should this be? Rav Yosef said that it should be a cubit square. Rav Hisda added that it must be by the door. A man can prepare a full course banquet, but he should leave out an item or two. What should this be? Rav Papa says: The hors d'oeuvre of salted fish. A woman can put on all her ornaments but should leave off one or two. What should this be? Rav said that she should not remove the hair on her temple. For so it says: *If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget; let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not raise Jerusalem as my head joy* (Psalm 137:5). What is meant by *my/head joy*? Rabbi Isaac said: This is symbolized by the burnt ashes which we place on the head of a groom. Rav Papa asked Abaye: Where should those ashes be placed? He replied: Just where the head phylactery/tefillin is placed...

Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha said: Since the day of the destruction of the Temple we should by rights bind ourselves not to eat meat or drink wine except that we do not place a hardship on the community that the majority cannot endure. And from the day that a government has come into power which issues cruel decrees against us and forbids to us the observance of the Torah and mitzvot and does not allow us to enter into the week of the son/ brit milah—according to another version, the redemption of the son—we ought by rights to commit ourselves not to marry and have children. But the seed of Abraham our father would come to an end of itself. Rather, let Israel go their way, being fruitful, and do not bring the matter before them. It is better that they should err in ignorance than presumptuously. (Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra 60b)

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