

V'shinantam L'Vanecha

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According to a beloved *midrash*, when Moses first encountered God on Mt. Sinai, God was holding something beautiful and sacred, something Moses has never before seen.

"What is that?" Moses asked.

"It's a Torah," God answered. "A scroll filled with stories and values, laws and commandments, journeys about both the past and the future."

"Wow, that's pretty awesome!" Moses replied. "Kind of like a time machine with soul."

Moses then took a peek at some of the lessons and asked, "Does it really belong up here with You? After all, it says right here, 'לא בשמים היא' /*The Torah is not in Heaven.*' Why don't You give it to me so I can bring it down to the people."

"Moses," God replied, "I will give it to you. But you have to guarantee that you will honor its lessons. How will I know that you are sincere?"

Moses then peeked more at the text and read about Shabbat. He then said, "What if we promise to observe Shabbat - and all the other Holy Days? What if we go to shul regularly, build a sukkah, keep Passover? If we practice these rituals, will you give us the Torah?"

"Moses," God said, "These are good, but not good enough. I need something more special in return."

Moses then read ahead and looked at the books after the Torah. He then said, "What if we promise to always have great Prophets, like Isaiah and Deborah. Oh - and this one here looks like the

best, Zachariah! If we promise to always have great visionaries who will comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, will you give the Torah?"

Once again, God said, "These are good, but not good enough. I need something more special in return."

Finally, Moses looked down the mountain, and he saw the souls of little Maya Ruth playing with her twin brother, Eli Noah. He then looked back to the Torah and found the following phrase, right after the Shema: **ושננתם לבניך**/ Teach them to your children. Then Moses said, "God, what if we promise to always teach our children the values in this Torah? What if we promise to teach them the essence of our tradition. If we promise to do this, will you give us the Torah?"

And to that God said, "Moses, **NOW** you now understand that the Torah is the second most important treasure - second only to our children. Take this scroll and spend your life teaching. It is for *their* sake that you inherit this treasure."¹

"But how?" Moses responded? "How do I know what to teach?"

God then said, "Study Study this scroll."

Moses spent 40 days discussing the scroll with God. There were some parts that were simply extraordinary. The **rainbow** after the Flood. Jacob wrestling with an angel. Joseph's rise to become the Prime Minister of Egypt. But other sections confused Moses.

"God?" Moses asked, "It says here that we are supposed to stone rebellious children who talk back to their parents. Did You really mean this? Is that what we are supposed to teach our children?" God blushed a little and said, "You know, Moses, there are some sections in there that could use another set of eyes. That's why I want you to consult with others. Learn with

¹ Loosely based on Midrash Tanchuma

Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Yehuda. Discuss with Aristotle and Plato. Listen to the wisdom of Ghandi and Mother Teresa. Reflect on the insights of Sally Preisand and Mordechai Kaplan. Hear the voice of Cantor Lonee Frailich."

God continued, "Crowdsource from **Facebook** and **Instagram**. Find out what others have to say via **Twitter** and **Snapchat**. And don't be shy to come back to me and deliberate on all you discovered. Just remember what Rabbi Akiba will teach: 'What is hateful to you, don't do to others.' If you keep that in mind, you will better be able to filter texts that are difficult."

And with that, Moses set off to discover the most important values to teach the next generation. Here is what he found:

V'shinantam L'vanecha: Teach them diligently to your children.

Teach them that we have a rich text, an anthology of Jewish values. Our Torah and rabbinic literature offer a treasure trove of stories, allegories, and spiritual guidance. Teach them to sift through the pages, to argue and wrestle with the passages. Teach them to question but never walk away from our texts. While the Torah and Talmud may not always make sense, our engagement with them allows us to be part of a 3500 year conversation. Remind them that the Talmud is not about how the rabbis agreed or had consensus or even came to resolution. No - the pages show that even the smallest voice from a minority perspective is honored and preserved.

Teach them diligently to your children.

Teach them that it is their right and their responsibility to question God, to demand more of God.

Teach them to pray to God. Find God in the synagogue and in the playground. Experience God at Yosemite or at the Opera or at Disneyland. Partner with God every time they do a *mitzvah* or participate in *Tzeddakah*. Be God's eyes when they look at the earth from above and marvel at just how incredible it is. Be God's feet when they march for Social Justice. Be God's voice when they speak out against inequality. Be God's hands when they feed the hungry. Be God's soul when they give another person a hug.

Teach them diligently to your children.

Teach them. Teach them that things that we often call "acts of God" like the California fires the hurricanes in the Gulf States - events that do catastrophic harm - that those have nothing to do with God. At least not the God that their daddy prays to.

Teach them that every person is created *b'tzelem elohim* - that we are in the image of God. Teach them to treat one other properly. Teach them to seek out that spark of God in every interaction, even when it isn't easy. Teach them that there is good in everyone - but that not everyone acts with goodness. Teach them that when humans treat others cruelly in the name of religion - they are bearing false witness. You can't get to Heaven by treating others like hell. Nevertheless, we must face the world with goodness in our hearts.

Teach them to use their blinkers when they drive.

Teach them diligently to your children.

Teach them that they have a responsibility to the Jewish community. Teach them that even once they have received their education, it is up to them to ensure others get one as well. Teach them to support Jewish institutions, both local and beyond. Remind them we are all responsible for one another.

Teach them diligently to your children.

Teach them also that we have a responsibility beyond our people. We need to build bridges, to welcome the stranger, to reach out to those we don't understand. Teach them to never judge another until we have been in that person's place. This means the homeless person. This means those who suffer mental illnesses. This means older adults. This means people who are lonely. This means trying better to understand our neighbors from other religious backgrounds.

Teach them. Oh teach them. Teach them to love, to be kind, and to be honest. Teach them patience. Teach them how to listen.

But also teach them to speak their minds and to share their truths. Yes - share their truth, but with filters. Teach them that it's not ok to always say it like it is. They need to learn to balance.

Teach them to stand up in places where others might need to sit. Teach them to hold doors open ... but never to become a doormat.

Teach them to swim, yes to swim: to understand how to survive in a difficult and complicated world. Teach them to stay afloat in the sea of life.

Teach them diligently to your children. Teach them to be trustworthy, that others will rely on their integrity. Teach them that their word should be honored and their handshakes should be firm. Teach them to look at others in the eye. But also teach them to look into the souls of others.

Teach them diligently to your children.

Teach them. Yes, teach them. Teach them *Ba'al Tashchit*/ that we have a responsibility to the environment, that we should plant trees, recycle, and strive to leave the world greener than it was when we entered it.

Teach them that blind people can see them roll their eyes, that deaf people can hear them mock, and that voiceless people **do** have opinions. Teach them to do the right thing, even when - *especially* when - no one else is looking.

Teach them that they come from a line of thinkers, doers, and survivors. They come from intellectuals, rebels, and fighters. Their ancestors were scholars and milkmen, musicians and tailors. We were poets and pioneers. We were tortured. And we rose from the ashes.

Yes, teach them about the Holocaust and the Inquisition and the Pogroms. Teach them about the Crusades and about American Country Clubs, Colleges, and Communities that prohibited Jews. But tell them that the reason to be Jewish is not only to honor the victims. Teach them about the disproportionate number of Jewish Noble Prize Winners - the scientists and thinkers. Teach them about the great Philanthropists. Teach them about the Triangle Shirt Factory Fire - and the women who rolled up their sleeves to fight for better and safer working conditions.

Teach them to be on time. Teach them to call when they are late. Teach them that God created cell phones precisely to minimize parent's getting overly worried about their children.

Teach them to carry literature with them at all times. A newspaper. A novel. A biography. Teach them to listen to great music. Show them the Jewish names of supporters in the back of every Playbill and Theatre program. Show them how our people care about the music and the arts. Sing to them in Yiddish and Ladino and Hebrew, Spanish and French, Farsi and Greek.

Teach them that Simon and Garfunkel will have a special place in Heaven.

Teach them that their words are precious and that gossip hurts. It really really hurts. Teach them that causing a person to

feel ashamed in public for malicious reasons is akin to murder. And teach them that when they affirm another person's dignity, they enable Heaven and Earth to kiss.

Teach them diligently to your children. Teach them *Ahavat Yisrael*, a love of Israel, We are a people as well as a nation. We have a history and a future that is woven into the land, with a tapestry that includes Jews of all backgrounds and practices - but including threads and patterns from people from other faiths.

Teach them. Teach them to be mensches. Teach them to welcome the stranger. Teach them to give really good hugs.

Teach them diligently to your children. They are here to make the world a better place.

After Moses gathered all this precious information, he went to God and said, "When do I begin?" God said, "You had better head down the mountain NOW. **YOUR** people, Moses, are getting restless. They have built a Golden Calf, and I am really not too happy about it. I'm thinking of just abandoning the whole covenant with them."

"God," Moses insisted, "I'll make you a deal. You take a deep breath and count to ten. And I'll start with ten as well - ten top Commandments for the people."

God agreed with the deal. And God created a special day, Yom Kippur, to commemorate the very first time God forgave the people. Moses learned a lot from that. "Perhaps," he thought, "forgiveness isn't something we teach through words. It's something we teach by example."

And Moses went down the mountain to be with the people.

Friends, this Yom Kippur is a day of embracing these values. It's a day of connecting, soul-searching, and reflection. It's a day to imagine the infinite possibilities in a finite world. And it's a day to harness the teachings that have nourished our people for millennia. If we promise to live these values and inspire others through them, our people will flourish from now until Eternity.

V'shinantam L'vanecha. Teach them to your children. Speak of them in your home and on your way. Inscribe them on your hearts. Be mindful of them. And do them.

Ken Yihi Ratzon.