

Healing Torah for Troubling Times

1) The Guest House

Rumi, translation by Coleman Barks (The Essential Rumi)

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

2) Psalms 121:1-8

- 1) A song for ascents. I turn my eyes to the mountains; from where will my help come?
- 2) My help comes from God, maker of heaven and earth.
- 3) God will not let your foot give way; your guardian will not slumber.
- 4) See, the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps!
- 5) God is your guardian; God is your protection at your right hand.
- 6) By day the sun will not strike you, nor the moon by night.
- 7) God will guard you from all harm; God will guard your life. 8) God will guard your going and coming now and forever.

תהילים קכא:א-ח

שִׁיר לַמַּעֲלוֹת אֲשָׁא עֵינֵי אֶל־הַהָרִים מֵאֵין
יְבֹא עֲזָרִי:
עֲזָרִי מֵעַם יְהוָה עֲשֵׂה שְׁמִיךְ וְאֶרֶץ:
אֶל־יָמֶיךָ לִמּוֹט רַגְלֶךָ אֶל־יְנוּם שְׁמֶרְךָ:
הִנֵּה לֹא־יְנוּם וְלֹא יִישָׁן שׁוֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל:
יְהוָה שְׁמֶרְךָ יְהוָה צִלְּךָ עַל־יַד מִיְנָה:
יוֹמָם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לֹא־יִכָּה וְלַיְלָה בְּלִילָה:
יְהוָה יִשְׁמְרְךָ מִכָּל־רָע יִשְׁמֹר אֶת־נַפְשְׁךָ:
יְהוָה יִשְׁמֹר־צֵאתְךָ וּבֹאֶךָ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם:

3) Mishna Avot 1:2

Shimon the Righteous was among the last surviving members of the Great assembly. He would say: The world stands on three things: Torah, *Avodah* (prayer), and *Gemilut Chasadim* (acts of kindness.)

משנה אבות א:ב

שמעון הצדיק היה משיירי אנשי כנסת הגדולה. הוא היה אומר, על שלושה דברים העולם עומד--על התורה, ועל העבודה, ועל גמילות החסדים.

I. Torah:

4) Dr. Michael Fishbane, Spirituality of Texts

<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/spirituality-of-texts/>

Judaism is a text culture that always has been nurtured by study and interpretation. The interpreter and the text interpenetrate in dynamic ways. The individual finds and realizes that the layers of his or her deepest self have been “textualized” by study, so that the sacred texts provide the language for ongoing life experience and inspiration. The text, on the other hand, reveals itself through the accumulated readings of its many seekers and learners. **In a profound reciprocal way, every renewal of the self is simultaneously a renewal of the text, while every deadening of human sensibility is a simultaneous deadening of the life breath of the text.**

The biblical text is a shaping of the divine spirit by the human breath of Moses and the prophets; but it may speak now only through the spirit and breath of its interpreters. Martin Buber [the 20th-century Jewish philosopher] once said that the task of the biblical translator is to overcome “the leprosy of fluency,” a disease of the spirit that can lead us to imagine that we already know what we are reading, causing us blithely and triumphantly to read past the text.

The effective translator must, therefore, reformulate the word or the words of the text to produce a new encounter with its language and thus facilitate a new hearing and a new understanding. **The spiritual task of interpretation, likewise, is to affect or alter the pace of reading so that one’s eye and ear can be addressed by the text’s words and sounds—and thus reveal an expanded or new sense of life and its dynamics.**

The pace of technology and the patterns of modernity pervert this vital task. The rhythm of reading must, therefore, be restored to the rhythm of breathing, to the cadence of the cantillation marks of the sacred text. Only then will the individual absorb the texts with his or her life breath and begin to read liturgically, as a rite of passage to a different level of meaning. And only then may the contemporary idolization of technique and information be transformed, and the sacred text restored as a living teaching and instruction, for the constant renewal of the self.

5) Exodus 20:15 – 18

15) All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the blare of the horn and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance.
 16) “You speak to us,” they said to Moses, “and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.”
 17) Moses answered the people, “Be not afraid; for God has come only in order to test you, and in order that the fear of God may be ever with you, so that you do not go astray.”
 18) So the people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.

שמות כ:טו - יח

וְכָל-הָעָם רֹאִים אֶת-הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת-הַלְפִידִם
 וְאֵת קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר וְאֶת-הַהָר עֹשֵׂן וַיֵּרָא הָעָם
 וַיָּנֻעוּ וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ מֵרָחֹק:
 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר-אַתָּה עִמָּנוּ וְנִשְׁמָעָה
 וְאַל-יְדַבֵּר עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים פֶּן-נָמוּת:
 וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הָעָם אֵלֵי-תִירָאוּ כִּי לְבַעֲבוֹר
 נִסּוּת אֶתְכֶם בָּא הָאֱלֹהִים וּבַעֲבוֹר תִּהְיֶה
 יִרְאַתוֹ עַל-פְּנֵיכֶם לְבִלְתִּי תִחַטְּאוּ:
 וַיַּעֲמֵד הָעָם מֵרָחֹק וּמֹשֶׁה נָגַשׁ אֶל-הָעֶרְפֶּל
 אֲשֶׁר-שָׁם הָאֱלֹהִים: {ס}

6) Midrash Shmot Rabbah 28:1

“Moses ascended to God. The Lord called to him from the mountain, saying: So you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell to the children of Israel” (Exodus 19:3).

Rabbi Berekhya said: The length of the tablets was six handbreadths. As it were, there were two handbreadths in the hand of the One who spoke and the world came into being, two handbreadths in the hand of Moses, and two handbreadths separated between the two hands

מדרש שמות רבה כח:א

וּמֹשֶׁה עָלָה אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים,
 אָמַר רַבִּי בְרַכְיָה הַלּוּחוֹת הָיוּ אַרְבָּן
 שִׁשָּׁה טַפָּחִים, כְּבִכּוּל הָיוּ בְּיַד מִי שֶׁאָמַר
 וְהָיָה הָעוֹלָם שְׁנֵי טַפָּחִים וּבְיַדוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה
 שְׁנֵי טַפָּחִים וּשְׁנֵי טַפָּחִים הָיוּ מִפְּרִישֵׁי
 בֵּין יָד לַיָּד.

7) Tiferet Yisrael 48, Maharal of Prague

The Torah is the link between God Almighty, the Giver of the Torah, and the human, who is the Receiver of the Torah. For this reason, God held onto the top two tephahim (handsbreadths), and Moshe held onto the bottom two tephahim [of the Tablets]. As to the two tephahim that remained in the middle – these are shared between God the Giver and the human the Receiver. This image exemplifies the absolute connectedness between the human and God by means of the Torah. In fact, this is much like the case of two people holding one tallit on each end (this refers to a piece of Talmud in Tractate Bava Metzia). The part of the tallit held by each one belongs to the holder; while the remainder is divided equally between them and belongs to both. The same applies here.

תפארת ישראל מהר"ל מפרג מח

ועוד יש לפרש, כי התורה היא החבור בין השם יתברך שהשפיע התורה, ובין האדם, הוא המקבל את התורה. ולכך אמר כי השם יתברך היה *תופס בשני טפחים עליונים, ומשה המקבל היה תופס בשני טפחים התחתונים. ואמר כי שני טפחים חלק. ואותם שני טפחים חלק שותפים *בהם השם יתברך הנותן, והאדם *המקבל. ודבר זה מורה החבור הגמור שיש אל האדם עם השם יתברך על ידי התורה, כי הכי קיימא לן (ב"מ ז.) לענין שנים אוחזים בטלית, מה שהוא ביד כל אחד הוא שלו, והשאר חולקים בשוה. ושניהם משותפין בו, כך יש לפרש

II. Prayer

8) Babylonian Talmud Tractate Brachot 10a

There once were some Zealots (in the Aramaic – BIRYONI) in the neighborhood of Rabbi Meir who distressed him greatly. He would pray that they should die.

His wife Bruria said to him: What are you thinking? Is it due to the fact that the verse in Psalms 104:35 says “*Yitamu Chataim (Let sinners cease from the land)*”? Is it written “*Let sinners cease*”?! No, it is written sins! (The text can be read in both ways – y.e.)

Furthermore look at the end of the verse “**And let wicked people be no more.**”

For, if the sinners would cease, how could there be no more wicked people?

Rather pray for mercy on them, that they should repent and “there will be no more wicked people”.

He did pray for them and they repented.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף י עמוד א

הנהו ברייני דהוו בשבבותיה דרבי מאיר והוו קא מצערו ליה טובא.

הוה קא בעי רבי מאיר רחמי עלויהו כי היכי דלימותו.

אמרה ליה ברוריא דביתהו: מאי דעתך?
משום דכתיב: +תהלים ק"ד+ יתמו חטאים, מי כתיב חוטאים? חטאים כתיב!

ועוד, שפיל לסיפיה דקרא: ורשעים עוד אינם

כיון דיתמו חטאים - ורשעים עוד אינם?

אלא, בעי רחמי עלויהו דלהדרו בתשובה – “ורשעים עוד אינם”.

בעא רחמי עלויהו והדרו בתשובה.

9) Babylonian Talmud Tractate Berachot 7b

It was taught that Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha, the High Priest, said: Once, on Yom Kippur, I entered the innermost sanctum, the Holy of Holies, to offer incense, and I saw Akatriel Ya, the Lord of Hosts, seated upon a high and exalted throne.

And God said to me: Yishmael, My son, bless Me.

I said: “May it be Your will that Your mercy overcome Your anger, and may Your mercy prevail over Your other attributes, and may You act toward Your children with the attribute of mercy, and may You enter before them beyond the letter of the law.”

The Holy Blessed One, nodded to me with God’s head.

This event teaches us that you should not take the blessing of an ordinary person lightly.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות ז:

תניא א"ר ישמעאל בן אלישע פעם אחת נכנסתי להקטיר קטורת לפני ולפנים וראיתי אכתריאל יה' ה' צבאות שהוא יושב על כסא רם ונשא ואמר לי ישמעאל בני ברכני

אמרתי לו יה' ר' מלפניך שיכבשו רחמך את כעסך ויגולו רחמך על מדותיך ותתנהג עם בניך במדת הרחמים ותכנס להם לפנים משורת הדין ונענע לי בראשו וקמ"ל שלא תהא ברכת הדיוט קלה בעיניך.

III. Acts of Kindness

10) Babylonian Talmud Tractate Sotah 14a

Rabbi Chama the son of Rabbi Chanina said: Why is it written, **“Walk after the Lord your God”**? (Deut. 13:5) Is it possible for a person to walk after the Divine Presence? Furthermore - do we not already have a verse that teaches us that *“The Lord your God is a consuming fire”*?! (Deut. 4:24)

Rather, it means **to walk after the ways of the Lord**. Just as God clothes the naked, as it is written: “And the Lord God made clothes of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them,” so you too should clothe the naked. God visits the sick, as it is written: “And the Lord appeared to him (Abraham) in Alonei Mamre”, so you too should visit the sick. God comforts the mourners, as it is written: “After the death of Abraham God blessed his son Isaac,” so too you should comfort the mourner.

Just as the God buries the dead, as it is written: “And he was buried in the valley in the land of Moab” (Deuteronomy 34:6), so too, should you bury the dead.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סוטה יד.

ואמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא, מאי דכתיב:
"אחרי ה' אלהיכם תלכו?" וכי אפשר לו לאדם
להלך אחר שכינה? והלא כבר נאמר: "כי ה'
אלהיך אש אוכלת הוא!"
אלא להלך אחר מדותיו של הקב"ה, מה הוא
מלביש ערומים, דכתיב: "ויעש ה' אלהים
לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבישם", אף אתה
הלבש ערומים; הקב"ה ביקר חולים,
דכתיב: "וירא אליו ה' באלוני ממרא" אף אתה
בקר חולים; הקב"ה נחם אבלים, דכתיב:
"ויהי אחרי מות אברהם ויברך אלהים את
יצחק בנו", אף אתה נחם אבלים;
הקב"ה קבר מתים דכתיב (דברים לד, ו)
ויקבר אותו בגיא אף אתה קבור מתי

11) Deuteronomy 13:2-5

2) If there appears among you a prophet or a dream-diviner and he gives you a sign or a portent, 3) saying, "Let us follow and worship another god" — whom you have not experienced — even if the sign or portent that he named to you comes true, 4) do not heed the words of that prophet or that dream-diviner. For the Lord your God is testing you to see whether you really love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul. 5) Follow none but the Lord your God, and revere none but God; observe God's commandments alone, and heed only God's orders; worship none but God, and hold fast to God.

דברים יג

ב פי-יקום בקרבך נביא, או חלם חלום; ונתן אליך
אות, או מופת. ג. ובא האות והמופת, אשר-דבר
אליך לאמר: גלכה אחרי אלהים אחרים, אשר לא-
ידעתם--ונעבדום. ד. לא תשמע, אל-דברי הנביא
ההוא, או אל-חולם החלום, ההוא: פי מנסה יהוה
אלהיכם, אתכם, לדעת הישכם אהבים את-יהוה
אלהיכם, בכל-לבבכם ובכל-נפשכם. ה. אחרי יהוה
אלהיכם תלכו, ואתו תיראו; ואת-מצותיו תשמרו
ובקלו תשמעו, ואתו תעבדו ובו תדבקו.