

Tyler Case

D'var Torah

BEHAR

When I first looked at my torah portion, Behar, or “On the Mountain”, I didn’t think it is was the most exciting thing I’ve ever read. BUT, I then thought about being on top of a mountain and how it **actually feels** to be on top of a mountain peak. I live in Manhattan, and as you all know there are not a lot of mountains here, so being on top a mountain, or even a large hill, is an experience that I don’t often have. When I have had the opportunity to be on a mountain, I have become very relaxed and even focused. Finding this sense of calm and clarity is very important for me, living in the busiest city in the world. The challenge that I must face is finding this calm in my every day life, considering I cannot just go to a mountain when I want to. I need this clarity not only when I am on a mountain, but also in school or playing soccer. When I am in school, taking a test, or a quiz, I need to be focused on the task at hand in order to get a good grade, which I honestly, am not always able to do. Being focused also helps me a lot in soccer. I am a goalie, which is more of a mental than physical position. Being focused is a necessity in the net. If my focus strays from the field, I **quite literally** will *miss the ball*. **This is true in soccer and in life.**

Being on a mountain, physically and metaphorically, also enables you to open your eyes. This view gives us a new and wider perspective on the world around us. Ideally, it gives us a new perspective on life. This fresh view will let us see **new** things around us. Getting a new perspective on life is very important in Judaism, and we can physically experience this during the Amidah, one of the prayers we recited during the service today. Before we begin the Amidah we ask God to help us “open our lips so that our mouths can declare God’s glory.” While we chant this, it is customary to take 3 steps back and then three steps forward. **We take steps backwards in order to get a more grand view of life, the world, and most importantly, God.** We take steps backwards to see things in a new light, just like when looking at art. When we are in a museum, it is often necessary to distance yourself from a piece of art so that you see it from a different perspective and so you can **truly appreciate it**. When we take the steps forward, back to the place where we started, **we will never be able to see what we saw before in the same way**. Taking this journey, whether it be backwards, up, or faraway, **will forever alter our view of art, life and God**. When you return home, to where you were before, what you see will be different. **YOU will be different**. Taking these steps backwards, or up a mountain, helps us to see things we thought we could never see, **things we took for granted**.

A few years ago I took a journey to Haiti to help open up a library. I stayed with a Haitian family. Their house had about 6 rooms, with about 4 families living in it. They had at least 6 window spaces in each room, but no windows. They had a shower, with 2 minutes of running water. **This** family was considered rich. My experience in Haiti taught me not to take anything for granted. It taught me not to look at what I DON’T have, but to look at what I DO have and how I can use that to help people. It also taught me that trying new things is EXTREMELY important. To be totally honest, I was scared out of my mind and I really didn’t want to go when we began our trip to the island. The journey to the top of the mountain is not always an easy trip. But when you reach the top, it is a great feeling. Climbing the mountain is a **huge feat** and you most likely have to confront and conquer many fears on the way up. **I had many fears** before and during my trip to Haiti. But the most extreme experience I had was the one when I got home. Since I hadn’t showered in about 6 days, I was pretty dirty and I immediately jumped into my swimming pool. **My swimming pool...**Half of the children my age in Haiti have **never even seen a pool**. When my body hit the water, I felt like a different person. I had come to realize over that trip, that you cannot take anything for granted. And yes, I took things for granted and still sometimes do. When I got out of the water, I didn’t feel like I deserved the pool. What had I done to deserve a bath, or a swim? Haitian children my age had to drop out of school so they could work to help support their family. I have always known that going to school is what was going to provide a good future for me. Knowing that these children had to drop out of school to help support their families made me feel undeserving.

While in Haiti I visited a school. I wasn't expecting anything fancy, considering what the houses were like. When we arrived, I thought we were making a stop on the side of the road to pick up a friend of the tour guides, but then, I saw kids walking around. We followed a group of children into their classroom. The room had three essential objects for a classroom: desks, seats and a chalkboard. But I knew something was missing. Then I looked up. Oh yeah, **there wasn't a roof**. And then, unbelievably, it started to rain. As soon as the first drizzle came down, class was called off. I asked my dad how the kids were going to *learn anything* during the rainier seasons and he looked at me and said, "They don't".

It says in this Torah portion that the land will get a **sabbatical** every seventh year and all the slaves will be set free that year as well. The land gets a jubilee, **a rest**, for a few reasons. One, is for environmental purposes, so the earth doesn't get over worked and the land gets a chance to be revitalized. But the main reason is to make us realize who the real owner of the land is, that being God. The commandment to let the earth rest every seventh year makes us see that we are all part of God's plan to keep the world going. **We are God's stewards**, created to take care of the earth, which **God** has given to us. **Everything we need** comes from the natural state of the earth.

During the sabbatical year, humans and the earth are returned to their natural state. A state of Freedom. A human's natural state is not enslavement. **Humans** are not to be owned by other humans, **just as land** can never truly be owned by humans. This portion says that all *Israelite slaves* shall be released during the Sabbatical year. This also means that the Israelites were enslaving their own flesh and blood. If these commandments to make a jubilee year are a way of gaining equality and perspective, then the freedom granted to one slave should be given to all, whether he is black or white, blue or green, Israelite or Asian.

The sabbatical year, theoretically speaking, put a rich man into a poor man's shoes. Over the sabbatical year, the people were not allowed to farm or work, and all slaves were released, which created a sense of equality for the Israelites, AND GAVE THE ISRAELITES A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THEIR LIVES AND THEIR SOCIETY. When you are given a new role in a society, in order to understand what you are doing, you have to open your eyes; you have to *understand* the new view. YOU ARE PUT ON TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN AND MADE TO LOOK AT THE WORLD THROUGH A DIFFERENT LENSE. THIS CHANGE IN PERSPECTIVE hopefully SHOWS PEOPLE THAT THE LAND GOD HAS GIVEN THEM AND THE HUMANS THAT INHABIT AND CARE FOR IT ARE TO BE TREATED WITH KINDNESS AND EQUALITY. **THE ONLY WAY** THIS EARTH AND THE HUMAN RACE WILL SURVIVE IS IF **WE CLIMB TO THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN AND SEE THIS TRUTH**.

The portion concludes with God telling the people not to worship idols and to keep the Sabbath. God promised that if the people followed the laws of Shabbat, then God would provide for them a bountiful harvest before the sabbatical year and they would survive. God realizes that we must work very hard to uphold the commandments, which is why God gave us the sabbatical year and the day of rest, our Shabbat, each week. Work is prohibited on Shabbat and during the sabbatical year, so God is giving us time to do things we are not normally able to do. These periods of rest allow us to be with our family and friends. During the Sabbaths, we are able to focus on the things that really matter in life, and become revitalized for the work that lays ahead.

Over the last few years, Hebrew school has never been the highlight of my day, and I am sure that is true with a lot of my friends, but lately, I realized that this is an important time in my life and, somehow, it has become enjoyable. Over the last months, I have studied with Melanie Sylvan, who has been great in helping me prepare. She is a very nice person, unless you haven't studied enough that week, then, you are in for it. But she has been one of the main factors in making this day possible. AND We can't forget the Rabbi. I mean, Rabbi Goldstein is one of the coolest people I have ever met. We share interests in music, sports, you name it, which has really made it easy for me to understand my Torah portion, Behar. Also, I want to thank my friends for helping me out, especially Scott and Mike, for coming over and sitting through my tutoring with Melanie, which I am sure you had a great time doing. But my biggest thanks go to my parents, who have both been incredibly helpful, even though at times they did get a little annoying about it. I would also like to thank my sister. Even though

she could get a little annoying about it at times, her several suggestions did help. I would also like to thank her for finding the suit I will be wearing to the party, tonight.

I have climbed a mountain to become a Bar Mitzvah today. I have climbed the mountain into Jewish adulthood, metaphorically, because at heart, I will always be a kid. The view from the top of this mountain has taught me about my ancestors and the importance of my Jewish heritage. Most importantly, this journey has helped me to mature. I am now ready to take on more responsibility. I have become inspired to **help others**, because so many people have **HELPED ME** to get to this place today.

Thank you and SHABBAT SHALOM!

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