

# Mussar HaTorah

ת"סב

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

23 Tishrei, 5770 Vol. 10, No. 49

Simchas Torah

“AND HASHEM SAID, ‘THIS IS THE LAND THAT I PROMISED ... AND MOSHE PASSED AWAY THERE...’” (DVORIM 34: 4-5)

**Moshe wanted to protect his people from depression**

THE MIDRASH TANCHUMA (Vaeschanan 6) describes Moshe debating with Hashem and begging to be allowed to enter the Land of Israel. Among other assertions, Moshe said, “If I die without entering Eretz Yisrael, the world will say: If Moshe – who went up to the heavens, spoke to Hashem face to face, and received the Torah from Him – did not have his *teshuva* accepted, surely our *teshuva* will not be accepted.” This would cause the Jews to lose hope from ever correcting their misdeeds and bring them to a state of despair. Moshe wanted to protect his people from depression, and keep them hopeful and optimistic, so that they could serve Hashem properly. However, the Midrash later describes Moshe’s final moments as he is about to die. His very last words to *B’nei Yisrael* are, “See the end of flesh and blood – these two hands that received the Torah from Hashem, will fall into the grave.” Moshe’s last words are humbling thoughts that focus on the mortality of man: even the hands that achieved the greatest accomplishments in history, will disintegrate in the grave.

**Are these the last words we would expect?**

How can we reconcile these two statements with seemingly opposite messages? On the one hand, Moshe is concerned about *B’nei Yisrael* becoming depressed by his death. We all know the critical importance of positive encouragement, and how devastating despair and hopelessness can be. Yet, right before his death, Moshe chooses to emphasize his mortality. Are these the last words we would expect? Aren’t these also depressing? He should have told them to be close to Hashem and follow the Torah, with a message to inspire them or perhaps to console them. How does Moshe’s message accomplish either goal – it seems to offer no inspiration or consolation?

True optimism and *simcha* does not come from ignoring the reality that we are flesh and blood, and ultimately destined to die. It comes from confronting death and mortality with a positive and constructive attitude. Life in this world is, as our sages teach us (Avos 4:21), only a relatively brief journey, an entrance-way to the eternal World-to-Come. Our challenge is to avoid the distractions, the empty facades of this world; to use every moment we have here to prepare and improve ourselves, perfecting our *neshamos* so they can come close to our Creator in our real destination, the next world. Moshe was telling the Jews not to be misled and not to get involved with the foolish trinkets of this world. In truth, his words were the greatest consolation because they served to guide them on the right path. He reminded the Jews of their true purpose in life, which is the source of genuine happiness and joy, satisfaction and fulfillment.

**When we realize our true purpose in life, it will infuse us with the greatest joy**

Unfortunately, too many of us don’t feel this message properly, so we pursue the wrong goals. We get caught up with petty jealousy, baseless hatred and other negative traits which bring us only anguish and suffering. As we enter the holiday of Simchas Torah, if we focus on the truth, the reality, of why we are here in this world, we can abandon those passions that only bring us frustration when we can’t fulfill them. When we realize our true purpose in life, it will infuse us with the greatest joy as we are inspired to focus on the spiritual goals of Torah and *mitzvos*, preparing for our eternal destiny in the ultimate pleasure of the World-To-Come.