

To Learn and to Teach  
*Parashat Eikev*  
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Shabbat shalom!

Almost every day of my work-week, in order to reach my office, I walk down a long, dimly lit grey carpeted and grey walled corridor. Students who accompany me on the walk down this hallway, often point out to me how drab it is, to which I reply, “Yes, but *do you know* that there is a world famous research study group working behind that grey unmarked door?”

The research study going on behind the door is called the New England Centenarian Study and is the “largest and most comprehensive study of centenarians in the world.” The word “centenarians” refers to people who live longer than 100 years and until recent years was a relatively rare phenomenon. With every year that goes by now, the number of centenarians increases, so much so that the New England Centenarian Study now includes a sub-set of those aged 110+ whom they refer to as “supercentenarians.”

In the book of Devarim, Moshe is 119 years and 11 months old, a “super-centenarian.” Rabbi Sacks describes Moshe at this point with the following words: “Imagine you are 119 years old. The end of your life is in sight, You have been told by G-d that you will not enter the land. You have been criticized by the people you have led. Your sister and brother have predeceased you. And you know that neither of your children, Gershom and Eliezer, will succeed you. Your life seems to be coming to a tragic end, your destination unreached, your aspirations unfulfilled. What do you do?”

We could understand if Moshe’s life came to a sad end. Fortunately for Moshe though he possessed one of the traits described in studies of today’s centenarians.

One of the characteristics many of those who today live extraordinarily long and relatively healthy lives have is what is called in Japanese “Ikigai”, meaning “a reason for living,” a meaning for one’s life, and what makes life worth living.

Moshe found his “ikigai” in the last months of his life through his teaching. The same Moshe who in Exodus 4:10 said to God: “Please O Lord, I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now” speaks his own words (Hebrew “devarim”) in Deuteronomy.

In all previous biblical stories Moshe was given his tasks and script (the liberator, the lawgiver, the miracle worker, G-d’s spokesman) from God. It is only now that

Moshe speaks *his own* words, finds his own voice and becomes Moshe Rabeinu, Moshe, our teacher.

The Hebrew verb “le-lamed”, means to teach and appears for the first time (of 17 times) in the Torah in sefer Devarim. Parshat Eikev includes this sentence: “Teach (ve’limadetem) these words to your children, speaking of them when you sit at home and when you travel on the way, when you lie down and when you rise” (from the second paragraph of the Sh’ma Yisrael).

In effect, Moshe is calling on the Israelites to follow his lead and become teachers of the next generation. The Hebrew words for to learn, “lil-mod”, and to teach, “le’lamed” are the same root (shoresh) and make clear the obligation of those who learn to subsequently pass their learning on and teach others.

Many generations after Moshe lived, my late grandfather, Irving Karol, *z’l*, was my first teacher of Hebrew and Torah, taught in Hebrew schools in the Boston area, and continued teaching until the end of his life. I recently met one of my grandfather’s former students, who is now a Rabbi in New Jersey. His face lit up when I told him that I am “Mr. Karol’s granddaughter” and told me that every year, on Hanukah, the first menorah that he reaches for is one my grandfather gave him for his Bar Mitzvah many years ago.

Moshe began the tradition of teaching the next generation and was the first link in the chain of learning that we all benefit from and are obligated to continue.

Shabbat shalom