

## The Dynamic Duo Behaalotecha 5781

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Rosenkranz and Guildenstern, Abbot and Costello, Sherlock Holmes and Watson, Simon and Garfunkel, Gilbert and Sullivan, Thelma and Louise and Bert and Ernie. History, Art, Music and Literature are replete with dynamic duos, but possibly the earliest duo in recorded history appears in this week's sidra. I am referring, of course, to Eldad and Meidad. We don't know much about these two, though the Midrash does inform us that they were the lesser known half-siblings of Moshe Rabeinu.

We are introduced to Eldad and Meidad after Moshe gathered the seventy elders and bestowed prophetic powers upon them:

במדבר פרק יא

(כה) וַיֵּרֶד יְקַנְקַן בְּעַנְנֹ וַיְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו וַיֵּאצֹּל מִן־הַרוּחַ אֶשֶׁר עָלָיו וַיִּתֵּן עַל־שִׁבְעִים אִישׁ הַזִּקְנִים וַיְהִי כְּנֹחַ עָלֵיהֶם הַרוּחַ

וַיִּתְנַבְּאוּ וְלֹא יָסֹפוּ:

Then the LORD came down in a cloud and spoke to him; He drew upon the spirit that was on him and put it upon the seventy elders. And when the spirit rested upon them, they spoke in ecstasy, but did not continue.

(כו) וַיִּשְׁאָרוּ שְׁנַי־אֲנָשִׁים בְּמִתְנָה שֵׁם הָאֶחָד אֶלְדָּד וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִי מֵיִדָּד וַתָּנַח עֲלֵהֶם הַרוּחַ וְהִמָּה בְּכַתְּבִים וְלֹא יֵצְאוּ הָאֶחָדָה

וַיִּתְנַבְּאוּ בְּמִתְנָה:

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Two men, one named Eldad and the other Meidad, had remained in camp; yet the spirit rested upon them—they were among those recorded, but they had not gone out to the Tent—and they spoke in ecstasy in the camp.

The Torah describes the way in which most of the prophets dispersed once they were finished giving over their prophecy, except for two of them, Eldad and Meidad, who remained in the camp and continued to experience nevuah. This was considered to be an unusual sight, similar to the two or three individuals who remain in shul and continue with their prayers and their psalms while everyone else is enjoying the kiddush helping themselves to a second bowl of cholent. As it turns out, we are not the only ones who find it peculiar when people remain in a protracted state of spiritual ecstasy, for even Yehoshua bin Nun was taken aback by their curious behavior and their rapturous expressions. So offensive was the image of someone else's endless prophecy that Yehoshua felt it warranted termination: במדבר פרק יא (כח) וַיַּעַן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן־נֹון מִשִּׁרְתַּת מֹשֶׁה מִבְּחַרְיוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי מֹשֶׁה כָּלֵאֵם: And Joshua son of Nun, Moses' attendant from his youth, spoke up and said, "My lord Moses, restrain them!" Moshe, however, rebuffed the request made by Yehoshua, saying "if only we should have more prophets like them in Israel!" במדבר פרק יא (כט) וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא מֹשֶׁה הִמְקַנָּא אֶתְּהָ לִּי וְלִי וְלִי כָּל־עַם: But Moses said to him, "Are you wrought up on my account? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD put His spirit upon them!" It is surprising that the text does not identify the prophecy of Eldad and Meidad. What was it that inspired Moshe to come to their swift defense? What was so important that they lingered a little longer - "נתגבאו ולא פסקו"? And why was it that their

vision seemed to have agitated Yehoshua? The Talmud in Mesechet Sanhedrin (17a) presents us three possibilities: מה נבואה נתנבאו? אמרו: משה מת, יהושע מכניס את ישראל לארץ. אבא חנין אומר משום רבי אליעזר: על עסקי שליו הן מתנבאים, עלי שליו, עלי שליו! רב נחמן אמר: על עסקי גוג ומגוג היו מתנבאים, שנאמר כה אמר ה' אלהים האתה הוא אשר דברתי בימים קדמונים ביד עבדי נביאי ישראל הנבאים בימים ההם שנים להביא אתך עליהם וגו', אל תיקרי שנים אלא שנים.

The first suggestion was that Moshe Rabeinu would die and Yehoshua would bring them into Eretz Yisrael. Alternatively, Abba Chanin in the name of R' Eliezer, suggests that their prophecy was concerning the upcoming debacle of the quail - wherein the Jewish people would complain about the food they lacked, and would consequently be fed more quail than they could stomach, and succumb gruesome deaths.

Lastly, there is the view of Rav Nachman- that Eldad and Meidad envisioned an apocalyptic scene in the distant future, in which the battle for world dominance begins on Israeli soil. It is the battle of Gog U'magog, the war to end all wars, when the nations of the world will conspire to annihilate the Jewish people. Our sages, in their interpretation, identified three different events in the history of the Israelites, but each of these may help explain why Yehoshua was so upset to hear about them. You see, each one of these prophecies represents a different deep-seated fear we all experience. The first view- that the prophecy was about Moshe's death and Yehoshua's leadership into the promised land- represents fear of change, and of life's inevitable yet challenging transitions. As we conclude/embark upon graduation season, this is a fear experienced by many parents and children alike. Whether it is beginning high school, leaving for a year in Israel or beginning the empty nest phase in life, each of these transitions is fraught with uncertainty and can be a source of considerable anxiety. Any change in status or stage in life carries this challenge- the death of a relative, divorce,

financial loss, marriage of a child, birth...Yehoshua was afraid of the next stage in his life, too. He was never a leader- just a faithful follower, a strong second-man, but now he would be leading the Jewish people as they began a new national stage. No wonder he was critical of Eldad and Meidad! For Yehoshua feared the truth they forecasted, and would do anything to forestall the inevitable.

The second opinion- that Eldad and Meidad prophesied about the quail- represents the fear that our desires will go unfulfilled. In the 2003 mockumentary “A Mighty Wind,” about a folk music reunion concert, one of the groups, The Folksmen, sing a song called “Never Did No Wanderin”:

*Never heard the whistle of a southbound freight*

*Or the singin' of it's drivin' wheel*

*Never seen the dance of the telephone poles*

*As they go whizzin' by*

*And I never soared where the hawk may soar*

*Or see what the hawk might see*

*Never hiked to Heaven on a mountain trail*

*Never rode on a river's rage*

*No I, never did no wanderin'*

Some people found this parody song hilarious, making fun of the folk song genre that wistfully recalls epic travels of yore. Others might find this deeply sad- because it touches on that nerve of those who experience profound wanderlust- or have unfulfilled ambitions for the finer things in life. There are those places we want to see and never will, fancy or delicious foods we want to taste but won't be able to- because of a tight budget, a homebody spouse, a strict diet or poor health. Yehoshua, and perhaps all of us, would prefer to silence the prophecy of the quail, because deep down inside we know that we cannot have the charcuterie boards, the expensive scotch, and dream vacations constantly- and that if we can, we are fearful of the day that will inevitably come when we won't anymore, or when they will cease to be sources of pleasure for us. For the only thing more painful than not having שלי is realizing that it makes us sick to our stomachs. How many young and thirsty, ambitious and bright eyed people grow up, and realize the futility of the extravagance they wasted their whole lives chasing!?

Lastly, there is the image of Gog U'magog - that final nevuah we wish we could ignore. According to the translation attributed to Yonatan ben Uziel, Gog Umagog represents the perennial national fear - when all nations of the world join forces to turn on us. We have spent most of Jewish history bouncing between one mortal enemy and another; those who are our "friends" at one time become our enemies at others, and the reverse. Recall that in the Golden Age of Spain, the Jews enjoyed warm relationships with their Moslem neighbors, and if you told our ancestors in Poland that fundamentalist Christian groups are among the most vociferous supporters of Israel, they'd ask if you've gone meshuggeh. The prophecy of

Gog Umagog reminds us of the plain truth: **we have no real friends and no true allies.** No one- not on the right or the left, not conservatives and not liberally, not Christians or Moslems or Buddhists or Sikhs or anyone- actually cares for our well being or wishes us well, no matter how many rallies we attend, no matter who we vote for, no matter what our supposed friends say and certainly no matter what we would like to tell ourselves.

In light of each of these approaches, we can well understand why Yehoshua desperately wanted to silence the prophecy. It is so much easier to dismiss these voices as the instance rantings of the village drunkard, the insane person standing on the street corner with a sign saying “ Repent of your sins! The end of the world is nigh!” Moshe understood the importance of hearing these prophecies after all. Coming face to face with future unpleasant truths prepares us to be resilient, and allows us to identify our own inner strength. Yes, we fear change, but the ability to attain a new equilibrium in their wake shows us that we have reservoirs of strength for which we previously did not give ourselves credit. And as for the שליו and all of the other unrealized dreams and unchartered courses, there is comfort in knowing that fulfilling those desires may not sustain us, that our eyes are often bigger than our mouths. We learned this lesson well during covid, with more subdued smachot on more modest budgets, without sacrificing one iota from the joy and meaning of the day. Maybe this is a prophecy we needed to hear.

Lastly, there is value in confronting the unpleasant prospect of an apocalyptic future in which we are the universal target of all and friend of none. It is at times like these that we

learn the true strength of our nation; our most valuable lifeline is each other- if we can stop fighting each other long enough to notice.

Eldad and Meidad teach us the importance of heeding the prophecies we prefer to ignore.

That which makes us uncomfortable also makes us stronger, giving us the physical, emotional and national fortitude to withstand whatever Hashem has in store for us.