

Loneliness: Lessons from Past and Present Torah Leaders

מלכים א פרק יט

I. Lesson #1 about loneliness: recognize you are not alone!

1. Describe a situation in which you felt lonely: What made you feel lonely? Physically were you alone?

2. Consider Rabbi Sack's experience of loneliness below and answer the questions that follow:

"... Rav Kook, when he arrived in Israel, wrote, "There is no one, young or old, with whom I can share my thoughts, who is able to comprehend my viewpoint, and this wearies me greatly."

Even more candid was the late Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik. Near the beginning of his famous essay *The Lonely Man of Faith*, he writes, starkly: "I am lonely." He continues, "I am lonely because at times I feel rejected and thrust away by everybody, not excluding my most intimate friends, and the words of the psalmist, 'My father and my mother have forsaken me,' ring quite often in my ears like the plaintive cooing of the turtledove." This is extraordinary language.

At times of loneliness, I have found great solace in these passages. They told me I was not alone in feeling alone. Other people had been here before me."

("Loneliness and Faith," *Covenant and Conversation, Beha'alotecha*, 5780.)

a. Which two figures does Rabbi Sacks describe as having publically described their own loneliness?

B. What effect does this have on Rabbi Sacks' loneliness?

3. Consider your answer to #1- can you think of at least one other person you know or imagine has felt a similar sense of loneliness? Who is that person?

4. Finally, does knowing that someone else lived that same situation and emotion make you feel any differently about your own situation. In other words, does having an answer to #2 make you feel differently about #1?

II. Lesson #2 about loneliness: It is not always rational, but those trying to help should take it seriously!

Let's now look at ה'׳s response to human loneliness in Tanakh: Refresh your knowledge of Eliyahu Hanavi's major moment on Har Hakarmel by reading through Melochim 1 perek 18 <https://mechon-mamre.org/i/t/t09a19.htm>

1. What feelings would you imagine Eliyahu would have after his success at Har Hkarmel?

2. Now consider the beginning of the following perek- perek 19, focusing on the underlines psukim:

א ויגד אחאב לאיזבל, את כל-אשר עשה אליהו, ואת כל-אשר הרג את-כל-הנביאים, בחרב. ג ותשלח איזבל מלאך, אל-אליהו לאמר: כה-יעשון אלהים, וכה יוספון, כי-כעת מחר אשים את-נפשך, כנפש אחד מהם. ד וירא, ויקם וילך אל-נפשו, ויבא, באר שבע אשר ליהודה; וינח את-נערו, שם. ז והוא-הלך במדבר, דרך יום, ויבא, וישב תחת רתם אחת; וישאל את-נפשו, למות, ויאמר רב עתה ה' קח נפשי, כי-לא טוב אנכי מאבתי. ח וישכב, וישן, תחת, רתם אחד; והנה-זה מלאך נגע בו, ויאמר לו קום אכול. ט ויבט, והנה מראשתיו עגת רצפים וצפחת מים; ויאכל וישת, וישב וישכב. י וישב מלאך ה' שנית ויגע-בו, ויאמר קום אכל: כי רב ממך, הדרך. יא ויקם, ויאכל וישתה; וילך בכלח האכילה ההיא, ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה, עד הר האלהים, חרב. יב ויבא-שם אל-המערה, וילן שם; והנה דבר-ה', אליו, ויאמר לו, מה-לך פה אליהו. יג ויאמר קנא קנאתי לה' אלהי צבאות, כי-עזבו בריתך בני ישראל--את-מזבחתך הרסו, ואת-נביאיך הרגו בחרב; ואותר אני לבדי, ויבקשו את-נפשי לקחתה.

a. Eliyahu actually feels depressed and lonely! Why?

b. Is his feeling rational? Why or why not?

c. Can you describe a time when your feeling of sadness or loneliness was irrational

3. What does the Malakh ה' do to help Eliyahu:

Pasuk 5 (is aware of him! Reaches out! talks to him!):

Pasuk 6 (gives him physical comfort and sustenance):

Pasuk 7 (is gentle and does not give up trying to connect):

II. Lesson #3 about loneliness: You may not realize it but **יה** is reaching out to you!!

Continue reading perek 19:

יא ויאמר, צא ועמדת בְּהַר לְפָנַי יְהוָה, וְהִנֵּה יְהוָה עֹבֵר וְרוּחַ גְּדוּלָה וְחֶזֶק מִפָּרֶק הַרִים וּמִשֶּׁבֶר סְלָעִים לְפָנַי יְהוָה, לא בְּרוּחַ יְהוָה; וְאַחַר הָרוּחַ רֶעַשׁ, לֹא בְּרֶעַשׁ ה'. יב וְאַחַר הָרֶעַשׁ אֵשׁ, לֹא בְּאֵשׁ יְהוָה; וְאַחַר הָאֵשׁ, קוֹל דְּמָמָה דְּקָה. יג וַיְהִי כִשְׁמַע אֱלֹהֵיו, וַיִּלֵּט פָּנָיו בְּאֲדָרְתוֹ, וַיֵּצֵא, וַיַּעֲמֵד פֶּתַח הַמַּעְרָה; וְהִנֵּה אֵלָיו, קוֹל, וַיֹּאמֶר, מִה-לָּךְ פֹּה אֱלֹהֵיו.

What 4 natural occurrences does **יה** have Eliyahu experience here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

In which natural event is **יה** most likely to be found?

What message, then is **יה** trying to convey to Eliyahu?

How do we see **יה** reaching out both verbally and symbolically to Eliyahu in these פסוקים to help him?

How does Rabbi Sacks echo **יה**'s approach to Eliyahu:

There are people who find solace in solitude. They are alone without being lonely. But for the most part, life is about relationships. That is why loneliness can be depressing and dangerous.

Morality, (Basic Books, 2020), p. 29.

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