

“Anticipate Your Holiness, But Do the Work Now”
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Rabbi Jay M. Stein

Alexander Pope was born on May 21, 1688. In 1700, his family moved to a small estate in Binfield, Berkshire, close to the royal Windsor Forest. This was due to strong anti-Catholic sentiment and a statute preventing Catholics from living within 10 miles (16 km) of either London or Westminster. From the age of 12, Alexander suffered numerous health problems, such as Pott's disease (a form of tuberculosis that affects the bone) which deformed his body and stunted his growth, leaving him with a severe hunchback. His tuberculosis infection caused other health problems including respiratory difficulties, high fevers, inflamed eyes, and abdominal pain. He never grew beyond 1.37 meters (4 feet, 6 inches) tall. Pope was already removed from society because he was Catholic and his poor health only alienated him further.

Ernst Cassirer wrote, *An Essay on Man; An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (Yale University Press, 1944). He claims that Pope's “*Essay on Man*,” is an affirmative poem of faith. Life seems to be chaotic and confusing to man when he is in the center of it, but according to Pope, there is a divine order. In Pope's world God exists, and this is what he centers the Universe around so that there is an ordered structure. The limited intelligence of man can only take in tiny portions of this order and experience only partial truths, hence the reason they must rely on hope which then leads into faith. Man must be aware of his existence in the Universe and what he brings to it... It is man's duty to strive to be good regardless of other situations...” Pope himself, suffering so much, writes...

Hope springs eternal in the human breast;
Man never Is, but always To be blest:
The soul, uneasy and confin'd from home,
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.

Hope springs eternal in the human breast;
Man never Is, but always To be blest:

Hope is what permits us to continue. It is the most popular word today and becomes ever more valuable to us in these most difficult times. Implicit in the idea of hope, is the idea of a future that is better than the present. Whenever we utter the word “hope,” we imagine a future. We stand in the now and think about what will be. Every person and every people think of the future. For some it is a dream of wealth, for some it is who they want to become, for some it is a future free of physical pain, and for some it is simply a quieting of their mind. Hope springs eternal in the human breast; ***Man never Is, but always To be blest.*** The potential lies within.

Kidoshim tihiyu, “You are going to be holy.” Says our Torah, “You are on the road, you are on your way.” *Kidoshim tihiyu*. “You are going to be holy although you are not there yet, but you are on your way.” *Kidoshim tihiyu*, “You are going to be holy.” “You have a road map, you have the directions and you will arrive.” That is the name of one of our readings which begins this morning. Rashi amplifies the point when he says, *Melamed she'ne'emra parasha zo b'hakel mipnei she rov goofei hatorah tilooyim bah*, so much of the Torah rests on this principle. You are

going to be holy. If Hillel says the most important principle in the Torah is another verse we read this morning, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” (Leviticus 19:18) then Rashi, explaining Midrash Vayikra rabbah, is saying, “No.” The entire Torah, our entire existence, and our entire belief system rests on the guiding principle that we all have the capacity for holiness within us and that we can become holy. We must begin to anticipate it now. We have to ready the soil for the growth of the holiness and we must plant the seeds of holiness now.

Again, let me remind you where the story line is in our reading of the Torah. We have left Egypt, built a tabernacle, committed the sin of the golden calf, received the Torah and experienced the tragic death of two of Aaron's sons, the high priests. It seems as though so much has happened and now there is a quiet. This quiet offers a necessary but brief moment to catch our breath.

However, with quiet also comes the opportunity to think, and thinking can lead to insecurity. Insecurities creep in, doubt begins to take hold and so, in the brilliance of God's plan, the silence is quickly filled with laws and plans. This week's Torah reading is a guideline for setting up a just union of tribes and people. The very idea that we could begin with a clean slate, raising up a nation in a vacuum devoid of outside influence or past history, is a bit enticing. To be able to divorce ourselves from reality, and speak or dream only of ideals, is energizing. Like Plato composing *The Republic*, the Torah is writing a code for setting up a society.

“Don't steal, don't defraud, don't insult the deaf, and don't bear a grudge. Don't tolerate injustice. Love your neighbor as yourself.” (19:11-18) We may have no idea what will be in the future, we may have no idea what is going to happen in the world to come, or what tomorrow will bring, but at least we know how to behave now.

We all live between the worlds of “now” and the world of “what is yet to be.” We struggle to occupy this impossible place. We fight change while knowing how necessary it is. We want to live in the present and we want to be present, but we can't help but anticipate what we think will happen. In our conversations, we quickly rush to our next response, even before we have fully heard the conclusion of what the person to whom we are speaking is saying. How many times in the past month have you been in a conversation with someone and they have said, “Hear me out.” or “Let me finish.” We respond too early and we jump the gun because we want to get on with it. This is where the Torah, as only the Torah can, teaches the genius lesson, “Plant it now, do something now.” Live it now while you anticipate its coming. You can build a just society. Some things have to be done right away and there will be that which you have to do in the future.

That is why the very next verse is so instructive. On so many levels, Chapter 19; Verse 23, teaches us. Please look with me on page 698 in your *Etz Hayim Humash*. “When you enter the land and plant any tree, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden for you.” *V'chi tavo el ha'aretz*, when you arrive. You are not there yet, but you are on your way. You are in the desert right now and there is nothing that grows out there, but you are on your way to a place where things grow. When you get there, you are going to plant and you are going to plant trees that will cover the land, but don't rush to eat from them right away. You will arrive and you will plant, but just leave it alone, let it grow, and, let it blossom. Don't be so quick. Slow down. Listen to the breeze, feel the warmth of the sun. Smell the blooming flowers, but do nothing. You see those first fruits don't taste great anyway. The trees need time to mature, they need time to produce a better fruit. This is also true of ourselves.

For some, we move at a frenetic pace. We are always looking for the next project, the next activity, or the next event. To you the Torah says, “Slow down.” Others, however, can’t get going. For them, it is hard to get motivated and it is hard to make a move, but the Torah says “Here are a few small steps to get you going.” The Torah, the sages, and our traditions implore us to live a life of *mitzvot*. It is the way we till the soil and it is the way we prime the earth for something to grow. This week’s reading is filled with commandment after commandment because God wants us to know how to behave and he wants us to know what to do. This is what *mitzvot* are, they tell us how to live and they help us bridge the world of “now” and the world “yet to be.” *Mitzvot*, and there are so many to choose from, begin to ask us to taste a perfected world through small actions. Do one *mitzvah* today and one *mitzvah* this week. Do a *mitzvah* for one reason – not because of what you will receive in return, do one *mitzvah* just because you recognize God plays a role in your life. If you do this then I promise you – you will feel your holiness.

- ✧ Determine to do one *mitzvah* and make a choice about what you are and what you are not going to eat,
- ✧ Decide that next week you will light Shabbat candles.
- ✧ Resolve that this week you will give charity to the poor.
- ✧ Agree now that you will attend one class.
- ✧ Plan now to pray just once this week in gratitude for the bountiful gifts you have been given.
- ✧ Make up your mind to volunteer for one project in your holy congregation

Draw this conclusion right now and you will be prepping the soil for spiritual growth. Entrust yourself now to do God’s will and you will be anticipating your holiness. Your holiness is on the way. You may not have arrived yet, but you are on the way. Your holiness is on the way. You have to imagine that it is on the way, you have to believe it is coming and you have to have hope. Alexander Pope taught us, “ Hope springs eternal in the human breast; ***Man never Is, but always To be blest.***”

This week in Israel, I observed Yom HaZikaron. In a powerful speech at Har Hertzl, Israel’s Arlington cemetery, Rabbi Shimon Rosenberg, the father of Rivka Holtzberg, spoke of his daughter who had been killed in the attack in Mumbai. He said the following, “ *Anu Mityachadim im zichram she’hanoflim ha’kidoshim asher yikum damam asher nitzchu biyidei aivah.*”, “Today we stand together in memory of those holy people who have fallen, whose blood has been spilled by those who seek chaos in the world.” It was the use of the word “Kedoshim,” those holy people, that struck me so deep.

At the end of every funeral, the Hazzan sings the words, “*El maleh rachamim, shochayn bomiromim hamtzeh minucha nichana tachat kanfei ha’shichnah b’maalot kidoshim*” “Exalted and full of compassion, grant perfect peace in your tender embrace to the holy and the pure.” I thought , “Why do we wait until people die to call them holy?” We need to anticipate our holiness while we are still alive. We can be holy while we still have breath.

As I already mentioned this past week, we observed Yom HaZikaron, Israel's Memorial Day which is followed immediately by Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence day. In Israel, they literally run right into each other, requiring the observer to switch gears and to make the transition with little opportunity for thought. The move from sadness over fallen brothers and sisters, to the jubilation of living free in our own land, occurs in an instant. It is the ability to make that exchange that lies in our ability to believe and to hope. If you believe things will get better, then the difficulty is more easily tolerated. You must have hope.

Hope has become the popular word of the day, although we have been saying this word for a lot longer. The only difference is that we have been saying it in Hebrew. The word for hope in Hebrew is Tikvah. In order to survive, in order to make the move from darkness back to light, from struggle to triumph, we have had to say the word, walk the walk and we have had to sing the song. So, again I ask the Hazzan to come forward and lead us today in "Hatikvah," the anthem of our people and our nation. Let us rise in our places, let's dream together, and let's sing together.