

*Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick June 2, 2018*  
*Behaalotecha 2018*

I'd like to start by sharing my favorite story about Simon Wiesenthal, the famous Nazi-hunter who passed away back in 2005. It's a story that was first told to me by Rabbi Furman. Wiesenthal tells of the days following the war, when a neighbor approached him and asked "Could you lend me ten dollars until Monday? I've got a package coming tomorrow. I'll sell it on the black market; Monday, you'll have your money back. I swear it." Wiesenthal figured, "Why not help out a neighbor? I'll lend him the money." Monday arrived, the man came up to him and said, "I don't know what happened. The package didn't arrive. You know how messed up the mail is these days. But don't worry; it'll be here any day." This went on for weeks. Twice a week, for six weeks, the man came up with one excuse or another. Finally after six weeks, the man came to Wiesenthal and said, "It came. I sold it. Here's the ten dollars you lent me." And Wiesenthal answered, "No, keep it. For ten dollars, it's not worth changing my opinion of you."

In this week's Torah portion, Moshe's impression of the people he is leading changes. He reaches his breaking point, and just when it seems that he is going over the edge something changes. You'll recall that in this week's portion, like so many before it, our People are complaining. This time it's about the food. They are bored by the manna and they want a new menu. Moses is so frustrated that he turns to Gd and says, "Kill me now!" Sensing that he is overwhelmed and really burnt out, Gd tell Moses to appoint 70 elders on whom Gd will give the gift of prophesy to help Moshe. As the Torah says, *"Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to Moses. He took some of the spirit he had given to Moses and gave it to the seventy leaders. When the spirit came on them, they began to speak like prophets, but not for long."* We have already read, back in Exodus, that Moses appointed a whole system of judges to help him. That system, we can only assume, is still in place. This, however, is different. These 70 will only have the gift of prophecy for a short time. As the Torah tells us, it's a "one off." They won't carry that ability with them, it's just a one-time event. But after they get this gift of prophecy a serenity comes over Moses. Case in point: Two of those newly minted, one-time prophets speak inside the camp, even though they are told that it should have been done out of the camp. Joshua (Moshe's second in command) comes and says, "You have got to discipline them!" But Moses says calmly, *"Are you afraid the people will think that I am not the leader now? I wish that all the Lord's people were able to prophesy. I wish that the Lord would put his Spirit on all of them!"*

Clearly his impression of the People has changed! What happened? Simply, Gd let Moses see the influence he had on others. For a brief moment Gd took 'the spirit that is on you (Moses) and put it on them' so that Moses could see the difference he had made to one group, the seventy elders. Moses needed nothing more. He did not need their help. He did not need them to continue to prophesy. All he needed was a glimpse of how his spirit had influenced their lives. Then he knew he had made a difference.

There can come a time in the life, in all of our lives, when, in spite of all of our best efforts, we wonder, "Am I really making a difference? Am I deceiving myself when I think I can change the world in any meaningful way? After all, I have tried, I have given the very best of my energies and inspiration, yet nothing seems to change. And so Moshe was shown a group of people, (granted, not the entire People, or even most of them) whose life his spirit had changed. He did not see it. But Gd did, and wanted Moshe to see that he really had made a positive impact in the

lives of others. And that was all Moshe needed. This People did not make it into the Promised Land. In the big picture, Moshe could not change them entirely. But he could see that he had had an impact on the lives of a few people and that brought him a great sense of inner peace.

That's what makes this story so important. In this respect, we too are like Moses. We never really know how much we have given others - how much a kind word or thoughtful deed or gesture changed another person's life for the better. Like us, Moshe was human; he had no privileged access into other people's minds. He could not have known the influence he had even on those closest to him so Gd had to show him.

Deep down we all hope that our lives have made a positive impact on others; that what we have done has not gone unnoticed, that our efforts have been appreciated. But the daily wear and tear of our lives does not often afford us the privilege of taking yes for an answer. And that's why we have spiritual lives; to have that spiritual perspective that allows us to look at our lives from Gd's vantage point, to see our lives from above and to understand the various spheres of influence each and every one of us has had on the lives of others. This realization is indeed the ultimate antidote for despair and self-doubt. We may tend to be myopic in our view. We may be tempted look only to one or two people and measure our personal success on influencing this or that individual's life. But the Torah reminds us that we must broaden our view. We need to try to gain Gd's perspective and realize that we indeed have a far greater influence, in ways both subtle and profound in the lives of those around us. This will renew in us the courage to care and give us the courage to persevere in living our best lives, even in the face of adversity. That is the gift of spiritual renewal we have inherited - the ability to see beyond ourselves and into the lives of those we have influenced.