



IDO KEDAR

Ido Kedar is a 14 year old young man with autism who has limited ability to express himself verbally, but who has found that by typing or pointing to letters on a board that he can spell out the most soaring of thoughts. Ido's life goal is to help liberate other autistic people from their silence. The following pieces were written by Ido when he was 13 years old.

IDO'S TEACHING

The Moses – Aaron Cooperative: A Shavuot Program

Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services Synagogue, May 23, 2010

I was thinking about God and suffering. When we really need God is when we hurt inside. That is when God can seem like a remote presence. I often felt like God didn't hear my prayers because I didn't get better and it was my greatest hope. I prayed and God was not sending me a cure so I got the idea that God didn't care about me.

It is a common reaction. It helps to see a response to a prayer because we tire of suffering and expect some relief. I think that God doesn't see it that way. He isn't helping just because we believe He should. He helps in His own way, in His own time, I think.

The religious person may feel betrayed by God but God is there and listening to his prayers. God isn't a wish-fulfiller. He is a hope-fulfiller. He gives our soul an outlet for our hopes that would not be heard otherwise.

I spoke to God for a cure. He didn't cure me but He instilled in me a determination to help myself and other autistic people. He gave me a way to express my thoughts and to relate to people. He helped me see that autism is not the end of my hope but it is a challenge.

The truth is that all people face challenges at some point. The person who seems so happy on the outside may suffer inside. We all have sorrows- in the death of a loved one or an injury or a crime or a million other sorrows- some big and some small. The task we face is to keep moving and hoping. I mean, we have to find the strength to face our suffering and fight for life. We get our strength from our loved ones but also in our hope that God guards for us. He helps us to know that we do not have to stay trapped forever. There is God's promise of a better possibility.

It's a hard struggle. I fight my doubts and my demons every day but I am so sure that hope is like a taste of God's presence. How else would we have this relief if not for God? I think horrible things seem worse without this hope that promises a better tomorrow. It's necessary to see that our suffering leads to calming hope through our love in God.

I also think we cope with suffering by forcing ourselves to see God's blessings around us. When we are suffering all we see is the pain in the world and in ourselves. I saw my suffering as the result of a cruel world. If I saw a nature film I saw the predator and the prey playing out a cruel system of winner/loser.

It's a lot more complicated than that though it is a competition to survive, it's true. The animals don't kill for sport. They kill to live. In the animal kingdom a lion dies if it cannot hunt a zebra. The zebra dies if there are too many of them. There is a system that supports both a lion and a zebra in a kind of relationship of survival. I see it now not as cruel for the zebra but as enabling the herd to stay strong and live, so what I'm trying to say is that the world isn't only cruel. There may be a benefit to what seems miserable.

We get strong from fighting adversity. My situation has taught me to point on a letter board. It's slow. I need a lot of time to say what I want. On the other hand, I get to think about what I say and I don't waste my words. This is like funneling my thoughts into a clear stream. It's like a gift in a way though I hate the speech problem.

The truth is that much of what people say is meaningless. They instantly say what comes into their head. Their lack of working on their thoughts makes their thoughts unfocused. It's not only a curse to be quiet, it's a blessing of thinking inside and saying what is important, so a bad thing may be an opportunity too. It is our inner determination that keeps us feeling hopeful and enables us to turn suffering into an opportunity and a mission.

The world is full of sorrow and it's easy to find: illness, war, death, earthquakes and tsunamis, and just when you feel it's all sadness- it's spring and the world bursts into bloom and life is all around and it is like a miracle of life.

The world is joy and sorrow and we tend to see joy as our blessing and sorrow as our curse. We work for now to find joy or to preserve it but the suffering we face is also part of the system of life. It is the suffering that forces the world to improve itself and it reminds us to appreciate the blessings we have.

IDO'S BAR MITZVAH SPEECH

Parashat Re'eh August 5, 2010

The Parsha tells the story about the conclusion of the Exodus. The Hebrews are at last entering the land of Israel after all their years of wandering. They have shown themselves to be tough and weak, grateful and ungrateful, patient and unable to wait a moment, loyal and backstabbing, pious and seduced by temptation, heroic and cowardly, and inspirational and very mundane. In other words, they were regular people in unusual circumstances.

They asked to be freed and were freed. They asked for food. They got manna. They asked for a leader. They got Moses. They asked for a land. They got Israel. They asked for hope. They had God. But they complained, and they lost hope and patience, and they built an idol, and they quit trying because they stopped appreciating the miracles they had experienced.

I like that Judaism shows that we are descended from ordinary people, not saints. Saints are perfect so they don't really grow. These people had a journey to grow as a culture, a faith, and a theology. They show me that God chose imperfect, ordinary people to act out his plan for humanity in order to show our potential for growth.

From simple slaves came a beautiful message; the right to freedom, the creation of a people, the teachings that would inspire humanity. What clearer message could there be that humanity and God work as a team than the uplifting of this wretched group of refugees from Egypt?

The slaves represent the potential for overcoming challenges that exists in all people. They also show that people are easily defeated by their internal weaknesses. They were slaves to their fears of being free. They longed for freedom, but once free they were not liberated mentally from their dependency. They needed to learn to breathe independence and freedom before God let them set foot in Israel.

The story is for me an analogy of my life. I felt so wretched in my silent years, and as I began to get liberated, I many times made things harder on myself through impatience and self-pity. Yet, God turned these wretched people into his partners, perhaps to show that we all can rise. In fact, they worked to improve themselves through the laws of God and the model of Moses, and some became great and others stayed weak and ungrateful.

Sometimes I think I have been both. I have been weak in determination and I have not always tried hard enough. On the other hand, I have to say I am proud of what I have overcome. I am rising from a prison into freedom too. I am sure I am still in the middle of my wandering in the desert, but I have travelled a long way from Egypt.

I want to add something about the two mountains that open the Parsha. Side by side they stand, the same height, shape and environment. But, Ebal is barren and lifeless and Gerusim is lush and green and full of life. Doesn't the symbolism just leap out at you?

We choose our mountain. We might be on Ebal but we can go to Gerusim if we try hard and we fight for life. The world is both, of course. But we choose if the beauty of Gerusim is what we see when we are on Ebal, or if we only see Ebals's misery.

Truthfully, even on Gerusim we must be grateful for its gifts. I mean, here in America we are blessed with freedom and independence and self-sufficiency, and many people don't realize how miraculous that is. I think we need to imagine life in a society without these rights to see that we are deeply fortunate to be here. But I see many who talk of our free Gerusim as if it was Ebal. Then they turn Gerusim into Ebal even if they don't mean to. We are blessed and we should see it and be grateful.

We should live in awareness that our choices matter and that like the Hebrews entering Canaan, we choose which mountain to live on.

Thank you for coming to my celebration today. I want to say special thanks to a few people. First is Rabbi Jackie who saw the truth in me. Mom and Aba- the best parents I could have had. I am fortunate to be your son. Liat, who is a really nice person. Oma, my inspiration for keeping cheerful in spite of a hard life. Chidi, who helped my body listen.

IDO'S "MOSES" ESSAY

Bar Mitzvah Siddur Companion insert

Moses couldn't talk well yet he was the man God selected to liberate the Hebrew slaves. Why did God choose an imperfect man to do the job? Moses pleaded with God to choose someone else. He said, "I don't talk well. How can I speak to Pharaoh? How do I make my point heard?" God insisted it be Moses in spite of his speech disability. "Moses," he told him, "You must use your brother Aaron as your spokesman."

Why did God do this? I think for several reasons. First of all, Moses was a great man, perfect in spirit and values. He fought for justice. He yearned for fairness, and he was a free soul inside. He was a slave's son *and* a prince. He knew freedom and he was not limited by fear of the whip.

I think God also wanted to show that perfect in His eyes is not the same as perfect in man's. That is, God looks to the core, not the shell. Moses was not sure he could do it because he saw the shell. The core was revealed gradually as he led the slaves to freedom.

Moses amazed the world in his challenges. Who was he, this speech impaired shepherd, to challenge Pharaoh, thought to be an embodiment of the gods at that time? Moses assumed he was right when he insisted on freedom because God insisted it was right. Pharaoh assumed he was right when he insisted on slavery because no one dared challenge Pharaoh. That is, until Moses, the reluctant spokesman stuttered, and Aaron repeated the command to let the slaves be freed.

Moses taught the world that God rejects slavery. No matter how this idea has been ignored, no one can argue after the Exodus, that God approves of enslaving others. This was the first time that humanity saw a mass liberation movement and it has inspired people for thousands of years to aspire to be free.

There is also a lesson in mutual support. Moses had a helper, and this, I think, shows that we should not take too much on alone. Aaron and Moses are a team. I am sure Aaron needed Moses as much as Moses needed Aaron, and God relied on both of them to convey his instructions of liberation.

The message of Moses is that one leader doing what is right, with the right support, can change a terrible situation to one of hope and promise. I get inspiration from Moses. I faced a terrible situation without hope in my childhood. But, despite my inability to speak, I have reluctantly seen that if I don't say the truth it may be years before change occurs. So, I face **my** pharaohs- autism experts- to see if we can't find a way to liberate autistic people from the solitude they face.