



THE PERSON IN THE PARSHA

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB
OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, EMERITUS

“Two Kinds of People”

“There are two kinds of people.” I am sure that you all have heard one variation or another of that theme.

We seem to have a well-ingrained habit of dividing people into two categories. For example, we say that there are those for whom the cup is half-full, while others for whom the cup is half-empty. There are two types of people: some are optimists, and others are pessimists.

There are other dichotomies that we utilize. We distinguish between those individuals who are rational, guided by their heads, and those who are emotional, who follow their hearts. There are men and women of reason, and there are men and women of feeling.

The British political philosopher, Sir Isaiah Berlin, wrote an entire book about such a dichotomy. He entitled it, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*. He bases this title on a remark made by one of the ancient Greek philosophers: “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.” The fox has many little tricks up his sleeve, by which he can evade his pursuers. But the hedgehog has but one defense and, by the use of his prickly quills, can successfully defend himself against his enemies.

Sir Isaiah applies this distinction to the field of literature; specifically to the great Russian novelists such as Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Turgenev. Some excel at portraying details, while others are masters of depicting grand

themes. If we transfer Sir Isaiah's approach from literature to, say, medicine, we can certainly easily distinguish between the specialists and the generalists.

Personally, I believe that such dichotomies are simplistic, failing to take the complexity of human beings into account. Few of us are so rigidly one-dimensional. Most of us fluctuate between optimism and pessimism. We occasionally rely upon our reason, but in other circumstances become quite emotional. We shift our focus from fine details to the overall picture and back again.

It is fascinating to find such dichotomies in our traditional Jewish sources. Perhaps the most famous of them relates to two schools of thought that pervade Talmudic literature: Hillel and Shammai and their respective schools. These two great sages debate each other on hundreds of subjects, ranging from the question of whether it would have been better that man had never been created to laws regarding the fine points of ritual purity. They each prescribed different sequences for the blessings which constitute the *Havdalah* service, and they even differed as to the precise wording of some of those blessings.

Many scholars have assumed that fundamentally, different philosophies of life were at the root of their disagreements. One attempt to identify such an underlying rationale was

made by a sage of the last generation, Rabbi Solomon Joseph Zevin, who fortunately escaped the prisons of the Soviet Union and lived to teach and write in Jerusalem.

Rabbi Zevin believed that all of Hillel and Shammai's differences of opinion could be reduced to one basic difference between them. Shammai, he argued, held the future potential of a situation to be more critical than the actual current situation. Shammai was concerned with probable future consequences; Hillel, with present realities.

Hillel, felt that the actual situation with which a person is confronted takes precedence over considerations of what might happen in the future. Rav Zevin's dichotomy puts Shammai's priority on potential eventualities against Hillel's belief that actual present circumstances took priority.

Their contrasting approaches to religious life is exemplified in the well-known story of the aspiring convert to Judaism who approached first Shammai and then Hillel with the request that they teach him the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Shammai angrily rejected him, while Hillel welcomed him, famously declaring that the essence of the Torah could indeed be taught while standing on one foot: "Do not do unto others what is hateful to you." Hillel then went on to advise him that the rest of the Torah was just commentary that he could study independently.

Following Rav Zevin's approach, when Shammai was confronted with the bizarre request of the convert, he suspected, with good cause, that this man would not be a good candidate or a lasting conversion—sooner or later, he would revert to his pagan ways. Characteristically, Shammai considered potential.

But Hillel was not troubled by what the

potential future might hold in store. Here was a man who wished to convert. That was all that mattered. The actuality of the present moment prevailed.

With another of their many debates, we finally come to this week's special Shabbat, the Shabbat of Hanukkah.

Hillel ruled that one begins the holiday by lighting just one candle and then increases the number of candles day by day. Shammai ruled in the opposite manner, beginning with eight candles and then gradually decreasing the number of candles night after night.

We are all so accustomed to lighting one candle of the *menorah* on the first night and then adding an additional candle for each successive night that many of us are unaware that this procedure follows Hillel's opinion. Shammai insisted that things should be done differently. He and his entire school lit eight candles on the first night and proceeded to light in descending order, from eight down to one.

Applying Rav Zevin's analysis can gain a fresh understanding of the candle lighting ceremony of Hanukkah. For Shammai, the miracle was

**In loving memory of
our incredible mother
Shirley Jungreis z"l**

**who spread positivity and
love wherever she went.**

**Missing her dearly.
May the learning of Torah Tidbits
and the light of Chanuka
bring an עליית נשמת**

שולמית בת רחל ע"ה

כ"ו כסלו - 3rd yahrzeit

**Wolf, Jungreis, Charish
& Penn families**

powerful at that specific time in history when it occurred. But, concerned as he was about the potential future, he was convinced that, with time, the memory of that miracle would fade and its lessons would be forgotten.

Hillel had a different view. We can return, he asserted, to the moment in history when the miracle occurred. At first, on day one, the phenomenon was almost insignificant. But as each day passed and the oil of the Temple's *menorah* continued to burn, the wonder grew and grew. That was the nature of the situation at that moment in time, the awe increasing gradually day after day.

Hillel had an additional insight. Always holding the present moment in focus, he realized that that bygone moment did not have to disappear over time. It could be preserved. It could forever be experienced in all of its wonder.

The victory of more than 2,000 years ago remains ever present, right up to this very year. Memories need not fade. Such is the nature of the Jewish historical memory: events can be relived.

Hillel's teaching about the primacy of the present moment and our ability to perennially relive that moment lies at the core of the Hanukkah holiday. This teaching is encapsulated in the words of the blessing we recite just as we light the *menorah*:

"Blessed are You, Lord our God... who performed miracles for our ancestors in those days, and at this time." ■

**Condolences to the
Beitar Illit community
on the passing of**

FEYGEH SARAH FRIEDMAN a”h



The Tzimmerim @ Weissman Farms



**The perfect pastoral venue
for a family getaway!**

**Enjoy Shabbat in the dati moshav
Sde Ilan in the Lower Galilee**

Room for up to 26 guests

**Fully equipped kosher outdoor
kitchen**

Spacious indoor dining area

**Pool heated year-round and
covered in winter**



WhatsApp/Call Ira @ 050-630-2312

Website: Weissman.Farm