

Not Wanting to Walk the Dog - Ki Tavo 5782

So, I want to start with a confession.

We have had a dog for almost four years now, and I don't totally love having the dog.



I love our dog, Bamba - named for the great Israeli Peanut Butter snack. He greets me with his tail wagging, excited to play. He snuggles. He's very sweet at home. He's a super cute off-white Goldendoodle.

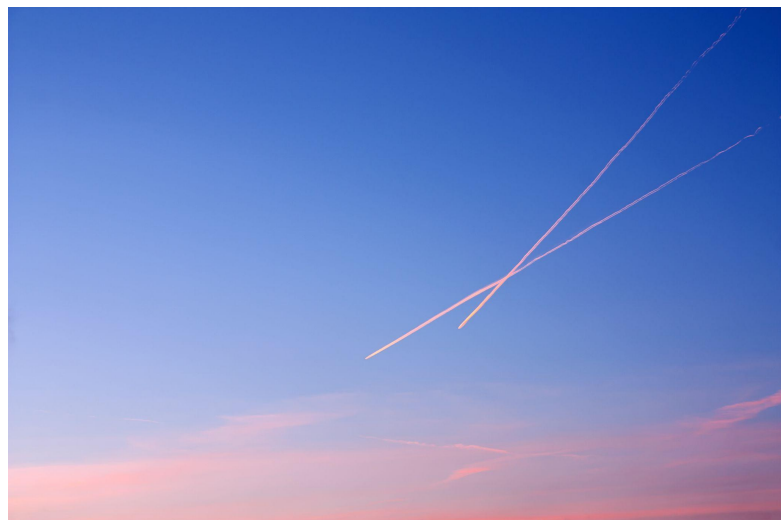
But he is not a good walker.

He is anxious and fearful, which makes him bark and bolt after lots of things.

If he sees a person coming toward him when he is being walked, he starts breathing more rapidly, and I know what's going to happen next: he will start barking his head off and even jumping up on his hind legs as I try to restrain him with the leash.

And this behavior gets much worse when he sees other dogs; that's when he truly goes ballistic.

What puzzles me the most is that he also barks at planes in the sky. Strangely, this plane-a-phobia is not activated by super-loud helicopters or low-flying planes, which, to me, are much threatening, but by planes high up in the air - with their lights



faint in the dark night sky. Or even one high up during the day when you can barely detect it, except for its contrails. It's as though he thinks he's some kind of early warning system for an aerial attack.

Yes, we've worked with him and tried to get him to relax, and he has gotten a little better, but the bottom line is, it's a challenge to walk him, and I'm not going to even going to get into the coyotes in our neighborhood.

Bottom line: I do not love walking him.

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That said, walking is a big part of my life and a big part of our tradition. I am blessed to live close to shul, to Emunah, and enjoy my 15-minute walk.

It reminds me of my walks to shul when I was growing up. Living 2.3 miles from our synagogue meant it was a healthy walk. And sometimes, I would walk to shul with my dad, and we would talk. Sometimes, I would walk back with my friend Michael, and we would talk. It was a gift; may their memories be for a blessing.

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Our parashah, our Torah reading, contains a couple of moments of walking that I wanted to stop on.

At the beginning of the parashah, we find the Israelites ready to cross the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land. Moses delivers his final instructions.

They are told that once they are settled in the land, they will bring their first fruits, walking with them from their farms around the country to Jerusalem.

We can imagine what this looked like - farmers walking with their donkeys, carrying their fruits and some of their harvest; the people

streaming together into a river of Israelites, journeying up to the Holy City to deliver their gifts for those without land to sustain themselves including Levites, strangers, immigrants, orphans, and widows.

This was a parade of gratitude - with people carrying these gifts, walking together in appreciation and kindness. And the Torah even states, “V’samahta” - you shall be happy after this walk, when you help others, it brings you joy.

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There is another, more subtle walking we read this morning. In between a long list of curses, the Torah offers a few blessings.

One states: “*Barukh atah b’voekha u’varukh atah b’tzeitekha* - blessed are you as you come in, as you arrive, and blessed are you in your goings, as you go out.” (Dt. 28:6)

It is a reminder that as we literally go out each day to work, to learn, to live our lives, we pray that we are protected and safe.

We do not want to be afraid.



As Rabbi Joseph Hertz comments in his classic 1929 *Chumash*, that some of us grew up with, we should be blessed not simply on our daily walks, but as we walk through life. As he writes, “this blessing becomes the blessing of safety in all the manifold activities of ordinary life.”

Our great French commentator and rabbi from almost a millennia ago, Rashi, zooms out from this blessing. Basing himself on the Talmud, he explains - “may you leave the world as

you enter it - without sin;” having a good, blameless life. (Bava Metzia 107a)

As we live our lives, we are reminded that our behavior, how we walk in it and walk with others is critical.

This is related to another concept in the tradition: *halahkah*. Derived from the word “to walk,” *halahkah* means Jewish law, meaning that this is the way we are supposed to live our lives, filled with ethics, morals, and meaning.

For Star Wars fans, this gets picked up in the recent series *The Mandalorian*, where this group of people lives by walking their own unique path of ethical behavior, loyalty, and customs which they call “the way.” The trope of this series is the phrase: “This is the way.”



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So, now we have come full circle. Walking reminds us that we should live lives of generosity and kindness, bringing others and ourselves joy. All of which reminds us to live our days and entire lives walking on moral paths, a guide to the journey of our lives.

And that brings me back to Bamba - I should have more compassion towards him and towards myself and walk with him as best as he can, recognizing his limitations and taking the joy I can from it.

