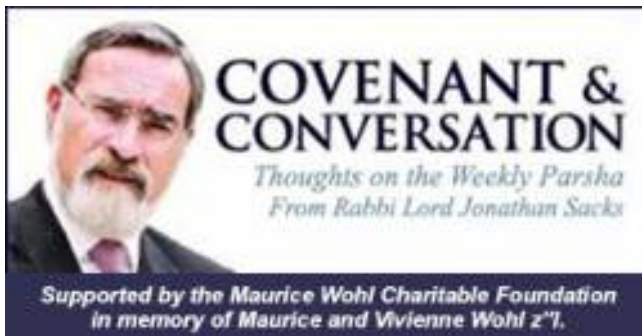


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## Celebrate

If leaders are to bring out the best in those they lead, they must give them the chance to show they are capable of great things, and then *they must celebrate their achievements*. That is what happens at a key moment toward the end of our parsha, one that brings the book of Exodus to a sublime conclusion after all the strife that has gone before.

The Israelites have finally completed the work of building the Tabernacle. We then read:

So all the *work* on the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, was *completed*. The

Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses ... Moses inspected the *work* and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. So Moses *blessed* them. (Ex. 39:32, 43)

The passage sounds simple enough, but to the practised ear it recalls another biblical text, from the end of the Creation narrative in Genesis:

The heavens and the earth were *completed* in all their vast array. On the seventh day God finished the *work* He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His *work*. Then God *blessed* the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the *work* of creating that He had done. (Gen. 2:1-3)

Three key words appear in both passages: “work,” “completed” and “blessed.” These verbal echoes are not accidental. They are how the Torah signals intertextuality, hinting that one law or story is to be read in the context of another. In this case, the Torah is emphasising that Exodus ends as Genesis began, with a work of creation. Note the difference as well as the similarity. Genesis began with an act of *Divine* creation. Exodus ends with an act of *human* creation.

The closer we examine the two texts, the more we see how intricately the parallel has been constructed. The creation account in Genesis is tightly organised around a series of sevens. There are seven days of Creation. The word “good” appears seven times, the word “God” thirty-five

times, and the word “earth” twenty-one times. The opening verse of Genesis contains seven words, the second fourteen, and the three concluding verses 35 words. Always multiples of seven. The complete text is 469 (7×67) words.

The account of the construction of the Tabernacle in Vayakhel-Pekudei is similarly built around the number seven. The word “heart” appears seven times in Exodus 35:5-29, as Moses specifies the materials to be used in the construction, and seven times again in 35:34 – 36:8, the description of how the craftsmen Bezalel and Oholiav will carry out the work. The word *terumah*, “contribution” appears seven times in this section. In chapter 39, describing the making of the priestly vestments, the phrase “as God commanded Moses” occurs seven times. It occurs again seven times in chapter 40.

A remarkable parallel is being drawn between God’s creation of the universe and the Israelites’ creation of the Sanctuary. We now understand what the Sanctuary represented. It was a micro-cosmos, a universe in miniature, constructed with the same precision and “wisdom” as the universe itself, a place of order against the formlessness of the wilderness and the ever-threatening chaos of the human heart. The Sanctuary was a visible reminder of God’s Presence within the camp, itself a metaphor for God’s Presence within the Universe as a whole.

A large and fateful idea is taking shape. The Israelites - who have been portrayed throughout much of Exodus as ungrateful and half-hearted - have now been given the opportunity, after the sin of the Golden Calf, to show that they are not

irredeemable, and they have embraced that opportunity. They are proven capable of great things. They have shown they can be creative. They have used their generosity and skill to build a mini-universe. By this symbolic act they have shown they are capable of becoming, in the potent rabbinic phrase, “God’s partners in the work of creation.”

This was fundamental to their re-moralisation and to their self-image as the people of God’s covenant. Judaism does not take a low view of human possibility. We do not believe we are tainted by original sin. We are not incapable of moral grandeur. To the contrary, the very fact that we are in the image of the Creator means that we humans – uniquely among life forms – have the ability to be creative. As Israel’s first creative achievement reached its culmination Moses blessed them, saying, according to the Sages, “May it be God’s will that His presence rests in the work of your hands.”<sup>1</sup> Our potential greatness is that we can create structures, relationships and lives that become homes for the Divine Presence.

Blessing them and celebrating their achievement, Moses showed them what they could be. That is potentially a life-changing experience. Here is a contemporary example:

In 2001, shortly after September 11<sup>th</sup>, I received a letter from a woman in London whose name I did not immediately recognise. She wrote that on the morning of the attack on the World Trade Centre, I had been giving a lecture on ways of raising the status of the teaching profession, and she had seen a report about it in the press. This prompted her to

write and remind me of a meeting we had had eight years earlier.

She was then, in 1993, the Head Teacher of a school that was floundering. She had heard some of my broadcasts, felt a kinship with what I had to say, and thought that I might have a solution to her problem. I invited her, together with two of her deputies, to our house. The story she told me was this: morale within the school, among teachers, pupils and parents alike, was at an all-time low. Parents had been withdrawing their children. The student roll had fallen from 1000 children to 500. Examination results were bad: only 8 per cent of students achieved high grades. It was clear that unless something changed dramatically, the school would be forced to close.

We talked for an hour or so on general themes: the school as community, how to create an ethos, and so on. Suddenly, I realised that we were thinking along the wrong lines. The problem she faced was practical, not philosophical. I said: “I want you to live one word: *celebrate*.” She turned to me with a sigh: “You don’t understand – we have *nothing* to celebrate. Everything in the school is going wrong.” “In that case,” I replied, “*find* something to celebrate. If a single student has done better this week than last week, celebrate. If someone has a birthday, celebrate. If it’s Tuesday, celebrate.’ She seemed unconvinced, but promised to give the idea a try.

Now, eight years later, she was writing to tell me what had happened since then. Examination results at high grades had risen from 8 per cent to 65 per cent. The enrolment of pupils had risen from 500 to 1000. Saving the best news to last,

she added that she had just been made a Dame of the British Empire – one of the highest honours the Queen can bestow – for her contribution to education. She ended by saying that she just wanted me to know how a single word had changed the school, and her life.

She was a wonderful teacher, and certainly did not need my advice. She would have discovered the answer on her own anyway. But I was never in any doubt that the strategy would succeed, for we all grow to fill other people’s expectations of us. If they are low, we remain small. If they are high, we walk tall.

The idea that each of us has a fixed quantum of intelligence, virtue, academic ability, motivation and drive is absurd. Not all of us can paint like Monet or compose like Mozart. But we each have gifts, capacities, that can lie dormant throughout life until someone awakes them. We can achieve heights of which we never thought ourselves capable. All it takes is for us to *meet someone who believes in us, challenges us, and then, when we have responded to the challenge, blesses and celebrates our achievements*. That is what Moses did for the Israelites after the sin of the Golden Calf. First he got them to create, and then he blessed them and their creation with one of the simplest and most moving of all blessings, that the Shechinah should dwell in the work of their hands.

Celebration is an essential part of motivating. It turned a school around. In an earlier age and in a more sacred context it turned the Israelites around. So celebrate.

**When we celebrate the achievements of others, we change lives.**

## AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. Why do you think these passages about creation are structured in multiples of seven?
2. Why did Rabbi Sacks' advice have such a deep impact on the school in the story?
3. Could you apply this idea of celebration to a group of people you work or socialise with?

## NOTES

1. Sifrei, Bamidbar, Pinchas, 143.



## The Architect

In his introduction to The Book of Exodus, Nachmanides calls it the "Book of Redemption."

This is because the Book of Exodus begins with the slavery of the Children of Israel, proceeds through their liberation and the triumphant moment at Mount Sinai, recounts the sin of the golden calf, and ends with the building of the *Mishkan*.

The period of time which elapses from the escape from Egypt until the end of the Book of Exodus is actually quite short, all of these events having occurred in less than one year.

The book ends with this Torah portion as the *Mishkan* is enveloped by the cloud which would, from that point onward, indicate to the People of Israel the proper time to resume their journey.

## A SPECIAL MAN

Clearly the *Mishkan* is one of the major topics of the Book of Exodus as is evidenced by the amount of space and detail devoted to the description of its construction.

The minutely detailed instructions were given to Moses, but implemented by a man named Bezalel. Who was this individual -- Moses' "right hand man" in the project?

The Torah tells us:

*God spoke to Moses saying, 'See I have called by name Bezalel, son of Uri son of Hur, from the tribe of Judah. And I will fill him with the spirit of Elohim -- with wisdom, understanding, and knowledge.'*  
[Exodus 31:1-3, see also, 35:30-31, 38:32]

From this description it does not sound as if Bezalel is endowed with the critical attributes as of yet. The verse tells us that God plans to "fill up with the spirit of Elohim," using the future tense.

If this is the case, what is the reason for his selection?

Furthermore, the phrase "See I have called by name Bezalel" implies that there is something special about his name.

So, on the one hand, the architect of the *Mishkan* does not yet possess the skills needed to perform the task, and on the other hand there is something about Bezalel which God has singled out, something which is indeed a part of his essence.

### OF ILLUSTRIOUS LINEAGE

The Midrash offer several accounts of the selection of Bezalel which together form a composite picture. First is a passage in the Talmud:

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses, "Moses, is Bezalel acceptable to you?" He (Moses) said to Him, Master of the Universe, "If he is acceptable to You, he would certainly be acceptable to me!" He (God) said to him, "Nonetheless, go tell them." He (Moses) went and said to Israel, "Is Bezalel acceptable to you?" They said, "If he is acceptable to God, and to you, then he is certainly acceptable to us." [Brachot 55a]

This passage is strange. Why would Bezalel not be acceptable? Why was it necessary for Bezalel to be "accepted" by both Moses and the nation?

There are two factors, which may contribute to the implied note of hesitation in the acceptance of Bezalel. The first was his age, and the second was his lineage.

When Bezalel constructed the *Mishkan*, how old was he? Thirteen ... [Sanhedrin 69b]

Why would a thirteen-year-old be chosen to build the *Mishkan* and its utensils? Surely there must have been more qualified artisans who could have performed this sacred task. Perhaps this was the reason that God "asked permission" to use such a young person for so important a task.

As far as his lineage, the Torah had told us that he was the "son of Uri son of Hur, from the tribe of Judah."

Hur is a familiar, albeit somewhat mysterious character. When the Amalekites waged war against the Jews almost immediately following the Exodus, it was Hur, together with Aaron, who supported the arms of Moses and assured victory [Exodus 17:10-12]. Later, when Moses prepared to go up to heaven to receive the Torah, he tells the elders that Hur and Aaron are in charge during his absence and should be consulted should any question arise.

That, however, is the last we ever hear of Hur. The Midrash questions his disappearance, and reports that when the Jews asked Aaron to construct the golden calf, Hur is nowhere to be seen, and explains why.

When the Israelites wished to do that deed, they said to Aaron, "Come make for us a lord." Hur, the son of Caleb, arose and chastised them. They immediately arose and killed him. [Tanchuma T'zaveh 10:10]

If Hur was murdered as part of the golden calf episode, we can understand why employing his grandson to build the *Mishkan* may have been a sensitive issue. Obviously, Bezalel would serve as a constant reminder of the perfidy perpetrated by the people.

On the other hand, having Hur's grandson represent them in this meaningful way may have served as an indication of complete forgiveness for their nefarious deed.

Another Midrash spells out this relationship:

Why was Hur mentioned in this context (building the *Mishkan*)? When Israel wished to commit idolatry, he (Hur) offered his soul for the sake of God, and would not allow them (to sin). They rose against him and killed him. God said to him "By your life I will repay you." [Shmot Rabbah 48:3]

This Midrash teaches that there is a clear relationship between the death of Hur and the selection of Bezalel.

But other Midrashim [Shmot Rabbah 40:2 and Shmot Rabbah 40:3] state that Bezalel had been chosen for this task long before the murder of Hur, indeed, "from the dawn of creation" and that his name was already written "in the Book of Adam." Therefore, we must conclude that there is something special about Bezalel himself, irrespective of his illustrious lineage.

### **IN THE SHADOW OF GOD**

The name Bezalel means "in the shadow of the Lord" and it seems particularly appropriate for the man who built the *Mishkan*.

The Midrash teaches us that on the day that Moses completed the *Mishkan* he said, using the words of Psalm 91:

"He who sits alone most high, shall abide in the shadow of Shaddai."  
 [Shavuot 15b, Bamidbar Rabbah 12:3, Shmot Rabah 34:1]

The *Mishkan* itself may be considered the "shadow of the Lord," for its purpose was to allow the Presence or Shadow of God into this world.

It is our belief that a person's name reflects their inner self; in this case, the quality reflected in the name Bezalel is the very same quality as is possessed by the *Mishkan* itself. Perhaps this is the reason that he was chosen.

There is another aspect of Bezalel which has eluded us. The Torah records that Bezalel also built the *Aron*, the "ark" which contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments. Rashi explains why Bezalel's name is mentioned specifically in connection with the ark, while in the case of all the other utensils, the text simply states that they were completed.

Bezalel made (the ark); since he displayed more self-sacrifice than the other sages, the ark was called by his name. [Rashi 37:1]

Rashi's statement is based on a source in a Midrash which recounts a dialogue between Moses and Bezalel:

At the time that God told Moses to make the *Mishkan*, he (Moses) came and told Bezalel, he (Bezalel) said,

"What is the purpose of the *Mishkan*?" He (Moses) answered, "That God may allow His Presence to rest within it, and thereby teach Torah to Israel." Bezalel said to him, "Where will the Torah be placed?" He answered, "After we build the *Mishkan* we will build the *Aron*." He said, "Moses, our master, this is not honor for the Torah, rather first we should make the *Aron* and then make the *Mishkan*. Therefore the *Aron* was called in his name." [Shmot Rabbah 50:2]

Bezalel's wisdom was such that he could question Moses and ultimately understand the essence of the *Mishkan*. Indeed, Bezalel was the builder of the entire *Mishkan*, but the heart and soul of the *Mishkan*, the *Aron*, was named for him.

The *Aron* was built, in the words of the Midrash, to allow God's presence to dwell amongst the People of Israel -- in order to teach them Torah.

Nachmanides {25:2} writes that the purpose of the *Mishkan* was that the experience of Mount Sinai accompany the Jews on all of their travels.

This seems to be what Bezalel understood: The essential purpose of the *Mishkan* is to teach Torah to the Jewish people; consequently, the *Aron* must be built prior to the *Mishkan*. When the Cloud of Glory, last seen on Mount Sinai, entered into the *Mishkan* upon its completion, it was clear that the project was a success. God now dwelled among the people, or perhaps we can say that the People now dwelled in the shadow of God.

## THE GIFT OF UNDERSTANDING

And now we can come full circle in our explanation of why Bezalel was chosen as the architect of this holy construction project.

As we learned earlier, he was the son of Uri, the grandson of Hur, from the tribe of Judah. And now the last puzzle piece fits in.

Hur, as we already know, was one of a select group of two, entrusted by Moses in the latter's absence, and he was one of a select group of two, holding up the arms of Moses in the midst of that first battle against the Amalekites.

Why was Hur so special? Because he came from the tribe of Judah, the tribe of kingship from which King David and his dynasty would later come. Hur thus functioned in the capacity of future king both in the battle of Amalek and at the golden calf.

The other leader entrusted by Moses was Aaron, the future High Priest. These were the two empowered by Moses on the first occasion when Moses had to establish the subsequent tier of leadership. Aaron and Hur are the two whose descendants would one day lead, each in a different sphere.

When the people made the golden calf, Hur heroically stood against them, but they rejected him and his teachings. In much the same way, his grandson Bezalel was so concerned that the teachings of the Torah receive their proper place.

At Mount Sinai, all present had complete clarity that God is one. They felt God; they experienced God. At that moment sin and rebellion seemed foreign, impossible. But a short time later, the

impossible became a horrific reality. The golden calf was built; Hur tried to stop them but instead he was stopped. The man who could have been king was dead.

His grandson then set out to build the *Mishkan* in such a way that the teachings of the Torah would always be felt.

As Rashi stated, Bezalel was prepared for self-sacrifice in building the *Aron*, just as his grandfather had been, but with one important distinction -- his grandfather gave up his life attempting to prevent sin. Bezalel tried to prevent sin preemptively, by making sure that God would always be felt, and the Torah constantly taught.

Bezalel achieved a clarity of vision, an understanding of his mission and of the power of Torah as the most direct connection of the Jews to God, which paralleled the clarity achieved at Sinai.

Many years later, another descendent of Hur [see Sotah 11b] named David would be king. He would be endowed with special qualities that would allow him to establish kingship in Israel. His son Solomon would follow, ascending the throne at the tender age of twelve.

When God appears to Solomon in a dream and encourages him to make a request, Solomon responds:

*'I am but a little child ... Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and evil ...' And God said to him ... 'Behold I have given you a wise*

*and understanding heart.'* [I Kings 3:7-12]

Solomon, the young king from the tribe of Judah, asks for wisdom and understanding; he asks for the attributes bestowed upon Bezalel.

When Solomon awakes from his dream, he travels to Jerusalem:

*And Solomon awoke and behold it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem, and stood in front of the Aron of the Covenant of the Lord ...*  
[Ibid]

How appropriate that Solomon asks for wisdom, and comes to pray in front of the *Aron*, the same *Aron* that Bezalel was willing to sacrifice himself for, the *Aron* which represented Torah and understanding of God. It is Solomon who proceeds to build the Temple in its proper place, just as Bezalel built the *Mishkan*, and both are endowed with the same gifts that allow them to complete their mission.

## **A MESSIANIC VISION**

Many years later, the Prophet Isaiah has a vision of the End of Days:

*And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots, and the spirit of God shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the wisdom of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and fear of God ... The wolf shall dwell with lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead*



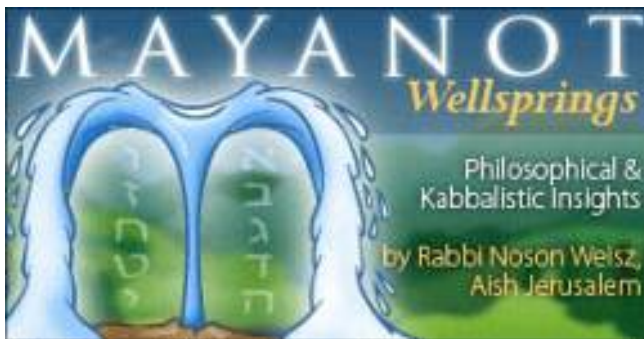
*them ... They shall not hurt nor destroy on my holy mountain. For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea.*  
[Yishayahu 11:1-9]

The prophet sees a young, gifted child, endowed with a combination of the spiritual traits of all his ancestors -- his "roots." This descendent of David will succeed in spreading the wisdom of Torah to all the inhabitants of the planet. This child will complete the work begun all those years ago in the desert, bringing the vision of Hur, Bezalel and Solomon to fruition.

This child will bring Sinai to the people. And then, sin, conflict, and pain will become a memory, a remnant from the past.

Now we understand why Bezalel's name was written "in the Book of Adam." A character so crucial in the End of Days must be present in thought from the Dawn of Creation.

*Chazak Chazak Vinitchazek!*



## His Soul's Fire

This week's Torah portion manages to symbolize conclusion and renewal at one and the same time.

It brings the Book of Exodus to its close, but the accompanying reading of the Torah portion for the New Month (Nissan) -- which contains the commandment of sanctifying the months symbolic of spiritual renewal -- creates a very powerful association with the idea of renewal.

Both these associations have a deeper aspect. Nachmanides expounds on the theme of the Book of Exodus (in his introduction to Parshat Shmot). He presents the thesis that the Book of Exodus should really be called the Book of Redemption. It begins by describing the descent of the tribes to Egypt, and it ends with the descent of the Cloud of God's Presence on to the Tent of the Meeting erected by their progeny, who had in the interim assumed the dimensions of a great nation.

The descent into Egypt, which marked the beginning of exile, also represents the loss of the special grace of God's Presence that accompanied the patriarchs, and the recovery of God's Presence, described at the very end of Parshat Pekudei, signifies a return to this special state of grace. Redemption is the closing of this circle of separation and reunion.

But the recovery of the special grace of God's Presence described at the end of the Book of Exodus represents much more than merely the reinstatement of what had already existed in the past. This recovery encapsulates the phenomenal spiritual accomplishment of Judaism.

All over the world, tiny enclaves of human beings manage to spend their lives in a state of grace, embraced by the consciousness of God's Presence. But invariably, these groups attain their state of grace by means of separation from the

mundane world, and a total immersion in a life of prayer, meditation and poverty. Among all human societies there are small groups of human beings who spend their lives in these practices, and they are the only members of their social groups who are conscious of God's actual Presence as a part of their everyday reality. The degree of asceticism required to attain this special state of grace makes it an impractical life style for any large group.

Thus the fact that God's Presence rested on the tents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and even when this Presence stretched to embrace their seventy descendants who went down to Egypt does not represent a unique departure in human history per se. Any small group of committed human beings can manage to attain this state of grace through dedication and self-sacrifice.

The singular achievement of the patriarchs -- and the reason that they represent a new departure for mankind -- was the creation of a nation of millions who could attain this state of grace, and manage to spend their lives with God's Presence while carrying out the tasks and bearing the burdens of ordinary human existence.

Thus when Nachmanides associates the Book of Exodus with the idea of redemption, the association involves the redemption of human existence itself, rather than the release from bondage of a particular group of individuals.

### **BACK TO THE GARDEN**

By the end of the Book of Exodus, man as a species had regained the ability to conduct life in a state of grace in the Presence of God, an ability that was lost to mankind with Adam's expulsion

from the Garden of Eden. From the expulsion until the Exodus -- a period of roughly two thousand years -- the ability to live in a state of grace was a capacity possessed by individuals and small groups only.

The absence of the ideal conditions prevailing in the Garden of Eden had heretofore presented an insurmountable barrier to man being able to achieve this state of grace as a species.

The redemption described in the Book of Exodus, therefore, represents a giant step forward in the development of the relationship between man and God. Before the Exodus, man as a species could only live in a state of grace in the Garden of Eden, a place where he could only remain as long as he was totally unblemished by the slightest contact with sin. Following the Exodus, the possibility of living in this state of grace was regained in the context of ordinary human existence. If we look at human history in terms of man's ability to coexist with God's Presence, we can conclude that with the Exodus mankind managed to regain entry into the Garden of Eden!

The historic processes that engineered this redemption in the world are described in the Book of Exodus.

The Book of Exodus, and the redemption it encapsulates, rests on a tripod:

1. The miracles of the Exodus and the desert sojourn.
2. The introduction of the special life style associated with Torah observance.
3. The establishment of the Tabernacle.

In practice, today we retain our contact with all three elements of this tripod through the single vehicle of Torah observance. Many of the commandments were given specifically to preserve the memory of the events of the Exodus, while the system of daily prayers was introduced to preserve the contact with God that rested on the Temple service.

### **OBSERVANT LIFESTYLE**

A study of the observant lifestyle easily demonstrates that its adherents are literally always in God's Presence at all hours of the day and through all activities of life. There is rarely a moment of human existence that is not covered by one of the Torah's commandments. The observant Jew, leading his everyday life, busy with his job, his family, pursuing his interests is constantly living in a state of Grace, ever in God's Presence through the observance of the commandments that apply to all of life's mundane activities.

This achievement of the Jewish people is an incredible accomplishment, unrivalled in human history. Never in history has a large body of human beings, usually numbering in the millions, managed to hang on to living in God's Presence for such an incredibly long uninterrupted stretch of time, nearly four thousand years by now, ever since the Exodus.

While Torah observance is surely the factor that made this achievement attainable, the phenomenon of continued Torah observance itself requires explanation. For it is clear to everyone that such observance requires dedication and self-

sacrifice. What is the source of this commitment to observance that the Jewish people have always maintained, and what factor in the human spirit lies at the root of this attraction to conducting life in this state of grace?

The Ba'al Hatanya (Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the author of the *Tanya*) explains the psychological background of Jewish commitment. His explanation is based on the following passage:

*For this commandment that I command you today: It is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in heaven [for you] to say, "Who can ascend to the heaven for us and take it for us, so that we can listen to it and perform it?" Nor is it across the sea [for you] to say, "Who can cross to the other side of the sea for us and take it for us, so that we can listen to it and perform it?" Rather the matter is very near to you -- in your mouth and in your heart --to perform it.*  
 (Deut. 30:11-14)

If you would ask people their opinion of the message contained in this passage, the most common response would be skepticism. Dedication to Divine service is based on the love of God and the fear of God. Belief in God, love of God, fear of God are hardly common phenomena in our world. How can the Torah claim that they are so near, "in your heart and in your mouth"?

### **CLINGING TO GOD**

The truth is that we are looking at the problem backwards. The commitment of the Jewish people over a four-thousand-year period to living with

God is a demonstrable historical fact. They have clung to the idea of living with God with great stubbornness, sometimes in the face of the greatest adversity. Many have fallen out over the centuries, but a great multitude has always remained fully observant, loyal and faithful to their traditions.

In adversity, people only cling to the things that are central to their lives. Whenever it is possible to make life easier and more pleasant by adopting alternative lifestyles, the human instinct for survival encourages change and adaptation.

The aspects of behavior that remain unchanged through the vicissitudes of time are those that people cannot live without. Thus, the fact that Jews have remained loyal and faithful to the Torah for so long is living testimony that they cannot live comfortably without Torah observance. Just as humans cannot live without food, or sleep, and we have all learned through our experience with exams and diets, that no one stops eating or sleeping, no matter how strong their desire to do so, Jews cannot live without Torah observance.

When Moses wrote the above passage in the Torah three thousand odd years ago, one might have been able to question its accuracy, but the march of history has demonstrated its accuracy. The commandments must indeed be very "near to the Jewish heart and the Jewish mouth." They are such integral parts of the Jewish personality that they have proved just as impossible to discard as the need for food and sleep.

Explains the Ba'al Hatanya: This history indicates that the emotional attachment to God, the love of

God and the fear of God must be integral parts of the Jewish personality. For human beings who do not come pre-equipped with these feelings, and who must therefore begin to develop them on their own, the climb to a state of grace is difficult indeed and often requires heroic measures. Precisely because this is so, only small groups of people at any one time have the necessary resources to attain the state of grace. For the same reason, because it is not "in their hearts and in their mouths," it is difficult for them to remain on this pinnacle even after it is attained.

Therefore, the real implication of the passage must be that Jews are born into the state of grace. Living in God's Presence starts for them at the moment of birth, because they are born with the love of God and the fear of God already implanted. There is no need for any heroic climb to attain the state of grace. All that is required is simple maintenance of what is already there. Torah observance is not an effort for a Jew, because it is merely the outward expression of what he already feels inside.

### **"LORD OF THE FLIES"**

A good way to bring this down to earth is by examining the thesis of the "Lord of the Flies" by William Golding, a popular high school book that many people are familiar with.

The author presents the scenario of a group of upper class boys stranded in the jungle, out of touch with civilization. His thesis is that in such an environment the thin veneer of civilized behavior is rapidly stripped away from the group, and they revert to the savagery of jungle law. Thus according to the theory presented by the

author, civilized behavior is not programmed innately into human beings, who are basically like any other species of wild animal, but is merely an adaptation to living in the organized modern world. As soon as the conditions that favor it disappear, the behavior itself will vanish.

While in the case of civilized behavior this is surely a highly debatable proposition, in terms of living in the state of grace of God's Presence there is no doubt as to its accuracy. The love and fear of God that are the necessary underpinnings of maintaining closeness to God as a life style over any stretch of time and outside the band of a narrow set of conditions are certainly not built into the human genetic program. They must be developed.

Therefore, verifiable evidence of the presence of these feelings in a particular group of human beings generation after generation, in the broadest possible variety of circumstances, amounts to nothing less than objective proof of the appearance of a genetic variation in the human species -- a new step in human evolution if you will.

## **COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM**

We trace the beginnings of this special adaptation to Abraham:

*And God said, "Shall I conceal from Abraham what I do, now that Abraham is surely to become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him? For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the*

*way of God, doing charity and justice, in order that God might then bring upon Abraham that which He had spoken of him."* (Genesis 18:18-19)

God loves Abraham because Abraham is dedicated to teaching his children and his household the importance of doing charity and justice, and doing them not only because they are morally correct, but because they are the ways of God, and it is impossible to live in God's Presence without practicing His ways. The dedication to following the way of God is a precondition to God delivering on the promises He had made to Abraham.

This dedication has been a part of Jewish consciousness ever since. Each generation of Jews was taught the importance of living with God's Presence along with its mother's milk. Judaism teaches that spiritual values that are pursued with zeal and dedication generation after generation gradually become part of the essential human personality. We do not subscribe to the theory of Aldous Huxley. Man is not a savage beast but an image of God. In a being that was created in God's image, the trait of Godliness can gradually become incorporated into the personality itself.

God chose Abraham because Abraham chose God. All human beings are capable of this choice. All human beings are capable of spirituality and self-sacrifice. They can all attain a state of grace. They can all invest in teaching it to their children and grandchildren. Every human gene pool can incorporate the love and fear of God into its DNA. All human beings are created in God's

image. There is nothing unique about Abraham and his descendants except the decision to dedicate life to the development of this potential that exists in everyone.

The message of the Book of Exodus is the story of this incorporation. The redemption is the transformation of the human character.

### **RENEWAL**

And now we turn to renewal.

In ancient Sparta, society focused on developing a nation of warriors. In Athens, the focus was on developing human beings who would be dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge. If we look around the world we find differing levels of commitment among different societies toward many different values. In Scandinavia they place a very high priority on making social welfare available to all. In the United States the social emphasis is on providing equality of opportunity. Whatever human value is pursued with self-sacrifice and dedication produces results, and the results are inevitably commensurate with the intensity and duration of the input.

The Jewish people have invested its zeal into living in God's Presence. They have pursued this course with great self-sacrifice and over an enormous span of historic time. They have pursued it with such intensity and over so long a period, that the fear and love of God became integral to every Jewish psyche, standard furniture in every Jewish soul. Whoever is a descendant of Abraham inherits this love and fear of God. It may never burst into flame in a particular Jewish heart, but the love and fear of

God cannot fail to be present at least in a dormant form. As Jews do not have to develop these feelings, all that is required is renewal.

Change is difficult. The creation of a bond with God is even more so. Renewal is relatively simple and requires no special heroic effort. The most temporary immersion into a life of Torah observance is sufficient to make the dormant fire of the love of God burst into flame in the Jewish heart. Every Jew can always live in a state of grace.



### **Rejoice on the Final Day**

According to the Midrash, the boards of the *Mishkan* were so heavy that the people could not hold them up erect next to each other long enough for them to assemble the *Mishkan*. They kept toppling over. In frustration, the people brought all the boards and poles to Moshe, and he assembled it with miraculous strength that Hashem granted him especially for this purpose.

The Torah, however, states that the Jewish people "brought the *Mishkan* to Moshe." This would seem to imply that they brought him a completely

assembled *Mishkan*. How can the Midrash be reconciled with these words?

Regarding this same verse, the Midrash quotes from *Mishlei* (31:25), "Might and splendor are her garments, and she will rejoice on the final day." The Midrash goes on to illustrate this idea with a story concerning Rabbi Abahu's departure from this world. On the threshold, he was shown all the reward that awaited him in the World to Come, and he remarked with astonishment, "All of this is for Abahu? I thought I had been toiling in vain, and now I see I have a great portion in the World to Come!"

What point is the Midrash making by bringing this story in connection to the erection of the *Mishkan*? And how do we understand Rabbi Abahu's surprise? Did he really expect that having spent his life learning Torah and doing mitzvos he would not be rewarded in the World to Come? Did he really think he was laboring in vain?

Rav Shlomo Breuer explains that Judaism is a deed-oriented religion. It is not enough to say, "I am a Jew at heart." Deeds are what count, learning Torah, performing mitzvos, doing *chessed*. Being a Jew is about doing, from the moment we arise until the moment we go to bed. Our religion is not one of sentiment, it is one of deed.

At the same time, however, intent also plays a great role in Judaism. If someone is prevented by circumstances beyond his control from doing a mitzvah, the Torah considers it as if he had done the mitzvah (*maaleh alav hakasuv k'ilu asahu*). Judaism demands deeds but not necessarily results. As long as a Jew puts in the honest and

sincere effort, he is rewarded even if he is not successful. Hashem considers his intentions as deeds.

This is what Rabbi Abahu was saying, "There were so many times in my life when I tried, I made the effort, but I was not successful. I had assumed that on these occasions my efforts had been in vain. Now I see that I have been rewarded even for my intentions, for my efforts, even when they were unsuccessful." Therefore, Rabbi Abahu "rejoiced on the final day."

When the time came to assemble the *Mishkan*, the Jewish people made every effort to do it by themselves. Sweat pouring from their brows, veins bulging on their foreheads, they strained and they pushed those heavy boards with all their might, but they could not erect the *Mishkan*. It was simply beyond them, and they had no choice but to turn to Moshe for help.

Nonetheless, the Torah reports that they "brought the *Mishkan* to Moshe," because that is what they intended to do and what they tried to do with all their hearts. Hashem considered it as if they had erected the *Mishkan* themselves, and He rewarded them. Therefore, they "rejoiced on the final day."

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