

INSPIRE

VYAKHEL - PEKUDEI - CHAZAK
29TH ADAR - 13 MARCH 2021
THE VANGUARD



Service times

Friday 7 PM

Shabbos 9:30-11:30 am

Sunday 8:30 am

By Lazer Gurkow

Did you know that women were the first to contribute to the building of the Tabernacle? Did you know that not a single woman worshipped the golden calf? Did you know that Jewish women did not believe the negative report, brought by the spies, about the land of Israel? Did you know that only the women kept faith and did not despair, despite the terrible travails of the Egyptian exile?

Women are the vanguard of our people. What is their secret?

Sun and Moon

The secret of the Jewish woman is bound up with the secret of our survival. The Jews have survived for more than thirty-three hundred years. During this time powerful nations and great civilizations came and went, yet we are still here, practicing the same religion and perpetuating the same legacy.

We have weathered the storms of history better than others, because of our moon-like character. The Jewish calendar is set to the moon. The sun is a steady source of light; its full orb appears every day in mid-sky. The moon, on the other hand, waxes and wanes. One day it is full, the next day it shrinks. As the month wears on, the moon diminishes until it is a sliver of its former self.

Yet, despite its growing weakness, the moon never goes away. The next month it returns, albeit as a tiny sliver of light—but at least it returns. And, with time, it recovers its original flare.

The same is true of our people. Ancient nations were concerned with growing their power base and with expansion. They sought fame, wealth and dominion, whereas the Jew was satisfied with survival. Human nature is such that we cannot maintain directed focus for sustained periods of time. We can succeed and flourish for a while, but then the wheel of fortune turns and we slide to the bottom.

If we are not prepared for the fall, it can overwhelm and even drown us. The Jew always understood that life, like the moon, waxes and wanes. At times we are at the top, and at times we slide to the bottom. If at times our nation was exiled and impoverished, we learned to adjust and emerge with a fresh focus and renewed energy.

History proved us right. Time and again our star has risen, only to fall. But time and time again our star has fallen, only to rise and shine again.

The Woman

This enduring mentality is synonymous with the woman's feminine character. Whereas the masculine aspect of a person is powerful and aggressive, the feminine aspect—most dominant in women—is patient and enduring. For all his unyielding strength, the man is often shattered by failure, whereas the woman calmly picks up the pieces and, unperturbed, starts over again.

This is reflected not only in the female character but also in her biology. The human female menstruates: at the beginning of the month her womb is lined with blood, capable of generating and hosting life. But, if at the end of the month she has not conceived, she sheds the blood that failed to generate life, takes a few days to re-energize, and emerges renewed, with a fresh supply, prepared to start over again.

This is true of every woman, but the Jewish woman underscores this strength through the rhythm of her family life. The Jewish woman celebrates this time as an opportunity to regroup not only biologically but also emotionally. A Jewish couple avoids physical contact during this time, forcing them to explore the alternative dimensions of their relationship. During part of the month they enjoy the physical side of their relationship, but during this time they explore the soulful, emotional and spiritual dimensions that further cement their bond. Thus, when the physical relationship resumes, it is enhanced by a deeper spiritual bond.

Upbeat Outlook

This incredibly powerful outlook synthesizes the reality of our present with our constant dream of growth. Rather than deny the fact of occasional downturns, the woman learns to embrace them as opportunities. Rather than sitting back to lick the wounds of failure, it is her nature to grow from them and adapt to her reality. She thus emerges much strengthened and better positioned to improve.

With such a healthy mentality, it is easy to see why the Jewish woman refused to despair during difficult times in Egypt. She is not built to shy away from challenge only because it might lead to failure; on the contrary, she fully anticipates regular periods of failure. Only she is not afraid of them. Instead, she welcomes them as opportunities to redirect her patterns of growth.

This is also why the woman was not prepared to accept the golden calf and the negative report from the spies about Israel. She is not in the business of taking “no” for an answer, or of surrendering to failure. She knows that G-d struck a covenant with the Jew, and if the articles of the covenant seem to have become obscure, she is willing to be patient and allow it to re-emerge.

This holds true also in our present. The woman is the glue of today's family nucleus. It is the mother's constant nurture and the wife's unceasing support that inspire the family to move forward into the next generation. Progress is made by absorbing the challenges and learning from them. More than the man, it is the woman who helps to show us the way. More than the man, it is the woman who grows the Jewish family. More than the man, it is the woman who builds the house of G-d.

This is why women were the first to contribute to the building of G-d's Tabernacle

CELEBRATE!

By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Shabbat Times
Candle Lighting 5:41pm
Shabbos ends 6:52pm

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.¹

The passage sounds simple enough, but to the practiced 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.

Three key words appear in both passages: “work,” “completed” and “blessed.” These verbal echoes are not accidental. They are how the Torah signals intertextuality, that is, hinting that one law or story is to be read in the context of another. In this case the Torah is emphasizing 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 organized 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. 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 Exodus 35:34 - 36:8, the description of how the craftsmen Bezalel and Oholiav were to carry out the work. The word *terumah*, “contribution” appears seven times in this section. In Exodus 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 as 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. They are 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-moralization 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 – 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.”³ 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 9/11, I received a letter from a woman in London whose name I did not immediately recognize. 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, head-teacher of the 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 the answer 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 have to close.

We talked for an hour or so on general themes: the school as a community, how to create an ethos, and so on. Suddenly, I realized 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 to 65 per cent. The roll 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 one word had changed 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. We 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 Shekhinah 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. When we celebrate the achievements of others, we change lives.

PARSHA SUMMARY

ARTSCROLL 516 -1218
LIVING TORAH 464 - 1282

HAFTORAH SUMMARY

Moses assembles the people of Israel and reiterates to them the commandment to observe the Shabbat. He then conveys G-d's instructions regarding the making of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). The people donate the required materials in abundance, bringing gold, silver and copper; blue-, purple- and red-dyed wool; goat hair, spun linen, animal skins, wood, olive oil, herbs and precious stones.

Moses has to tell them to stop giving.

A team of wise-hearted artisans make the Mishkan and its furnishings (as detailed in the previous Torah readings of Terumah, Tetzaveh and Ki Tisa): three layers of roof coverings; 48 gold-plated wall panels, and 100 silver foundation sockets; the parochet (veil) that separates between the Sanctuary's two chambers, and the masach (screen) that fronts it; the Ark and its cover with the Cherubim; the table and its showbread; the seven-branched menorah with its specially prepared oil; the golden altar and the incense burned on it; the anointing oil; the outdoor altar for burnt offerings and all its implements; the hangings, posts and foundation sockets for the courtyard; and the basin and its pedestal, made out of copper mirrors.

An accounting is made of the gold, silver and copper donated by the people for the making of the Mishkan.

Betzalel, Aholiav and their assistants make the eight priestly garments—the ephod, breastplate, cloak, crown, turban, tunic, sash and breeches—according to the specifications communicated to Moses in the Parshah of Tetzaveh.

The Mishkan is completed and all its components are brought to Moses, who erects it and anoints it with the holy anointing oil, and initiates Aaron and his four sons into the priesthood. A cloud appears over the Mishkan, signifying the divine presence that has come to dwell within it.

Ezekiel 45:18-46:15.

This special haftorah is a prophecy regarding the Paschal Offering that will be brought during the Messianic Era, reflecting the theme of the Hachodesh Torah reading—Moses' command to the Israelites in Egypt to prepare and bring the Paschal lamb.

This haftorah is part of Ezekiel's prophecy regarding the third Holy Temple—its structure, inauguration and some of the practices that will be observed therein.

The haftorah begins with a description of the various sacrifices that will be offered during the Temple's seven-day inauguration ceremony, and then mentions that on the 14th of Nissan we shall bring the Paschal offering.

Much of the rest of the haftorah is devoted to the sacrifices that will be brought by the "leader," and prescribes his entry and exit from the Temple.

WISHING ALL THOSE WITH YARTZEIT THIS WEEK CHAIM ARUCHIM

Roll, Gary father Roll, Pinchas Pinchas Ben Eliezer Saturday 13/03/2021 Adar 29, 5781

Bermange, Karen sister Solomon, Masha Masha bas EliMelech Saturday 13/03/2021 Adar 29, 5781

Leigh, Ruth mother Moss, Fanny Chinah bas Yitzchak Monday 15/03/2021 Nissan 2, 5781

Gee, Audrey father Tendler, Willy Ze'ave ben Yoseph HaCohen Tuesday 16/03/2021 Nissan 3, 5781

Curtis, Marsha mother Wallis, Leah Leah bas Avraham Avinu Wednesday 17/03/2021 Nissan 4, 5781

JEWISH HUMOUR

Moishe and Miriam had been arguing of late. Moishe was a homebody but Miriam wanted to go out and explore the world, learn about herself and most importantly, try to figure things out on her own. Miriam's birthday was coming up so Moishe thought he'd get her a present that encapsulated her new outlook on life: he got her a ball of yarn, knitting needles, and a how-to-knit book. The card read "Scarf, some assembly required."

RIDDLE OF THE WEEK

If eleven plus two equals one, what does nine plus five equal?

Answer for last week by Harvey Berg
tomorrow

STORY TIME

There was once a Chasid who travelled to his Rebbe, Reb Yisrael of Koznitz, every month to take in the atmosphere of holiness which filled the very air of the Rebbe's court. Although in general, he was happy with his lot in life, he knew he would only be completely content if he had a child.

Several times his wife had encouraged that he ask the Rebbe for a blessing to cure their childlessness but to no avail. His wife wouldn't desist from her pleas. "This time," she insisted, "you must not leave the holy Rebbe until he answers our request."

The next time when the Chasid came to Koznitz and was admitted into the Rebbe's chambers, he told the Rebbe of their longing for a child. The Rebbe listened and offered him the solution his spiritual vision afforded him: "If you are willing to become a pauper you will be granted the blessing you seek." The man agreed to discuss the condition with his wife and return with her answer.

The woman didn't think for a moment. "Of course it's worth everything to me." The man returned to Koznitz and accepted the harsh prescription. But poverty was not the end of the Rebbe's advice; the man was sent on a long arduous journey to visit the famous tzadik, the Chozeh (Seer) of Lublin.

The Chozeh was known for his power to discern the state and provenance of a person's soul, and when he met the Chasid he studied his visitor long and hard before he spoke.

"I will tell you the source of your childlessness and what you must do to correct the problem. Once, when you were very young, you promised to wed a certain maiden. When you matured, she didn't interest you any longer and you broke your promise. Because you hurt her feelings, you have not been able to have children since. You must find her and beg her forgiveness. Go to the city of Balta (which was very distant); there you'll find the woman."

The Chasid wasted no time in embarking on the journey. But when he arrived in Balta no one knew anything about the woman. He rented a room and waited to see the words of the tzadik materialize.

One day, he was walking down the street when he was caught in a sudden downpour. He ran to a nearby shop to escape from the rain and found himself standing near two women who were also seeking shelter. Suddenly, he was shocked to hear one say to the other, "Do you see that man? He was once betrothed to me in my youth and deserted me!" He turned to see a woman dressed in the richest fabrics and wearing beautiful jewels.

He approached her and she said, "Don't you remember me? I am the one you were engaged to so many years ago. Have you any children?"

He immediately poured out the entire story, telling her that he had come only to find her and beseech her to forgive him. He begged her to ask of him anything to atone for the terrible pain he had caused her.

"I lack nothing, for G-d has provided me with everything, but I have a brother who is in desperate need. Go to him and give him 200 gold coins with which he can marry off his daughter, and I will forgive you. In the merit of marrying off a poor bride, you will be blessed with children, as the tzadik told you."

"Please, you give your brother this money. I have travelled for many months and I'm very anxious to return home."

"No," the woman adamantly refused. "I am not able to travel now, and it is not feasible to send such a sum of money. No, you must go yourself." With that, she turned and proceeded down the street.

The Chasid ventured on yet another journey to a distant city where he was able to locate the woman's brother. The man was in a terrible state of agitation which he readily explained: "My daughter is betrothed to a wealthy young man, but I have suddenly become penniless and unless I can find the dowry money, the marriage is off."

The Chasid listened to the heart-rending tale and then said: "I will give you 200 gold coins which will be more than enough for all your expenses." The man couldn't believe his ears. "What, you don't even know me - why would you do such a thing for a total stranger?"

"I have been sent by your sister whom I met a few weeks ago in Balta. Many years ago I was once betrothed to her and I abandoned her, and the help I'm offering to you is my promise to her."

"What are you saying?" the man turned pale. "What kind of crazy tale are you spinning and why? My sister has been dead for 15 years. I should know - I buried her myself!" Now it was time for the Chasid to be shocked.

The Chasid pondered the miracles G-d had wrought on his behalf so that he would be able to make amends to his former fiance and merit to have a child of his own. He handed the man the golden coins and the man blessed him to be granted many sons and daughters and long and happy life of joy from them.

FOOD 4 THE SOUL

Why must we have jobs? Why can't our bread fall from heaven?

It does. Everything you earn is manna from heaven. But can you eat manna from heaven?

So that manna has to get from its heavenly state down to an earthly form you can handle, step by difficult step.

And for you to bring it to that final, most difficult step, to become a part of this physical world—for that, you need a normal job in this physical world.

What's important to know is that the job doesn't create anything. It just provides packaging and delivery.

To create the income, you need to work with heaven. Up there, it's your contribution towards bringing heaven down to earth that counts.