

Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality

From Rav Binny

(Portion of Tetzaveh)

In 1860, a relatively unknown one-term congressman (who had practiced law in the prairie towns of Illinois) named Abraham Lincoln stunned the country by prevailing over three prominent rivals—William Seward, Salmon Chase, and Edward Bates—to win the Republican nomination for President.

But even more surprising was what Lincoln did after being elected President: He appointed all three rivals to his cabinet—Seward as secretary of state, Chase as secretary of the treasury, and Bates as attorney general.

Reading up on Abraham Lincoln, one discovers that this was not an astute political move; rather, it was simply who he was.

In fact, even his enemies often became his friends. To quote David Chamber Mearns:

“Enemies seemed to be potential friends to Abraham Lincoln. When British writer Edward Dicey was introduced to the president as one of his enemies, Lincoln’s response was: “I did not know I had any enemies”. (Largely Lincoln pg. 93)

The same Dicey, in the June 1861 issue of *Macmillan’s*, wrote:

“In my life I have seen a good number of men distinguished by their talents or their station, but I never saw anyone so apparently unconscious that this distinction conferred upon him any superiority, as Abraham Lincoln.”

The commentaries note a fascinating detail in this week’s portion of *Tetzaveh*: This is the only portion in all the last four books of the Torah (after his birth) that contains no mention of Moshe’s name.

Many suggestions have been offered and the *Midrash* suggests that when Moshe, in his attempt to save the Jewish people after the debacle of the Golden Calf, pleads before G-d to be ‘erased from His book (the Torah) “if you will destroy this people” (*Shemot* (Exodus) 32:32), the decree of such a Tzaddik (righteous person) must be fulfilled to some degree. So Hashem leaves out the mention of Moshe’s name in this week’s portion.

The obvious question then is why specifically this portion?

This is the second of two portions that discuss the mitzvah to build a *Mishkan* (the Tabernacle, which was the predecessor of the Temple) and it focuses largely on the role of the *Kohanim* both in the daily lighting of the golden menorah, with which the portion begins, as well as the special clothing the *Kohanim* (priests) wore and some of the special parts of their daily service (the daily sacrifice known as the *Korban Tamid*, and the offering of incense), discussing as well the special ceremony (the *shmonah ye’mei miluim*) inducting Aaron and his sons into the priesthood.

In short, this portion actually introduces the *Kehuna*, the priesthood, even though the actual dedication and commencement of their service will only begin in the next (third) book of the Torah: *Vayikra* (Leviticus).

One might have expected to find some hint of jealousy or at least hesitation on Moshe’s part considering this was a role neither Moshe nor any of his offspring will ever be able to enjoy.

Yet, Moshe displays not a hint of jealousy or struggle. And, perhaps to make this point, does not even include his own name in the entire portion.

It is interesting to note that Moshe was perhaps following Aaron's own lead on this topic. When Moshe debates with G-d Himself whether he is the most appropriate person to lead the Jewish people out of slavery, he suggests that Aaron might be a better choice especially as he remained with the Jewish people in Egypt whilst Moshe was leading a much easier life in Midian. Yet Hashem's response is that:

"Aaron your brother will come out to greet you, and will rejoice in his heart." (ibid. 4:14)

Indeed, Aaron himself displayed not a hint of envy or struggle with Moshe being appointed the leader of the Jewish people, he simply rejoiced in Moshe's arrival.

This is especially significant given the enmity found so often amongst brothers in the Torah. In fact, the first murder was between brothers when Cain killed Abel, not to mention the conflict that existed between Yitzchak and Yishmael, Yaakov and Esau, and of course Joseph and his brothers.

One wonders where these two brothers, along with their sister Miriam (a prophetess in her own right who clearly shared this trait), learned this impressive humility of attitude. They must have had incredible parents. Yet, we know very little about their parents; indeed, the first time we find mention of them, they are not even mentioned by name! They are simply described (ibid. 2:1-2) as a man and a woman ("*Ish*" and *Isha*").

Interestingly, this the same term used in *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers) when describing the value of stepping up when there is no one else to do the job:

"Bemakom she'ein anashim, hishtadel le'hiyot ISH."

"In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man." (Avot 2:6)

Which can be summarized to mean; when there is no one to do the job, you have to try to be the one to step up and get it done.

One day, now a teenager (ibid. 3:11) Moshe ventures out and sees the suffering of his brothers, and sees an Egyptian beating a Jew, and (ibid. v.12) "he looks back and forth and sees there is no man (ISH) ...". Here too Moshe is not named, he is described as a 'lad'.

Because to be a leader a person has to get out of the way; it has to be about the larger picture; the job that needs to get done; the greater cause, and the people....

In fact, the smaller the ego, the greater the leader. It is not accidental that Moshe's greatest trait was his extreme humility. And character development most often centers around the ability of a person to make it less about him or herself, and more about the bigger picture, and the people and/or cause that is meant to be served.

In fact, *Pirkei Avot* (end chap. 4; and see Maimonides: *Rambam Hilchot Deot* 2:7) also tells us that there are three things that remove a person from the world (which may mean such a person is missing what life is all about):

1. *Kinah* (jealousy),
2. *Ta'avah* (self-centered desires) and
3. *Kavod* (running after honor).

And what these three character flaws share in common, is that they involve a person placing themselves at the center, rather than the cause or higher purpose which they are meant to serve.

If, as an example, a person is envious of what someone else has, be it position or property, it is a clear indicator he or she has not accepted that G-d (Hashem) has a different role or purpose in mind for them which is why they don't have whatever it is they are jealous of....

In fact, healthy systems of government inherently have a well thought-out separation or balance of powers which entail leaders realizing not only what they are meant to do, but just as much what they are *not* meant to do. When the president starts to interfere with the judiciary, things get complicated quickly. And the same is true in healthy institutions and endeavors in general: if the CEO gets too involved with what the accounting department is doing, it doesn't work....

And one last thought which provides such a great example in the realm of education:

Our portion opens with the mitzvah of the Kohein to light the Menorah every day in the Mikdash (Temple). Based on the word "*le'ha'alot*" (ibid. 27:20) which literally means the *Kohein* is meant to raise up the flame in lighting the menorah, the Talmud (*Shabbat* 21a) infers that the *Kohein* is meant to kindle the flame until it would rise on his own. The *Kohein* literally would not remove his hand from the wick he was lighting until there was an independently strong flame.

The Talmud suggests in numerous places that the Menorah was symbolic of the Torah. (See *Baba Batra* 25b as an example: R Yitzchak suggests a person should pray facing south if he wishes to gain wisdom, i.e., the wisdom of Torah, because the Menorah in the Temple stood in the South.)

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch suggests therefore, that when we educate our children, our job is to make ourselves un-necessary; even superfluous; we have to get the flame to burn on its own.

Success in education is actually when our students or children can stand on their own. And the wisdom of a good educator is in fact to know when it is time to step back in order to let that child fly.... If we step back too soon, it can be disaster, as when the Jewish people (according to some commentaries) felt abandoned at the foot of Sinai in the debacle of the Golden Calf. But if we get it right, then they, our children and students, can build a *Mishkan*, a temple all their own...

Shabbat Shalom from Jerusalem

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