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Sensitivity is Never Superfluous

The people respond to Moses' request to donate the materials for the Tabernacle with great enthusiasm. When Moses realized that they were receiving an abundance of material, he puts forward a request. "No man or woman shall do any more work for the offering of the Sanctuary" ([Shemos 36:6](#)).

If they had too many materials, why didn't Moses instruct the people not to bring any

more items? Why does he just request that no more work is done?

The Sforno explains that this request highlights Moses' sensitivity to the people's feelings.

Some people had already worked on completing something, and had they been told not to bring what they had already prepared, they would have been very disappointed. Moses recognized this and carefully worded his request so that those people would not be caused any anguish.

What a lesson in sensitivity! It would have been so easy for Moses to just see what was and wasn't needed, and to command the people accordingly.

When trying to work towards a goal with optimum efficiency, keeping in mind the feelings of the workers is a real skill.

If someone does something for us which ultimately proves to have been unnecessary, be considerate of their feelings. Don't show that their efforts were not actually needed.

This could apply in work environment when something is completed and then proves to be superfluous, but also can apply to people giving ideas that one has already thought of, or news that one has already heard of.

A story is told of Rabbi Y E Spector when one after the other people came to inform him of good news. Rabbi Spector listened politely and thanked each one as if they were the

first, allowing each one the pleasure of informing him!

We learn from Moses an important and practical message. Never to cause even the slightest amount of pain, not even a jolt of disappointment.

(Adapted from Love your Neighbour by Zelig Pliskin)



Moments Ripe for Anger

Before Moses provides his long delineation of the details of the *Mishkan*, the Tabernacle, he begins with a brief message related to Shabbat, highlighting one specific prohibition: “you shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the day of Shabbat” ([Shemot 35:3](#)). Commentators are bothered as to the connection between Shabbat and the *Mishkan* and why the location of “your dwellings” is singled out for the prohibition; surely the prohibition applies no matter where one is located.

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin suggests that the reason “your dwellings” is singled out is to emphasize “the primacy of that fundamental

unit – the centrality of which is underscored, over and over again, at critical points in Jewish history – the Jewish home.” Shabbat and the *Mishkan* are connected to teach us that “as central as the Sanctuary and Temple will be in your experience, their role will pale in comparison to that of your homes and families... The Sanctuary is meant to inspire and to teach, but the lessons it teaches will reach their fulfillment only within your homes.”

The *Zohar* famously sees the fire referenced in this verse as a metaphor for anger. One should not get angry on Shabbat. Why is the prohibition of anger emphasized only on *Shabbat*? Shouldn’t it be a problem on other days as well? Perhaps, since Shabbat is a symbol of peace, getting angry is so antithetical to the spirit of the day, that the problem of getting angry is accentuated on Shabbat.

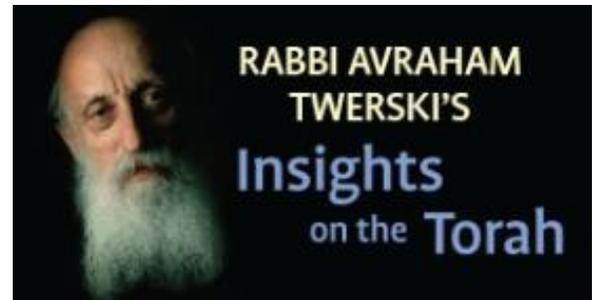
Alternatively, while Shabbat is in theory emblematic of tranquility, it often does not translate well into practice. The Mishna requires that before Shabbat starts, we ask, “Have you tithed? Have you prepared the *eruv*? Light the candles!” But we are implored to say it with calmness because in the rush of *Erev Shabbat*, the sense of urgency makes it an apt time for anger, especially if those close to us are not subservient to our demands and timelines. *Shabbat* is also a time when people are home from work and families are united under the same roof for a

long period of time without the distractions of a regular routine. The environment is ripe for anger, frustrations, and disagreements, so it is important to be mindful of our tone of voice, keeping it cool and level as we talk.

A related therapeutic strategy, also found in the *Mussar* literature, is to predict times we are prone to get angry and to imagine beforehand what will likely happen. After we become aware of how we usually would react in such a scenario, we rehearse in our minds how we can react effectively when that moment inevitably does surface. This way, when we are confronted with the rush of *Erev Shabbat*, or with the building frustrations that may surface on a long Shabbat afternoon, we are already equipped with an adaptive response.

Due to the requirements of social distancing and *shul* and school closures, we are now in a time where that same environment that is apt for angry responses is not just applicable to *Shabbat*, but to all week long. Our Sanctuaries and Temples are closed, but as Rabbi Goldin argued their roles “pale in comparison to that of our homes and families.” It is incumbent upon us, both on *Shabbat* and during the week, to be aware of situations where we tend to get angry. By identifying these patterns, we can work better on being prepared with a healthier response. This will go a long way to maintaining and sustaining the beauty and sanctity of our

homes and of *Shabbat* as we confront and respond to new challenges.



Wise Hearts *Vayakhel*

Every wise-hearted person among you shall come and make everything that God has commanded #(35:10) *Every wise-hearted woman spun with her hands* ([Exodus. 35:25](#))

He [God] filled them with a wise heart to do ... every craft (35:35)

The wise-hearted among those doing the work made the Tabernacle (36:8)

The repeated references to the trait of “wise-hearted” cannot be without significance.

On the verse, “Every man whose heart inspired him came” ([Exodus 35:21](#)), Ramban comments that none of the Israelites had learned the skills necessary for the work of the Sanctuary and the vestments. However, because they were intensely motivated to do the Divine will, they discovered that they were in fact able to do the skilled craftsmanship. This might be interpreted as a miraculous endowment of skills they had not had. However, the words of Ramban indicate

that it was not an endowment of something new. Rather, it was a discovery that they had these skills within them.

This is an important lesson. Clinically, I repeatedly encounter people who are not aware of their inherent skills and personality assets. In my writings on self-esteem I point out that not only are many people oblivious of their personality assets and potential, but even when these are pointed out to them, they persist in denying them. One can only wonder why intelligent people are not able to accept such factual information.

It is not uncommon in psychotherapy to repeatedly point out something to a patient, but it does not have the slightest impact upon him. After regularly pointing this out for a year and a half, there is a sudden insight. The patient may then say, "Doctor, I've been coming here for a year and a half. Why haven't you ever pointed this out to me before?"

During the year and a half of therapy, when the therapist interpreted the patient's symptoms, the patient said, "I understand everything you've said, but it doesn't make me feel any better." I can conclude only that intellect is subordinate to emotion, and that intellectual knowledge that is not accompanied by emotional knowledge is ineffective. If there are emotional factors that do not allow a person to accept something about himself, whether it is something good

or something bad, no amount of intellectual information will register.

According to Ramban, this is what happened with the Israelites. Many people did not have an inkling that they had the requisite skills for the intricate work in crafting the vessels, vestments and curtains of the Sanctuary. But their devotion to God and their desire to do His will resulted in "their hearts being elevated in the ways of God" ([II Chronicles 17:6](#)). Their spirits soared, and the emotional fervor enabled them to discover the skills within them.

We usually think of wisdom as associated with the mind and brain rather than with the heart. We associate the heart with emotions rather than with wisdom. The Torah repeatedly refers to the "wise-hearted" to indicate the overriding influence of emotion over intellect, and that only when one's emotions permit can one implement the powers of the intellect.

We have untouched reserves of both physical and mental abilities. Under conditions of stress, people have been known to perform physical feats that they never thought were within their capacities. There is reason to believe that some geniuses were not of such superior intellect, but rather that their emotional investment allowed them to fully utilize their potential.

This is an important principle in education. If we can stimulate interest and desire for

knowledge in children, they are likely to excel in their studies. A good teacher is, therefore, one who can reach the students in a way that they become “wise-hearted.”

It's Up To You *Pekudei*

Rashi says that because Bezalel dedicated himself to the work of the Ark more than others, it bears his name: the Ark that Bezlael made.

In [Exodus 25:10](#), the Torah says, “They shall make an Ark of acacia wood.” The Midrash notes that for all the other appurtenances of the Sanctuary, God said to Moses, “You shall make,” but in the case of the Ark, He said, “They shall make.” The Midrash explains this exception; God said to Moses, “Let everyone participate in the fashioning of the Ark, so that all will have the merit of Torah” ([Shemos Rabbah 34:3](#)). There seems to be a bit of a conflict here. God instructed that everyone should share in the construction of the Ark, yet it appears as though Bezalel did it almost single-handedly.

Rabbi Boruch Sorotzkin says that the message herein is that when Torah is involved, one should not assume that others will do their part, but rather act as if one were the only person who could carry out the responsibility. Although all the Israelites were obligated to share in the Ark, Bezalel approached it as if he were the only one available to fashion it.

There is the well-known story of the shul that asked all its members to donate a cup of wine. Each member reasoned that everyone else would donate wine, so he could get away with putting in a cup of water. When they came to fetch wine from the barrel, it was all pure water! That is what may happen when one relies on others to do the task. Every person may rationalize that others will do it.

Rabbi Sorotzkin's observation is relevant to all commandments as well as to Torah. When there is something to be done, do not rely on others, even if they share the responsibility. Act as if you were the only person available and capable of doing the task.



Why Do It?

This week's Torah portion begins with a few verses about Shabbat, and then the entire remainder deals with the building of the Tabernacle. From this juxtaposition, the Sages derive that one cannot build the Tabernacle on Shabbat. One might think that since the Tabernacle is a means through which an individual attains a deeper

relationship with God, the building of it overrides Shabbat. But this is not so. Why?

I think the reason is that "building" is ultimately a mundane act. And when we involve ourselves in the mundane - no matter for what meaningful purpose - we can too easily and quickly forget why we are doing it.

A nurse can take blood all day long and turn into a blood taker - not someone who is helping save human lives. A volunteer in the Third World, helping dig ditches for irrigation, can become a ditch digger, not a person contributing to the development of a nation. And someone building God's Sanctuary can come to look at himself as merely a builder.

Shabbat is the day to stop and remember. It is a day to stop doing what we are doing and remind ourselves why exactly we are doing it. If the answer is a good one, then Shabbat will help infuse meaning into the week. And if the answer is not a good one, then Shabbat will (hopefully) help steer our lives toward more meaningful accomplishment.

If we don't stop on Shabbat and refocus, then even the building of God's Tabernacle can lose its meaning to us. All the more so, the myriad other tasks we might find ourselves involved in. We vitally need that perceptive - every week, without exception.

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