

Shabbat Parashat T'tzaveh Putting God's Gift of Skill to Use

The design and construction of the *mishkan*, the portable desert Tabernacle/Temple, are the main focus of the last *parashiyot* of the Book of *Sh'mot*/Exodus. The first of the instructions came last week and they continue into our reading this week. On its surface, the content is very "dull." The directives are very specific and highly detailed. Finding the deeper meanings in these texts takes a little extra interpretive work, this being a very useful intellectual and cognitive exercise in and of itself. There is one particular *pasuk*/verse toward the beginning of this week's reading that catches the eye and mind if not glanced over quickly:

"Next you shall instruct all who are skillful, whom I have endowed with the gift of skill, to make...a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a fringed tunic, a headdress, and a sash" (Ex. 28:3-4)

What is interesting about this verse is that God specifically requests skillful artisans for these particular tasks and notes, as well, that their skill is a gift given to them by God. These two comments remind us of two very important aspects of our identities as individuals:

- 1) We all have different areas of expertise. God called upon experts to do the crafting work necessary for the making of the special uniform of the High Priest. It would not have been appropriate for just anyone to have been given that job. Each person has strengths and weaknesses and we must find a way to match the tasks/work/activities that we choose to areas in which we can be most successful. That does not mean that we ignore our weaknesses. On the contrary, we must strive to improve them; yet, knowing our strengths and applying them in order to find success and joy in life is critical. As did the artisans, we must also find ways to use our skills for the benefit of the entire community, not only for the benefit of self.
- 2) Our skills are not exclusively self-cultivated. The Torah teaches us that while human beings are flesh and blood, created through the natural genetic process, God plays a significant role in this process. Parents often talk about "the miracle of childbirth." There is a miraculous nature to the development of a baby inside a mother's womb and then being born healthy. Not to feel, in one way or another, that God was involved in the process and guiding it along, would indicate a detachment from one's spiritual and religious self. The Torah is indicating here that the skills that make each of us unique are one of the ways that God plays a role in the process of creation. We are all made in God's image and one way that that manifests itself is through the different skills that each of us possess.

Recognizing your own strengths and skills and making deliberate choices about how to use them to your advantage and for the betterment of the community and the world is one way that we can walk in God's footsteps and bring out the divine in ourselves. We must not only celebrate our own skills, but also those of others. Recognizing that each of us fills our own important place in the world will allow us to see others in a much different way. We will be able to appreciate our differences and the divine characteristics that we all possess.

May we all look at others and see their unique divine spark which, together with our own, create light in the world.

Shabbat Shalom!