



**Parsha Vayak'hel**  
**Haftarah I Kings 7:40-50**  
**Sepharadim read I Kings 7:13-26**  
**February 21, 2014 / 21 Adar 1 5774**

Talent is a wondrous thing. Although many can develop sufficient facility for playing an instrument, creating some form of art, play a sport, write communications, or learn to maintain odds and ends around the house, far fewer of us can do it well or with notable depth. Amongst those who may be talented enough to become professional or recognized in a field, there are the precious few who rise to the level of genius. Maimonides, Leonardo Di Vinci, Albert Einstein, Jimi Hendrix, all had talents that, it is safe to say, transcended the common understanding of talent—at least inasmuch that their vision and creativity changed the world. As the 19th century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer said, “Talent hits a target no one else can hit; Genius hits a target no one else can see.” Genius illuminates undiscovered terrain and we are blessed with awe.

Our Haftarah leads with King Solomon acquiring the recognized talent of Hiram from Tyre. Hiram was a master craftsman endowed with the same mysterious talent of Bezalel, the master craftsman who crafted the various utensils and ritual objects of the Mishkan, the first Holy place wherein the Israelites and the Divine would meet. Like Bezalel, Hiram was: Filled “...et hachochmah, v’et hat’vuna, v’et hada’at, la’asot kol m’lacha/endowed with skill, ability, and talent for executing all work in bronze. He came to King Solomon and executed all his work.” (Etz Hayim translation) A more direct translation of the key words would render Hiram being filled with wisdom, understanding, and knowledge of all forms of creative labor. What can this mean to us?

Our mystical tradition suggests our universe is endowed with Divine energies and characteristics that are imprinted in a form of spiritual DNA, called the sephirot, of which there are Ten in total. Seven are manifest in the physical realm, and three are transcendent of the physical: Chochmah (wisdom), Binah (understanding), and Da’at (knowledge). Chochmah is like a bolt of lightning from which erupts the creative spark of imagination. This is fed to Binah, which organizes this initial wisdom into discernable deductions of understanding. From here, it processes onward to Da’at, where the creative thought is translated into applicable skill and knowledge. Another understanding of Da’at is its association with “Yichud/unification,” where an idea can unify with emotions. God called out to Bezalel “by name,” and here King Solomon sends for Hiram by name, for he had indeed made a name for himself as a master craftsman. The genius and talent of these individuals was, perhaps, an example of unfettered access to

that deep well of creativity, translated through the sephirot of chochma, binah, and da'at, and then manifest in the physical as awesome works of splendor. The master artist becomes, in a sense, a prism through which to behold God's magnificence.

In today's world of self-oriented spirituality and psychological actualization, one might think that each of us has a "Hiram within" waiting to come out--but we don't. At least we shouldn't think that way. King Solomon employs Hiram to build the permanent meeting place between the Israelite nation and God, quite reasonably a most coveted opportunity by any tradesman, because Hiram was blessed with his particular talent. He was an outlier. Most others are not. Our ego might be driven for the prestige of that level of recognition and talent, but that ought not be our lesson. Rather, we should learn that we each have our own particular contribution to make in connecting God with the world. Action, not ritual, changes the world. Ritual elevates our action, but cannot replace the hard work of building character, of raising menschen, and engaging in daily tasks of tikkun olam. If the Temple would be a metaphor for the world we seek to create, Hiram was the architect of our ritual center, but each of us is charged the task of maintaining a society worthy of God's continued presence, building the world as a Temple.

There is a dangerous temptation to narcissism should we think that we need to be Hiram, or a most notable and recognized name. Rather, each of us has the responsibility to better refine our imagination, creativity, and intellectual abilities, our chochma, binah, and da'at, and apply them in ways that might better serve our sphere of influence, whatever our talent. The famous story of Reb Zusha at his death-bed makes the point:

The students of Reb Zusya, hearing that their teacher was about to die, came to pay him one last visit. But entering the room, they were surprised to see him trembling with fear.

"Why are you afraid of death?" they asked. "In your life, have you not been as righteous as Moses himself?"

"When I stand before the throne of judgment," Zusya answered, " I will not be asked, 'Reb Zusya, why were you not like Moses?' I will be asked , 'Reb Zusya, why were you not like Zusya?'"

To realize our own individual potential is our greatest challenge.

As Mark Twain correctly observed, "We are always more anxious to be distinguished for a talent which we do not possess, than to be praised for the fifteen which we do possess." We should be blessed to recognize and refine the talents we have and make conscious contributions to the melacha, continued building of our world as a worthy residing place for the Divine in whatever ways, large and small, that are within our hands.

Food for Thought:

1. If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, then some sanctuaries are elegant, some are warm, some are opulent, and others downright gaudy. What do you think contributes to creating a space that is elevating as opposed to distracting in its splendor?
2. If God is meant to be "everywhere," then what is the point of building "holy spaces?" Do dedicated sanctuary spaces add to our experience of holiness/elevation, or are we objectifying and limiting God--and our own experience of the spiritual--to these spaces?

3. The Kotzker Rebbe famously responded to the question (when he was 4 years old, mind you), "Where is God?" with the insightful point: "Wherever we let God in." If this is true, then shouldn't we be spending more time in homeless shelters, in opportunity-deprived areas, etc. than in shul? Is it fair to say that our "prayer" can only really have meaning if we're active in uplifting to downtrodden, or are our holy spaces there for a reason other than God? How might we find or create balance between time in the sanctuary, and time in "the world?"

*From the Editors: Join the discussion of this commentary in Mentschen, the FJMC's online forum.*

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