



Good Shabbos SYDENHAM!

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The Self-Made Man?

by: Rabbi Yossy Goldman

"He is a self-made man who worships his creator." Who said it? About whom? Well, it doesn't really matter as long as we make sure the description doesn't fit us.

This week's Parsha details the offerings of the princes of the twelve tribes. These gifts were brought at the time the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary in the wilderness, was completed. Previously, towards the end of the Book of Exodus, we had read that Moses blessed the people when they finished their work. What blessing did he give them?

May it be G-d's will that the Shechinah, the Divine Presence, should come to rest upon the work of your hands. He also blessed them with the phrase that would become part of Psalm 90. *May the pleasantness of my L-rd, our G-d, be upon us...may he establish for us the work of our hands.*

But why pray at this time? Surely the time for prayer was before the sanctuary was built. Then it might have been needed to inspire the people to bring in their offerings and contributions, to execute the huge amount of work that was required to create this new, sacred structure. But now the work is done, everything is in place, why pray now?

The answer is that Moses understood that building G-d's sanctuary is not in our hands alone. Sure we can create a structure. That's the easy part. The question is will G-d see fit to live there, to make it His home? For this, a special prayer was called for. We needed a blessing upon the work our hands.

How often people imagine that they do it them-

selves - all by themselves. How many boast that they are self-made men? Is anyone who didn't have a rich father before him a self-made man? Do you really believe that your success is all your own doing? Are you convinced that all it takes is hard work, business acumen or clever trading techniques? Are these the only secrets of success?

Where does our wisdom and ability come from? Every one of the skills and talents we possess are G-d given gifts we should acknowledge and be grateful for. And that's not humility. It's reality. You were born with that natural talent and flair. Give credit to your creator. No matter how many 'rags to riches' stories I may hear, I will continue to insist that there is no such thing as a 'self-made man.' Every individual who makes it in their chosen field of endeavor has made it thanks to the innate faculties or aptitudes that G-d implanted inside his or her character from birth. Sure, we learn new tricks and perfect our skills and talents, but where did they come from in the first place? I will happily recognize and give credit to people for their achievements. They, in turn, should thank He who endowed them with the intellectual or emotional wherewithal that got them there.

There are lots of clever people out there who did not find the success they had hoped for. There are also many less intelligent individuals who are very successful. Clearly, there are higher forces at work.

A friend of mine was once laid up with a bad back. What happened? He picked up a little bicycle for his 5-year old. A tiny nonsense but it left him flat on his back for weeks.

I remember some years ago catching some kind of 'bug' and losing my voice for quite a while. There I was, the Rabbi, the preacher, the speaker and the

Calendar

- ◆ Shacharis: 8:30 am; Shtibl 8:45 am
- ◆ Brocha in the Seeff Hall.
- ◆ **Smorgasbord of Shiurim.**
- ◆ Mincha: 4:50 pm
- ◆ Shalosh Seudos sponsored by **Clive Bedell** in honour of his father's 1st yahrzeit.
- ◆ Pirkei Avos: Chapter 1
- ◆ Shabbos Ends: 5:58 pm

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lights. How dare you instruct me on what to do with them! I shall press each of my buttons and flip each of my switches as I please. As for the indicator lights, I, not you, shall decide for myself what they indicate; indeed, if I so choose, I shall ignore them altogether. Yours truly, a very stupid customer."

He did not, of course, sign off that way, but he might as well have. Needless to say, I didn't bother replying.

The sages of the Talmud didn't see much difference between my stupid customer and your standard sinner. As they saw it, when a person acts contrary to his Creator's instructions on how life is to be lived, he may be doing something bad, evil, selfish, destructive, enjoyable, defiant, cowardly — as the case may be. But above all, he is doing something profoundly stupid.

Live & Laugh

The mothers are gathered and showing their *nachas*. One boasts of her son, the head of a medical department; the other has a son, a judge, and a daughter, psychiatrist. One of the women is quiet through it all. Finally, they turn to her and ask: "Well, what does your son do?" "He's a rabbi!"

"A rabbi? What kind of a profession is that for a nice Jewish boy?"




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radio personality - the man of words whose entire profession is built around his ability to say the right thing for every occasion and suddenly he is utterly speechless thanks to a tiny germ. Overnight, I was rendered useless and unproductive – all by a little virus.

To get sick takes a minute, to get well can take weeks and months. We all need to remember our frailties and limitations. No matter how strong, clever or talented we may be, we are all subject to higher forces. Nobody can do it alone. There is no such thing as a self-made man.

And so Moses reminds us all that even when our work is done, we still need that blessing from Above. Even when we work hard, concoct the most intricate business schemes, or present the most wonderful proposals, ultimately our success needs a prayer. We need to recognize the hand of G-d in our lives and, hopefully, in our success. Let us do our work as best as we can and then let us not forget to ask Him to bless the work of our hands.

Parsha Pointers

*Naso: Artscroll Chumash pg 748;
Living Torah pg 677*

Completing the head-count of the Children of Israel taken in the Sinai Desert, a total of 8,580 Levite men between the ages of 30 and 50 are counted in a tally of those who will be doing the actual work of transporting the Tabernacle.

G=d communicates to Moses the law of the Sotah, the wayward wife suspected of unfaithfulness to her husband. Also given is the law of the Nazir who forswears wine, lets his or her hair grow long, and is forbidden to become contaminated through contact with a dead body. Aaron and his descendants the *kohanim* are instructed on how to bless the people of Israel.

The leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel each bring their offerings for the inauguration of the altar. Although their gifts are identical, each is brought on a different day and is individually

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described by the Torah.

Blessing the Blessers

By Rabbi Elisha Greenbaum

Holiday morning services have nearly finished; there is a stir of excitement throughout the synagogue as the children stream in from all directions and dive under their fathers' *tallits*. The Levites saunter back to their places after having ceremoniously washed the hands of the priestly *Kohanim*, while the *Kohanim* file self-consciously into the synagogue, slip off their shoes and assume their position at the front. The *chazzan* reaches the moment, the *Kohanim* turn around, lower their prayer shawls over their eyes, raise their hands towards the crowd and the Priestly Blessing begins.

What an amazing religion we have where certain people have been specifically assigned the job of blessing the masses with sanctity and love:

May G-d bless you and guard you.

May G-d cause his face to shine to you and favour you.

May G-d raise his face to you and grant you peace — Numbers 6:24-26

What wonderful words of blessing and true evidence of G-d's love. However, it is the next line of the Torah's instructions that I find truly enlightening:

They [the priests] should place My name upon the Children of Israel, and I will bless them(—ibid. v. 27).

Those last words, "and I will bless them", have been variously interpreted to either be referring to the Jews or to the Priests. According to the first explanation it means that G-d Himself will fulfil those blessings pronounced by the *Kohanim* on His behalf, while the alternative way of reading the verse is that after the *Kohanim* bless the people, G-d blesses them in return.

I would suggest that both explanations are equally valid and perhaps even mutually dependent. The relationship between the Priests, the Jews and our G-d is instructive for the way we should live our lives.

People often worry that the time and effort they expend on helping other people will cost them in the long run. They're afraid to volunteer themselves for public duty or to dedicate themselves to altruism because they're worried about the gossip and innuendo that such dedication may bring. Other people are just too busy feathering their own nest to have the time or inclination to donate to those less fortunate

than themselves.

G-d tells us that if we are there for other people, He'll be there for us. The *Kohanim's* job is to display love and blessings, they have the enviable task of standing up in public, extending their arms in affection and welcoming the nation into the G-dly fold. They are promised that their communal endeavours will be crowned with success and that G-d Himself will validate their blessings.

However, they too will be blessed in turn. When you shower others with affection, G-d responds in kind. The *Kohanim's* efforts are welcomed by G-d and reciprocated. Where necessary, the fact that they were willing to stand up and extend themselves for others will be the saving grace that keeps them close to G-d and guarantees them a future.

Individual Talents

By Rabbi Mordechai Wollenberg

The Torah tells of twelve sets of gifts brought as offerings by each of the twelve tribes in honour of the dedication of the Tabernacle. Although the Torah does not waste words, and although each tribe seemingly brought the same gift, the Torah repeats word for word the exact order of their donation - "Reuben gave..., Shimon gave..., etc.", rather than simply saying "Reuben, Shimon,... and Benjamin each gave..."

Each of the items symbolized different things to different tribes, relating to that tribe's role. In this sense, each tribe brought a different flavour to their gifts.

All of the tribes conform to the same divine guidelines, all follow the same Torah, yet each one carries out those very same deeds with their own personal approach.

We often see tension between conformity and creativity, between tradition and innovation. People ask why Judaism has to be so rigid and conforming. Where is creativity? On the one hand we need the foundation stones of our Jewish tradition; on the other, we need an outlet for our creativity, to personalize, to nurture our own individual talents.

This Torah tells us that this is not a contradiction. The entire nation, including individuals of every conceivable character and calling, can do the very same deed, down to every last detail, yet each person provides a unique flavour. Two people may do

exactly the same thing in a very different manner.

In the same manner, we can live in a civilized society, governed by ethical and moral precepts, yet still thrive as individuals. We can follow Torah and carry out its commandments, yet still remain true to our sense of individuality. No matter how conformist Judaism (or society, for that matter) may seem, there is always room for personal expression. It does not, however, have to involve rebellion or non-conformity. On the contrary, the greatest personal expression comes from different individuals who are following the same framework yet show diversity and individuality within that framework.

We were blessed with the framework of Torah, of Jewish teachings and practices. Let us endeavour to enjoy and celebrate our Judaism, in the traditions of our predecessors, yet with our own individual flavour — to keep it going for **the next generation**.

Do Jews Believe in Sin?

By Rabbi Yanki Tauber

Say the word "sin" and you'll evoke different things in the minds of different people.

To the fire-and-brimstone types, the word smells of shame and scorched flesh. To the hedonist it sounds like fun. Some think it's a wholly Christian concept, while others ascribe it to the ancient Hebrews. To the sages of the Talmud, sin is, above all, an act of stupidity.

"A person does not sin," they wrote, "unless a spirit of folly has entered into him."

Before I got this job I used to write manuals for various household items — those 30-page booklets that come in the box together with electric drills, microwaves, and the like. It was pretty boring work, but it paid well and it was the kind of writing you could do with two kids on your lap. The best part was that you didn't have to put your name on it.

Anyway, one day the consumer department of one of the companies I wrote for forwarded me a letter which, since it was the first response I had ever gotten from a reader of my work, I read with interest. "Sir," the letter began. "I have in hand a booklet you wrote which came in the box with my new video camera. I must say that I am outraged by your presumptuousness and audacity. This is my camera, for which I paid my own hard-earned money. It has lots of buttons, switches and indicator lights — and these are all *my* buttons, switches and indicator