



*“Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart”*

SHEMOT > Trumah

By Rabbi Simon Jacobson

February 4, 2011
Trumah

Two Sermons

- 1) Spiritual Architecture Page 1
- 2) Do You Feel Lonely? Page 15



Meaningful Sermons *"Words from the Heart Enter the Heart"*

By Rabbi Simon Jacobson

*"Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart"*

Shemot > Trumah > Spiritual Architecture

February 4, 2011

ABSTRACT

A manufacturing question: What do you create first – the package or the product?

In today's commercial world it often appears that marketing matters more than the product, and wrappers are designed before the contents. But it is also true that if the exterior is not appealing and the packaging poorly conveys the message about what is inside, we won't trust the product.

In our personal lives the same kind of question can be asked: What takes priority – the means or the ends? What drives us – the body or the soul?

Here's where marketing structure, business administration and personal life all converge. For conventional wisdom of business administration dictates that a successful entity requires two essential forces: a visionary and a builder.

We examine both in this two-part sermon:

Part I: The Visionary vs. the Builder

Part II: The Building Blocks of Existence

In Part I, we explore the symbiotic relationship between Moses the visionary, and Bezalel, the builder of the Sanctuary, and mine it for the vital lessons the Torah offers for our lives. And then, in Part II (which may work better as a class) we explore the psycho-spiritual Kabbalistic insights of that relationship. Surprisingly, we find that it mirrors the binary-digit computer language, and that the process of the cosmic order, the spiritual DNA of all existence, works like a series of 0's and 1's

Shemot

Trumah

Spiritual Architecture

PART I:
THE VISIONARY VS. THE BUILDER

1. Importance of Packaging

A manufacturing question: What do you create first – the package or the product?

In today's commercial world it often appears that wrappers are so vital that they are designed before the contents. And marketing cynics scoff that "perception is more important than reality."

But it is true that perception *shapes* reality, and there is no question that we *do* judge books by their covers. If the exterior is not appealing and the packaging poorly conveys the message about its contents, we don't trust the product within.

In our personal lives the same kind of question can be asked: What takes priority – the means or the ends? Where do we place our primary focus – on ensuring that our outer veneer and image looks good, or on our internal values and standards?

Say, you're planning an event. Do you begin by creating the theme and agenda or do you first think about the setting – the look and feel?

Which brings me to an ever deeper form of this question: What drives your life – your body or your soul ... your physical or your spiritual needs? Do you see yourself as a material creature who occasionally engages in some spiritual activities? Or do you see yourself as a spiritual creature who uses matter to fuel spirit?

Do you aim for the target, or do you draw the target around where your intentions have landed?

A joke is told about a young man who is learning archery, and he notices that one old Jew consistently produces a target with a bull's eye. Wondering how this elderly man is shooting more accurately than the instructors, he asks him. "Simple," says the old guy, "first I shoot, then I draw put the target wherever my arrow has landed."

2. Lessons from Business Administration

Here's where marketing structure, business administration and personal life all converge.

Conventional wisdom of business administration dictates that a successful entity requires two *equally* vital forces: that of the visionary and that of the builder.

The visionary ensures that the entity always remains aligned with its long term objectives and higher aims. The builder implements the vision, directing the mechanics of the operation towards its intended goals.

Usually, the visionary must hold the bird's-eye view, and from this vantage point, he is able to maintain quality control and assure that the operation is aligned with its bigger long-term vision. But precisely because he is the visionary – whether it is from 20,000 or 2,000 feet up – he is unable to run things on the ground level. In contrast, the builder must be immersed in the nitty-gritty below, as he cannot do that job from a pedestal.

Vision alone can remain abstract and unfulfilled without an implementer who knows how to execute the plan and build accordingly. But building without vision is aimless.

3. The Sanctuary Model

You may be surprised to hear that the first model for balancing these two forces does not originate with the Harvard Business School – it goes back some 3,300 years. We find it described in this week's Torah reading, which delineates a model for all structures – for all entities – both physical and spiritual, in the realm of microcosm and of macrocosm.

Here is where God instructs Moses to tell the Israelites: "Build for Me a Sanctuary, and I will dwell among them."¹

¹ Exodus 25:9.

The purpose of existence is to build a home for the Divine in our material universe from the components available to us here. Building this home is thus a model for every form of building that we will ever devise – from grandiose skyscrapers in our sprawling cities to the constructs of our businesses and corporations, from our personal lives, homes and families to our social relationships and organizations.

As such, the construction of the Sanctuary offers us many lessons ... which explains why the Torah elaborates on every detail not once, but three times.

4. Discrepancy in Order of Assembly

The [first] lesson that I would like to examine today is contained in the discrepancy in the order of assembly.

When God first commands Moses about the Sanctuary, He states: “You must make the Tabernacle and all its furnishings following the plan that I am showing you.”² God then issues specific instructions on how to assemble the furnishings – the Ark of the Covenant, the Showbread Table, and the Menorah – before beginning the instructions for the assembly of the Tabernacle itself.

So we see that, although God mentions the assembly of the Tabernacle first, the actual instructions start with the furnishings.

But, when Moses issues the instructions for the building to begin, he reverses that order. He says: “Every naturally talented individual among you shall come forth and make all that God has ordered: the Tabernacle ... the Ark ... the Table ... the Menorah ...”³

What caused Moses to reverse God’s order? The Talmud⁴ relates a fascinating dialogue between Moses and Bezalel, the chief builder:

² Exodus 25:10.

³ Exodus 35:10-14.

⁴ Talmud, *Berochot* 55a. Cited in Rashi at the opening of *Parshat Pekudei*.

Initially, Moses told Bezalel to first construct the vessels and then the structure, but Bezalel responded, “Moses, our teacher, the way of the world is that first one builds a home and afterwards one puts in the furnishings. Here you tell me to build the ark and vessels and then the Tabernacle. Where shall I put the vessels I make until the Tabernacle is finished? Perhaps God really said it to you in a different order: Tabernacle, ark, vessels?” Moses responded: “Perhaps you were under God’s shadow (the meaning of the name *be-zal-el*) and knew what God intended.” And Moses deferred to Bezalel.

What are we to make of this? Moses was a very wise man. Could he not figure out on his own “the way of the world is that first one builds a home and afterwards one puts in the furnishings?” Why did he need Bezalel to remind of this simple fact?!

Initially, Moses spoke from the perspective of the visionary, and this perspective is essential to the process. But when it comes to actual implementation, he was persuaded by the builder that God really intended the Tabernacle to be actually built first.

A visionary – the driving force that should stand behind every initiative – sees the end in mind; he always maintains focus on the mission and purpose of the entire operation. The ultimate purpose of the Sanctuary (which was the precursor to the Temple) lay in the furnishings and vessels, which were the vehicles of divine service. The structure was merely necessary to house and protect what was within. Moses, man of God, was the visionary who saw the end-goal at the beginning – he understood that the vessels were more important. He thus began by mentioning the construction of the vessels before the structure.

But, it is the builder who must implement the vision, and in so doing, must define the actual method and order of assembly. Bezalel, the builder and implementer, recognized the practical process, “the way of the world is to first build a home, and afterwards to furnish it.”

5. Who Controls Your Life?

The symbiotic relationship between Moses, the visionary, and Bezalel, the builder, carries vital lessons for our lives. Pondering this balance, we are forced to ask ourselves some hard questions:

Who controls your life – the builder or the visionary in you? Is it the details and daily mechanics that drive you, or a higher vision and purpose?

Who is the captain of your ship? Is your body following your soul, or is your soul following your body? Does the hammer tell your hand what to do or the other way around? The saying goes: “Give a man a hammer and everything becomes a nail.” Is that you?

This seems like a good spot for a hammer and nails joke, so ...

The two builders, Tom and Harry were on a construction job building a house, when Tom sees Harry going through a bag of nails. Harry looked at each nail in turn and some he put into a box and others he threw away. “Why are you throwing those nails away?” asked Tom. “Don’t you see...” said Harry, “they’re pointed at the wrong end.” Of course Tom laughed, and he rebuked Harry: “You idiot – those nails are for the other side of the house.”

For most of us, life operates backwards. We tend to be driven by life’s circumstances rather than the other way around. Due to the struggle for survival, most of our lives are consumed with the means – working, commuting, shopping, preparing. And we have much less time and energy available for the ends – the whole reason we invest all that effort: love, family, virtue, personal growth, making the world a better place.

This state of things creates the inevitable, undesired and contradictory result. We often forget the destination for we get overwhelmed with the journey. Instead of our mission defining our activities, it’s the activities that define our lives, and the mission is given short shrift.

As John Lennon sang: “Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.”

⁵ “Beautiful Boy, Darling Boy” by John Lennon, 1980.

Some of us, though, have the reverse problem. Some of us get so carried away with vision and illusions of grandeur, which – even if they aren't illusions – often don't come to realization due to their grandiosity.

6. The Order of Priorities

To get it right, first and foremost we need to listen to the voice of Moses, the visionary, within us. Then we need to balance it with the voice of Bezalel, the builder.

In our lives, each of us ought to empower *both* these aspects of our personalities. We should empower the visionary (which must come first), the part of us that distinguishes between the means and the ends, and makes sure to keep focused on the purpose of all the work we do in life. And we also should empower the builder, the practical part of us that understands the right order to actualize our vision.

Obviously, some of us excel at one more than the other. And if we know we don't have the balance right, we should to be wise enough to consult an objective expert who can help complement our own weaknesses.

7. Conclusion to Part I

Is one more important than the other? No. Both are essential. But they must be in balance.

The idealism of a visionary alone can remain abstract and unrealized. The greatest vision will fail if it does not have a builder that will execute and actualize it. At the same time, the builder alone, without vision, can get distracted and carried away with the means, and forget the end. So we need both – the end always in mind, and the set of priorities always in the right order.

This is the secret to success. And we see that, because Moses and Bezalel worked in tandem, their partnership created a model for the future. This was a model for the subsequent Temple in Jerusalem, but above all, a

permanent model for us – to create a home for our souls and for the divine, so that God can dwell among us, and there be no division between the vision and its execution, between matter and spirit.

[May we all see that day come true. Amen.]

PART II

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF EXISTENCE⁶

8. The Vision in the Details

Thus far we have examined the two complementary roles and perspectives of Moses and Bezalel – the visionary and the builder of the Sanctuary, which was a portable Temple that traveled with the Jewish people throughout the wilderness.

We established that the visionary sees the end in mind, while the builder concentrates on the implementation process. Both elements are part of the divine plan – both are necessary components of transforming our lives into a divine home.

Thus, even the visionary Moses, provides us with a *detailed* accounting of all the materials used to build the Sanctuary, as the Torah testifies: “These are the accounts of the Tabernacle, which were calculated by Moses...”

Since we previously established that a visionary is someone *not* involved in the details, why then does Moses invest so much time in balancing the books?

To teach us that the greatest vision is in the details.

There are visionaries that remain aloof of the practical process, but the ultimate tribute to Moses is his unique and counterintuitive ability to fuse the vision with the details.

⁶This part may work better as a class.

⁷Exodus 38:21.

For all his vision, Moses understood that the divine scheme also includes a practical plan. In other words, building the structure actually reflected God's will, and Moses was humble enough to defer to Bezalel, as the Torah relates: "Bezalel ... fulfilled all that God had commanded Moses to do."⁸

This raises an interesting issue: Bezalel did not hear what God told Moses. Instead, he received his instructions *through* Moses. Therefore, shouldn't the Torah have said: "Bezalel fulfilled all that Moses had commanded him"? The answer is that when Moses commanded Bezalel to first make the furnishings and afterwards the Tabernacle, Bezalel perceived God's true intention that first the structure must be built and only then the vessels.

9. More Than Meets the Eye

Besides the practical lessons that we derive from Moses and Bezalel's symbiosis, there is actually much more here than meets the eye.

The Sanctuary's structure reflects the magnificent architecture of the entire universe which we occupy – a complex and eloquent beauty which can only be understood when we uncover its inner spiritual makeup.

10. Kabbalistic Insight

The mystics call this structure the Cosmic Order (*Seder Hishtalshilus*), for it reveals the elaborate development process of how existence came into being, how it developed stage after stage:

First it moved from the ethereal to the tangible, then from the pristine to the mundane, and finally from pure spirit into brute matter.

When you begin to study this process, its sheer elegance strikes you with a profound resonance, for it captures an all encompassing formula

⁸ Exodus 38:22.

that can be applied to every aspect of our existence and lives, defining the model of literally every successful venture.

As we know the basic computer language – known as the bit, short for binary digit – is made up of 0's and 1's (which translates to off/on, the two positions of an electrical switch, or two distinct levels of light intensity, or two directions of magnetization/ polarization). And so, it shouldn't surprise us, that this is also true of the process of the cosmic order.

Generally speaking, the process of the cosmic order, the spiritual DNA of all existence, works like a series of 0's and 1's. Kabbalah calls the 0's *iggulim* ("circles") and the 1's *yosher* ("lines").⁹

The Kabbalists explain that the actual process begins with the "circles" and then within the circles enter the "lines" of energy – carried there by the thin thread of light known as the *kav* – and they manifest internally, as "lights within containers." Consistent with this was the way Bezalel built the Sanctuary, for he first built the surroundings (the walls) and only then the furnishings (the lights).

In the "higher" stages of the cosmic order, the light/energy is the most dominant feature, while the containers are either non-existent or invisible, for they are totally eclipsed by the overwhelming light. As the cosmic order evolves, the light diminishes, allowing for the containers to emerge, up until the point where – in the "lower" stages of the process – the containers become dominant, and the light is all but invisible.

The material universe in which we live is one large container, comprised of countless smaller containers, whose "gravitational pull" – the seductive forces all around us – is so powerful that it barely allows any spiritual light in or out. Matter is the governing force.

But life's purpose and objective is to reveal the hidden light/energy that lies submerged within every aspect of existence.

⁹ These are also called in Kabbalah *makif* ("transcendent") and *pnimi* ("immanent"), while Hassidic literature uses the terms *sovev* ("surrounding") and *memale* ("permeating").

11. Parable of the Student and Teacher

A parable for this process is the classic example of the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student. First the ideas “surround” the beginner’s mind. At this stage, concepts are communicated, but initially they remain outside and “above the head” of the student. Slowly, these thoughts begin to seep in and become internalized by the student’s mind. With time, as the student’s mind expands and he absorbs more information, he will integrate the concepts until he owns them, and they become one with him.

Now some teachers may actually argue that point. Consider the teacher who asked her student to spell “crocodile”? He responded: “K-R-O-K-O-D-A-I-L.” Of course, the teacher said, “No, that’s wrong.” The student shot back: “Maybe it’s wrong, but you asked me how *I* spell it!”

Or the teacher who asked the class “What is the chemical formula for water?” The answer she got was “HIJKLMNO.” She was mystified, “What are you talking about?” she asked the student. “Well, yesterday, you said it’s H to O!”

Or the teacher who told her student, David to go to the map and find North America.” David got it right. “Here it is!” he proclaimed. The teacher congratulated him, and then asked the class, “Now, class, who discovered America?” The class answer was unanimous: “David!”

Or the teacher who asked his student to name one important thing we have today that we didn’t have ten years ago. The answer she go? “Me!” (That’s what they mean by the “me generation.”)

And finally, consider the teacher who asked his student, “Why are you late?” The answer: “Because of the sign.” “What sign?” The one that says SCHOOL AHEAD, GO SLOW.”

[But seriously,] the process of personal and spiritual growth is similar [to that of the teacher and student transmission process, assuming something does get transmitted].

It begins from the bottom up. At the earliest stages of our lives, our first states of awareness can best be described as conscious ignorance. We only perceive that which our senses can experience. We may sense a deeper reality “outside” of ourselves as we begin to explore, but our earliest internal experiences are sensory in nature, even narcissistic, and this is how we get acquainted with our world.

But, as we progress and grow, that which was beyond us begins to become part of our consciousness. We study, observe, learn and mature, and this allows us to integrate deeper states of awareness, both of our own inner selves and that of those around us. As well, we become aware of inner, invisible forces which shape the universe at large.

A mature, intimate relationship with another is possible only when we learn to recognize an inner self, and when we are able to transcend our own immediate needs and forge inner bonds with another. This is what we call love.

In simple terms, this shift can be classified as moving from a physical body-oriented perspective to a sublime soul-oriented one; from a material consciousness to a spiritual consciousness.

All this mirrors the actual process of creation.

12. Integration

From the perspective of the visionary – who sees the end at the outset, before the entire process even begins – the purpose of the entire cosmic order is integration.

The way to achieve integration in a world that initially conceals the light requires an elaborate process, which begins first with “surrounding” circles. This allows us slowly to acclimate ourselves and absorb deeper truths. But, with the end in mind, the visionary recognizes that it all begins with the internalization of the “vessels,” which then dictate that the process of building commence.

Indeed, the vision of integration did not merely remain an abstract reality in the mind of Moses, but it actually had a practical application as well.

The Kabbalists explain that, at the earliest stage of the cosmic order, even prior to the first “circles,” there was the *kav*, the thin thread of light which pierced the darkness (the utter concealment of the divine light that was necessary for creation to take place). And it is this ray of light that carried the divine force that shaped the circles and the lines that followed.

In other words, metaphorically speaking, before the earliest circles, was *kav*, the “line.” Then, this line proceeded to create the first circle, followed by a continuation of the line, then another circle, and so on.

Thus, Moses’ visionary perspective actually manifested the first step of the cosmic order. For this reason Moses wanted to fashion the Sanctuary’s vessels before the actual structure. The primary vessel was the Holy Ark, which contained the Torah. The Torah represents the level of the *kav* that preceded the “circles” and the “lines,” and, indeed, infused them with the power to become one.

Yet, when it came to actual construction, Bezalel’s order defined the process – “circles” followed by “lines.” But now they had the power to become one, due to the fact that Moses revealed the purpose of integration. This paved the way and empowered all levels with the ability to ultimately internalize the highest levels of the divine – in a total fusion of form and function.

13. Personal Accounting

As we read about the Sanctuary’s elements and remember Moses’ accounting of all the material used to construct it, this is the time for all of us to do an accounting of the personal Sanctuary we are building in our lives whose purpose is to be a home for the Divine in our material universe.

We each have the surrounding “walls” of our personal Temple and the “vessels” within. At all times, there are forces that surround and are beyond us, and then those that we absorb and assimilate.

Growth is the ongoing process of internalizing new truths, while newer ones constantly emerge above us. As we climb the mountain of human development, we conquer new frontiers, as ever newer horizons appear.

A vital component in steady and sustainable growth is to go at your own pace, to assess where you stand and know what higher truths you are ready to integrate in your life, and what still remains around you. But at all stages, even at the earliest stage, integration is always the driving force and ultimate goal.

In addition, to the obvious deterrents and defenses that must be implemented, in addition to the physical Jerusalem that we must rebuild and fortify, we also have the ability and responsibility to rebuild our spiritual Jerusalem and our personal Temple.

We are taught that by constructing the Jerusalem and Temple above, the Jerusalem and Temple below will follow.

Something to think about. But above all, action is paramount.

May we all recommit to fortify our inner Temple by intensifying Torah study (which represents the Ark), by intensifying prayer (which represents the Altar), by multiplying our acts of kindness and virtue (the Showbread Table), and by inspiring and illuminating others in kind (the Menorah).

May we surround our inner Temple with strong protective walls, trusting the divine forces beyond us, and forging ahead with the confidence in the promise that God watches over us and protects us always. Amen.



Meaningful Sermons

By Rabbi Simon Jacobson

*"Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart"*

Shemot > Trumah > Do You Feel Lonely?

February 4, 2011

ABSTRACT

Do you ever feel lonesome? Utterly alone? With no one to turn to and no one able to understand you?

Poets and singers capture the feelings of isolation that resonates with so many of us. Their solution however often makes us feel more lonely than ever. Billy Joel sings: "They're sharing a drink they call loneliness. But it's better than drinkin' alone." And if that's not enough, Leonard Cohen, in his inimitable depressing manner, puts it this way: "Ah baby, let's get married, we've been alone too long. Let's be alone together."

Loneliness – existential loneliness – is one of the most difficult challenges in life? But join the club. Discover the surprising company that loneliness shares. And what you can do to find comfort in a desolate world.

In this week's Torah reading, God instructs Moses to tell the Israelites: "Build for Me a Sanctuary, and I will dwell among them."

Until this command was issued from above, we would never have thought that God needed a home, a place of belonging, a place of rest. Houses/shelters are for mortals. Why would an infinite God need such a thing?

Simply put, God wanted a home so that He could stay among people! Until the Sanctuary was built, God was (in effect) homeless and lonely!

How we can say that God is lonely? This sermon takes us the subject of God's loneliness and what it can teach us about our own.

Shemot

Trumah

Do You Feel Lonely?

THE LONELY GOD

1. Children's Questions for God (Humor)

A father was at the beach with his children when the four-year-old son ran up to him, grabbed his hand, and led him to the shore, where a seagull lay dead in the sand.-“Daddy, what happened to him?” the son asked.-“He died and went to heaven,” the father replied.-The boy thought a moment and then said, “Did God throw him back down?”

Children have so many questions about God – what He does, how He thinks. One first grade teacher encouraged her students to write out their questions to God. Here are a few examples:

Dear God: Instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don't You just keep the ones You have?

Dear God: In school they told us what You do. Who does it when You're on vacation?

Dear God: Did You mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident?

Dear God: Are You really invisible or is it just a trick?

Out of the mouths of babes, right?

Children in their innocence can teach us a lot, and I will return to this theme before we are through, but right now I'd like to consider some questions that adults have about God.

2. Who is God?

[Many, many theories have been posited about God and even more questions:]

- Does God care or does He not care about mankind and earthly matters?
- If God is all-good, how can He allow evil in the world?

- Does God share in our pain and suffering?
- Is God a He or a She, neither or both?
- Why does God hide from us? Why can't we see Him?
- What is God like – angry, loving or detached?
- Does God govern every detail of our lives?
- Why did God create the universe ... and us?
- Does God gain anything from our existence?

These questions arise because God manifests Himself to us in so many different ways, even contrary ones. Indeed, the mystics explain that every possible human “mood” and “state of mind” originates from a divine source. So though God in His essence transcends all definitions and anthropomorphic characteristics, at the same time He is the source of every possible type of experience.

Today, I would like to explore an unexpected dimension of God – a “vulnerable” one, so to speak – and one that I believe can offer us great comfort.

3. A Home for God

In this week's Torah reading God instructs Moses to tell the Israelites: “Build for Me a Sanctuary, and I will dwell among them.”¹

Simply put, God wanted a home so that He could stay among people! Until the Sanctuary was built, God was (in effect) homeless and lonely!

Until this command was issued from above, we would never have thought that God needed a home, a place of belonging, a place of rest. Houses/shelters are for mortals. Why would an infinite God need such a thing?

At first glance, we may be inclined to believe that the Sanctuary was not really built for God, but for us humans, a holy place where we mortals can experience the Divine. All of our lives are spent in the mundane struggle for survival, and *we need* a holy place as sanctuary from mortal

³ Exodus 25:9.

toil. *We need* a sacred environment where we can rest our weary souls and find some heavenly consolation. *We need ... not God.*

But listen closely, “Build *for Me* a Sanctuary and I will dwell among them.” From this, it is very obvious that the Sanctuary is not just a place for us to meet God, but also a place for God to meet us and dwell among us.

This point is amplified in the conversation between God and King Solomon, the builder of the first Temple in Jerusalem. King Solomon asked God, “Will You really dwell on earth? Heaven, even the highest heaven, cannot contain You. How much less this house I have built!”² And God responded: “I consecrate this house which you have built, and I set my name there forever. My eyes and My heart shall ever be there.”³

So, however you explain it, God clearly did not feel at home in the infinite cosmos – despite all its grand and magnificent glory. Until the Sanctuary was built on Planet Earth, God did not have a place where He belonged.

4. In Search of Company

Loneliness, it appears, is not merely a mortal concern. The Almighty Himself is in search of company.

I find this thought both disturbing and comforting.

At times, we all experience moments of existential loneliness. Despite our families and our loved ones, despite all our accomplishments and accolades, deep (or not so deep) down, there is a part of us that always remain very much alone. We may distract ourselves, party away, get carried off by all types of entertainment, but at the end of the day, that lonely core reminds us from within: “You are alone.”

² I Kings 8:27.

³ I Kings 9:3.

Indeed, the deeper you travel into your innermost recesses, the less anyone can enter that space. And the harder it is to express yourself, the more alone you are. At your most intimate core, you are all alone.

A sad verse in the Book of Ecclesiastes captures this sentiment: “I have noted this further futility under the sun – the case of the man who is alone with no companion, who has neither son nor brother...”⁴ Perhaps this is the verse that inspired the famous Leonard Cohen poem:

I had a friend:
he lived and died in mighty silence
and with dignity,
left no book son or lover to mourn...⁵

Or perhaps it inspired the Woody Allen quip: “Life is full of misery and loneliness ... and it’s over much too soon.”

5. Finding Comfort

Since we all feel so alone, we should find it comforting to know that we really are not alone in our loneliness.

God, too, is very lonely, in His core and essence.

This loneliness derives from strength, not weakness. It derives from the fact that God is absolutely unique, “He is one, and there is none like Him.” And the same is true of our core. Our most lonely place – our essence – is a reflection of our profound individuality and uniqueness.

We feel alone in that intimate place not because we are excluded or hated – we are alone at the core because we, each one of us, are utterly unique, in a way that no one else can really understand.

Our core essence is quiet and still – it does not have the party element that accompanies our social interactions. When we are involved with

⁴ Ecclesiastes 4:7-8.

⁵ “There Are Some Men” from *The Spice-Box of Earth* by Leonard Cohen.

more outer, superficial levels, we can celebrate and share these moments with others. But our essence we experience alone precisely because it is our unique center.

6. Sanctuary on Earth

And yet, there is something else about our unique center that we learn from God – it doesn't want to dwell alone.

As special as His divine essence may be, God wanted company – He wanted to find a home in which He could dwell among human beings. Divine *revelation* manifests in the “heaven and the highest heaven,” but God *Himself* feels at home only on earth – in the Sanctuary that we build for Him.

We mirror this feeling. Just like God, we are not satisfied living inside our selves, isolated and apart from others. We need to build a space that we can call home – a sanctuary where we find respite, an environment where we can finally rest our lonely souls.

So the next time you feel all alone, remember two things:

- 1) Every essence is fundamentally alone, but your *loneliness* is shared by every soul and by God Himself (so in that respect you are not alone).
- 2) If you build a sanctuary out of your material life, if you sanctify the money and belongings you were blessed with, then that will provide your lonely essence – and the essence of the lonely God – with a warm home in which to rest in comfort.

This is the only sure antidote to loneliness – to connect with God and in so doing with the unity of oneness. Because when we connect with Him, we connect with all existence, all that there is, and in that place of unity, it is impossible to feel lonely. [May we arrive there quickly, in our days. Amen.]

7. Between the Cherubim (Optional)

Before I close, I would like to bring to your attention one more point:

When the Israelites had finally built the Sanctuary as instructed by God, the Cloud of Glory descended over the Holy of Holies.⁶ This was the sign that God's presence had come to rest among them.

There, in the inner sanctum, God would speak with Moses as He had promised:

"I will commune with you there, speaking to you from above the ark cover. From between the two cherubim that are on the Ark of the Covenant, and I will give you instructions for the Children of Israel."⁷

Who were these cherubim, and why were they such an important part of God's home on earth?

The cherubim were children – one male, one female – who were carved out of gold atop the ark cover. They represented, according to Kabbalah, the union of God's masculine and feminine energies. Note that these energies were not represented in the form of a patriarchal grandfather with a long white beard and his matronly counterpart. The form chosen by God was specifically that of two *children*!

This symbolically communicated God's great love of children, and especially His beloved Children of Israel, as He declared through the Prophet Hosea: "For Israel is a child, and I love him."⁸

But the very fact that the figures of two children were placed in such a prominent location in God's home indicates something even more profound.

We tend to believe that childhood represents an early stage of life, one to be outgrown as we mature and develop intellectually. We are expected to shed our childishness and move on into adulthood. But the covering of the ark sends a very different message. What is placed above the ark, as a shield, protection and as means of communication between

⁷ Exodus 25:22

⁸ Hosea 11:1.

God and His people? The child. So childhood, in God's perspective, represents an extremely holy stage of life.

Why is it that as adults, we no longer have the same free abandon as we did as children? How is it that we don't have the child's innocence and sense of adventure? We no longer enjoy childish delights. A child relishes the journey, we have no patience until we arrive there. Have we gained a new awareness, or have we lost a special gift?

The answer is a combination of the two.

As we grow and mature, we gain an intellectual awareness. Our horizons are broadened and we find interest in more sophisticated objectives than childish games. We also develop our transcendental needs, seeking to discover our purpose, and trying to understand how things must be utilized for a higher end. Yet our very sophistication causes us to lose touch with that innocent, essential divine side of our nature.

Our awareness of the darker sides of life, of our disappointments and difficulties, causes us to split ourselves into two – the inner and the outer. We are one person (the child) inside, and another (the adult) outside, dressed in our defensive armor. A dichotomy takes over our thinking. In our perception, the outer/physical and the inner/spiritual represent two antithetical worlds. And from this grows our existential loneliness – our awareness that our inner spiritual core dwells alone in a selfish and hostile world out there.

However, in an integrated, harmonious world, no such fragmentation exists. All of existence is a reflection of one unified truth. Thus, our most intimate self can be easily expressed on an outer level. Children don't have the dichotomy of adults. Their lives and drives are seamless – what you see is what you get. Because they have not yet developed complex defense mechanisms to protect themselves in an insecure world, their free spirit shines all the time. Children, therefore, don't feel alone; they don't suffer from existential loneliness.

Imagine all your drives and desires finding fulfillment in one unified purpose. Imagine being able to actualize your inner potential with no conflict from any outer or internal source. Imagine feeling less lonely.

In such a world, eating a pleasurable food and appreciating the divine benevolence that brought this food into being would be no less sublime than meditating on the deepest mysteries of creation. And this awareness is what every child essentially has from birth. The child may not know it – the knowledge comes through education. But the child's ability to revel unabashedly in the delights and pleasures of this world are actually an indication of a lofty spiritual status, where the physical does not threaten or negate the spiritual.

It's time to take a new look at childhood. Let's try to suffuse our worldly needs and indulgences with an awareness of the Divine. Remember that the ultimate is being able to synthesize all the components of our personality, from the most base to the most sublime, into a harmonious unit.⁹

So skip the guilt. God is not looking accusingly at you over your shoulder.

Skip the lonely-hearts routine. God is with you all the way.

Imagine, instead, the Divine Presence hovering lovingly and protectively above the cherubim. Imagine the Father of us all, the God who is smiling benignly down at all His children, for indeed, "Israel is a child, and I love him." Amen.

⁹ *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. XXVI, pp. 175-182.

© Copyright 2010 The Meaningful Life Center. By downloading this PDF file from Meaningful Sermons, you agree to respect the copyright of this written material. You understand that your right to this material is limited to using it to deliver sermons, classes or other oral presentations to your community. You agree not to publish this material or any part thereof, nor to email, fax, copy, scan, mail, etc. or otherwise share this material with others, nor to verbally share these ideas with others.