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SHEMOT

Trumah

Sizzle or Steak?

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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? The sizzle or the steak?

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.

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." "Sell the sizzle," they say,

“not the steak.”

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

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

1 Exodus 25:9.

2 Exodus 25:10.

3 Exodus 35:10-14.

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

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?

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

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

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.

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

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...”⁷

⁶ This part may work better as a class.

⁷ Exodus 38:21.

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.

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

⁸ Exodus 38:22.

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.

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!”

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

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 got? “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.

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