

"THE EDUCATION OF A LEADER"  
or: Do you Have to Like in Order to Love?

It is well known that the Sidra of Tetzaveh is unusual in that it is the only one in the whole Book of Exodus in which the name of Moses is not mentioned. What is less well known, but equally intriguing, is the succession of the second person singular pronoun, אתה ("you"), which occurs at the beginning of the reading this morning. Three times within the first five verses, God addresses Moses with the word: אתה, "and you." Thus, ואתה תצוה, and you shall command the Children of Israel that they bring you olive oil; ואתה תקרב, and you shall bring Aaron and his children the priests close to the service of the Lord; ואתה תדבר, and you shall speak to all the wise-hearted that they make the vestments of the priests.

The problem was already raised by some of the early commentators, such as Ramban and Seforno. The Zohar too was aware of the strange repetition of this word, and it maintained that the word represents רזא עזא, a supernal mystery.

How can we understand it, even without plumbing its mystic depths?

My suggestion is that all three come to teach Moses, in one way or another, the lesson of patience, tolerance, and forbearance.

I begin with what I consider a startling hypothesis -- at least when I discovered it, it startled and amazed me: *Moses did not like Jews!*

I do not mean that he was lacking in אהבת ישראל, the love of Israel, although he most certainly must have been accused of this by his enemies, critics, and detractors. Of course he loved Israel -- more so than anyone who ever lived. Remember that Moses was the only human being in history to whom God made the offer that on his behalf He would abandon the Children of Israel, and raise up a new people from his, Moses', loins, and that this people would be the Chosen People, descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob -- and Moses. But Moses refused. He gave up this stunning opportunity. Not only that, but his refusal bespoke his feeling of injury on behalf of his people, when he turned to God and said: Forgive this people, ואם אין, מחני נא גםפרך, and if not, erase me from Thy Book. He loved the Jews so much he was willing to forfeit, for them, his life, his fate, his very eternity.

But he did not particularly like them. By this I mean, that he did not find them congenial, he was not comfortable with them, did not enjoy their presence, he had little respect for them, he had no desire to impress them, he did not seek their approbation, and there was no mutuality between them.

Truth to tell, Moses was not the sort of man whom it was easy to get along with or make him like you. It is usually difficult to develop an easy relationship with a perfectionist, let alone the greatest prophet who ever lived. And it is equally true that there was not much to like about these Israelites. They were an impetuous and whining and complaining lot. Moses broke open for them the horizons of Heaven, and they concentrated only on their trivial needs and petty wants. He offered them a career of kedushah, holiness, and they snivelled about leeks and onions and garlic and cucumbers. He offered freedom, and they complained they were thirsty. He pointed to the heights of the spirit, and they complained about the fleshpots of Egypt. Additionally, they were ungrateful, stubborn, slow to learn, and narrow. So, Moses loved them enough to risk and sacrifice all for

them; but he did not really like them too much.

As a result, he was impatient with them, intolerant, angry, and usually upset.

Remember that according to the Sages, the portions we are now reading are not presented in chronological order. Thus, last week's portion and this week's, Terumah and Tetzaveh, really belong after next week's portion of Ki-Tisa. This means that our portion this morning was given after the incident of the worship of the Golden Calf. So that when this morning's commandments were given to Moses, he was already quite disenchanted with this people. He was disgusted with and contemptuous of them. He set his tent far off from their camp, far off even from his brother Aaron, the High Priest. The people reciprocated his love with awe, and his contempt with fear.

Hence, the mitzvot of this Sidra must have puzzled, bemused, and even scandalized Moses. He must have thought: What is all this business with oil for the candelabrum? If their hearts are dark and their eyes are blind, who needs a menorah? What good will it do to light candles, if they are spiritually totally insensitive?

Who needs the priesthood, kohanim? Who wants it? What good will it do, especially after the head of all the priests, my brother Aaron, had failed so miserably and allowed the people to fashion a Golden Calf by feebly trying to postpone and procrastinate instead of protesting vigorously?

And all this pomp and ceremony of the בגד' כהונה, the priestly vestments, the clothing and the gems, must have left Moses cold and sardonically amused. This is the man who, all alone, climbed to the top of the mountain and carved the Ten Commandments with his bare hands into the cold stone -- without bands, without public relations, without uniforms, without medals. And now he sees this new enthusiasm for mere externals! Moses' nerves must have been frayed, his temper short.

So the divine command comes in answer and says: ואתה, "You!"

Moses, you condemn the Israelites for lacking an inner light, and you are angry why I have them play the game of lighting the menorah. You probably contrast their merely physical act of הדלקת נרות, of the kindling of the lights, with the supernal light of revelation when you gave them the Torah. Well then, Moses, remember: Your light, no matter how sublime, comes from them, no matter how petty and simple they may be! God is educating the greatest leader of all: ואתה תצוה, You Moses -- you who appreciate the inadequacy of your Jews -- you are the one who must ask and beseech and command that ויקחו אליך שמן זית, that they take to you pure olive oil, that they bring it to you! Without them, your own illumination is dimmed, your enlightenment is ineffective, your spirit is enfeebled. Your strength derives from them! Remember Moses: אני צריך ואני לא צריך -- I, God, do not need their light; you do! You may not like them, Moses, but if you love them, you will learn patience and humility and tolerance -- because you need them!

Similarly for the second ואתה. Moses objected to the priesthood. He considered that it failed at the very beginning. He probably thought (if we may translate into the context of our contemporary lives): If you have a Rosh Yeshiva, who needs a Rav?... Priests, Moses undoubtedly said, are mere religious functionaries, directors of ritual, ecclesiastical masters of ceremony. And the people need prophets, not priests. We must not allow them to play

religious games but to be religious.

So Moses despaired of the kohanim, the priests. He faulted Aaron for liking the Jews too much, for being too close to them, for identifying too much with hoi polloi, the masses, and therefore bringing on this great catastrophe of the Golden Calf.

Therefore does the word of God come to Moses: וְאַתָּה הִקְרַב אֵלַיךְ אֶת אֶהֱרֹן וְאֶת בְּנָיו אִתּוֹ, "And you bring nigh unto you your brother Aaron and his children with him." It is not enough to love Jews from afar. Someone has got to talk with them as well as at them, listen to them as well as command them, respect as well as criticize, appeal as well as scold. If you, Moses, are unable to do that, then don't. But וְאַתָּה הִקְרַב, if you truly love them, as a leader you will provide for them someone who likes them as well!

So too for the last element, the priestly vestments. Moses must have felt more outraged about this more than about anything else. There was to be מִצֵּי וְכִתּוּנֹת תְּשֻׁבֵץ מִצַּנְפֶּת וְאַבְנֹט... תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן תּוֹלַעַת שֵׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ "Robes, chequered tunics, mitres, girdles... blue and purple and scarlet, linen..." But what is all this fuss about? Who needs these weavers and stitchers and tailors and dyers? Who asked for a biblical Seventh Avenue in the precincts of the Sanctuary?

And then, what are all these gem-cutters doing cluttering up the Sanctuary, muting the voice of God?

אֲבָנֵי שֹהַם מְעֻשֵׂי חֶרֶשׁ מִשְׁבְּצוֹן זָהָב שְׂרָשְׁרוֹת זָהָב אוֹדָם פֶּטָדָה בְּרִקְתָּ נוֹפֵךְ סִפִּיר וְהַלּוֹם... "Onyx stones, engravings, gold settings, gold chains, carnelian, topaz, carbuncles, sapphires, emeralds, diamonds..." What have we here, a 47th Street of the Sinai?

In answer comes the third וְאַתָּה as God tells Moses: וְאַתָּה תְּדַבֵּר אֶל כָּל חַכְמֵי לֵב אֲשֶׁר מָלֵאתִיב רוּחַ חֵכְמָה "And you shall speak to all the wise-hearted whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom." Moses, it may be true that your wisdom is of an infinitely superior kind, the wisdom of the head and the soul and the spirit -- but do not denigrate those whose wisdom lies in their hearts and in their hands, the artisans and the craftsmen, the simple folk who bring their gifts to God by offering to prepare the clothing and the gems of the priestly vestments. The people may be petty and sometimes obnoxious, but there is a fundamental and simple wise-heartedness in them that we must evoke. And don't deprecate the people's desire and need for externals. You as the great prophet may be able to get along without it, but ordinary people live by symbols and appearances and impressions and even esthetics. It is part of your own growth, Moses, to appreciate that others may need mere externals לְכַבּוֹד וְלִתְפָאֳרָה, for honor and for beauty, even if you do not. Therefore וְאַתָּה תְּדַבֵּר, it is you yourself who must offer this commandment to them. If you love them, even if you don't like them, you must provide for them and understand them and sympathize with them.

That is why three times the Torah emphasizes וְאַתָּה, all of them coming to teach the great leader how to become a greater leader, with patience and tolerance and humility and forbearance.

וְאַתָּה תְּלַוּהוּ taught Moses that the leader's illumination and greatness derives from his people. וְאַתָּה הִקְרַב taught him that the people need liking as well as loving, and he must provide someone to do that task. וְאַתָּה תְּדַבֵּר taught him that the people need and deserve externals and esthetics and symbols, and they must be able to show their devotion through these means.

No wonder that the Zohar, which saw in ואתה what we have referred to as רזא עלאק, a supernal mystery, explained that by saying that in this one word God told Moses שכינתא בהדיא, to include the Shechinah in his acts which he was now commanded.

The term שכינה comes from the Hebrew word שכן, a neighbor. It implies that aspect of God which indicates closeness and warmth, nearness and sympathy. Moses must act towards his people with the aspect of Shechinah. He must learn from God Himself what R. Yochanan taught (Meg. 31a): בכּ מקום שאתה מוצא גדולתנו של הקב"ה אתה מוצא ענותנותו, "Wherever you find the greatness of the Holy One, you find His meekness," His readiness to come down and hear the heartbeat of every human, especially the lonely and the sick and the suffering.

So the greatness of a leader -- and Moses is the archetype of a great leader -- is when he can combine גדולה and עלותנות, distance and proximity, criticism and friendship, when if he loves them but does not like them he will at least provide for them someone who will -- giving the people affection and warmth and the security that all of us seek בכּ מקום שאתה מוצא גדולתו ... אתה ענותנות מוצא. Wherever you find the word אתה, "you," there you will find the combination of greatness and meekness; there the superiority of the great man will be tempered by his patience and his love for those who are subordinate to him.

This is the אתה of Moses.