

Shemot

“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh or that I should bring Israel out of Egypt?” (Ex.3:11). History has revealed very few statesmen who, in their passion for influence, authority, fame, wealth and power, did not ‘seize the moment.’ The authentic humility of Moses meant that greatness had to be thrust upon him.

Va’eira

“Behold the children of Israel do not listen to me, so how should Pharaoh?” (Ex.6:12). It has well been said that ‘it was more difficult to bring Egypt out of the Hebrews than the Hebrews out of Egypt.’ The Diaspora is deceptively alluring and comfortable, and the struggle for independence demands self-sacrifice, courage, discipline and the surrender of the many comforts that the status quo offers.

Beshalach

With the blast of Thy nostrils the waters were piled up. The floods stood upright as a heap... (Ex.15:8). In the aftermath of the Sunami, this account of gigantic tidal waves wreaking sudden destruction on the entirety of the Egyptian army and its chariots becomes uncomfortably graphic and plausible. The ‘miracle’ may now be viewed as a natural phenomenon invested with unnatural quality, quantity and power.

Yitro

The generations that were spared the Holocaust are not spared the awesome duty of preventing its recurrence.

Mishpatim

The slave who refuses to go free after serving his six year sentence, preferring the domestic cosiness of his master’s home, is branded on his ear and forever loses the right to freedom. He has, essentially, undermined the entire objective of both the Creation and the Exodus. Man’s role is to assume responsibility, to be master of his destiny, not its slave. Once we leave it to others to determine our lives, then we open the door to exploitation, oppression and totalitarianism. Indeed, to everything that our “mishpatim” (justice system) abhors.

Terumah

Israel’s first Sanctuary was portable. The true sanctuary is not the one that we enter inside, but the one inside of us.

Tetazaveh

And now bring near Aaron...and his sons with him, from among the Children of Israel (Ex.28:1). Unlike the ecclesiasts of so many other ancient cults and later religions, who constituted themselves into an elite and privileged fraternity, the priests of Israel had to be ever mindful of the fact that they were ‘from among the children of Israel.’ The hallmark of their calling was *avodah*, ‘service.’ They were to consecrate themselves both to the service of God and to that of their brethren.

Ki Tissa

When he saw them acclaiming the Golden Calf that they themselves had fashioned, Moses broke the Two Tablets, depriving Israel forever of the product of God's hands. Once man deifies his own intellect, creativity, science and technology, he deserves to forfeit the manifold benefits, blessings and grace inherent in God's law.

Vayakheil

The Israelites donated so overwhelmingly of their choice possessions for the making of the Sanctuary that Moses had to call a halt to the giving (see Exodus 36:5-6).

If we Jews possess one special attribute that has never been challenged, it is our unique level of sensitivity and generosity toward good causes.

Pekudei

The Midrash states that when the Sanctuary was completed it was so heavy that no one could raise it to its upright position. God instructed Moses to do so, but he shied away from attempting the task. "Just try," said God. When Moses applied just a little exertion, the Sanctuary miraculously raised itself up. When we commit ourselves to a lofty spiritual objective, its spirit carries us forward and invests us with undreamed of power. When we elevate ourselves, we elevate everything around us.

Parashat Zachor

The command to blot out the memory of Amalek "from under the heavens" (Deut. 25:19) suggests that the Amalek philosophy is not only a threat to Israel, but to the entire human race. Once unleashed, the virus of racism and anti-Semitism is pandemic. It is never confined to one target.

Tzav

Pride is listed as one of the seven deadly sins. Pride in one's learning and spiritual attainment is quite another matter. That this is commendable, or, at the least, pardonable, is clearly stated in the concluding verses of our Haftarah: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, the warrior in his strength or the rich in his riches. Only in this may one justifiably boast: in his understanding and knowledge of Me..." (Jeremiah 9: 23).