

Care for Your Soul
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Growing up we never enjoyed visiting relatives. The reason was pretty clear. My father never liked visiting relatives and he passed that along to us. The same was true of museums. Actually, the two were very similar in that many of my relatives were ancient artifacts. That is the nature of family dynamics. We not only get DNA from our parents, but also many of their impressions and sentiments. In many ways, we pick up what they feel and what they believe. We pick things up and then we make them our own. Our parents, our siblings and our friends teach us all of the time and we are consciously and subconsciously taking in their ideas etc.... Sometimes we put our ideas on someone else and sometimes we take other's on and in ourselves. Some of that material is junk and some of it is worthwhile, some we fight to hold on to and some we work equally hard to let go of. It happens all of the time. When we realize this is happening to us all of the time, we recognize why we do some of the things we do. However, in the end we are who we are and we must learn to take care of ourselves. Last week I spoke of this - figuring out who we are. I spoke of the need to hold up a mirror to our inner selves to find out who we are. Today I ask you, what do you need? Have you started caring for yourself? We have to figure out what our needs are and learn to care for ourselves. There is so much static in our world that, at times, we can no longer hear our own voice. We are so harried and pulled in every direction by family and friends, that we don't even have an opportunity to see our own reflection.

The example I often give while trying to explain this principle is one I heard from my teacher and mentor, Rabbi Vernon Kurtz. For those of you who have taken a long airline flight, I'm sure you know the instructions that are given before take off. "If there's a sudden drop in cabin pressure, an oxygen mask will appear. Place your mask on first, then assist any small children with theirs." It is quite opposite of our intuition. It runs against our instinct. Our reflex is to protect our children first and then care for our selves. However, the explanation makes perfect sense. If your oxygen is cut off, you are not able to help your children. If you put your mask on first, then you can give them what they need. Putting your mask on first gives you the opportunity to really take care of them. I promise you, if you honestly and sincerely work at developing yourself, it will be enough for those who depend on you. You will be a better friend, a better spouse, a better son or daughter and even a better parent.

There is so much we can learn from a simple name in the Torah. Bezalel is the most famous of the artisans that worked in the Tabernacle. He is described as skillful and wise. He is described as creative. His name means, "in the shadow of the almighty." While working in the shadow of God, he creates extraordinary vessels for the holy service of the tabernacle. However, it is his co-worker's name that produces much more food for fodder. The Kli Yakar explains how Oholiav ben Ahisamach got his name. *She'nikra kach al shem ki hu yibane ohel moed l'avinu she'ba'shamayim*. He was called *Oholiav* because he built the tent of meeting for our Father who is in Heaven. Then his second name, the son of Achisamach - *ki shem makom simichut ha'achim*, because it is in the place where brothers can rely on one another. The Kli Yakar makes it clear, from the name of Oholiav Ben Achisamach, that his contribution was that he helped build a place where God resides, not just in place but in peace. Oholiav Ben Achisamach

is clearly the product of his genetic code. Oholiav Ben Achisamach in his name that is connected both to his father and to his brothers. We, like Oholiav Ben Achisamach, are the product of our families of origin and we have a unique contribution to make.

However, the entire verse in which Oholiav is introduced to us, is the most enlightening. “To give direction he and Oholiav have been endowed with the skill to do any of the work.” (Exodus 35:34-35) Yet the word used to open the sentence is *l’horot*, to teach, to instruct. Bezalel and Oholiav teach us. Bezalel is from the tribe of Judah, which is the largest most powerful tribe and Oholiav is from the tribe of Dan, which is the smallest tribe. They both come to teach us. As long as we know who we are, whether we come from the largest, most prominent family, or from the smallest, we have a contribution to make. Both of these artists have God given talents that will be used to build a most significant physical structure and they do so because they know who they are. The Torah tells us who they are. The Torah tells us who their parents were, the Torah tells us who their siblings were, and the Torah tells us which tribe they came from. We know who they were and they knew who they were. Once that foundation has been laid, then and only then, could they make their contribution.

Before we can begin to fill another’s needs, we have to figure out who we are and what our needs are. Before Oholiav could build a structure for the Jewish people, before he could build a structure for his family, before he could build a structure for his father – he had to build it for himself. I know this sounds selfish, but it is actually selfless. We have to take care of ourselves first and we have to know what we stand for before we can stand for anyone else. Once we are well cared for, then we can truly provide for the needs of another. We cannot, and should not expect that someone else will be able to do for us that which we are not capable of doing for ourselves.

A young mother wants to get out to a yoga class, or an art class, a tennis lesson or...you fill in the blank. However, she is stuck at home with the children. She had already worked out with her husband that he would get home in time for her to leave so she could get the hour she desperately needs for herself, but he is running late. He doesn’t make it home until well into the night, long after the children have been bathed and put to bed. She is able to hold it together for that one evening and she survives without doing any damage, but as that becomes a recurring event she begins to resent being stuck at home. She begins to feel trapped. When her needs aren’t being met, she stops being a good mother. When her needs aren’t being met, she stops being a good spouse. Just like a flower, we too need nourishment. When we get proper nourishment, our scent is fragrant, the sight of us is beautiful. When our needs are met, we blossom and there is enough of us to go around.

After the Jewish people’s souls have been feed, after their physical needs are met, the Torah teaches, *V’ham’lachah ha’y’tah dayam* “*Their efforts had been more than enough*” (Exodus 36:7) In our *parashah*, B’nei Yisrael – all of the men, women and children – are asked to contribute to the building of the *mishkan*. The people voluntarily give fabric, building materials, architectural expertise and money because when we feel taken care of, then we can freely give of ourselves.

We are the product of our world, the product of the people in our lives and the product of our surroundings. We need to learn to care for who we are. In a rich book by Thomas Moore entitled, *Care of the Soul*, he teaches that narcissism is a condition whereby a person does not love oneself. He then illustrates this point with two stories of Narcissus:

“One day Narcissus loses sight of his friends and cries out, “Is anyone here?”

“Here,” Echo answers.

“Let’s meet here,” Narcissus says.

“Meet here,” Echo responds. But when she approaches him, Narcissus backs away.

“I would die before I give my power to you,” he says.

“I would give my power to you,” she says in her own way.”

The young man approaches a pool of water, so still and smooth that it has never been disturbed by human or animal. It is surrounded by a cool, dark grove of trees. As Narcissus puts his head into the water to get a drink, he sees his image in the water and is frozen. Ovid describes Narcissus as fascinated by his ivory neck. Like the young people who desired him before, Narcissus feels a great yearning to possess this form. He reaches into the water but he can’t get hold of it. “What are we looking for,” Ovid says, “is no where. Turn your head away and see what you love is lost.”

Oh that we could enjoy the reflection we see and the sound of our own voice.

Rainer Maria Rilke was a poet whose philosophy was transforming the everyday into the sacred, the invisible into the visible. In a famous letter of 1925 he writes, “Our task is to stamp this provisional, perishing earth into ourselves so deeply, so painfully and passionately, that its being may rise again, ‘invisibly’ within us. (*Care of the Soul* by Thomas Moore, page 75.)

Take care of your soul first, then you will be able to better care for your kids, take care of your neshama first, then you can shape the neshama of your children. Take care of yourself, then you can help care for our community. Come to a class that you find enriching, then you will be better equipped to do those other tasks in your life.

I never like to conclude without giving you an opportunity to make these words your own by joining me in the reading found in our Shabbat Brochure.

“Let us go forth in confidence from this sacred place. And may the blessing of God go with us. Let us take with us the words we have just heard, and may God give us resolve to fill our desires. May God’s spirit be with us and with those we love, and may we be granted health and contentment.

And may God give us strength, hope and vision – in a world at peace and let us say Amen.”