

"UPLIFTED"

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It is really unnecessary to dwell on the importance of inspiration in life. Inspiration is that which makes the dull exciting, which fills the routine with a sense of mystery, and which transforms the prosaic into the poetic. Without inspiration, art reduces to mere photography, music to a form of applied mathematics, and teaching is nothing more than mechanical informing.

It is no different with religion. Without spirit, without inspiration, there is a danger of religious practice freezing into mechanical behavior. When our rabbis told us Al taas tefilat'kha keva, "do not make your prayer a matter of routine," they meant to emphasize the element of inspiration in prayer. It is precisely that element which makes the great difference between the two Yiddish terms "davnen" and "updavnen."

But while it is unnecessary to persuade anyone of the importance of inspiration, it is necessary to analyze its meaning, its cause and its effect in the Jewish scheme of things. For Judaism decidedly has a judgment on the matter.

The Jewish view of inspiration can best be understood in contrast with a prevalent non-Jewish view, in which inspiration is taken as a detached and isolated phenomenon. It is assumed that it is something which has no inner cause and no outer effect. It comes out of nowhere, and leads into no place. A representative of this point of view is the renowned English philosopher and psychologist, William James, in his "Varieties of Religious Experience," in which the main theme is that of religious inspiration. In order for one to achieve the Divine Presence, according to James, "he must relax." Inspiration just "happens" to you, it is not related to your striving for it. And while it may transform your life, it has no necessary effect upon society and your fellow men.

It is against this view that the Jewish idea of inspiration can best be understood. Judaism does not see inspiration as something that

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is unrelated to the rest of life. It is so intertwined with all other experiences that there is no special separate word for it. You might call it hashraat ha-shekhinah -- the Divine Presence resting upon a person; or in the prophetic language, va-tehi yad ha-Shem alay -- the hand of G-d falls upon one; or in the language of Hassidism and the Kabala, hitpashtut ha-gashmiyut -- divesting of oneself of material life -- or devekut, communion with G-d. It is part of religious life, not a self-contained world or experience.

So the first thing that we ought to say about inspiration is that in order to attain it one must look for it, strive for it, work for it. It doesn't just "happen" to you. You must dig into life, and strain to the utmost reaches of experience in order to achieve it. You cannot relax; quite the contrary, you must work for it.

The most inspiring thing ever to happen to mankind was the giving of Torah at Mount Sinai. Twice this event occurred. The first time we read va-yered ha-Shem al har sinai -- that the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai. The Lord worked, Israel did not. As a matter of fact, so relaxed were our ancestors that according to the Midrash they were asleep on the morning of Revelation and Moses had to arouse them from their slumber. And yet when he came down he found his people dancing about a golden calf and broke the tablets of the Law. G-d, according to our rabbis, was highly satisfied with Moses' reaction. He told him yeyashar koach she-shibartam -- I congratulate you for having destroyed such tablets. For when inspiration is achieved in a relaxed manner, without strain and striving, then it cannot and ought not last.

The second time that the Torah was given Moses again requested of the Lord that He appear to him, that Moses waits whilst the Lord teaches: hareni na et kevodekha -- show me Your Glory. But this time G-d will not

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satisfy man's request for easy inspiration. G-d responds: ani savir et kol tuvi lefanekha -- yes, I shall make all My Glory appear before you, but first: hinei makomiti ve'nitzavta al ha-tzur -- here is place beside Me and you shall stand upon the top of the mountain, buffeted by strong and cold winds, alone and without support, working, straining, aspiring. You shall not be able to rely upon My work for you. Pesal lekha shenei luchot -- hew the tablets out of the mountain with your own muscles, bend your own backs, v'ish lo yaaleh imakh -- and go up alone, without accompaniment, without dramatics, all by yourself. When the inspiration of Revelation was received in this manner, the Torah lasted forever. Inspiration easily acquired is easily lost.

Dear friends, of all the impressions of the last several weeks the most outstanding in my mind is that of inspiration. Having visited what is probably the poorest Jewish community in the world, lost in a morass of ignorance, I yet found a tremendous inspiration for Judaism and a desire to learn. These people have been isolated, low cast, yet today they are thriving, **still** Jewish, still anxious to learn Torah. Could they have achieved this through relaxing? Never! Through relaxation they would have long assimilated to pagan India. It is only through hard labor, with hard effort, stiff-necked stubbornness, zeal and loyalty bordering on the fanatic, that they have been able to survive to this day. This is what one must do in order to achieve the inspiration of Divine Presence. There must be the command, motivated from within, of pesal lekha shenei luchot -- hew out the tablets of life from the mountains of existence. Stand on top of the cliff and reach up for Divine Inspiration.

Of all the ways in which to work in order to attain this inspiration, the best is: the study of Torah, education. Listen to the moving

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Midrash in this week's portion. Of the expression "and they shall take from Me an offering" it can be compared, say the rabbis, to a king who has a one and only daughter. He arranged for another king, a young man, to marry her. After the wedding, the young king wishes to take his wife back to his country. Whereupon the older man turned to him and said: My daughter, whom I have given you is the only one I have, the only one in my life. To depart from her I cannot. To tell you that you may not take her, that I also cannot, for she is your wife. But do me this one favor: Wherever you go to build your home, make me one little room in some remote corner of the palace that I may dwell with you, for I cannot bear to think of leaving my daughter. So when G-d gave the Torah to Israel he said: I have given you My Torah. Depart from it I cannot. To tell you that you may not have it that I also cannot. But when you take the Torah, keep one chamber therein where you will remember Me and recognize My Divine Spirit. Thus, "they shall take for Me an offering," should be read "they shall take Me together with My offering of Torah."

So, in the place of Torah, there is a chamber of Divine Presence. You cannot reach G-d except if you traverse the ground of Torah. You cannot reach within the walls of inspiration until you have penetrated the place of education.

This is what our major effort must be in Israel. This must be our major effort in the United States. And this was my own humble effort in India. When I hear people complaining that the service is uninspiring, the Torah reading uninspiring, I would urge them to remember that inspiration must be worked at and achieved only through learning. Work at Hebrew, study the Bible, then you will achieve the inspiration of the service.

Never shall I forget the one outstanding incident of my recent visit.

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I had just come out of a lecture in a "prayer hall" in the poorest section of poor India. A number of young teen-age boys crowded about me, and I was told that they wanted to ask me something. I tried to think: what is it they want? These were all barefoot children. Do they want shoes? They are hungry children. Do they desire food? Many of them sleep in the streets for they have no homes; do they want their rich American relatives to help them with a roof over their heads? The answer to all these was: no. For they turned to me, and in broken English, said: "Rabbi, give us Hebrew books."

It is this kind of aspiration which leads to inspiration. It is the striving and love for learning that will make for true, lasting Jews.

Finally, inspiration not only must have a definite cause, but it must also lead to something greater than itself. For it is not only a psychological experience. It is rather a halfway point on the slope of the mountain of the Lord. You must climb until you reach it; and when you have reached it, it must give you the energy and motivation to continue to the peak. I would use two words: inspiration and the feeling of being uplifted. Inspiration, as its root indicates, means to breathe in, to be passive and simply inhale the electricity of the spirit. To be uplifted, that means to reach upward, to strive, to raise yourself to the summit of life. Inspiration alone is a form of spiritual entertainment; to be uplifted means to reach the climax of spiritual creativity. Inspiration is a luxury; the feeling of upliftedness is a vital necessity. If I am inspired it may send a chill down my spine; if I am uplifted it sends warmth into my heart and soul. Inspiration is a blossom in the orchard of the spirit. Being uplifted is its ripened fruit.

In other words, to be uplifted means not only to be inspired, but, in turn, to inspire others. The philosopher Plato explained this with his simile of the ring. If you have a magnet, it will attract to it an

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iron ring. But it does more than merely "inspire" the ring and hold it. It also enables that ring, in turn, to attract a second ring, and that a third, and that a fourth, and so on. Similarly, inspiration is that which leads you to inspire others so that a whole chain of ecstasy appears in the world. Indeed, inspiration must lead to blessings that transcend it itself. In our Haftorah this morning you read that the Lord gave chokhmah, wisdom, to Solomon "as He had spoken to him." This was more than the gift of intellectual excellence and mental brilliance. It was the gift of wisdom "as He had spoken to him" -- and Solomon had asked not only for intellectual competence, but also for an "understanding heart," the wisdom that is inspired and spiritual. That is why the very next part of the verse tells us "and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon." Chokhmah led to Shalom. The wisdom was inspired, hence uplifting -- leading to peace. Thus, and only thus, can the world be transformed into the kind of place worthy of being inhabited by people created in the Image of G-d.

Oseh shalom bi-meromay, May G-d who creates peace on high, who sends down inspiration from above, hu yaaseh shalom aleinu v'el kol yisrael -- may He cause us to rise upward, by establishing peace in our midst so that these mundane blessings will lift us up to the highest heights of human experience.