Being Chosen: Thoughts for Parashat Tsav

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Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Tsav

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When I was a student in Yeshiva, one of my Talmud teachers offered a parable to our class. Imagine that a general assembled his best soldiers and told them he needed to choose one of them for a vital mission. The mission would require tremendous skill and courage. But it was very dangerous. If the recruit would succeed in this mission, our people would be saved. If, though, the recruit failed, the results would be disastrous

The general cast his eyes over the group of soldiers and then pointed to one of them: “You are the one! I appoint you!”

How would that soldier feel? On the one hand, he might be overwhelmed with fear and anxiety; so much responsibility would now be resting on his shoulders. Yet, he would also feel tremendously proud and honored. Of all possible candidates, he was chosen as the best able to fulfill this mission. The general had paid him the ultimate tribute by this demonstration of confidence.

Our rabbi then explained the parable: The Almighty is looking for individuals who will undertake the mission of bringing the word of God to humanity. It is a difficult, frustrating mission, fraught with innumerable challenges and dangers. There are so many obstacles in the way. Who is capable enough and courageous enough to undertake this mission? And then God points directly to you: You are the one! I appoint you! If one internalizes this appointment from the Almighty, one might initially feel intimidated and unconfident. Yet, one will then realize the great honor that has been bestowed. One will rally internal strength and courage to live up to the Divine expectation. The challenges are great, but so are the opportunities.

The lesson: each of us is supposed to see ourselves as having been chosen to bring the ideas and ideals of Torah to our society and to the world at large. Although this responsibility is weighty and can be dangerous, we may undertake

this mission with joy. We can strive to live up to the confidence the Almighty has placed in us.

In this week's Torah portion, we read of the inauguration of Aaron and his sons as the priests in the Mishkan (sanctuary). Many readers are not particularly interested in the details of how the cohanim were to be dressed or how they were to conduct the rituals. Yet, perhaps we should be thinking of these passages as symbols of being chosen for a sacred responsibility. Just as the cohanim were chosen as the officiants in the Mishkan, the entire people of Israel was chosen to be "a holy nation and a kingdom of priests."

Each individual is expected to draw on his/her best strengths and talents in order to fulfill his/her distinctive mission in life. If one internalizes the feeling of having been chosen to accomplish great things, one can live with vision, energy and sense of purpose.

Angel for Shabbat