Communication: Thoughts for Parashat Tetsaveh

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Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Tetsaveh

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

“And you shall command the children of Israel…” (Shemot 27:20)

“And you shall bring near to you Aaron and his sons… (Shemot 28:1).

“And you shall speak to all who are wise-hearted…” (Shemot 28:3).

This week’s Parasha opens with three different words alluding to three different means of communication.

Command: Sometimes the public (and individuals) need clear orders. A “commander in chief” must mobilize constituents and spell out specific responsibilities. If a major undertaking is at stake, forceful leadership is often required. Without the command, things might not get done properly…or at all. When Moses was dealing with the children of Israel, he frequently had to energize people by giving commands.

Bring Near: Sometimes commands don’t work. The public (or individuals) are reluctant to take responsibility or simply do not like to be given orders. In such circumstances, it is best not to command but to draw near. Offer words of encouragement. Let them know you appreciate and value them and that you know they are up to the task at hand. Thoughtful words are more effective than cold commands. It is better to talk with…not at. When Moses instructed Aaron to begin his service as high priest, the Midrash suggests that Aaron was hesitant. He needed Moses to draw him near, to encourage and strengthen him.

Speak: Ideally, the way to move forward is with direct communication where people feel part of the process. When Moses spoke to the “wise-hearted” he was speaking with those who were self-motivated. They didn’t need commands or encouraging words. They needed to have candid discussion about how to proceed; they needed to feel that they were valued partners in the work ahead.

Communication is not only about issuing a message; it requires that the message be received. Each context has its own dynamics. Each parent/leader/rabbi etc. must have the sensitivity to choose the

right means of communication for each situation.

Whether one commands, brings near, or speaks, one must be attuned to the mindset of the recipients. A message, no matter how excellent, is only successful if it is received and acted upon appropriately.