

Called to Rise

By Mordechai Gafni

An orchestra is composed of many instruments, all of them necessary for making music. Each instrument is distinct and special without being "better" than any other. To participate in the symphony, you must be familiar with all the instruments, yet be particularly responsive to the unique call of your own instrument. While you may be a dabbler at many instruments, you must be master of your own.

Every calling is great only when greatly pursued. If everyone played the same instrument, the music would just be loud and boring; it would lack texture and harmony. So it is with life itself. The great diversity of this world requires radical individualism. We contribute to the harmonious symphony of being only when we master our own unique soul prints.

The third book of the Bible opens with the words, "Vayikra el Moshe." Literally translated from the Hebrew, the phrase means, "God called to Moses and God spoke." Is it not enough for God to speak? Why must he call first? The Hasidic master Nachum of Chernobyl explains that only if one experiences the call first can one hear the words. For the kabbalistic reader, Moses stands in for all of us. We are all called. And, as it was for Moses, so it is for us: our life is an adventure in which we answer the call or we do not. Living means being called-and responding.

What would life be like if we heard no call? Jean Paul Sartre and his school of existentialism, which has shaped much of the postmodern sensibility, pursued that path. In a work aptly titled, *Nausea*, Sartre wrote:

Man can will nothing unless he has first understood that he must count on no one but himself; that he is alone, abandoned on earth in the midst of his infinite responsibilities, without help, with no other aim than the one he sets himself, with no other destiny than the one he forges for himself on this earth.

Sartre understands that an unfriendly universe which issues no call to the individual is a place of nausea. Yet, he cannot imagine that he is called. For those engaged in biblical consciousness, however, (*mysterium tremendum* notwithstanding), the universe is constantly issuing invitations for our engagement. For us, an essential energy, a force if you will, courses through the universe, knows our name, and calls us. To live, for biblical man and woman, is to be addressed. To be addressed is to be called by a personal destiny that is profoundly needed by the world and can be filled by you alone.

Too often, we don't hear that address, or worse, we are told not to listen. The discipline of psychology, especially in its classical forms, seeks to undermine our sense of calling. It pathologizes our urge to find our vocation, diagnosing it as character disorder, neurosis, manic depression or grandiosity. One wonders, along with therapist Otto Rank, whether psychology's denial of human grandeur is not itself partially responsible for the symptoms and complexes it then so delightfully labels. All of the psychoanalysis in the world will not allow you to find out

who you are, why you are here on earth, why you have to die, or how you can make your life a triumph. When psychology tries to offer itself as a full explanation for human motivation, it becomes a fraud.

Protestant theologian Frederick Buechner defines the call this way: "Neither the hair shirt nor the soft berth will do. The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." A calling is not a job or an occupation: it is a vocation. It is not what you do for a living—it is your very life.

The word "vocation" is derived from the Latin *vocare*, to call. Calling is an issue of voice. You must sense the voice of the caller, then find your own voice, and realize the two are the same. Our vocal expression in the world is melodious only if we sing in response to *vocare*, the call of our vocation. When you find your radical uniqueness, your voice, then you find God.

Often we try to escape from the singularity of our call. The clarion call can be so loud that we go deaf from its decibels. Its voice can shout so directly to our soul prints that it is exhilarating and affirming, yet frightening. The first response of the Hebrews to the calling voice at Sinai—which, according to the Kabbalists, was an inner voice—was to be absolutely overwhelmed and to run. In an earlier story, Moses himself hides his face so as not to be overpowered from the voice calling him from the Burning Bush. When the prophet Jonah hears an inner voice calling him to teach in the Assyrian city of Nineveh, he books immediate passage on a boat—going in the other direction. It is only when going in the opposite direction wreaks havoc on his life and he finds himself trapped in the belly of the whale that he sets course for Nineveh.

We run because we fear we are not up to the job. So we ignore our unique calling. We try to join the magnificent symphony of being without learning our particular instrument. But that strategy never works, for everyone knows that you're not invited to join a symphony without having mastered your particular instrument.

Ever present in us is the temptation to take the Eden Express back to the idyllic oneness of the Garden, to the time before human being was called to action. But the tree of life must be the tree of your life, your instrument, your soul print.

We are all heading in the same direction toward the vocation that comes from the authentic realization of our soul prints. Yet we can only reach our destination by taking our different paths. All-One-Ness is achievable only through aloneness and singularity. Beyond our important ties with a particular spiritual community, we must all create our own religion. Teaching in the time of the Temple, the seer Chabakuk exclaimed, "The righteous live by their faith." Contemporary mystic Abraham Kuk rereads "their faith" to be their particular faith, that is, their soul print. You are called to be the priest in the temple of yourself.

Chaim Vital, a sixteenth-century kabbalist who lived in the Galilee, expressed this idea by saying that every person has his or her own specific letter of the Bible. My letter is not yours and yours is not mine; our sacred text is created when all the unique letters form sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and ultimately, an entire narrative. The paradox of singularity is not separation but merging, not division but harmony, not conflict but relationship.

You only become your letter in the Bible by reaching down to your deepest level of singularity. It is in the cauldron of authenticity that your letter of the Bible is forged. Your false self, no matter how colorful, idiosyncratic, or ostensibly distinct, can never become a letter in the Bible. It is a misspelling of your soul.

I once asked a class that I was teaching, "How many people here consider themselves messengers of God?" They looked at me as if to say, "He has finally lost it." Wouldn't we be excited waking up in the morning if we knew we held vital information in our hands—information that makes the very world spin? In the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel, one of the great readers of biblical myth, "We are messengers who have forgotten our message.

The Zohar, the magnum opus of biblical mysticism, goes one dramatic step farther. We are not only all messengers, say the kabbalists. We are the message itself. We are the scroll. The Bible, the Koran, the Sutras, are us and we are them. It is heresy to ignore the call of your message or to confuse it with a message not your own. For we all have different pieces of the message, our own unique ideas, character traits, experiences, perspectives, or talents, that we need to realize for ourselves and that the community needs to have to be whole.

That message is encrypted into our individual psyches. The code is accessed through the call to destiny that goes out to each of us. To break the soul's unique code, we need to listen deeply, to hear when our number is called. Only then can we pluck out the tune on our instrument, play the part that is ours alone in the larger symphony.

To deny the uniqueness of your message is to deny your ability to contribute to the community. Genuine community can only emerge when a soul print exchange takes place—when we share with each other our unique letters and piece together first a word, then a sentence, and ultimately, a world.

What I have been saying has been written before, by the poet Emily Dickinson:

We never know how high we are

Till we are asked to rise

And then if we are true to plan

Our starures touch the skies—

The Heroism we recite

Would be a normal thing

Did not ourselves the Cubits warp

For fear to be a King—

Each of us should have only two great fears in our lives, the fear of deceiving ourselves and the fear of imitating someone else. Both of these prevent us from being our selves, from being kings.

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