

PEKUDEI (EXODUS 38:21-40:38)

I Saw the Face of G-d!

2004 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

Moses' fund-raising efforts paid off. The nation had responded generously to his call for contributions for the Tabernacle. The structure was complete.

This was a fulfillment of G-d's command, "*They will build for Me a Sanctuary, and I will dwell among them.*" (Exodus, 25:8) Israel had fulfilled their side of the bargain; they had built the Sanctuary. Now it was time for G-d to do His part:

"The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and G-d's glory filled the Tabernacle." (Ibid. 40:34)

G-d allowed the *Shechina*, His Divine Presence, to be apparent for all the world to see. The Tabernacle, and later, the Temple in Jerusalem, was a place where miracles were a daily event. One could not spend the day in this place and deny the existence of G-d.

Sadly, this Divine Presence is much harder to perceive than it used to be. Even in the Second Temple, many of the blatantly obvious miracles no longer took place. G-d is no longer so easy to find.

Or is He?

Benny was born twenty-two years ago in Tucson, Arizona. My wife and I met his newlywed parents a few weeks before he was born. They eagerly awaited the perfect little bundle of joy that was on the way. As it turned out, their anticipated definition of "perfect" was not the one G-d had in mind. Benny was born with Down Syndrome.

I remember one Shabbos when Benny was a few years old. I was holding him while his parents recounted the early hours of his life. The "doctor," considering the various health issues that often surround Down Syndrome babies, suggested that if less-than-heroic measures would be taken to save their child's life, their "problem" would go away.

As I listened to the story, Benny was giving me the most delicious hug! We expressed our shock that anyone, especially a doctor, could discount the value of such a precious little life. (And to think that this suggestion was made by a man who had taken the Hippocratic Oath!)

My wife and I have stayed in touch with Benny's family. Benny has grown into a young man. His parents have invested over two decades of love and devotion into him, educating him to meet his potentials. He is, to be sure, considerably limited. He will never achieve the educational accomplishments of a "regular" person. But, in many ways, he has accomplished so much more.

This week, I attended Benny's sister's wedding. It was a beautiful event, with lively music and spirited dancing. As is the case at all religious weddings, the ladies danced with the bride on one side of the hall, while the men danced with the groom on the other.

Benny, his father, and I formed our own little circle while everyone else danced around the groom. We slowly tried to break through the rapidly moving circle to approach the middle. Finally, we were able to get to the groom. That's when it happened:

"The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and G-d's glory filled the Tabernacle."

I wish I could describe to you what I saw in that circle. Benny's new brother-in-law took his hands and the two danced together. If only you could see the look of absolute ecstasy on the face of that beautiful young man as he celebrated his sister's *Simcha*. G-d was surely resting his Divine Presence in our midst!

The Torah tells us that man is created in G-d's image. Nowhere does it say that IQ or number of chromosomes should mitigate that image. In fact, I'd like to suggest just the opposite. When we allow jealousy, pettiness, and hatred to cloud our senses, we obscure the Image of G-d that we each possess. But a pure *Neshomah*, an untainted soul that is unpolluted by these "benefits," allows the brightness of G-d's Presence to shine through for all to see.

We sometimes look at people whose abilities seem fewer than our own and fail to recognize their greatness. (And WE call THEM handicapped!!!)

That look of joy on Benny's face brought me back twenty years to that delicious hug he gave me back in Tucson. He was a baby back then. Today he is a man. A man of G-d.

Mazel Tov, Benny. May G-d continue to shine His Light upon you and your wonderful family. May you be well and bring continued Nachas to your beloved parents.

I love you, Benny. Have a great Shabbos.