

THE WEXNER FOUNDATION

REFLECT, RENEW, REBOOT NOURISHED BY TORAH

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This Generation Calls Us To Great Things

1. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Who is Man*, p. 107

Over and above personal problems, there is an objective challenge to overcome inequity, injustice, helplessness, suffering, carelessness, oppression. Over and above the din of desires there is a calling, a demanding, a waiting, an expectation. There is a question that follows me wherever I turn. What is expected of me? What is demanded of me?

What we encounter is not only flowers and stars, mountains and walls. Over and above all things is a sublime expectation, a waiting for. With every child born a new expectation enters the world.

This is the most important experience in the life of every human being: something is asked of me. Every human being has had a moment in which he sensed a mysterious waiting for him. Meaning is found in responding to the demand, meaning is found in sensing the demand.

2. R. Shalom Noah Berezovsky (1911-2000), *Netivot Shalom, Awareness* ch. 6

In the holy book “Yesod Ha-Avodah” (vol. 4 chapter 1) the author quotes Arizal as follows: “Since the creation of the world every day and every single moment is utterly unique, every person is utterly unique, and no-one has the capacity to repair what his fellow repairs... This idea is crucial; one needs to discern what it is that Hashem requires of him—of him in particular. What are the ways open for him to come close to Hashem according to the root of his soul, according to his qualities, according to the day, and the period of history in which he lives? One who lacks this clarity of personal mission is like someone who wanders aimlessly in the streets, not knowing where he wants to go.

This clarity is necessary for all aspects of one’s service—for knowing one’s mission in general, for matters concerning one’s nature and character, and for knowing one’s obligation in every situation. It safeguards him in all his decisions; he confidently maintains a course that ascends to the house of God.

The first matter he needs to reflect deeply upon is his special mission in the world. Why has his soul come in to the world? The key to detecting his mission is that it is connected to his own root of wormwood and gall, that is the particular area in his personality that causes him the greatest difficulties and brings out the worst in him. The tzaddikim have said that his mission on earth is to correct precisely that area, and it is a mission that requires nothing short of total dedication. When it becomes clear to a person that his soul has descended for the purpose of rectifying this particular trait—that this is his mission on earth—no sacrifice is too dear for him. He will not let himself be deterred or distracted from expending every effort toward the fulfillment of his life’s mission.

The same idea applies concerning one’s strengths. One needs to discern the special talents with which Hashem has bestowed him and through which he is given the opportunity to draw closer to Hashem. For God created this corresponding to that. In the same way that one has a particular negative trait, one also has a particular strength through which he can successfully ascend spiritually...If someone is blessed with an exceptional talent in Torah, it is a sign that his mission is to succeed in Torah; if someone loves to be generous, it is a sign that this area is connected to the root of his soul.

... It is vitally important that one recognize the age one lives in, and what its special significance is. This is what is meant by the verse (Deuteronomy 32) Understand the years of the generations, and, as we wrote earlier, quoting the Arizal, every day is different and every epoch in history carries with it a unique mission.

In light of this we are obligated to reflect deeply on the era we live in. What is our special mission? We live in astonishing times. Our age began with a holocaust the likes of which we have never known as a people—wiping out all the faithful Jewish communities of Europe. Yet we did not fall into complete despair. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto writes (in his book KeLaCH Pitchei Chochmah) that a draught is followed by rains of abundant blessing. Similarly, after a period of terrible concealment we have experienced a great influx of divine benevolence and compassion, though we cannot understand how any recovery is possible after such destruction.

... Much is required of us. Though we do not fully understand it, we intuit that we live in a very great time of history. We need to recognize the importance of our mission, our obligation, and our task in this generation—we need to utilize what has been given to us—so that we not despise the King’s gift, God forbid.

... This generation calls us to great things. Rabbi Moshe of Kobrin commented on the saying The day is vast. It’s not a time for gathering cattle. “The great and awesome day is approaching. This is not a time to gather up “cattle” and worldly possessions.”

3. Toni Morrison, The Handy English Grammar Answer Book

If there’s a book that you want to read, but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it.