

FEBRUARY 21, 2011

## Parashat Vayakhel

### A Leading Role

**And they approached, both men and women (Exodus 35:22) (ויבואו האנשים על הנשים (שמות לה:כב))**

Ramban (on 35:22), noting the unusual language in the text—which translated literally means that “the men approached upon the women”—explains that the Israelite women took a prominent role in the gifts of jewelry and other finery to the Tabernacle: “For jewelry is usually more prevalent among the women...and the reason for the term ‘upon the women’ is that they [came forward] first and the men acted secondarily to them.” Yet, this explanation does not give due credit to the reason that the Israelite women merited contributing first. In his work *Lilmod U’lelamed* (p. 96), Rabbi Mordechai Katz elaborates that when Aaron constructed the Golden Calf, he told the men to approach the women to contribute their finery—a request the women steadfastly refused. “As a reward for this, the women were given the right to contribute first to the construction of the holy Sanctuary.”

From the language of the Torah we learn how women took a prominent role in sanctifying the Jewish people thousands of years ago. In the modern state of Israel, Israeli women are following in the footsteps of their ancient mothers, showing their strength of character and rising graciously out of the worst circumstances.

Nurit Grossman is one such woman. After the tragic death of her son in a car accident, Grossman used her grief and pain as a means to gain strength—transforming her loss into an opportunity to change her own future as well as the future of others. Grossman told the website [Israel21C](#) that she realized that she “...could sit home and be miserable or do everything I could to try to stop other families from becoming bereaved.” It was in that incredible moment that Grossman decided to start “Women in Red” (later renamed “People in Red” when men followed suit and joined the group). For the past 14 years the group has worked tirelessly to change the dangerous condition of the roads in Israel. They began creating chapters of “People in Red” all over Israel, “that pioneered Israel’s graduated licensing law; mounted a successful...bumper sticker program for corporate and army vehicles; won awards for videos on drunk driving... and innovated numerous educational projects for all ages.”

The Jewish state takes pride not only in the equal rights enjoyed by women, but also in the fact that so many capable women have risen to the challenge of leadership roles. Like their ancestors, the people of Israel are better for following the lead of wise and capable women who, like Nurit Grossman, are changing the contours of our world. ■

### Creative Capability

**In wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge (Exodus 35:31) (בחכמה בתבונה ובדעת (שמות לה:לא))**

The Torah explains that Bezalel was the best choice to lead the construction of the Tabernacle because he was a person filled “in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge” (35:31). What is the difference between these three attributes? The Midrash (*Lekach Tov*) explains that “wisdom” refers to his Torah knowledge, “understanding” alludes to that which he learned from others, and that “knowledge” describes what he was able to derive on his own, “learning one thing from another.” This unique skill set meant that Bezalel was not just a person who was capable of leading the Israelites in the building of the Tabernacle, but that he was the ideal person to do so.

Bezalel's attributes can be seen in the innovative Israelis whose spectacular technological advancements are making our world a better place. In fact, one piece of amazing Israeli technology may have saved the life of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords.

Bernard Bar-Natan, originally from Brooklyn, immigrated to Israel in 1979 and by 1983 had become an Israeli Defense Forces medic. According to the [Jewish Telegraph Agency](#), during his service he noticed that “The guns we used had improved, the planes flying above us had improved, but the bandages were the same.” This observation led Bar-Natan to invent a bandage that changes the way head injuries are wrapped, applying the equivalent of 30 pounds of pressure over a sterile pad by wrapping it in the opposite direction of the first wrap. Over time, his bandage was adopted by elite units of the military and emergency medical technicians here in America. Following the tragic attack on Arizona Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, which left six dead and 13 wounded, “first responders credited the emergency bandage colloquially known as ‘the Israeli bandage’ with saving lives...” While it is unclear if this specific type of bandage was used on Giffords, [The Los Angeles Times](#) quotes Dr. Katherine Hiller, one of the doctors who attended the victims of the shooting, as saying that “without this care it would have definitely been a different situation.”

Bezalel's strength laid both in his personal talent and his ability to learn from others, attributes which Bernard Bar-Natan used to create a bandage that saves lives around the world. Numerous American and Israeli servicemen—and maybe even a member of Congress—are alive today because of his ingenuity. ■

## A Furious Pace

**And they made...the Tabernacle (Exodus 36:8)**

**וַיַּעֲשׂוּ...אֵת הַמִּשְׁכָּן (שְׁמוֹת ל"ח)**

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While the Torah lists the most minute details surrounding the construction of the Tabernacle, it never explicitly states how long it took to assemble. Rashi (on 33:11) provides us with a sense of the chronology, explaining that following the sin of the Golden Calf Moses again climbed Mount Sinai on the first of Elul, returning to the people forty days later on the tenth of Tishrei. The next day, he “began to instruct them on the construction of the Tabernacle, which they made by the first of Nissan.” According to this timetable, the people completed the difficult construction of the Sanctuary in less than six months, a remarkably short time for the intricate work demanded.

Ultimately it was the zeal of the Israelites that drove them to their furious pace in the construction of the Tabernacle. While such enthusiasm is an affirmative characteristic when working towards a positive goal, like the American Apollo program of the 1960s, the opposite is true when a nation invests its resources and energy into the pursuit of a dangerous aspiration.

While initial speculation suggested that the Stuxnet computer virus, which disabled many of the centrifuges that Iran had been using to enrich uranium, set Iran's nuclear program back several years, [The Washington Post](#) reports that Iran worked quickly to recover and return the facility to full capacity. “The International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) files also show a feverish—and apparently successful—effort by Iranian scientists to contain the damage and replace broken parts, even while constrained by international sanctions banning Iran from purchasing nuclear equipment. An IAEA report due for release this month is expected to show steady or even slightly elevated production rates at the Natanz enrichment plant over the past year.” This report follows another report which states that Iran continues to produce low-enriched uranium and may be diverting its nuclear material for military purposes. To learn more about Iran's nuclear weapons program, visit [www.aipac.org/Iran](http://www.aipac.org/Iran).

The Jewish people demonstrated their devotion through their incredible efforts to complete the Tabernacle in an astoundingly short period of time. Through its own zealous efforts to fulfill its nuclear ambitions, Iran highlights that while such enthusiasm can drive people to great achievements, it can also lead to terrifying results. ■