

Time to Be Alone ***Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer***

א"ו

Parshat Va'et'hanan

Paul Revere is best known for his solitary ride to warn the Americans that the British forces were coming. Our image of Paul Revere has been shaped by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, and we tend to think of Paul Revere as a solitary person, devoted to his patriotic duty to the virtual exclusion of all else in life.

But there was another side to Paul Revere. Paul Revere – a well-recommended biography by David Hackett Fischer titled *Paul Revere's Ride* was published by Oxford University Press in 1994 – was not the virtual hermit that Longfellow describes. He was a member of more clubs and other organizations than almost any of his fellow-Whigs, certainly far more than John Adams and John Hancock. And he was the father of sixteen children.

Still, when he went on his famous ride, he did so in solitary splendor; it was a solo performance. He had his support system, of course – those who prepared his horse, those who got the information about the British troop movements, the one who lit the lamp in the church tower to give him the signal – but the ride itself was a solo.

Moses was very different from Paul Revere. Moses was a truly solitary figure. Set apart from the rest of the Jewish people, envied by his brother and sister, admired and revered by Joshua, separated from his wife and children more than he was with them, Moses had no colleagues, no peers, not even any close friends. And the Internet was millennia away.

Moses, however, did have one real relationship – his relationship with G*d. And that relationship was one of such intimacy that it enabled Moses to translate G*d's message – delivered in a language of pure spirit – into human language, audible language, understandable (at least, to some degree) by all humanity. Although Moses never attained a true human relationship, his G*d-relationship became the root of every

human relationship; his G*d-intimacy became the root of every human intimacy; his working with G*d became the root of every life-enhancing act we perform.

Moses attained his spirituality, his G*d-connection, through his solitude. Today, we seem never to be alone. We have the Internet, and we have our cell phones; we make sure that we are reachable at every moment. Even on Shabbat, even those of us who do not use the telephone on Shabbat are in touch, for we have our answering machines to take the messages for us, and we respond immediately after Shabbat. We even reflect this “un-alone-ness” in our language. English has lost the second person singular form; we have forgotten the difference between “you” and “thou.” And perhaps it is our very togetherness that today impedes our spirituality.

But Moses spoke to us – in G*d’s Name – in the singular as well as in the plural. In particular, we read the Command to love G*d in the singular – **Thou shalt love thine Eternal G*d with all thine heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might** (Deuteronomy 6:5) – as if to say that love, real love, the intimacy of real love, can be attained only one-to-one (one-to-One, One-to-one) and not in a group.

Certainly, our cell phones and our other constant connections have value. We are safer carrying cell phones – otherwise, what would we do in case of an emergency – than without them. But can you imagine Moses carrying a cell phone up Mount Sinai? Can you imagine Moses trying to hear G*d’s Commandments while juggling his cell phone and receiving Aaron’s report on the Golden Calf?

Even when we are on vacation, when we go to some far-away pristine place to immerse ourselves in nature’s wonders, we insist on remaining plugged in. How can we even begin to hear the voice of God? Are we afraid we’ll disappear without the trappings of modern communication? Do we really think we are so indispensable? Worse, are we afraid that, if we are unreachable for a few days, others will find out that we are not indispensable?

Moses’ solitude, while not a lifelong pursuit, was necessary for his spiritual growth. Can we find some time to be alone with G*d?

Shabbat Shalom.

Time to Be Alone

© Copyright 2004 Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer

This document may not be reproduced (in whole or in part) in any manner, including, without limitation, print and electronic media, without the written permission of the copyright holder.