

## Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 13 #20, February 27-28, 2026; 11 Adar 5786; Tetzaveh 5786; Shabbat Zachor  
Tanis Esther is Monday, March 2; Purim is Monday evening and Tuesday March 2-3

**NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.**

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**May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We celebrate the return of all our hostages from Gaza and mourn those of our people who perished during the last two years. May a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.**

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During a non-leap year, we read Tetzaveh and the Maftir of Zachor the Shabbat before Purim. Tetzaveh opens with a command (to Moshe, although his name does not appear) to take pure olive oil and have the Kohanim (Aharon and his male descendants) light the Menorah. Tetzaveh is the only parsha from the beginning of Sefer Shemot to the end of Sefer Bemidbar in which Moshe's name does not appear, but there are numerous hints to Moshe in the parsha. Moreover, Moshe's birthday (7 Adar) always comes a week before Purim, thus very close to when we read Tetzaveh during a non-leap year. (The many hints to Moshe's name in Tetzaveh are not a subject for this introduction.)

Moshe's hidden name in Tetzaveh connects with Purim, because God's name does not appear in the Megillah. When Mordechai tells Esther about Haman's attempt to wipe out all the Jews, he tells her that she has a great opportunity. She is in a position to be Hashem's agent to save B'Nai Yisrael – or, if she fails to accept that responsibility, God will find a different agent to save our people, and she will die. Esther accepts the responsibility, involves all the Jews to fast and pray with her, and starts the redemption of our people. Esther also insists that her story be added to our Holy Scriptures so later generations will understand that it is God Himself manipulating events, without violating any of the laws of nature, who is saving our people (see Rabbi Mordechai Rhine's Dvar Torah below).

Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer identifies a chiasmic structure in the Maftir Torah reading for Zachor. A: Remember Amalek. B: Wipe out Amalek and blot out the memory of him. A': Do not forget Amalek and his evil intentions. The key to the mitzvah of Amalek is how we remember and tell the story. The wrong way to remember Amalek is to focus on the violence of his attacks and the bloody wars of revenge our people undertake at various times in history. The proper way is to remember that Amalek represents a culture of violence focused on a minority population and directed primarily against the weakest members of that society. To quote Rabbi Linzer:

**We have taken the mitzvah to destroy Amalek, a mitzvah that disrupts our moral and religious order, a mitzvah that embraces violence and, through interpretation, through choosing how we will tell the story, we have transformed it into a mitzvah of memory, a mandate to restore moral order and to repudiate violence.**

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander probes our obligation when faced with a Divine command to wipe out an entire nation. As Rabbi Brander states, a command to wipe out an entire nation **must not and cannot** be a model for human judgement in any other context. When we face enemies sworn to destroy us, it is proper and necessary to retaliate appropriately.

However, we must prevent our people from acting outside the proper channels and attacking unprovoked individuals from enemy nations, as some Jews in Judea and Samaria have:

**This is the great tradeoff in the story of Amalek and its destruction, and it contains an important lesson for today. Once we step outside the established moral framework of a situation and let emotions guide our decisions, like Shaul does, we put ourselves and our society at risk of heading down an immoral or unjustified path, of losing our moral legitimacy, of causing more harm than good. . . . In the face of these crimes [by individual Jews acting alone or in small gangs], we cannot remain silent. Despite all the challenges that we face, and notwithstanding the unfathomable hate and vitriol directed at the Jewish people and the State of Israel, we dare not allow fear and victimhood to eat away at our own mores and principles. This is the central message of the story of Amalek, the flip side of the commandment to destroy.**

Later in the Torah, in the fortieth year in the Midbar, God gives Moshe case by case commands of how to deal with each of the Canaanite nations our ancestors encounter. The command to destroy an entire nation is limited to the most vile nations or sinners. Commands to destroy an entire nation are the exception. When a nation, even of enemies of our people, have any redeeming qualities, the command is to spare those nations. The ways of the Torah are peace and kindness. Violence is an exception – not a model of behavior for a nation committed to spreading the values and ways of Hashem.

Unity of Jews, as Esther's message to the Jews of her time illustrated, was also a frequent theme for my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, whether he was leading a public protest (such as in front of the Soviet Embassy before Jews could more freely emigrate from behind the Iron Curtain) or encouraging congregants to learn from and appreciate lessons from diverse parts of the Jewish community. His message of supporting needy Jews and promoting unity among fellow Jews should be a priority at all time, not only around Purim.

Shabbat Shalom; Purim Samaich,

Alan & Hannah

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**Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezl Esther, Avraham Dov ben Blimah; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Rena Michal bat Sara, Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel.** Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

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## Haftarat Parshat Tetzaveh-Zachor: The Exception that Defines the Rule of Jewish Morality

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander \*

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

On October 15th, 1982, in the shadow of the First Lebanon War, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein published an open letter to Prime Minister Menachem Begin in the Religious Zionist newspaper Hatzofeh. In it, he emphasized the importance of the State of Israel taking responsibility for its part in the massacres in Sabra and Shatila, two Beirut neighborhoods where IDF-backed Lebanese Christian militias had killed thousands of Palestinian civilians. Begin was initially unwilling to conduct any investigation into the affair, and Rav Lichtenstein strongly criticized him for what he saw as an un-Jewish refusal to confront difficult truths.

Rav Lichtenstein's argument was not an accusation against the IDF, rather a moral call for those entrusted with power to uphold the highest standards of ethical accountability.

In the letter, he invoked the story of Shaul and Amalek, which we read this week as the haftara for Shabbat Zachor. Why, Rav Lichtenstein asked, was King Shaul punished for sparing the life of Agag, king of Amalek? Was it simply that he had left an Amalekite – any Amalekite – alive? Rather, Rav Lichtenstein suggested, the identity of the one victim spared was significant. Shaul had left Agag alive because he identified with him, as one king to another. He had used his own human logic and values to decide whom to kill and whom to spare.

By doing this, Shaul did not merely become guilty of disobeying a difficult divine command to kill all of the Amalekites; he assumed personal responsibility for all the Amalekites he had killed in the course of the battle. Shaul had been commanded to destroy an entire people. Such an act cannot be justified on ordinary moral grounds; it can only be understood as obedience to an explicit and unambiguous divine command. Precisely because such a command lies outside of ordinary moral reasoning, it cannot serve as a model for human judgement in any other context. Thus, the minute that Shaul decided to make an exception, all the other killings ceased to be part of the divine command, becoming his own moral responsibility instead.

**This is the great tradeoff in the story of Amalek and its destruction, and it contains an important lesson for today. Once we step outside the established moral framework of a situation and let emotions guide our decisions, like Shaul does, we put ourselves and our society at risk of heading down an immoral or unjustified path, of losing our moral legitimacy, of causing more harm than good.** ]emphasis added[

In any historical context, including ours today, it is necessary and justifiable to decisively defeat enemies sworn to our destruction. But the moment we allow our righteous indignation or the power of our own judgment to seep even the smallest bit past defensive strategy – the moment military action spills over into vigilantism, when civilian life and property are endangered one iota more than absolutely necessary – we run the risk of our just and necessary war being transformed into an abandonment of our values.

While military strength and valor are critical to our national survival, they cannot lead to victory or peace if we abandon our values.

This is an obligation that goes beyond the brave soldiers who are on the front lines. Community and political leaders, educators and rabbis need to call out the behavior of those in our own camp who jeopardize the justice of our cause. In recent months, there have been repeated criminal incidents in which a small minority of misguided Israeli youth have attacked Palestinians and vandalized their properties in Judea and Samaria, as well as attacking fellow Jews for the “crime” of simply working with or employing Palestinians. Tragically, these young Israelis have embraced a hate-filled, racist worldview. They take out their anger violently on innocent people, solely because of the victims’ religious and cultural identities.

**In the face of these crimes, we cannot remain silent. Despite all the challenges that we face, and notwithstanding the unfathomable hate and vitriol directed at the Jewish people and the State of Israel, we dare not allow fear and victimhood to eat away at our own mores and principles. This is the central message of the story of Amalek, the flip side of the commandment to destroy.** ]emphasis added[

In sharp contrast to the lawless extremist youth, in the most recent conflict we have seen the heroic soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces uphold the values of Judaism with justice and mercy. We've seen our soldiers enter damaged residential buildings in Gaza to rescue Palestinian families. We've seen units helping and protecting Palestinian children caught in the crosshairs of fire from an enemy that deliberately hides amongst civilians.

Our sons and daughters on the front lines have made brave decisions that have put themselves and their comrades at risk because they follow the values of the Torah. Because they understand that the command to wipe out Amalek was the exception — and that Amalek no longer exists. For **the enduring rule of Jewish life is to act, even at times of war, with compassion and moral restraint toward all human beings.** ]emphasis added[

Shabbat Shalom.

\* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact [ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org](mailto:ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org) or 212-935-8672. **Donations to 49 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

<https://ots.org.il/haftarat-parshat-tetzaveh-zachor-rabbi-brander-5786/?pfstyle=wp>

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## **Tetzaveh: 60,000 Golden Thoughts**

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5779

*And you shall make a Head plate of pure gold and you shall engrave upon it, engraved like a signet ring, Holy to HASHEM...and it shall be on his forehead always, to bring them favor before HASHEM. (Shemos 28:36-38)*

What is the value of the Kohein the High Priest wearing a golden plate on his head with the words Holy to HASHEM? How does that bring favor to HASHEM?

In the construction of the Aron which was the centerpiece of the Holy of Holies we find the following description, *“And you shall overlay it with pure gold; (MiBais) from inside (oobachutz) and from outside you shall overlay it, and you shall make upon it a golden crown all around.”* (Shemos 25:11) The Talmud asks (Taanis) *“Why was it covered with gold from the inside? To teach you that a Talmud scholar whose inside is not like his outside is not a Talmud scholar!”*

The golden quality of his personality has to be through and through. It cannot just be a show of golden pageantry but rather it needs to be emanating from and radiating and at least congruent with the outer appearance. How can that be measured? How can the Talmud scholar himself know if he is approaching this standard? I was struck by the wording for *“from the inside” – “MiBais.”* Literally the Bais is the house – the home. It is also a code term for the wife who is the internality, the spiritual essence of the home. Shalom Bais is the primary arena for the Talmud scholar.

Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel ztl. was addressing a group of alumni at a hotel on a Friday night after Kabbalah Shabbos. His wife interrupted his talk and reminded him that the wives were probably hungry. The students were interested to hear more, so they insisted that the ladies could wait a little while longer until he finished.

He told them, *"You cannot be certain that they are not hungry and uncomfortable now and besides my wife has indicated to me that she is hungry."* They may have thought that the Torah lecture was cut short and the lesson was truncated, but that decision was a lecture by itself with a lasting lesson.

I once brought a friend to receive a Brocho from Rabbi Mordechai Schwab ztl., the Tzadik of Monsey, the night before his wedding. Rabbi Schwab told us:

*"I met the wife, the Rebbetzin of the Chofetz Chaim in a Malon – a Hotel – after the war. I asked her, 'What was it like to be married to the Chofetz Chaim?' She told me, 'Oy was he Mechabed Me – Did he honor me!'"*

I suppose one would expect to hear about his holiness, and scholarship and world renown but her experience was that he honored her and that speaks volumes and validates the rest of his enormous accomplishments.

We must assume that the Kohain Gadol did not just wear a gold plate on his head that announced, *"Holy to HASHEM."* It needed to be a reflection of his inward reality. King Solomon writes, *"From all the things you watch guard your heart (mind) because from it founts life"* (Mishlei 4:23). We think something like 60,000 thoughts each day. Imagine producing 60,000 thoughts daily that are Kodesh to HASHEM! Is such a thing possible!?

Someone once tried to recruit me to be a spokesman for a Shmiras HaLoshon campaign. I told them that I did not feel that I was the fitting poster child for that project. I am not the Chofetz Chaim. He told me, *"Reb Label, that's the perk! That's the benefit!"*

Wearing such a plate on the forehead is certainly a powerful reminder and a major perk for the Kohain Gadol to help him stay focused and produce daily 60,000 golden thoughts.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5779-tetzaveh/>

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### **Tetzaveh/Zachor: A Thought on the Parsha \***

By Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2013, 2020

This Shabbat is Shabbat Parashat Zachor when, as a lead up to Purim, we read about the mitzvah to remember Amalek:

*Remember what Amalek did to you by the way, when you came forth out of Egypt.... Therefore it shall be, when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies... that you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget it.* (Devarim 25:17,19)

Three mitzvot: One, remember. Two, do not forget. And three, sandwiched in between – you shall blot out their memory. Kill them, wipe them out. What possible message can we learn from this mitzvah?

God is a vengeful God. Violence must be met with violence. Even innocents – the infants and the future descendants of the original nation – can be slaughtered by the hand of Israel when Israel is following God's command and is the agent of God's justice. Is this the message of Amalek? Is this the story that we tell?

We know that it is not. It is not the story that we as a people have told. Having as a people been persecuted and slaughtered in the name of religion, and as witness today to the evils that can be perpetrated by a murderous, fundamentalist religious belief – this also is not the story that we can ever tell.

The mitzvah to blot out the memory of Amalek is surrounded by two other mitzvot, two mitzvot of memory. *Zachor*, remember, and *lo tishkach*, do not forget. The latter, according to the Rabbis, is a command to remember in our hearts,

whereas the former is a command to verbalize that memory, a mitzvah to tell a story. How do we live up to these obligations? What is the story we choose to tell and what is the story we choose to remember?

It is a story, first and foremost, of moral grappling, of a people who treasure the sanctity of human life, and who believe in a God who commands them to preserve human life. It is the story of a people who can only be confounded by such a command.

The Talmud gives voice to this struggle through the mouth of King Shaul. Says the Talmud in Yoma 22b:

*When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Saul: Now go and smite Amalek, he said: If on account of one person the Torah said: Perform the ceremony of the heifer whose neck is to be broken, how much more [ought consideration to be given] to all these persons! And if human beings sinned, what has the cattle committed? and if the adults have sinned, what have the little ones done?*

Where is the justice in God's decree? Such a command violates God's own treasuring of human lives, and the most fundamental sense of justice, says Shaul. And the Talmud gives no answer to this challenge.

This grappling echoes throughout the generations. It can be heard in the words of the great Chasidic rabbi and posek, Rav Avraham Bornstein of Sochachov (1839-1910), who states that the punishment cannot be just because the Torah teaches that children do not suffer for the sins of their father (Avnei Nezer, Orah Hayyim, 508).

It can be heard in the words of Rav Yakov Chayim Sofer of Bagdad (1870-1939) who writes in his halakhic magnum opus the Caf HaChayim that we made no brakha when we do the mitzvah of remembering Amalek, because how could we make a blessing over the story of the destruction of God's creatures? And this he says about a mitzvah that God has commanded!

It is a story of a grappling, yes, but not one that leads to resignation or rejection, but to transformation. It is a story about how Amalek stops being a people whom we must physically destroy, and instead becomes a symbol, an idea, that we must fight against, peacefully and without violence.

This story can be heard in the words of Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, who states that we must destroy not Amalek, but *zekher Amalek*, the glorifying of all they stood for. This is a mitzvah about opposing the sword, not wielding it. **Amalek represents a culture that valorizes violence and the sword. Such a culture is pernicious for the moral future of mankind, and it is such a culture, not a people, which must be wiped out and obliterated.** [emphasis added]

This story can be heard in the writings of all those halakhic authorities who, through various halakhic devices, make the mitzvah to destroy Amalek effectively moot. From Rambam's claim that if they accept the Noachide laws they are not to be destroyed, to the consensus amongst poskim that such a people can no longer be identified, the practical implications of this mitzvah have effectively been erased and blotted out.

It is a story of moving from the passage in Devarim, from the charge of *timche* – that you shall blot out – to the passage in Shemot, and the declaration of *macho emche*, that I, God, will blot out. It is the transferring of the war, from B'nei Yisrael to God. *Milchama laHashem bi'Amalek*, a war of God against Amalek. *Midor dor*. The story that we have chosen to tell, from generation to generation, is the story of Shemot, the story of God's war, not of ours. The story of a war not against a people, but against violence, against evil.

**We are truly an amazing people. We have taken the mitzvah to destroy Amalek, a mitzvah that disrupts our moral and religious order, a mitzvah that embraces violence and, through interpretation, through choosing how we will tell the story, we have transformed it into a mitzvah of memory, a mandate to restore moral order and to repudiate violence.** [emphasis added]

This is not just a story about the mitzvah of Amalek. It is the story of the brit that we made with God at the foot of Mount Sinai. At that moment, we moved from being passive recipients of the Divine command, from having the mountain suspended over our heads, to becoming parties in a brit, active participants in the reception, interpretation, and application of God's Torah.

We have one God and one Torah, but our Torah has many mitzvot, and many potentially conflicting messages. How do we engage our Torah. What messages do we prioritize?

**When we tell the story of the Akeida do we tell the beginning of the story, or the end? Do we tell the story that one must be prepared to commit murder in the name of God, or do we tell the story of the angel's intervention, the story that God will never – in the end – command us to do such a heinous act? Do we, in the words of Dr. David Shatz, tell the story of the Akeida or the story of Al Qaeda?** [emphasis added]

The translation of the Written Torah into halakha happens through the Oral Torah. This process transforms an intense passion and a lofty idealism into a day-to-day way to live one's life. It transforms a passion that could lead to a fundamentalist extremism into an attention to detail, an anchoring in the real world, and a sense of responsibility to people and relationships.

The story of Amalek, then, is the story of the Oral Torah. It is, in fact, a Purim story. *Kiyemu vi'kiblu ha'Yehudim*, the Jews reaccepted – according to the Rabbis – what they had already accepted in the past. They freely accepted the Torah, at a time of exile, at a time when God's commanding presence was less felt, in a way that they could never have accepted it in the past when the mountain was suspended over their heads. Our acceptance of Torah today, when so many alternative interpretations of reality are available, is predicated on our choice, on our being full partners in the brit. And with great choice comes great responsibility.

We must embrace our role as partners in the enterprise of Torah, as part of the process that is the Oral Torah. We must be scrupulous to work within the parameters of cannon, precedence, and authority, the weight of the text, and the weight of our history. And we must be conscientious of our responsibility to the deeper values of the Torah, to the story that we are choosing to tell, to our role in this covenant.

As partners in the covenant, we will choose to hear the voices that resonate with our deepest sense of probity and morality, which we believe to reflect the Torah's deepest sense of morality and of justice. But we cannot lose sight that there are others who hear other voices. Others for whom the fundamentalist and extremist voices are the most attractive. Others who are more prepared to hear the mitzvah of *mechiya* and *milchama*, of war and destruction. Others who will tell a very different story from the one that we would tell.

Remember. Do not forget. We have a responsibility of memory and a responsibility of speech and of story. We, each one of us, will choose the story that we will tell.

Shabbat Shalom and Purim Sameiach!

From my archives

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**Nishmat haTorah: Parashat Tetzaveh**  
**The Cure for Certainty: Purim's Ad Delo Yada in the Age of AI**  
By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz \*

Purim is next Monday evening and Tuesday, a day of immense joy, spiritual disruption, and a unique religious mandate. To understand the depth of this mandate, I've always come back to an oft-repeated anecdote I heard during my years at the Brisk yeshiva in Israel. It's a story that perfectly illustrates a core intellectual concept, one that has been foundational to Torah scholarship across the ages.

After a decade of singular dedication to study, Velvel decided it was time to return home and begin to earn a living. He went to take his leave from the Rosh Yeshiva (RY). In the classic style of the Yeshiva world, the RY concluded their leave-taking with a customary challenge: “Velvel, you have been with us for ten long years. Share a ‘chiddush,’ a novel insight or new idea, that you learned during your time here.”

Velvel was caught completely off guard. Unable to produce the requested chiddush, he remained silent, visibly uncomfortable. After a long, deliberate pause, the Rosh Yeshiva’s eyes held a look of profound satisfaction. “*Very well, Velvel,*” he declared. “*You have truly learned a great deal.*” He then continued in Yiddish: “*bei untz lerent men vos nisht tzu zugen*” (here, we teach our students what NOT to say). With a small, knowing smile, he concluded, “*And you, apparently, learned the lesson perfectly.*” Following this, the Rosh Yeshiva offered a warm embrace and a bracha for Velvel’s future endeavors.

While the story possesses a touch of the comical, it embeds within it a kernel of deep intellectual truth. It offers a powerful expression of a central intellectual virtue that has been a foundational pillar of Torah scholarship for generations. This principle is distilled in a popular aphorism, though mistakenly attributed to Maimonides: “*the ultimate goal of knowledge is to realize our profound unknowing.*”

This virtue of Sh’lo Neda is not a resigned submission to limits, but an active, willful posture toward the Transcendent. It is the sober recognition that the perimeter of our understanding is a small, humanly-constructed space, whereas the sublime expanse of the unknowable stretches boundlessly beyond. True wisdom, therefore, is not measured by the facts we accumulate, but by the human capacity to stand at the edge of our own intellect and have a sobering realization of the great depth of the unknowable. This is not a flight from reason, but a strong assertion: the unknowing is a richer and more expansive domain, embracing mystery and depth that the finite borders of the knowing cannot contain.

Yet, while in the classic Yeshiva world this virtue remains a primary intellectual cornerstone, in Chassidic thought it is elevated to a central spiritual directive specifically prescribed for Purim. In the Chassidic understanding, this day is the designated time for embracing the disposition of Sh’lo Neda in our spiritual lives. (René Magritte *Le Faux Miroir* 1929)

The root of this spiritual mandate lies in the very distinctive and difficult Halakha of the day, which has its origins in the Talmud (Megilah 7b). The Gemara states: “*a person is obligated to become intoxicated on Purim until he no longer knows how to distinguish between 'Cursed is Haman' and 'Blessed is Mordechai.'*” This seemingly aberrant requirement prompted extensive discussion among the later Poskim, who, concerned with the dangers of inebriation, offered various alternatives, including simply sleeping on Purim. The common thread uniting all these opinions is the implicit affirmation that some form of deliberate suspension of reason and losing one’s mind is essential to the day.

This necessity is rooted in the very nature of the Purim narrative itself. The miracle we commemorate is often described as the most “*un-miraculous*” of all. The events are woven entirely from palace politics, human agency, and a string of coincidences that, while providential, never breach the laws of nature. It all seems logical and entirely sensible. This seamless comprehensibility is precisely the spiritual danger. The seemingly comprehensible nature of the Purim story risks leading us into a state of spiritual complacency: the world is orderly, everything adds up, and God’s ways are entirely transparent. It is at this critical juncture that the Halakha points us toward the important value of the state of not knowing. The moment calls for a disruption of our intellectual equilibrium and our presumption of comprehension. This intentional letting go of our grasp on the rational is what allows for an unmediated encounter with the Transcendent reality that lies just beneath the visible surface of events. We are thus mandated to step into a space of deliberate ambiguity, overcoming the spiritual tedium that sets in when we assume God’s governance of the world is fully discernible to our finite reason.

This lesson of Purim, however, extends beyond the spiritual realm and carries an increasingly crucial psychological and emotional resonance for our contemporary world.

We live in an age where we are never more than a click away from the illusion of total knowledge. AI apps promise to make us know-it-alls, providing instant, definitive answers to every query, tempting us toward a state of constant, shallow

certainty. In a world saturated with the temptation of all-knowingness, our emotional and psychological health demands that we learn to pause and deliberately step into a space of robust, volitional un-knowing. It is in this posture that we find liberation from the anxiety of needing to be right or in control. This intentional surrender to the unknown is an act of intellectual honesty, a spiritually sound posture, and a crucial tool for psychological wellbeing. It is in this deliberate, Purim-mandated surrender to the unknown — this act of *Ad Delo Yada* — that we find true psychological and spiritual liberation, trading the shallow certainty of a machine for the vast, humbling depth of mystery where a deeper sense of life can be found.

Shabbat Shalom.

[note: because of problems formatting across different word processing problems, I had to omit most Hebrew text, and some remaining Hebrew text will end up out of order, depending on word processing format.]

\* Chair of the Talmud Department and the Director of the Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY

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## **An Eternal Light: Thoughts for Parashat Tetsaveh**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

When I read or hear about a scandal involving a Jew, I bristle. I feel pain when Jews are accused )and convicted( of massive frauds, sexual misconduct, or any other criminal activity. Maybe you feel this way too.

We read and hear many stories about non-Jewish evil-doers; although we are unhappy about these things too, they don't impact on us as viscerally. When a Jew is disgraced, we somehow feel that we — and all our people — are also tarnished by association. We suspect that the general public will stereotype all Jews because of the misdeeds of a few of us. Members of other minority groups must feel similarly when one of theirs is in the news for criminal activity.

We Jews pride ourselves on the massive positive influence we've had on human civilization. Our Bible has inspired billions of people to lead honest, compassionate lives. Jews have made amazing contributions to the arts, sciences, business, politics and so many humanitarian causes. Some perceptive non-Jews have recognized the uniqueness of the Jews. The historian, Paul Johnson, in his *History of the Jews*, has written:

*"Certainly the world without the Jews would have been a radically different place....To them we owe the idea of equality before the law, both divine and human; of the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person; of the individual conscience and so of personal redemption; of the collective conscience and so of social responsibility; of peace as an abstract ideal and love as the foundation of justice, and many other items which constitute the basic moral furniture of the human mind. Without the Jews it might have been a much emptier place."*

This week's Torah portion discusses the eternal light that was to be kindled with pure oil in the Mishkan. Our synagogues draw on this ancient practice by having an eternal light above the ark. This light is said to symbolize the presence of God; our souls; the illumination of Torah. A special feature of the Ner Tamid is that it is a small, gentle, steady light. It draws our attention to the eternal values of the Torah in an inconspicuous way.

The Ner Tamid, in its very simplicity, reminds us of the importance of living pure, honest and humble lives. Don't be misled by the desire for excessive wealth, power or glory. Don't compromise your goodness for the sake of self-destructive behavior that undermines your life and harms others. Don't act in a way that brings shame to you, your family, and to the Jewish People. Emulate the Ner Tamid — pure, quiet, steady, Torah true.

We are called upon to be a “*kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*” Unfortunately, we don’t always live up to these standards. But we must keep striving...and the Ner Tamid lights our way.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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## **Paired Perspectives on the Parashah: Tetzavveh**

### **The Architecture of Mediation**

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel \*

If Terumah introduced the sacred space of Israel’s worship, Tetzavveh introduces the human beings who will inhabit that space and enable it to function. Only with the priesthood does Israel gain a living bridge between God and Israel, one that moves in two directions at once: Israel’s offerings and service ascend toward God, while God’s instruction, blessing, and judgment descend toward Israel. Tetzavveh constructs the priesthood as the institutional form of that mediation.

#### **Two Directions of Service**

There are multiple dimensions to the priestly role. On the one hand, the priests serve through the sacrificial worship and other Temple rituals (avodah) that direct Israel’s offerings toward God. But the priesthood also carries responsibility in the opposite direction — from God toward Israel — through the Priestly Blessing, the *Urim ve-Tumim* as an oracle of national decision, priestly adjudication, and halakhic instruction in matters of purity and impurity (Leviticus 10:8–11; Deuteronomy 17:8–9). These judicial and halakhic functions are especially important, since they translate divine categories into the lived world of the nation.

These two directions are not symmetrical. Avodah expresses Israel’s longing toward God. Instruction, blessing, and judgment express God’s will entering the life of the nation. Together, they stabilize the covenantal relationship. The priesthood stands at the seam.

#### **The Institution Rather Than the Individual**

To make this mediation stable, Tetzavveh suppresses the individual in favor of the institution. The Torah invests the office rather than the person. Clothing defines the priestly role more than character, ability, or charisma. The High Priest carries the names of the twelve tribes on his breastplate and shoulders, and the name of God upon the tzitz. The priest is not primarily a personality but a uniformed position.

As Rabbi Eitan Mayer suggests (Parsha Perspectives), the priest in Tetzavveh becomes almost a vessel or utensil of the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle contains many objects — ark, menorah, altars, curtains — and the priests are added to that catalogue. Their consecration mirrors that of the sacred utensils: anointed with oil and blood, handled by Moses with striking passivity (Exodus 29; Leviticus 8–9). They do not argue, negotiate, or improvise. They are inserted into sacred service the way the menorah is lit or the incense is burned. The parallel is intentional: the mediation of holiness requires uniformity, consistency, and reliability.

This helps explain the strictures on emotion and spontaneity. A priest in service may not mourn publicly (Leviticus 21; Leviticus 10:3–7), and even the deaths of Nadab and Abihu do not suspend the dedication of the Tabernacle by Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar. The point is not emotional coldness but institutional continuity: the bridge must remain standing.

Yom Kippur displays this most intensely. At the beginning of the day, the High Priest atones for himself and his household; only then may he atone for the sanctuary and the nation (Leviticus 16:17). In the first stage he is still a man, a father, and a sinner with a biography. In the second he becomes representative, purified of individuality for the sake of Israel. The shift from private person to public bridge is the logic of Tetzavveh made liturgical.

### **Boundary and Contention**

Such an institution inevitably produces boundary disputes. Korah and, centuries later, Jeroboam both insisted that holiness belongs to all and cannot be monopolized. God affirms the premise and denies the conclusion. “*All Israel is holy,*” but holiness does not flatten distinctions. The covenant contains hierarchy, not for the sake of power but for the sake of order. Someone must ascend and someone must mediate.

The priesthood is hereditary; the High Priesthood ideally passes from father to son. This prevents charisma from destabilizing the institution. If the priesthood were won by campaign, it would cease to serve its purpose. The priest must represent Israel before God precisely by not representing personal achievement or opinion.

### **Israel as a Nation of Priests**

The hereditary priesthood does not diminish the holiness of Israel; it clarifies its mission. At Sinai, before there was a Tabernacle or a High Priest, Israel was told, “*You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*” (Exodus 19:6). That is not a contradiction but a hierarchy. The individual priest stands at the sacrificial center, while the nation as a whole moves toward that center through Torah, prayer, and covenantal life.

The priesthood of Tetzavveh, therefore, is both narrower and wider than it seems. It is narrower because it excludes individual expression, spontaneity, and biography. It is wider because it stabilizes the covenantal relationship for the entire people. Israel’s holiness aims upward; the priest enables the ascent. God’s will moves downward; the priest articulates it. Between those movements stands the institution — not the man — and it is that institution that makes Terumah’s sanctuary a living center rather than a silent space.

\* Yeshiva University and National Scholar, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

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## **A Purim Miracle: Thoughts for Purim**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

Esther the Jewess marries King Ahashverosh. Her Uncle Mordecai tells her not to reveal that she is Jewish. The Jews throughout the 127 provinces of the Empire know Esther is Jewish. But not one of them gives away the secret. Ahashverosh, Haman and the entire royal court are kept in the dark about the Queen’s true identity.

This, commented Rabbi Haim David Halevy (late Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv), was an amazing phenomenon, a veritable miracle. Not one Jew in the entire empire betrayed the secret. The Jewish people were united, discreet, and disciplined to an extraordinary degree.

Let us imagine how this story would play out if it occurred today.

Jewish reporters would fiercely try to out-scoop each other to report about a Jewish Queen.

Wikileaks would put an image of Esther's birth certificate on the internet, with the indication that she was born Jewish.

The Hareidim would demonstrate worldwide at the travesty of a Jewish woman marrying a non-Jewish king, a wicked one at that.

The Chief Rabbinate of Israel would issue a statement that Esther's Jewishness was in question, and that she would need a "*giyyur le-humra*" (a conversion to be on the safe side) if she wanted to be considered Jewish for purposes of aliyah.

The Zionists would point to Esther and say: you see, the Jews of the diaspora are assimilating; they all should make aliyah before they totally disappear.

The zealous Litvaks would say: Esther is merely a Persian Jewess and doesn't have our fine Ashkenazic pedigree. We wouldn't want our sons to marry such a woman.

Chabad would send another shaliah to Shushan, to re-enforce the staff already there at the Chabad House. Cholent (Persian style) would be dished out each Shabbat morning along with prayers for the Queen's prompt release from bondage in the palace.

The Sephardi Federations around the globe would glow with quiet satisfaction that one of their own made the big time.

The peaceniks would say: this whole crisis could have been avoided if Mordecai simply bowed to Haman and would not have been so stubborn. If Jews simply gave everything away, we wouldn't have to worry about anti-Semitism.

The kabbalists would manufacture a new batch of red strings for bracelets, and sell them at a suitable price to those who wanted to provide mystical salvation to Esther and the Jewish people.

The secularists would blame the fanaticism of the religious community; the religious would blame the secularists for their innumerable sins which surely brought on God's wrath.

Jewish newspapers would be filled with spicy attacks and accusations, op-ed pieces and letters to the editor. Everyone would have an opinion, invariably wrong. All the commotion within the Jewish community would catch the attention of the non-Jewish media.

It would not take too long for Queen Esther's hidden identity to be revealed. Esther would have then been ejected from the throne; Haman would have had full sway; the Jews would have had no powerful person to intercede on their behalf. The Purim story would have ended in disaster. The joyous holiday of Purim would never have come to be.

The Jews of the ancient Persian Empire demonstrated remarkable intelligence and restraint. They understood what was at stake and they rose to the occasion with admirable self-control. They surely had differing opinions and ideologies among themselves; but when faced with national crisis, they knew enough to set their differences aside, to refrain from destructive gossip and back-biting.

While we modern Jews cannot hope to achieve the unity and self-control of the ancient Persian Jewish community, we can strive to act and speak with discretion, courtesy, and respect for the views of others. We can avoid vitriolic attacks on those with whom we disagree. We can focus on the really big issues which confront the Jewish people, and think how each of us can be constructive members of our community. We can know when to speak and when to remain silent. We can know when action is necessary and helpful, and when action is counter-productive and misguided.

Rabbi Halevy thought it was miraculous that the Jews of ancient Persia acted so wisely and so discreetly. Perhaps it is too much to expect such miraculous behavior from us. But perhaps — with intelligence, compassion, discretion and respectfulness — we can be part of a new Purim miracle for our generation.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City. Note: Rabbi Angel first published this column in 2012.

**The Insitute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals )www.jewishideas.org( wishes you and your loved ones a happy Purim**

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## **Titzevah - Purim: The Holy Letter**

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

*May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel*

One of the mitzvos of Purim is to recount the Purim story by reading the Megillah. The custom is that the reader unravels the scroll from which he will read and then he folds it so that it should look not like a scroll, but like a letter. At the conclusion of the reading, the reader must promptly roll the megillah back into a scroll, “*because leaving it folded as a letter is disrespectful to it.*”

One wonders: If folding the megillah as a letter is indeed disrespectful, why do we do it during the reading?

Let us consider the role that Jewish Scripture plays in Judaism. Jewish Scripture begins with the five books of Moshe, or the Biblical Era. During that time, Hashem’s presence was shown in a most dramatic way. Great open miracles occurred such as the splitting of the sea. Daily miracles were experienced in the desert when the Jews were provided with water from a rock, and Manna from heaven.

As the Biblical Era ended, the time of the prophets began. Hashem’s presence became less open as the Jews transitioned into a more natural lifestyle living in the Land of Israel. When necessary, Hashem would still perform an open miracle, but open miracles became the exception and not the rule.

**The story of Purim occurred after the Temple was destroyed. At that time, open miracles would no longer occur. Yet, even then, as the Jews found themselves in exile in a foreign land, Hashem promised that He would not forsake His people. During this period of exile, when Hashem chose to intercede, He did so through natural events.** In the Purim story, for example, Vashti was killed, Esther was taken to be the queen, and Haman sent letters which were later revoked. Everything looked natural. But when we look carefully, we can see the Hand of Hashem, guiding and nurturing events every step of the way. [emphasis added]

The Talmud relates that Esther requested that her story should be accepted as part of Scripture. It was clear to her, that in addition to the Biblical era and the era of the prophets, the Jewish people needed another model by which to live during the era of exile. Purim was the paradigm of the way Hashem would run the world during exile, and Esther requested that the story be codified as part of Jewish scripture. In effect, Esther argued, *“Do not think of the letter that was sent by Haman and Achashveirosh as merely a letter, and do not think of the letters that reversed the decree as merely fortuitous.”* Each one looks like merely a letter until we study the story well and realize that they are both part of a sacred story. Haman’s letter got the Jews to reconnect with Hashem. The letters that reversed the decree were divinely planned and implemented according to His Will.

The reason given for the custom to unroll the megillah and make it look like a letter is *“to show the miracle.”* Making the Megillah’s account of the story look first like a letter allows us to first view the events like casual letters. But by the time the Megillah is done we are ready to symbolically recognize the holiness of the letter. **Each year as we complete the reading we symbolically transition from seeing the Purim story as just a series of letters to recognizing Hashem’s Hand,** we recognize the holiness of this “letter.” We say, *“It is demeaning to leave it as a letter,”* and we promptly roll it respectfully into a scroll. [emphasis added]

**The gift of Purim is not just to celebrate the salvation. Purim is an opportunity to recognize the unique conduct of Hashem when we are in exile. His Hand is hidden but it is ever present. Esther recognized herself as a player in this G-dly orchestrated story. When we internalize the lesson of Esther, we too become eligible to be messengers of Hashem to bring about goodness.** [emphasis added]

For Family Discussion:

We describe Hashem's Hand as *“hidden but ever present”* during exile. What does that mean to you? If a miracle doesn't look like a miracle, is it still a miracle? How do you define a miracle?

Esther saw herself as a messenger of Hashem. Do you think regular people can be messengers too? What is one thing you could do this Purim to be a messenger?

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos and a Happy Purim!

\* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are [www.care-mediation.com](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com).  
**For information or to join any Torah613 classes, or to help sponsor his Torah insights, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

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## A Blind Person Reading Torah with the Assistance of Braille

By Rabbanit Aliza Sperling \*

### QUESTION:

May a blind person be the ba'al korei to read from the Torah for the congregation using a Braille text to access what is written in the sefer torah?

### ANSWER:

Until the invention of Hebrew Braille in the 1940s, the only option for a blind person's keriat ha'torah was to recite Torah from memory. Today, however, a blind person can stand before a kosher sefer torah and use Braille as an aid to access the Torah text. Even though the blind person would not be visually reading from the sefer torah in front of them, it would be clear that they are using Braille in order to properly communicate to the congregation the words from the Torah text.

Would a blind person reading the Torah while standing in front of the sefer torah, and with the assistance of a Braille text, be considered a halachically viable alternative to visually reading keriat ha'torah? Although, for some people, the possibility that the Torah reading could be performed without directly reading from the Torah scroll itself might seem inconceivable, the sources actually indicate otherwise. It is my contention that this practice would not only satisfy the halachic requirements for keriat ha'torah but would also be consistent with how halakhic authorities throughout history have provided access for blind people to receive aliyot for keriat ha'torah, and should be permitted le'chatchila. Communities should therefore not only permit, but indeed encourage, blind individuals to read Torah with the assistance of a Braille text.

### **Devarim She'bikhtav**

The Talmud never discusses whether a blind person would be permitted to receive an aliyah and read from the Torah. Mishnah Megillah 4:6 addresses whether a blind person can participate in other synagogue rituals but does not mention or discuss keriat ha'torah. Similarly, while the Mishnah (Megillah 2:1) states explicitly that when it comes to the mitzvah of reading Megillat Esther, one does not fulfill their obligation if they read b'al peh, that is, without directly reading from the text itself, no such statement ever appears anywhere in the context of keriat ha'torah.

The only concern we find in the Talmud regarding the need to read directly from a Torah scroll is the principle of *devarim she'bikhtav*, the Written Torah may not be recited from memory, which appears in Gittin 60b. This principle is not stated specifically in regard to the ritual *keriat ha'torah* in the congregation. It relates to any and all recitation of Torah verses from memory. Its purpose is to create a strict demarcation between the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. Since these two Torahs were transmitted from G-d in very distinct ways – one in written form, and one in oral form – their distinctive identities and methods of transmission must be preserved throughout history: the Written Torah may not be recited from memory, and the Oral Torah may not be written down.

This principle is also applied to the communal keriat ha'torah, and it is indeed the only halakhic issue that Rishonim discuss in regard to the problem of doing keriat ha'torah from memory. Indeed, in explaining their rulings as to why a blind person may not read from the Torah for the congregation, the sole reason that Tur and Shulchan Arukh give is that this would go against the principle of *devarim she'bikhtav* (Tur Orach Chaim 53:14, Shulchan Arukh Orach Chaim 53:14 and 139:3).

The question that we must ask, then, is whether there are ever any exceptions to this principle, whether in the case of simple recitation of Torah verses in the course of prayer or learning or the like, or – more to our point – in the case of the communal keriat ha'torah.

The first of these exceptions, already found in the Gemara itself, is that of *lo efshar*, when no other option is available or when counterbalancing concerns are present.

### **Exceptions When Not Possible or When Competing with Other Values**

In the Talmud, the prohibition to recite Torah from memory is limited in cases of *lo efshar*, where there is a clear need or countervailing value. BT Gittin 60a states that the Oral Torah was permitted to be written down because the Rabbis were afraid that persecution would cause it to be forgotten. Similarly, they permitted writing a book of haftarot (which violates *devarim she'bikhtav* since it was originally only permitted to write complete books of Tanach) since many communities did not own full books of Tanach.

Most significantly for our purposes, the Mishnah teaches that on Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol would read a Torah portion related to Yom Kippur to those assembled in the Temple from memory (Mishnah Yoma 7:1), and the Talmud explains that this was permitted since it would violate *kvod tzibur* to make the congregation wait while they roll the scroll to the right place (Yoma 70a).

Basing himself on these passages, Ravva, one of the early Tosafists, rules that it is permitted *lechatchila* to do *keriat hatorah* from memory when there is a countervailing need (*lo efshar*). Tosafot Yeshanim and Rosh go one step further and state that the need to read directly from the *sefer torah* for *keriat hatorah* is itself only a mitzvah *min ha'muvchar*, the optimal way to perform the mitzvah, but in a case of a competing need it may be done from memory.

While some other Rishonim argue that the Kohen Gadol's Torah reading was not a normal *keriat hatorah* and was thus permitted to be done without directly reading from the scroll, this is not the approach of the Rishonim we have cited. Moreover, as a practical matter, Rashba in a responsum, basing himself on the precedent of the Kohen Gadol, rules that on Shabbat Rosh Chodesh, when a congregation owns one *sefer torah*, it is permissible to recite the Rosh Chodesh Torah reading from memory rather than violating *kvod tzibur* by forcing the congregation to wait for the scroll to be rolled to the right place. (It is possible that Rashba is ruling this way only in regard to a special maftir reading, but he nowhere indicates this. His guiding principle is that *kavod tzibur* overrides *devarim she'bikhtav*.)

Similarly, Tosafot Rid writes that a *keriat hatorah* for the congregation done from memory is valid *be'dieved*, and that *devarim she'bikhtav* is only prohibited *lechatchila* out of a concern for mistakes. Furthermore, he writes that if one has memorized the text well, so that we are not afraid he will make mistakes, then their *keriat hatorah* is permissible *lechatchila*, as can be seen from the case of the Kohen Gadol who recited Torah from memory.

A blind person reading with the aid of Braille fits into these established exceptions. When one reads using a carefully prepared Braille text, the core concerns underlying *devarim she'bikhtav* are resolved. This is certainly a case of *lo efshar*, which – as we have seen – refers not to cases where there are literally no other options, but rather where there are counterbalancing concerns, such as the honor of the congregation, which are deemed to be of greater value. That would certainly be the case here, where excluding a member of the congregation due to a physical disability would be a clear violation both of *kvod ha'briyot* and *kvod ha'tzibbur*.

Beyond those countervailing concerns, in regard to the blind person himself, it is truly a case of *lo efshar*, since there is no other way that he might be able to read from the Torah. Indeed, Meiri quotes an opinion that permits a blind person to do *keriat hatorah* for the congregation, because *devarim she'bikhtav* applies only to cases where it is possible to visually read from the *sefer torah*.

Among contemporary poskim, Arukh HaShulkhan (OH 139:8), in addressing the practice of giving *aliyot* to a blind person despite the fact that the *oleh* is required to read directly from the Torah, states explicitly that:

*This practice seems to be based on what Tosafot Yeshanim (Yoma 70a) wrote, that devarim she'bikhtav is only a mitzvah min ha'muvchar requirement. Therefore, in the case of a blind person, since it is not possible for him to receive an aliyah in any other way, it is permissible lechatchila.*

Based on all of the above, it is clear that a blind person who cannot read from the Torah in any other way may read from the Torah with the assistance of Braille.

### **Concerns of Devarim She'bikhtav are Not Present**

Beyond the argument of *lo efshar* and counterbalancing concerns, it can be argued that the case of a blind person reading from the Torah with the assistance of Braille is not a problem of *devarim she'bikhtav* to begin with.

As we have seen, one of the reasons the Rishonim identify for this prohibition is a concern with maintaining textual accuracy and fidelity. Additional reasons include: preventing suspicion that a scroll is deficient; preserving textual features such as chaserot and yeterot; and maintaining communal investment in writing and acquiring sifrei torah.

None of those concerns is present here. Accuracy and fidelity to the text is maintained, since the reader relies on written words rather than memory. There is no reason to suspect textual deficiency, since the blind ba'al koreh is clearly reading, and the oleh is following along in the kosher sefer torah. The spellings of the Torah text are preserved in Hebrew Braille, which constitutes an alternative written form of the Hebrew alphabet and allows access to the same textual details. And the sefer torah would be present and accorded honor and priority, and no one would think that the congregation does not need to invest in acquiring a sefer torah.

A number of Rishonim state explicitly that when the concerns for devarim she'bikhtav are not present, the principle no longer applies. For example, Rishonim explain that we may recite *psukei di'zimra* without reading from a scroll of Tanakh, because we know the text fluently and will not make mistakes. While it is possible that some Rishonim may not be as prepared to apply this flexibility to cases of a ritual reading which is *li'hotzi et ha'rabbim*, coming to discharge a communal obligation, others clearly do not make such distinctions. Thus, as we have seen, Tosafot Rid states that if a person knows the text fluently, he may do the krias hatorah without directly reading from a Torah scroll.

Reading with Braille, though non-visual, directly addresses all the rabbinic concerns underlying the prohibition and should fall fully outside the prohibition and be permitted lechatchila. And, as we have seen, this is a case where there are no alternatives and where other values are at risk, and thus should be permitted, regardless.

It needs to be stressed that permitting such a reading is not a concession or something to ideally be avoided. When a community chooses to refuse to let a blind person read from the Torah so as to not compromise the fully traditional reading of the Torah, they are in fact compromising other core values that halakha has historically privileged. In such a case the right decision is to have the blind person read from the Torah. This can be seen from the case of the Kohen Gadol where the Rabbis determined that concerns for kvod ha'tzibbur outweighed and had to be given priority over the need to read directly from the Torah scroll.

This is also what emerges from the history of psak regarding giving a blind person an aliyah, which we turn to now.

We have shown how reading with the help of a Braille text would fit into the exceptions to devarim she'bikhtav and should be permitted lechatchila. But that is only half the story. The history of halachic decision making regarding blind people and krias hatorah shows that the needs of blind people to read Torah individually and as part of synagogue ritual overrode concerns of devarim she'bikhtav.

The question of a blind person receiving an aliyah – in contrast to reading from the Torah – has been discussed and debated for centuries amongst the poskim. And yet, even in those communities whose halachic traditions should have dictated otherwise, and had dictated otherwise in the past, the halacha developed over time to give blind people opportunities to engage in the communal krias ha'torah.

First, some background. In the time of the Talmud, the oleh, the person receiving the aliyah, would read from the Torah himself. By the time of Rav Yosef Karo, however, the institution of the ba'al koreh — a person standing alongside the oleh who would read from the Torah — had been established. Despite this, Rav Karo ruled in Shukhan Arukh that a blind person could not receive an aliyah because the oleh himself needed to be able to read from the text. In contrast, some Ashkenazic authorities permitted blind individuals to receive aliyot.

Over time, this practice spread widely – certainly among the Ashkenazim, but also among Sephardic communities that followed the Shukhan Arukh for everything else. Even Rav Ovadia Yosef ruled that blind people may receive aliyot

be'dieved to prevent *agmat nefesh*, the anguish of exclusion. Testimony records that he personally gave aliyot to a blind congregant, relying on lenient authorities and emphasizing that one must not rule stringently when it causes profound emotional pain. Nowadays, blind people regularly receive aliyot in almost every community.

Giving aliyot to blind people despite the strictures of devarim she'bikhtav was not easy for Sephardic communities who rule that the oleh must read from the Torah himself. And yet, the poskim found a way. Some authorities relied on the concept of *shomea k'oneh*, that when the blind person listened to the Torah reading it was as if they had read it. Others stated that repeating the words after the ba'al koreh ensured accuracy, and so it was permissible even though it was not being read directly from the text. And as we have seen, *Arukh HaShulkan* writes that blind people are able to receive an aliyah because the entire requirement of reading directly from the text is only *li'chatchilah*, and is permitted in cases where no alternatives exist.

In order to give blind people access to keriat hatorah, the poskim relied on positions that went beyond their normal approach to psak. We are called upon to similarly extend ourselves and permit blind people to read Torah for the congregation using Braille assistance, even if they have opportunities to participate elsewhere in Torah service, and even if it feels uncomfortable. If we fail to do so, we will not only cause great pain to these individuals but will also diminish kvod tzibbur and depart from the courageous and inclusive halachic history regarding blind people's participation in keriat hatorah.

## CONCLUSION

It is permissible for a blind person to recite keriat hatorah for the congregation with the help of a Braille text. The Braille text should be proofread carefully to ensure that there are no mistakes, and that the letters (including chaserot and yeterot, and other textual symbols) are exactly the same as that which is found in a kosher sefer torah.

The Torah service should be conducted as usual, and a kosher sefer torah should be taken out of the Aron and placed on the shulchan. The blind Torah reader, olim, and gabbaim should make it clear that the Sefer Torah is the cornerstone of the service, and that the Braille text is being used to access what is written in the kosher sefer torah. When sighted olim are called to the Torah, they should follow along in the kosher sefer torah.

\* Talmud faculty at Yeshivat Maharat, Riverdale, NY, and director of Maharat's Halakha in Action fellowship program.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2026/02/a-blind-person-reading-torah-with-the-assistance-of-braille/>

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## Parshas Tetzaveh – Remove the Grudge You Never Had by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \* © 5782 (2022)

When Hashem begins instructing Moshe in the making of the priestly garments, there is an unexpected phrase. Hashem says to Moshe, "*And you should bring Aharon your brother close to you and his sons with him to make them priests for Me.*" )Shemos 28:1( In what sense was Moshe to draw Aharon close to him?

The Medrash Rabbah explains that when Moshe came down from Har Sinai and saw the tragedy of the Golden Calf, he gazed upon his brother Aharon and saw Aharon banging on the calf with a hammer to fashion it. The Medrash tells us that Aharon had taken the lead role in fashioning the form of the calf in order to be in a position to delay the completion of the calf, hoping that Moshe would return before the calf was fully completed. Moshe, though, did not realize this at first and suspected Aharon of being a full partner in the creation of the Golden Calf. Moshe, therefore, had a measure of ill will in his heart towards Aharon. It was this ill will that Hashem was addressing now by saying, "*Bring Aharon your brother close to you.*" Hashem was telling Moshe to remove the ill will he felt towards Aharon because Aharon's intentions were entirely pure. )Shemos Rabbah 37:2(

The idea that Moshe should be holding any ill will towards Aharon over the Golden Calf is extremely difficult to understand. There is a Torah obligation to judge people favorably. When dealing with a righteous person who has an established track record of going above and beyond, that obligation applies even when it seems obvious that the person had done wrong. Aharon certainly deserved the benefit of the doubt. Indeed, the Torah tells us that Moshe immediately asked Aharon what the nation had done to force his hand and Aharon explained himself. )Shemos 32:21-24( Aside from this obligation, Moshe certainly trusted his older brother and wanted to believe in his innocence. Moshe held a tremendous love and respect for his older brother. Our rabbis teach us that when Hashem first asked Moshe to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt, he asked Hashem to send Aharon instead, because he didn't want to lead over his older brother. He was willing to forgo all of the great spiritual heights and the unique relationship which G-d had with him and the great merit of being called Moshe Rabbeinu – Our teacher – Moshe would have given all that up in order not to hurt his older brother. )Medrash Tanchuma Shemos 27( Moshe's closeness with Aharon was as close as brothers could be. The Medrash tells us also that when Moshe anointed Aharon and he saw the oil dripping down Aharon's beard, Moshe felt such joy for Aharon that it was as though the oil was flowing down Moshe's own beard. )Even though this was after Hashem told Moshe to draw Aharon close, Moshe certainly must have had deep feelings for Aharon beforehand to be able to reach such a depth of closeness so quickly.( )Vayikrah Rabbah 3:6(

Our rabbis teach us that the Torah uses extreme language when dealing with great people to highlight minor emotions. )See Ramba"n on Bereishis 29:31( It would seem that this principle applies here, as well. Certainly Moshe did not have strong feelings against Aharon, and he deeply believed – and wanted to believe – in Aharon's innocence. Nonetheless, deep within Moshe's heart was a memory of a shocking first impression from that moment when he saw Aharon appearing to be fully involved in the Golden Calf. That painful memory had left its imprint and Moshe still felt a twinge of angst deep within towards Aharon. It was this twinge that Hashem was instructing Moshe to remove. As great as their love was, it was not as complete as it could be. Hashem wanted their love for each other to be as complete as was humanly possible.

This Medrash is a powerful insight into *v'ahavta l'rei'acha kaocha* -- "*Love your friend as yourself.*" No matter how deep our love for another Jew is, Hashem wants us to strive for more – to see the good in others and see beyond their flaws. The mitzvah is to truly aim to love another as completely as I love my own self.

\* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and then associated with the Savannah Kollel.

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## **The Future of Sacrifices**

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \* (5783)

The rebuilding of the Temple, and the reestablishment of the sacrifices in it, are central themes in our prayers and rituals, including the Haggadah, but have you ever tried to visualize yourself making the pilgrimage to that Third Temple, with the animal for sacrifice in tow? Imagine yourself walking uphill, pulling a goat, lamb, or ox, behind you. You are surrounded by thousands of revelers, each with his own animal. You arrive at the gates of the Temple, where you wait in line for your turn. Hundreds of Cohanim hurry across the Temple grounds to perform the ritual slaughtering, while choirs of Levites chant and sing. When your turn comes the Cohen skillfully slits the animal's throat, as he has done thousands of times before. He deftly collects the blood in a vessel and hands it to a human chain which ends at the altar, on which the blood will be sprinkled.

How will you feel? Will you be elated and inspired by the frenzied action, the smell of blood, the burning animals, the clamor of the multitude, and the music in the background, or will you feel disconcerted and confused? Do you expect all other aspects of your life to remain the same when the Temple is built? If so, would you be able to walk away from the Temple Mount, barefoot and with blood soiled garments, check into your hotel, change, and be back the following day at your office? You don't need to be a vegetarian to feel uncomfortable with the description of the sacrifices at the temple, just try to spend a couple of hours at a butcher's shop, preferably in the summer. Most of us have never seen an animal being

slaughtered, except maybe for chicken for Kapparot )a practice forbidden by the Shulhan Arukh(. The process happens away from us and we receive the clean, sterilized meat, packed with absorbent pads to save us the discomfort of the sight of blood. Honestly, in the twenty-first century, do people still believe that God demands animal sacrifices of us? The scholar who best represents this dilemma is Maimonides. In his *Guide of the Perplexed* he argues that the system of the sacrifices was a concession, made by God to accommodate the Israelites, who knew no other way to worship their gods. According to that explanation, in a Temple built in modern times, there will ]not[ be room for sacrifices, since our society has changed and matured. On the other hand, in his Halakhic work, Mishneh Torah, there are over a dozen sections dedicated to detailed legislation of the Temple, its vessels, and the sacrifices. Which Maimonides do you follow? The rationalist who understands that sacrifices belong in the past, or the legalist who must present the full spectrum of Jewish Law? While many Jews choose to side with one of the options Maimonides offers, others prefer to live with the cognitive dissonance, feeling that the idea of sacrifices does not excite or inspire them, but adhering to the law as presented by Maimonides.

I believe that we pray for the restoration of the Temple and the sacrifices because we long for the past and this is what we have lost, and that the future may hold for us a different way of life. One might argue that one of Maimonides' Principles of Faith is the Torah is eternal and will never change, so it would be impossible to entertain an idea of a Temple in any other way than is described in the Torah. The answer to that is the Torah will never be changed by humans, but if God, through the word of the prophets, or maybe by speaking directly to all of us, informs us that a new system is in place, it is hard to imagine that we will reject His orders and say that we adhere to the Principles of Maimonides )though I can think of some colleagues who will do just that.(

In the meantime, if we look for guidance in the Tanakh itself, we will see that the concept of sacrifices was approached with great caution, and even criticism, from the very beginning. There are the scathing prophecies and sermons of Samuel, King David, Isaiah, Micah, Hosea, Amos, and Jeremiah,]1[ and there are the failed attempts of Aaron's sons and of Balaam to appease God through sacrifices. In a subtler way, the Torah informs us of the true purpose of the sacrifices in this week's Parasha, simultaneously with the introduction of the concept of sacrifices. The Torah does so by intertwining laws of impurity and protecting the Temple's possessions with laws of business ethics, honesty, and civic responsibility.

The section starts with the responsibility of citizens to report crimes to the judicial branch, and continues to discuss impurity, a powerful word which conjures images of banishment and contamination. The equation of the two is not coincidental. It is meant to plant in our mind the importance of fulfilling our civic duty. The next transgression is embezzlement of the Temple, another looming taboo, from which we go to a general statement on the transgression of any mitzvah. Following that, the Torah speaks of one who betrays God trust. And who is that person who defies God's authority, who is embezzling, as it were, God's possessions? It is the one who unlawfully took money or goods from another person.

The Torah makes it clear that there is no distinction between embezzling the Temple or your fellow man, and that being unethical and dishonest is tantamount to impurity. All these can be cured by a thorough process which includes repenting, paying damages and fines, bringing a sacrifice, and confessing publicly, but it is obvious that if only the ritual is conducted, while reparations were not made, and one did not change his ways, that the sacrifice is meaningless.

We should therefore focus on teaching these values to the next generation and on practicing them ourselves. This might lead to redemption and to the construction of the future Temple, which according to Micah )4:1-2( will be a center not for animal sacrifices, but for the dissemination of the Torah and its values:

#### Micah 4:1-2:

*)1( In the days to come,  
The Mount of the LORD's House shall stand  
Firm above the mountains;  
And it shall tower above the hills.  
The peoples shall gaze on it with joy,*

*)2( And the many nations shall go and shall say:  
"Come,  
Let us go up to the Mount of the LORD,  
To the House of the God of Jacob;  
That He may instruct us in His ways,  
And that we may walk in His paths."  
For instruction shall come forth from Zion,  
The word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

#### **ENDNOTE:**

]1[ 1 Sam. 15:22-23; Psalms 51; Is. 1:10-18; Micah 6:6-9; Hos. 4:1-5:7; Amos 5:21-26; Jer. 7:1-19;

Leviticus 5:1-26:

)1( If a person incurs guilt — When one has heard a public imprecation .... )2( Or when a person touches any impure thing ... )3( Or when one touches human impurity... )4( Or when a person utters an oath to bad or good purpose... )15( When a person commits a trespass, being unwittingly remiss about any of H's sacred things... )17( And a person who, without knowing it, sins in regard to any of H's commandments about things not to be done... )21( When a person sins and commits a trespass against H' — by dealing deceitfully with another in the matter of a deposit or a pledge, or through robbery, or by defrauding another, )22( or by finding something lost and lying about it; if one swears falsely regarding any one of the various things that someone may do and sin thereby... )26( The priest shall make expiation before H' on behalf of that person, who shall be forgiven for whatever was done to draw blame thereby.

Shabbat Shalom.

\* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan )Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights )copyright( to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

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## **A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community**

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz \*

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation \*\*

A few weeks ago, we read Parashat Yitro, one of the most significant moments in Jewish history: the receiving of the Torah. Interestingly, this parsha is not called Moshe, the Ten Commandments, or Mount Sinai – it is named after a non-Jewish, idol-worshipping priest.

No parsha in the Torah is named for Moshe, and even more striking, in this week's parsha, Moshe isn't even mentioned at all. From the beginning of Shemot through the end of Sefer Bamidbar )Numbers(, this is the only parsha where Moshe's name is completely omitted.

This week's Shabbat table discussion: Why is Moshe's name omitted in this parsha? What is the connection to Purim?

Shabbat Shalom & Purim Sameach!

Bahavat Yisrael,

Rabbi Netanel

\* Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher> .  
]Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message for the congregation?]

\*\* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

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## Rav Kook Torah Tetzaveh: Beyond the Holy

### One Line or Two?

One of the most impressive of the special vestments worn by the High Priest was the tzitz, a pure gold plate placed across the forehead. Engraved on the tzitz was the phrase, “*Holy to God.*”

According to Talmudic tradition, these words were split into two lines. God's name appeared on the top line, and underneath was written, “Holy to.” In contradiction to this tradition, however, Rabbi Eliezer testified that he had seen the tzitz among the plundered Temple articles in Rome — and the engraving was made on a single line )Shabbat 63b(.

Why should the phrase “Holy to God” be split into two lines? And if that was the way the inscription was supposed to be engraved, why did the actual tzitz used in the Temple bear the entire phrase on one line?

### The Realm of Kodesh Kodashim

We are accustomed to viewing the world as being divided into two realms: kodesh and chol, the holy and the profane. We are deeply aware of this dichotomy, and the friction between them, in all levels of existence: in our actions, feelings, thoughts, areas of study, and so on. The conflict between sacred and secular exists both in our private lives and in the public sphere.

There is, however, a third realm, even higher than Kodesh. This is the level of kodesh *kodashim*, the ‘*holy of holies.*’ This is the very source of holiness, and it is based on both kodesh and chol. While the realms of kodesh and chol appear to us as competing and contradictory, in fact, each one complements and supports the other. The holy gives meaning to the profane; without it, the world of chol is lost, without direction or purpose. And the profane gives strength and substance to the holy. Without it, the kodesh has nothing to refine and elevate.

The lofty realm of kodesh kodashim is attained by the complementary interactions of kodesh and chol. This level reveals the common source of elevated holiness that resides in both kodesh and chol. In fact, kodesh kodashim is so much higher than the other two realms, that, when viewed from such heights, the differences between the holy and the profane disappear.

The Oral Tradition states that God's name was engraved on a separate line above the words, "Holy to." In other words, God's name belongs to the exalted world of kodesh kodashim. Since it reflects a vision far beyond the apparent contradictions of holy and profane, it could not be written on the same line as "Holy to."

### **Distinguishing Between Kodesh and Chol**

This elevated outlook is, however, only theoretical. In our world, it is crucial that we distinguish between kodesh and chol. Humanity's moral development depends on havdalah, a clear awareness and distinction between what is sacred and what is not.

Furthermore, if we do not separate these two areas and ensure that each one maintains its independence, both kodesh and chol will suffer. Lack of clear boundaries between them greatly hinders human advance. For example, cold academic analysis and dissection of Torah subjects can leave them lifeless and dismembered. Religious encroachment on secular areas of study, on the other hand, can obstruct scientific progress )consider Galileo's struggles with the Church(. Therefore, in practice it was necessary to lower God's name on the tzitz to share the same level as "Holy to." In this way, the holy is set apart from the profane.

Still, the potential to perceive the inner unity of kodesh and chol was — at least theoretically — engraved on the High Priest's forehead-plate, raising his thoughts to the unified reality of kodesh kodashim, where God's name is inscribed above and beyond the kodesh.

)*Gold from the Land of Israel*, pp. 155-157. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. IV, p. 114; *Ma'amerei HaRe'iyah*, pp. 400-407.(

[https://ravkooktorah.org/tetzaveh\\_65](https://ravkooktorah.org/tetzaveh_65)

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### **Tetzaveh: Crushed for the Light (5778)**

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former UK Chief Rabbi\*

There are lives that are lessons. The late Henry Knobil's was one. He was born in Vienna in 1932. His father had come there in the 1920s to escape the rising tide of antisemitism in Poland, but like Jacob fleeing from Esau to Laban, he found that he had fled one danger only to arrive at another.

After the Anschluss and Kristallnacht, it became clear that, if the family were to survive, they had to leave. They arrived in Britain in 1939, just weeks before their fate would have been sealed had they stayed. Henry grew up in Nottingham, in the Midlands. There he studied textiles, and after his army service went to work for one of the great British companies, eventually starting his own highly successful textile business.

He was a passionate, believing Jew and loved everything about Judaism. He and his wife Renata were a model couple, active in synagogue life, always inviting guests to their home for Shabbat or the festivals. I came to know Henry because he believed in giving back to the community, not only in money but also in time and energy and leadership. He became the chairperson of many Jewish organisations, including the national Israel )UJIA( appeal, British Friends of Bar Ilan University, the Jewish Marriage Council, the British-Israel Chamber of Commerce and the Western Marble Arch Synagogue.

He loved learning and teaching Torah. He was a fine raconteur with an endless supply of jokes and regularly used his humour to bring "laughter therapy" to cancer patients, Holocaust survivors and the residents of Jewish Care homes. Blessed with three children and many grandchildren, he had retired and was looking forward, with Renata, to a serene last chapter in a long and good life.

Then, seven years ago, he came back from morning service in the synagogue to find that Renata had suffered a devastating stroke. For a while her life hung in the balance. She survived, but their whole life now had to change. They gave up their magnificent apartment in the centre of town to a place with easier wheelchair access. Henry became Renata's constant carer and life support. He was with her day and night, attentive to her every need.

The transformation was astonishing. Before, he had been a strong-willed businessman and communal leader. Now he became a nurse, radiating gentleness and concern. His love for Renata and hers for him bathed the two of them in a kind of radiance that was moving and humbling. And though he might, like Job, have stormed the gates of heaven to know why this had happened to them, he did the opposite. He thanked God daily for all the blessings they had enjoyed. He never complained, never doubted, never wavered in his faith.

Then, a year ago, he was diagnosed with an inoperable condition. He had, and knew he had, only a short time to live. What he did then was a supreme act of will. He sought one thing: to be given the grace to live as long as Renata did, so that she would never find herself alone. Three months ago, as I write these words, Renata died. Shortly thereafter, Henry joined her. *"Beloved and pleasant in their lives, and in their death undivided."*<sup>1</sup> Rarely have I seen such love in adversity.

In an earlier Covenant and Conversation, I wrote about the power of art to turn pain into beauty. Henry taught us about the power of faith to turn pain into chessed, loving-kindness. Faith was at the very heart of what he stood for. He believed that God had spared him from Hitler for a purpose. He had given Henry business success for a purpose also. I never heard him attribute any of his achievements to himself. For whatever went well, he thanked God. For whatever did not go well, the question he asked was simply: what does God want me to learn from this? What, now that this has happened, does He want me to do? That mindset had carried him through the good years with humility. Now it carried him through the painful years with courage.

Our parsha begins with the words: *"Command the Israelites to bring you clear olive oil, crushed for the light, so that the lamp may always burn"* (Ex. 27:20). The Sages drew a comparison between the olive and the Jewish people:

*"Rabbi Joshua ben Levi asked, why is Israel compared to an olive? Just as an olive is first bitter, then sweet, so Israel suffers in the present but great good is stored up for them in the time to come. And just as the olive only yields its oil by being crushed — as it is written, 'clear olive oil, crushed for the light' — so Israel fulfils [its full potential in] the Torah only when it is pressed by suffering."*<sup>2</sup>

The oil was, of course, for the menorah, whose perpetual light — first in the Sanctuary, then in the Temple, and now that we have no Temple, the more mystical light that shines from every holy place, life and deed — symbolises the Divine light that floods the universe for those who see it through the eyes of faith. To produce this light, something has to be crushed. And here lies the life-changing lesson.

Suffering is bad. Judaism makes no attempt to hide this fact. The Talmud gives an account of various Sages who fell ill. When asked, *"Are your sufferings precious to you?"* they replied, *"Neither they nor their reward."*<sup>3</sup> When they befall us or someone close to us, they can lead us to despair. Alternatively, we can respond stoically. We can practice the attribute of *gevurah*, strength in adversity. But there is a third possibility. We can respond as Henry responded, with compassion, kindness and love. We can become like the olive which, when crushed, produces the pure oil that fuels the light of holiness.

When bad things happen to good people, our faith is challenged. That is a natural response, not a heretical one. Abraham asked, *"Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?"* Moses asked, *"Why have You done harm to this people?"* Yet in the end, the wrong question to ask is, *"Why has this happened?"* We will never know. We are not God, nor should we aspire to be. The right question is, *"Given that this has happened, what then shall I do?"* To this, the answer is not a thought but a deed. It is to heal what can be healed, medically in the case of the body, psychologically in the case of the mind, spiritually in the case of the soul. Our task is to bring light to the dark places of our and other peoples' lives.

That is what Henry did. Renata still suffered. So did he. But their spirit prevailed over their body. Crushed, they radiated light. Let no one imagine this is easy. It takes a supreme act of faith. Yet it is precisely here that we feel faith's power to change lives. Just as great art can turn pain into beauty, so great faith can turn pain into love and holy light.

#### FOOTNOTES:

]1[ 2 Samuel 1:23.

]2[ *Midrash Pitron Torah* to Num. 13:2.

]3[ *Brachot* 5b.

#### LIFE CHANGING IDEA #20:

When you experience suffering, the question to ask is, "*Given this has happened, what then shall I do?*" for this has an answer not of thought but of deed.

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/tetzaveh/crushed-for-the-light/> Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Devar.

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## 7 Thoughts About Reflecting Light

By Katia Bolotin \* © Chabad

Light is necessary for the survival of life. Without it, the Earth would be completely cold and dark, and vegetation could not exist. Light can be produced from a source but can also be reflected by another object. The moon's glow, for example, comes from reflecting the sun's light. There is also a different form of light — spiritual light. The Jewish people are compared to the moon. Just as the moon is illuminated by the sun, the Jewish people are illuminated by G d's infinite light and reflect it onward. The Torah given to us by G d at Sinai is the perfect reflection of its Giver.

Light is a symbol for that which allows us to see, to know and to understand. When there is light, we need not stumble along the obstacle course called life. The Torah's light provides us with insight and wisdom. It enables us to clarify concepts, integrate ideas and clearly see reality. As corrective lenses are for the eyes, the Torah is for the soul; it maximizes the soul's inner vision.

The Tabernacle's Menorah symbolizes multidimensional concepts, among them the light of the Torah. Because the Torah's light is sacred, everything used to create the Menorah's flame is significant. From its placement in the Tabernacle to even the way it should be kindled, every detail is precise.

Here are seven lessons we learn from the Menorah and light.

### 1. The Light of Torah Guides Everything

We're instructed to place the Menorah "outside the Partition that is near the Testimonial Tablets."<sup>1</sup> Why outside the partition? So that the light of Torah will influence us not only when we are inside the sanctuary, involved in study and prayer, but when "outside the partition" as well. The Torah's light extends outward to guide our actions while at home, at work, and in our daily interactions.

## 2. Safeguard the Torah's Light

Only pure olive oil can be used for lighting the Menorah: *"And you should command the children of Israel that they shall take for you pressed pure olive oil, for illumination, to kindle the lamp until it burns continually."*<sup>2</sup>

A deeper meaning is that we must safeguard the Torah's light so that it is not influenced negatively by ideas that would compromise its purity. Use the Torah to raise yourself up; don't pull down or sully its light.

## 3. Make It Relevant

Once kindled, its flame must burn brightly. We can learn from this that the Torah's teachings must be fully absorbed, so that they will ignite an inner flame that will glow. Likewise, parents and educators must patiently and persistently strive to teach children Torah in a way that is both motivating and relevant.

## 4. Illuminate the Dark Times of Life

To obtain pure oil for lighting the Menorah, olives must be pressed. Only when it's pressed can the olive produce pure oil to fuel the infinite light of holiness. When pressed, its value is not diminished, but is elevated and increased.

We can emulate the olive. During difficult times, when we may feel stressed, we still can generate light to illuminate the dark place in our lives and in the lives of others. Pain can be transformed to a greater purpose.

## 5. G d's Light Illuminates to the World

When King Solomon built the Beit HaMikdash (Holy Temple) in Jerusalem, the architecture was influenced by the Menorah: *"He made narrowing windows for the Temple."*<sup>3</sup> Typically, windows would be wider towards the inside of a building so that the light from outside could be diffused throughout the room. The Talmud, however, explains that in the Beit HaMikdash the windows were wide on the exterior and narrow in the interior.<sup>4</sup> This symbolized that G d's holy presence dwells within Israel's midst yet radiates outward to illuminate the entire world.

## 6. The Jewish People as a 'Light Unto the Nations'

The Menorah also symbolizes the nation of Israel and its mission to be "a light unto the nations."<sup>5</sup> The prophet Isaiah envisioned that G d will restore the Jewish people to their ancestral homeland. This return will cause all of the nations to open their eyes to the Divine light of the one G d of Israel. "A light unto the nations" is a designation of the Jewish people's collective role — mentors for spiritual and moral guidance to the entire world.

## 7. Torah Means Light

The Torah's guiding light provides an ethical and moral compass with which to navigate the most complicated and challenging life issues. Its instruction and guidance speak to each individual, as well as to the Jewish people as a whole. The word Torah shares the same etymology as the Hebrew word orah, "light" — its teachings shine a light on life and show you which way to go. As King Solomon described, *"... a mitzvah is a candle, and Torah is light."*<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, Torah is the source of spiritual illumination in the world.

Always within our grasp, the Torah's light can help guide us towards our destination with greater positivity and faith. May we strive to actualize the Torah's wisdom, more and more, throughout our lives.

## Making It Relevant

1. Contemplate how you can reflect the Torah's light and wisdom. Choose to do so.
2. Increase your home's spiritual value. Don't allow negative influences that could be toxic to your or others' souls inside.
3. Conduct your own spiritual reality check. If you're feeling stressed and crushed by your challenges, find purpose in your pain. Amplify your inner light and shine it onto others.

## FOOTNOTES:

1. Exodus 27:21.
2. Exodus 27:20.
3. 1 Kings 6:4.
4. Menachot 86b.
5. Isaiah 42:6.
6. Proverbs, 6:23.â

\* Katia Bolotin, a regular contributor for Chabad.org, focuses on how personal growth harmonizes with the Torah's wisdom and how best to cultivate and maintain it.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/5833697/jewish/7-Thoughts-About-Reflecting-Light.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5833697/jewish/7-Thoughts-About-Reflecting-Light.htm)

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## Tetzaveh: Decoding the Exile

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

The high priest's Breastplate was a piece of material folded in half. A parchment inscribed with G-d's Name was inserted between the folds; it was called the "*urim and tumim*," meaning "*lights and sincere devotions*."

*You shall make a Breastplate of Judgment of woven design. You shall make it as the Ephod is made; make it out of gold, turquoise, purple, and scarlet [wool], and twined linen. )Ex. 28:15(*

The urim and tumim lost their ability to make the Breastplate function as an oracle after the destruction of the First Temple. This is a metaphor for the condition of exile, alluded to by the word for "*Breastplate*" )חֶשֶׁן(, whose numerical value )358( is the same as those of the words for "*snake*" )נָחָשׁ( and "*Messiah*" )מְשִׁיחַ(. The primordial snake, which brought sin to the world, and the Messiah, who will bring clarity of purpose, are, of course, diametric opposites. Yet that is the paradox of exile: The Messianic reality is implicit within exile; our job is just to reveal it.

Allegorically, then, our present mission is to restore the urim and tumim to the cosmic Breastplate – to “decode” the implicit Messianic perception, goodness, and perfection within the snakeskin of reality – so that it can assume its proper, revealed role, with the advent of the full and final Redemption.

\* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom #3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

— from *Daily Wisdom #3*

Gut Shabbos,

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# Likutei Divrei Torah

## Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

Purim Sameach

Sponsored by Ari and Esther Jacobs  
in memory of Ari's mother, Doris Jacobs, a"h, (Dubbah Freida bas Yehoshua)  
whose yahrzeit is 14 Adar  
and Esther's mother, Anita Bogopulsky, a"h, (Yocheved bas Tzvi)  
whose yahrzeit is 17 Adar

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Shabbat Zachor - Parashat Tetzave

5786 B"H

### Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

#### The Aesthetic in Judaism

Why is the Torah so specific and emphatic, in this week's Parsha, about the clothes to be worn by the Kohanim (Priests) and the Kohen Gadol (High Priest)?

"These are the vestments that they shall make: a breastplate [chosen], an apron [ephod], a robe, a knitted tunic, a turban, and a sash. Make them as sacred vestments for Aaron and his sons so that they will be able to be priests to Me." Ex. 28:4

In general, Judaism is sceptical about appearances. Saul, Israel's first king, looked the part. He was "head and shoulders" taller than anyone else (1 Samuel 9:2). Yet though he was physically tall, he was morally small. He followed the people rather than leading them. When God told Samuel that He had rejected Saul, and that Samuel should anoint a son of Yishai as king, Samuel went to Yishai's home and saw that one of his sons, Eliav, looked the part. He thought he was the one God had chosen. God, however, tells him that he is mistaken:

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." 1 Sam. 16:7

Appearances deceive. In fact, as I have mentioned before in these studies, the Hebrew word for garment, *begged*, comes from the same Hebrew word as 'to betray - 'as in the confession 'Ashamnu bagadnu', 'We are guilty, we have betrayed'. Jacob uses Esau's clothes to deceive. Joseph's brothers do likewise with his bloodstained cloak. There are six such examples in the book of Genesis alone. Why then did God command that the Kohanim were to wear distinctive garments as part of their service in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple?

By the Isen family  
on the occasion of the 32st yahrzeit  
of Milton Isen, a"h,  
(Moshe ben Mordechai Yitzhak)  
and the 19th yahrzeit  
of Adele Isen, a"h (Chaya bas Hinda Faiga)

The answer lies in the two-word phrase that appears twice in our Parsha, defining what the priestly vestments were to represent: *le-kavod ule-tifaret*, 'for dignity [or 'honour'] and beauty'. These are unusual words in the Torah, at least in a human context. The word *tiferet* - beauty or glory - appears only three times in the Torah, twice in our Parsha (Ex. 28:2, Ex. 28:40) and once, poetically and with a somewhat different sense, in Deuteronomy 26:19.

The word *kavod* - 'dignity' or 'honour' - appears sixteen times, but in fourteen (2x7) of these cases the reference is to the glory of God. The twice they appear in our Parsha are the only occasions in which *kavod* is applied to a human being. So what is happening here?

The answer is that they represent the aesthetic dimension. This does not always figure prominently in Judaism. It is something we naturally connect with cultures a world apart from the Torah. The great empires - Mesopotamia, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece and Rome - built monumental palaces and temples. The royal courts were marked by magnificent robes, cloaks, crowns and regalia, each rank with its own uniform and finery. Judaism by contrast often seems almost puritanical in its avoidance of pomp and display. Worshipping the invisible God, Judaism tended to devalue the visual in favour of the oral and aural: words heard rather than appearances seen.

Yet the service of the Tabernacle and Temple were different. Here appearances - dignity, beauty - did make a difference. Why? Maimonides gives this explanation:

In order to exalt the Temple, those who ministered there received great honour, and the priests and Levites were therefore distinguished from the rest. It was commanded that the priest should be clothed properly with the most splendid and fine clothes, "holy garments for glory and for beauty" ... for the multitude does not estimate man by his true form but by ... the beauty of his garments, and the Temple was to be held in great reverence by all. Guide for the Perplexed, III:45

The explanation is clear, but there is also a hint of disdain. Maimonides seems to be saying that to those who really understand the nature

of the religious life, appearances should not matter at all, but "the multitude," the masses, the majority, are not like that. They are impressed by spectacle, visible grandeur, the glitter of gold, the jewels of the breastplate, the rich pageantry of scarlet and purple and the pristine purity of white linen robes.

In his book *The Body of Faith* (1983), Michael Wyschogrod makes a stronger case for the aesthetic dimension of Judaism. Throughout history, he argues, art and cult have been intimately connected, and Judaism is no exception.

"The architecture of the Temple and its contents demand a spatial thinking that stimulates the visual arts as nothing else does. It must be remembered that among the many artefacts past civilisations have left behind, those intended for ritual use almost are always the most elaborate and aesthetically the most significant."

Wyschogrod says that postbiblical Judaism did not, for the most part, make outstanding contributions to art and music. Even today, the world of religious Jewry is remote from that of the great writers, painters, poets and dramatists. To be sure, there is a wealth of popular religious music. But by and large, he says, "our artists tend to leave the Jewish community." This, he believes, represents a spiritual crisis.

"The imagination of the poet is a reflection of his spiritual life. Myth and metaphor are the currency both of religion and poetry. Poetry is one of the most powerful domains in which religious expression takes place. And the same is true of music, drama, painting, and dance."

Rav Abraham Kook hoped that the return to Zion would stimulate a renaissance of Jewish art, and there is a significant place for beauty in the religious life, especially in *Avodah* - service - which once meant sacrifice and now means prayer.

An immense body of recent research into neuroscience, evolutionary psychology, and behavioural economics has established beyond

By Sari & Russell Mayer, Avi, Atara and Arella, on the occasion of the 42nd yahrzeit (11 Adar) of Sari's father,  
Dr. A. Abba Walker (אברהם אבא בן שלמה), z"l

doubt that we are not, for the most part, rational animals. It is not that we are incapable of reason, but that reason alone does not move us to action. For that, we need emotion – and emotion goes deeper than the prefrontal cortex, the brain's centre of conscious reflection. This is where visual stimuli play a key role. Art speaks to emotion. It moves us in ways that go deeper than words.

That is why great art has a spirituality that cannot be expressed other than through art – and that applies to the visual beauty and pageantry of the service of Tabernacle and Temple, including the robes and sashes of the priests. There is a poem in the Reader's repetition of Musaf on Yom Kippur that expresses this to perfection. It is about Mareih Kohen, the appearance of the High Priest as he concluded his service and emerged from the Holy of Holies:

As the brightness of the vaulted canopy of heaven,  
As lightning flashing from the splendour of angels,  
As the celestial blue in the fringes 'thread,  
As the iridescence of the rainbow in the midst of clouds,  
As the majesty with which the Rock has clothed His creatures,  
As a rose planted in a garden of delight,  
As a diadem set on the brow of the King,  
As the mirror of love in the face of a bridegroom,  
As a halo of purity from a mitre of purity,  
As one who abides in secret, beseeching the King,  
As the morning star shining in the borders of the East –  
Was the appearance of the [High] Priest.

And now we can define the nature of the aesthetic in Judaism. It is art devoted to the greater glory of God. That is the implication of the fact that the word *kavod*, "glory," is attributed in the Torah only to God – and to the Kohen officiating in the house of God.

Judaism does not believe in art for art's sake, but in art in the service of God, giving back as a votive offering to God a little of the beauty He has made in this created world. At the risk of oversimplification, one could state the difference between ancient Israel and ancient Greece thus: that where the Greeks believed in the holiness of beauty, Jews believed in *hadrat kodesh*, the beauty of holiness. There is a place for the aesthetic in Avodah. In the words of the Song at the Sea: "Zeh Keili ve-anvehu," "This is my God and I will beautify Him." For beauty inspires love, and from love flows the service of the heart.

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**Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

### What's in a Garment?

"And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for honor and for splendor... And they shall make the ephod out of gold, blue, purple and scarlet... And you shall make the breastplate of artistic work... And they shall be on Aaron and his sons whenever they enter into the Tent of Meeting..." (Exodus 28:2–43)

In the portion of Terumah, more than forty verses are devoted to the making of the priestly garments, and in the portion of Tetzaveh, another thirty verses are devoted to these same garments. Granted that priests should look different from the rest of the nation, but why isn't a white garment sufficient, something simple and functional? And why must priestly garments be so elaborately constructed, with gold beaten into threads, embroidered sashes, blues, purples and scarlet skillfully and intricately woven?

Moreover, not only do we find a wealth of details surrounding the details of each of the priestly garments, but from a certain perspective the garments seem to be the most fundamental aspect of priestly sanctity! The Torah goes so far as to caution that the priestly vestments must be worn by Aaron and his sons whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting or offer sacrifice on the altar otherwise they will have committed a sin and they will die (Exodus 28:43). And the Talmud teaches that while their [priestly] garments are upon them, the priesthood is upon them; if their garments are not upon them, the priesthood is not upon them. (Zevachim 7b).

In other words, the garments seem to make the priest, an interesting variation on the famous sartorial advertisement: "Clothes make the man." Is this not an undue emphasis on external dress?

Over the centuries many commentators have addressed them- selves to the question of the priestly garb. In the Talmud (Arakhin 16a), R. Annani bar Sasson asks why the biblical portion of the priestly garments is next to that of the sacrifices. The answer given is that just as the sacrifices atone for sins, so do these garments atone for sins; the tunic for murder, the breeches for illicit sexual acts, the waist sash for one's innermost thoughts, the ephod for idol worship, the robe for slander, the turban for haughtiness.

Nahmanides sees the priestly garments as regal robes in their own right. This garb need not be seen beyond its inherent beauty; the special clothing is one of the means by which we exalt the priest into the domain of the majestic. Our kohanim are our religious royalty, the majestic monarchs who preside over the Holy Temple precinct.

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In the Sefer Hachinukh on the 613 commandments, first published in 1523, the author acknowledges that from a psychological perspective, a person's inner being is affected by their outer garments. Thought follows action, and since a priest must have special thoughts when he performs the service, he must attempt to transform himself. Such a process of transformation begins with the act of getting dressed in special garb. To be sure, external change of costume does not necessarily create a change in inner motivation and thought, but it can, and often succeeds, in beginning the process. This is also why we are required to wear special garments on the Shabbat and on festivals. Special garments occasion special moods.

The Netziv in his Torah commentary follows the principle of the Sefer Hachinukh except that he switches the focus from the priest to the Israelites coming upon the glory of the priests in their ceremonial garb. Israelites enter the Temple precinct seeking inspiration and atonement. They want to be transported spiritually into the domain of the divine, into a world of repentance and atonement. The unique majesty and glory of the priestly garb, combined with the magnificence of the Holy Temple itself, will hopefully begin to uplift the Israelites and help them to feel that they have entered the kingship of God.

These explanations certainly illuminate the complex and varied role of the priestly garments. But I would suggest that if we look at the first time a garment is mentioned in the Torah, we discover that there is more to clothes than meets the hand or even the eye.

When Adam and Eve are exiled from the Garden of Eden, the text tells us that the Lord God made for Adam and his wife, garments of skin, and clothed them (Gen. 2:21). God drives them out of the Garden of Eden, and because of the extreme nature of the punishment of exile, we tend to overlook how unique it is that God Himself made these garments and Himself clothed the first couple.

After all, God had commanded humanity to conquer the world, "replenish the earth, subdue it and assume dominion" (Gen. 1:28). The world is pictured as a *tabula rasa* for the human to discover, unravel, invent, define – an imperfect cosmos which God created for the human to do and make, to repair and perfect. And indeed, people discover fire and bronze, wheels and windmills, electricity and atoms, apparently everything – except for the clothes on their back. And these they carry with them when they are banished. Why should the creation of the garments be relegated to God Himself? What can the Torah be teaching us?

Garments lie at the very root of what makes us human. Just as the Almighty created humans in

His image, He also fashioned garments for the human being. Remember that, externally, only one thing distinguishes a human being from an animal, and that is that humans wear clothing, while animals do not!

It was the mocking seduction of the serpent which led to the banishment of Adam and Eve. Condemned to eat dust, the serpent remains naked. God fashions garments for human beings in order to teach them to rise above animals and above their animal natures. Naked animals follow their bare instincts; human beings must cover over and transform their naked essence in order to ennoble and sanctify themselves to become more like the divine who formed them. And since only human beings are capable of self-improvement and development, our very bodies contain a fundamental holiness which the animal world – not created in God’s image – lacks. But humans must work on their naked essence, must refine and ennoble, purify and sanctify the raw essence which is nakedness. This is the magnificent idea of circumcision, this is the essence of a system of 613 commandments, and this is the symbol of clothing.

If we glance at the more visible symbols of Jewish life, we see how sanctity is associated with a covering. Inside the synagogue, the Torah scroll is covered with its special garb; this is also the case regarding the table from which the Torah is read, and the ark in which the scroll stands. There is even a strict biblical prohibition that the Levite family of Kehat not look upon the uncovered holy objects of the Tabernacle, lest they die (Deut. 4:20). Everything holy needs a covering, and it all began with the human body.

Departing from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are taught the necessity of improving themselves, of sanctifying human nature, of covering their nakedness. Once they know this, they can go out and conquer the world, transforming themselves and the world around them in the process. But if they forget that the body is holy, then the world transforms them, and they live disastrously closer to their animalistic nature. Since the priests function in the Sanctuary of the divine, devoting all of their activities towards bridging the chasm between heaven and earth, it stands to reason that they must wear unique clothing to remind them and the rest of the Israelites of their unique function of maintaining the Sanctuary so that God may truly dwell in every Israelite.

An inner holiness existed in the human being created in God’s image, but with the fall from the Garden of Eden, this holiness became endangered. From the Jewish point of view, clothes do not make the person; clothes do, however, distinguish the human being, reminding us of the inherent sanctity of the human body, of the necessity of separating

human from beast and, at least in function in Temple times, separating religious leaders from ordinary laymen.

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**The Person in the Parsha**  
**Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**  
**Self-Esteem, Jewish Pride, Purim**  
**and...Amalek**

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This column is a product of my experience with two of my mentors, one who passed away relatively recently and the other who passed away long before I was born.

The first was Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski, a psychiatrist of international renown and the epitome of a pious Chassidic Jew.

The other was Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, a leader and shaper of the Mussar Movement, who was popularly known as the “Alter of Kelm,” the senior sage of the great yeshiva in the small Lithuanian town of Kelm.

Rabbi Dr. Twerski taught me of the importance of self-esteem in the personal development of all human beings and its role as a measure of mental health. He was a prolific writer and wrote close to a hundred books. But he often remarked, “I only wrote one book. It was about the importance of self-esteem. Only, I wrote it in a hundred different ways.”

The Alter of Kelm also wrote about self-esteem, although he used a different terminology. He called it kavod, the Hebrew word which connotes honor, dignity, prestige, and pride.

It was the latter who taught me about the spiritual sources of pride and the role that such pride has for every Jew. It is the pride that every Jew possesses deep within himself or herself but must strive to attain and to preserve.

Rabbi Dr Twerski, with whom I was fortunate to have had a close friendship, insisted that I refer to him by his nickname Shea, short for Yehoshua. When I protested that I felt that I couldn’t compromise his dignity by using his nickname, he asked me what I would prefer to call him. We eventually agreed that I would call him “Reb Shea,” and he consented.

Similarly, biographers of the Alter of Kelm generally refer to him as “Reb Simcha Zissel.”

Whereas both Reb Shea and Reb Simcha Zissel stress the importance of healthy self-esteem, they both recognized its fragility. There are many factors within one’s personality as well as from external sources which threaten to undermine one’s self-esteem.

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One such factor is allowing one’s self-esteem to depend upon the attitudes or remarks of others. To maintain self-esteem, one must not depend upon the compliments or assessments of others. One cannot allow the praises heaped upon him from others to build his self-esteem. Such praise can lead to swell-headedness and even arrogance.

But nor can one allow insults and humiliation at the hands of another to diminish his self-esteem. One must not be overly sensitive to criticism but must retain sufficient self-confidence to retain appropriate self-esteem.

Reb Shea utilized this concept in his book *A Shame Born in Silence*. In this work, he exposed the shameful prevalence of domestic violence in the Jewish community. He portrays the erosion of one spouse’s self-esteem because of the other spouse’s abusive behaviors, physical or emotional. His focus was on the field of community mental health.

Reb Simcha Zissel had a very different focus. It was the need for the Jew to maintain self-esteem in the face of antisemitism, to stem the efforts of zarim, strangers and foes, to dehumanize us.

He expresses it in an essay of his entitled *The Strength of Israel Depends Upon Its Lofty Soul*. I paraphrase his contention: “One must consider himself fortunate to be a Jew, and very fortunate to be a learned and loyal Jew. He must not allow his honor, or her kavod, to be demeaned by zarim, by strangers or foes. He must hold himself high and withstand the efforts of those who attempt to belittle him, mock him, or shame him.”

He offers the above advice to his children in honor of the upcoming holiday of Purim. The customary treat for this holiday is a three-cornered pastry, which supposedly resembles the three-cornered headpiece worn by our vile enemy, Haman. It is known as a hamantash. Reb Simcha Zissel points out that this pastry must be well-baked so that it can be crunched and crushed as one chews it into pieces. So too must we “crunch and crush” the attempts to be shamed and humiliated, the efforts to defame us and do us in.

So too did the Jews in the ancient city of

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Shushan have to deal with the insults and nasty accusations which Haman used to convince King Achashverosh to accept his plot to eradicate the Jews, “men, women, and children in one day.”

He tried to literally dis-courage Jews by shaming us into cowardice, by making us feel puny, helpless, and hopeless, without courage. “But Mordechai did not bend and did not bow.” He retained his self-esteem, he modeled his Jewish pride, and remained resolute, self-assured, and ultimately invincible.

Reb Simcha uses the occasion of the supplemental reading for this Shabbat. It is Parshat Zachor, when we read of the attack launched by Amalek against the wandering Jews.

He asks: What motivated Amalek? He surely wasn't seeking territory because the Jews had no land yet. Their wealth was trivial, trinkets taken from Egypt. Their food supply was minimal, and their water was supplied miraculously. What was Amalek's goal?

He responds: “Amalek motivation was envy, plain and simple. The Children of Israel left Egypt in glory, triumphantly. No other foe dared to attack them. They felt protected by the Almighty, and they cherished their security. Their “souls were lofty.” When Moses “lifted his hands,” they felt powerful. Their self-esteem was based upon their leadership and their faith. They were impervious to the attacks, verbal or military, upon them by zarim, strangers and foes.

And so it is, concludes Reb Simcha Zissel, with every generation. There are the Amaleks who wish to deflate our just pride in our identity as Jews. They wish to subdue our “lofty souls.” But we refuse to yield. We chew the hamantash. Or, alternatively, we have the “Haman,” the archenemy, in our tash, in our pocket. (Tash is Yiddish for pocke’.)

The eternal enemy is the external enemy who wishes to “cool us off,” to erode our faith, to stifle our enthusiasm, to sabotage our confidence and courage. The way to fight Amalek is by asserting our pride in our nation and in its people. It is by retaining and reviving our enthusiasm and morale, by stimulating our confidence, and by expanding our courage.

This is the story of Amalek. This is the story of Purim and the reason why we are told by our Sages that the festival of Purim will be celebrated for all time and eternity.

The hitromemut hanefesh, the “lofty soul” of the Jewish people, will help us experience “light and joy, happiness and honor.”

May it be so for us, in our time.

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**Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**  
**Avnei Miluim and Avnei Shoham: Stones of Empathy and Stones of Action**

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The pasuk in Parshas Tezaveh says, “You shall take the two shoham stones and engrave upon them the names of the sons of Israel.” (Shemos 28:9). There were two types of stones, both of which had the names of the Tribes of Israel on them. One set were the Avnei Miluim, which the Kohen Gadol wore on his chest, and which had the names of each shevet (tribe) on one of the twelve stones. The other type of stones were the Avnei Shoham, which the Kohen Gadol wore on the two shoulder straps of the Ephod (Apron). The names of the shevatim (tribes) also appeared on these Avnei Shoham.

We might ask, once the Kohen Gadol has the names of the twelve shevatim on the Avnei Miluim, is it not superfluous to repeat these names on the Avnei Shoham, which rest on the shoulder straps? The Ramban here in Parshas Tezaveh says a very interesting thing: The names of the shevatim on the Avnei Miluim could not be engraved. The name Avnei Miluim implies that these stones need to be maleh (full). If they would carve or etch out the names of the shevatim with some kind of tool, it would negate the requirement of them being “Avnei Miluim.” This is not the case with the Avnei Shoham, regarding which the Torah specifically commands: “...and engrave upon them...” (ibid). There, in fact, they did etch out the names.

The question is – if they couldn't etch out the names on the Avnei Miluim, how did they get the names onto those stones? The Talmud describes a unique creature called a Shamir, which somehow ate through the stone following a traced path of the letters, such that the names appear as if etched into the stone, and yet the stones were still considered “Avnei Miluim” (full stones).

This is the difference between the Avnei Shoham and the Avnei Miluim. The former were worn on the shoulders and had the tribal names engraved upon them and the latter were worn on the chest and had the names miraculously created by the Shamir.

But the question remains, why the duplication of these two sets of stones? Practically speaking, they could have used a couple of buttons rather than the Avnei Shoham to keep the shoulder straps of the Ephod in place.

The sefer Avir Yakov brings a very interesting idea from someone named Rav Aharon Willner: The Kohen Gadol was the spiritual leader of Klal Yisrael. A spiritual leader needs to worry about his flock, the tzibur. There are

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two types of problems in life. Some problems in life are solvable, but some problems are beyond the power of man to solve. The most a leader or counselor can do about this second category of problems is to listen, feel, commiserate, and empathize.

I have a very fine bochur in my shiur. He came to me this morning with a complaint: He has been going out for well over a year and he can't find the right shidduch for himself. He is pouring out his heart to me. I don't think he is being too picky. He has some valid considerations. Trips back and forth to New York from Baltimore are draining. It is debilitating. It is expensive. He is getting very frustrated and it is obviously having a negative impact on his learning.

He asked, “What can you tell me, Rebbi?” Of course, I can't solve his problem, other than telling him “Don't be too picky (which was not applicable in this case).” I can't find him the perfect shidduch. What am I supposed to do? I am supposed to listen and to offer comfort. I can tell him, “Listen, everyone has some tzores in life. G-d willing you will be yotzai with these tzores, and then you will have a life that goes more smoothly in the future.” The only thing I can do for such a person is to provide a lev shomea (a heart that listens).

On the other hand, there are types of problems which people experience that can be helped and sometimes must be helped. There are situations where a person falls on hard times and can't pay his mortgage. Perhaps the gas and electric company will shut off his power or he will lose his health insurance. What are we supposed to do? We need to try to raise money for the person. Here there is something to solve, something to do. Likewise, if a person has some kind of medical condition, we can direct him to the right kind of doctor. We can make sure he gets the right kind of medical care. There is something we can do.

The Kohen Gadol had to deal with both of these types of problems – the type of problem that requires doing and the type of problem that requires feeling. Those are the two types of stones that the Kohen Gadol wore. The Kohen Gadol wore the Avnei Miluim, for which Klal Yisrael did not create the writing on the stones. They put the Shamir on the stones and the Shamir took care of the rest. The stones were not permitted to be engraved. The stones need to be Avnei Miluim. Those names sat on the Kohen Gadol's heart to represent the kinds of problems regarding which all you can do is give the troubled person your heart.

On the other hand, the Avnei Shoham were located on the shoulders of the Kohen Gadol.

The shoulders are the place on a person's body where he bears the burden. Those are stones with which they did something – they engraved them. The problems that the Kohen Gadol needs to bear on his shoulders – that he can do something about – were represented by those stones to which they did something. They physically engraved the names upon them.

The is why the Kohen Gadol wore both types of stones, to represent both types of problems.

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### **Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

This powerful message emerges out of the very first word of Parshat Tetzaveh, and that word is “Ve’attah” – “and you”.

Hashem was addressing Moshe. And, as is well-known, Tetzaveh is the only portion of the Torah outside of the book of Bereshit which doesn't mention Moshe's name. Every time Hashem was giving an instruction to Moshe, instead of mentioning the name, we have the word “Ve’attah” – “and you”.

Here Hashem was giving the instructions relating to Moshe's responsibility to have the Mishkan – the sanctuary in the wilderness – built and furnished. And the implication of the “Ve’attah” – “and you” is: Moshe, it must be you, and nobody else.

I find this very intriguing. Because, in Parshat Yitro, the Torah teaches us how important it is for good leaders to know how to delegate, how to share their responsibility with other capable people, and not to take the power, the glory, and the responsibility exclusively into their own hands.

And in Pirkei Avot, we are taught, “Lo alecha ham'lacha ligmor” – you don't have to finish every task you undertake, “V'lo ata ben chorin l'hibatel mimena” – but that doesn't mean to say you should desist from it; other people can also have a share in what you are doing, in order that you should achieve your aspirations.

Coming back to Parshat Tetzaveh, Ramban and Sforno teach us that the word “Ve’attah” – “and you” – implies that what Hashem was saying to Moshe was, there are many occasions on which indeed, it has to be you.

In order to be a great leader, the nation needs to see you leading from the front. People should never have a perception that you're lazy. On the contrary, they should know that you are utilising every living moment in order to lead them responsibly – to tirelessly guide and inspire them.

From the word “Ve’attah”, we learn that a great leader is somebody who says, “Acharai” – follow me, follow my example.

From the word “Ve’attah”, we learn that a great leader is not somebody who says, “Do as I say,” but rather, “Do as I do.”

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### **D'var Torah ahead of Purim**

Which biblical character am I referring to? He was catapulted overnight from relative anonymity to become second only to the king. In fact, there are two correct answers to this question: Mordechai and Joseph.

Mordechai, who is featured so prominently in the Megillah story that we will shortly be reading on Purim, and Joseph, who is described in the book of Bereshit as being a Hebrew who suddenly became second only to Pharaoh in Egypt.

When you come to think of it, these two characters have far more in common than it might initially appear. Both were born in the land of Israel and then exiled. Both were paraded on the king's chariot in public, and both were given a ring to wear on their finger by the king.

At the end of the Megillah, the concluding verses describe five outstanding attributes of Mordechai. Interestingly, these same qualities can also be applied to Joseph.

What were those attributes?

We're told, “Mishneh lamelech, Achashverosh” – Mordechai was second only to the king. This was also true of Joseph.

“Vegadol laYehudim” – he was great for the Jewish people. The members of his faith took pride in him. This was true of both Mordechai and Joseph.

“Veratzui lerov echav” – he was popular amongst most of his brethren. A great leader can't be universally popular, because tough decisions sometimes negatively affect people. That certainly was the case with Mordechai. However, it is a tribute to him that he was still popular amongst most people. The one biblical character who, more than anybody else, knew what it was like to be despised and hated by some was Joseph, particularly in the midst of his family.

“Doresh tov le'amor” – he sought only the best for his people. Both Mordechai and Joseph, while being in the court of the king, were determined that it would always be a priority to do the best for their own people.

But the final accolade is one which I believe is the most important of all:

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About Mordechai, we are told, “Vedover shalom lechol-zar'o” – he spoke in peaceable terms to his family. He was determined to get along with his family, because in his eyes, regardless of what he was doing, his family would always come first. This was also true of Joseph. Despite the fact that members of his family were guilty of attempted fratricide, Joseph was determined for the rest of his life to bond with his family and do the best for them.

Therefore, at this Purim time, there is a powerful and wonderful message that emerges from the similarities between these two great biblical characters. And that message is simple yet profound: Whatever we are doing in life, whatever our position or occupation – our family must always come first. It is within the family circle that we can achieve the most for the continuity of our faith and the betterment of our world.

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### **Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah**

#### **In a Red Shirt and Tie**

#### **Aviad Pituchei Chotam**

One of my most memorable experiences from my time at Neveh Shmuel Yeshiva High School actually took place the day before the school year even began. Just as I had finished packing my bag and was about to head out, my mother “requested” that I return to my room immediately and change the shirt I was wearing. Seeing my puzzled expression, she stated with absolute confidence, “At Neveh Shmuel, they don't wear red shirts... and certainly not those of Hapoel Jerusalem!” Naturally, I complied, but at the first opportunity when I returned home, I told her, with complete honesty, that at Neveh Shmuel, people most definitely do wear red shirts—and sometimes even those of the Hapoel Jerusalem Football Club.

Several years later, during our training for shlichut in the Straus-Amiel program, amid halachic lessons on conversion, Zoom conversations with emissaries in the field, and rhetoric workshops, the institute's staff made sure to dedicate time each year to discussing the important role of clothing in Jewish communities abroad and in various professional settings. They even held an entire workshop on the “laws” of tie-tying.

Clothing accompanies us through different stages of life—whether in our roles as parents, in the daily routines of many educational institutions, or, as noted, as a defining factor in the cultural differences between life in Israel and Jewish communities around the world.

This week's parsha invites us to reflect on the significance of clothing, placing it front and center—quite literally “on the table”. After

encountering the garments of skin worn by Adam and Chava, and Yosef's special coat — kutonet hapasim— in Bereshit, we now come to the priestly vestments—a subject given no fewer than 42 (!) verses of detailed discussion.

The first level of clothing serves a fundamental, functional purpose—one that has accompanied humanity since the days of the Garden of Eden. It exists to “cover the flesh of nakedness,” preserving our privacy and modesty while distinguishing us from the animal world around us.

The second level is designed “for honor and for splendor,” allowing us to express personal choices, social and cultural affiliations, and serving as a kind of public identity card.

The third level seeks to elevate us even further, adorning a person with elements akin to jewelry—such as the tzitzit, the golden headplate of the Kohen Gadol—or garments imbued with a defined role, like the choshen, the breastplate embedded with precious gems. This level is particularly significant because it is the one we were explicitly commanded to craft: “pituchei chotam kodesh la’Hashem”—engraved like a signet, holy to the Lord.

It is fascinating that this detailed discussion of priestly attire appears precisely within the parshiyot dealing with the construction of God’s Mishkan. Positioned at a transitional stage—from individuals and families to a national identity—it underscores the role of clothing as an integral part of shaping both spiritual and communal consciousness.

So, grab a cup of coffee or your favorite drink, find a study partner or discussion group, give some thought to what you’re wearing, and explore the following questions together:

What is my favorite piece of clothing, and why?

Is a dress code appropriate in an educational setting? What about in the workplace?

What is the maximum price I would be willing to pay for an item of clothing I truly want?

Why does the Torah distinguish between the attire of regular Kohanim and that of the Kohen Gadol?

What other significant garments appear in the books of the Bible?

What is the significance of the fact that the Hebrew root of the word for “garment” (כ.ס.ג) is also used in an entirely different—and often negative—sense, denoting betrayal?

### **Matanot La’Evyonim—Gifts for the Needy Shoshana Ron**

There are four mitzvot we are commanded to fulfill on Purim: reading the Megillah,

partaking in a festive meal, sending Mishloach Manot, and giving Matanot La’evyonim – charity to the needy.

“As the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and the month which was turned for them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning to a festive day—to make them days of feasting and joy, and sending portions one to another, and gifts to the needy” (Megillat Esther, 9:22).

Among these four mitzvot, I find Matanot La’evyonim the most distant from me, the one I feel least connected to in my own reality. What is my personal link to the evyon, someone who is truly destitute? Furthermore, what distinguishes the needy from a struggling student like myself?

To explore this question, let us first examine the literal definition of “evyon” as explained by the Ibn Ezra:

“And to the needy—those who have nothing [the word stems from the Hebrew root נ.א.ג, which means ‘to desire’], as in the verse ‘if you desire ’(im tovu), for they desire everything since they lack the means to obtain it” (Ibn Ezra on Esther 9:22).

While this may seem like a purely linguistic explanation, I believe there is a deeper insight in Ibn Ezra’s definition—an evyon is not merely someone who lacks material possessions but someone who longs for something they cannot attain on their own. In this sense, we are all evyonim in one way or another—each of us lacks something we are unable to achieve alone. This could be a material need, like someone requiring money to buy a home, or an emotional or spiritual need, such as someone seeking a listening ear to help them navigate a difficult decision.

Once we recognize ourselves as evyonim, we can then define the opposite—an ashir (a wealthy person):

“Who is rich? One who is content with his portion, as it is said (Tehillim 128:2), ‘When you eat the labor of your hands, you will be happy and it will be well with you’— ‘you will be happy ’in this world, and ‘it will be well with you ’in the World to Come” (Pirkei Avot 4:1).

According to Pirkei Avot, true wealth is not measured by possessions but by contentment—one who does not rely on others to feel complete is considered ashir. The fundamental difference between an evyon and an ashir, then, is that an evyon depends on others to help him reach a state of wholeness,

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whereas an ashir is already fulfilled with what he has.

Each of us embodies both aspects—there are areas in which we are “rich” and others in which we are “needy.” One of the central purposes of Matanot La’evyonim is to help those around us move from a state of need to a state of abundance. The question is: what is the most effective way to support someone who is an evyon in a particular area?

“Rabi Yochanan said: One who whitens his friend’s teeth [smiles at him] is better than one who gives him milk to drink, as it is stated: ‘And the whitening of teeth is better than milk’—do not read it as ‘whitening of teeth ’ but rather ‘whitening the teeth [in a smile]’” (Ketubot 111b).

According to Rabi Yochanan, it is better to smile at a person and, in turn, make him smile than to provide him with milk [physical sustenance]. It is easier to fulfill the mitzvah of Matanot La’evyonim—and to help others in general—by offering something that gladdens the body. However, it is far more meaningful for the recipient to receive something that brings joy to his soul.

“Receive every person with a pleasant countenance. How so? This teaches us that if a person gives his friend all the good gifts in the world but with his face turned downward, it is considered as if he has given nothing. But if he receives his friend with a pleasant countenance, even if he gives nothing, it is considered as if he has given him all the good gifts in the world” (Avot D’Rabi Natan 13:4).

Avot D’Rabi Natan again emphasizes the importance of a warm and welcoming demeanor over the giving of material gifts. Furthermore, the manner in which assistance is provided is crucial—if a person gives begrudgingly, the recipient will feel humiliated.

“There are eight levels of tzedakah, each greater than the other. The highest level is one who supports a fellow Jew who has fallen into poverty by giving him a gift or loan, entering into a partnership with him, or finding him employment so that he may become self-sufficient and not have to rely on others. Concerning this, it is said, ‘You shall support him, be he a stranger or a resident, and he shall live with you’—meaning, support him before he falls and becomes dependent on others” (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Matanot La’Aniyim 10:7).

According to the Rambam, the highest form of charity is enabling someone to overcome his

challenges independently, whether through a loan, a job opportunity, or financial support that helps him regain stability. This type of tzedakah empowers the recipient to rise above his situation on his own. However, what is the difference between the mitzvah of tzedakah and the mitzvah of Matanot La'evyonim?

“On Purim, we do not scrutinize those who ask for money; rather, whoever stretches out his hand to take, we give him. And in places where the custom is to give even to non-Jews, we do so” (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 694:3).

Unlike tzedakah, Matanot La'evyonim does not involve verifying whether the recipient is truly in need; instead, we give to anyone who asks. This highlights a unique quality of Purim. What then makes Purim so special?

“The eyes of the poor are lifted toward the reading of the Megillah. These are the poor in spirit, those who look to the Megillah with hope. Throughout the year, they remain in a state of poverty, as it is written [in Mishlei], “All the days of a poor person are bad”—even on Shabbat and Yom Tov. But there is one day each year to which their eyes are raised: Purim, the day of Megillah reading.

The Megillah tells of a time when the Jewish people reached the depths of despair—they had bowed to an idol and indulged in Achashverosh's feast. Even Esther, their final hope, expressed despair, saying, “If I perish, I perish.” Their only wish was to survive, seeking nothing more than physical security. Yet Hashem revealed something far greater—He transformed their reality. Not only did they survive, but they were granted victory over their enemies, and they merited a renewed revelation of the Torah.

This is why Purim is the day toward which the eyes of the poor are lifted. No matter how low a Jew has fallen, Purim has the power to uplift even those who are spiritually impoverished. It is said that on Purim, “whoever extends his hand is given,” and our Sages explain that this principle applies not only in a material sense but in a spiritual one as well.” [Netivot Shalom on Purim, “The Eyes of the Poor Are Lifted to the Megillah”).

According to the Netivot Shalom, the uniqueness of Purim lies in the fact that when the Jewish people were in a state of both physical and spiritual need, God not only granted them salvation but also a revelation that renewed their faith. Just as God provided them with both material and spiritual upliftment, so too must we recognize those in need and extend both physical and emotional support.

May we fulfill the mitzvah of Matanot La'evyonim this Purim with special care—attuned to those around us who may need our help in any form. May we find ways to give that preserve dignity, foster self-reliance, and avoid causing embarrassment. And may this Purim be a time when more evyonim come to feel like ashirim.

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**Rabbi Yakov Haber**

#### **The Inner Dimension of Clothing**

The first half of our parsha details the bigdei kehuna, the priestly garments, distinguishing between those of the ordinary kohein, the kohein hedyot, and the High Priest, the kohein gadol. The commentaries illuminate these laws with a plethora of approaches highlighting various moral messages concerning which the details of these garments instruct us.[1] The Torah informs us that the garments were given to the kohanim, "I'chavod ul'sifares - for glory and splendor." In addition, as noted and explained by Rav Eliakim Koenigsberg in a previously posted article,[2] much emphasis is attached to the garments of both the villains and the heroes of Megillas Esther. What does levush or clothing represent on a deeper level, and why does our parsha devote so much time to them?

My revered Rebbe, Rav C. Y. Goldwicht zt"l, founding Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, offers a profound elucidation of the inner meaning of clothing - and why it served such a crucial role in the mikdash - through a careful analysis of our Sages' treatment of the very first "tailor-made" clothing formed in the world, those formed by G-d himself for Adam and Chava after their sin. Here, we humbly attempt to summarize his presentation with some minor additions.[3]

"And Hashem Elokim fashioned for Adam and his wife כתנות עור (garments of skin) and clothed them." In the Torah of R. Meir we found (was written): " כתנות אור - garments of light." (Bereishis Rabba 20:12)

Adam Harishon was the firstborn of the world. When he brought his offering... he wore the clothing of the High Priest as it states: "And Hashem Elokim fashioned for Adam and his wife garments of עור (skin) and clothed them." They were Shabbos clothes,[4] and the firstborn would use them. (Bemidbar Rabba 4:8)

At first glance, these midrashim are not understandable. How could R. Meir, a notable sofer, have had a different version of such a basic word in his Torah? Concerning the second midrash we can ask, it was only after Adam and Eve sinned by partaking of forbidden fruit that G-d, in his mercy, helped

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them clothe their perceived nakedness, a phenomenon which became a source of shame only after their sin. What motivates the midrash to describe these garments, granted by Divine mercy, as nothing short of garments of the High Priest?

Rav Goldwicht explains that ultimately one question answers the other. The goal of the entire creation of the world was for the kavod, or glory, of Hashem. As Chazal teach (Avos 6:11):

All that the Holy One blessed be He created in His world, He only created for His glory as it states, "All that is called in my Name, and whom I created for My glory, I formed it and also made it" (Yeshayahu 43:7).

This statement also requires study. Does the "Mamlich melachim v'lo hamelucha - the One who bestows kingship upon kings but to Him alone is true majesty" need us to glorify Him? My Rebbe answers these questions by first carefully defining the concept of kavod. Kavod is the outward manifestation of an inner, exalted quality. Hashem's revealed purpose for creating the world was to allow the Ultimate Good that is Hashem yisborach to be revealed in a world that initially conceals His Existence, His goodness, the sanctity with which He endowed it and the fact that all that exists is only a result of His constant Will. The very world olam is related to the word hel'eim or hiddenness.

The world then is an illusion within which Man is charged to seek beyond its facade and recognize its inner reality. The outer physical layer is compared to a levush or garment concealing the true inner dimension. When Man succeeds in uncovering the inner reality of the manifestation of G-d's creation, His constant providence and His will to elevate and have a relationship with mankind, the pinnacle of the world which he formed, he has converted the levush into a levush of kavod, bringing out the inner, exalted quality of the world. Thus, the existence of an outer layer concealing an inner one is referred to as a "levush" and seeing beyond it converts the garment into a "garment of glory."

An additional, central example of this concept, that which is truly represented by clothing, is the bigdei kehuna. The mikdash - with its multi-dimensional service spanning animal (korbanos), vegetable (menachos, bikkurim) and mineral (salt, water) and the various activities done there - demonstrates that all of human activity can be, and is designed to be, elevated in the discovery of and connection to the Hidden One of creation. It should come as no surprise then that the purpose of the garments is described as "I'chavod ul'sifares," highlighting the concept of kavod, seeking the inner, exalted dimension. Even outside the mikdash, we are meant to mimic this "avodas halevushim - clothing service" discovering

Hashem's active presence and participation in every aspect of our lives, and through that to gain our eternity.

All this was only necessary when Hashem's presence was indeed hidden, a direct result of the sin of eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Had Adam and Eve not strayed, G-d's presence would have been directly manifested through the original light of creation which illuminated the whole world with Hashem's presence. After Man's failure, "garments" were necessary. In other words, Man had to now seek G-d out, piercing beneath the perceived outer layer of seeming reality to see the exalted inner quality of true Reality. Thus, the garments of עֲבוֹרָה fashioned by Hashem for his creations, were meant to teach Man to rediscover the עֲבוֹרָה beneath the surface, or, in the words of Rambam, the original "garments of light" of total clarity of the presence of Hashem which Adam and Chava originally possessed. This is the meaning of the midrash about R. Meir's sefer Torah; it contained the same actual text as ours, but R. Meir was teaching what the purpose of the "service of garments" ultimately is. This is also why the midrash identifies the clothing of Adam and Chava with the clothing of the Kohein Gadol which also symbolize this lofty goal of Divine discovery.

Since Purim is a holiday of, as Chassidim say, מְגִלַּת אֶסְתֵּר being מגילת אסתר, revealing the hidden, providential Hand of G-d in history, it is understandable why the Megilla is filled with allusions to garments and that the common custom is that many dress in costumes indicating the fact that not all is the way its outer layer appears.

II. This past year and a half has been an "eis tzara l'Ya'akov." Even the current joyful release of a significant number of hostages is marred by the release of so many terrorists with blood on their hands. May Hashem protect us from their evil designs! A significant number remain in captivity, their fate hanging in the balance. Many families have lost relatives fighting in the war or as victims of terror. So many have been adversely affected by their family members being away from home in Tzahal for so long. Thousands have been wounded and uprooted from their homes.

With our limited vision and without prophecy, we cannot, with certainty, know the Divine reasons for these tragedies. Even here, although we are not privy to the ultimate goodness hidden within perceived evil, it behooves us to attempt, to some extent, to engage in "avodas halevushim - garment service" to reveal the inner, exalted dimension within. To quote Rav Goldwicht concerning Man's central mission of Divine discovery, "From the darkness, light will emerge." To

focus on one of many positive aspects: After undergoing unspeakable horrors, many of the hostages and their families rediscovered faith in the One Above. Freed hostage Keith Siegel, previously not observant, recited Shema and blessings every day in captivity telling his family when he returned, "We had 500 days to reflect on ourselves. ... My thoughts led me to G-d and to the realization that I am Jewish. From now on, I want all of us to sit together and learn about our own Judaism." Omer Shem Tov insisted that his captors bring him wine for kiddush. Amazingly, they brought him a bottle on which, on a drop each week, he recited the blessing every Friday night for the duration of his captivity. Agam Berger strengthened the Jewish people with her now famous expression, paraphrasing the sweet singer of Israel's words, "The path of faith I have chosen, and with the path of faith, I have returned!" She continues to encourage all Jews to adopt mitzvos which they can perform. Recently Sasha Tropanov, along with his formerly freed mother and grandmother, all independently returned to shemiras hamitzvos. This recent majestic manifestation demonstrated by these heroes of seeing beneath the surface, finding sanctity and G-d Himself even in a purgatory in this world, is nothing short of remarkable and awe-inspiring. Let us hope that in an era of social media, that many of the previously unaffiliated will follow their lead and that those already observant will be inspired to more intensely serve our Father in Heaven. May the day come soon that once again, in the fullest sense, וְנִפְקֵחַ הוּא אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלַט, וְנִהְיֶה לְיִהְיִים הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלַט, וְנִהְיֶה לְיִהְיִים הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלַט, וְנִהְיֶה לְיִהְיִים הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלַט!

[1] See Shmiras Halashon al Parshiyos Hatorah (2:15), Rav S. R. Hirsch and Kli Yakar among others. Also see Sartorial Splendor for the Soul in which Malbim's approach is presented.

[2] See Do Clothes Really Make the Man?

[3] Asufas Ma'arachos, Parshas Bereishis - "Kosnos Or" and Parshas Tetzaveh - "Kavod HaTorah".

[4] See above for Rav Goldwicht's explanation of the allusion to "Shabbos clothes."

### **Rabbi Michael Rosensweig Purim: An Enduring Festival of Faith and Hope**

Rambam closes Hilchot Megillah (2:18) by citing the enigmatic view of the Talmud Yerushalmi ("haneviim vehaketuvim atidin libatel vechamishah sidrei Torah ein atidin libatel; ...Resh Lakish amar af Megillat Esther vehalachot ein atidin libatel...vezichram lo yasuf mizaram") that elevates Megillat Esther above the rest of Nach and that groups it with the Torah itself as the exclusive biblical canon in the era of yemot ha-mashiach. Ra'avad registers his objection to this apparently unvarnished reading that he conceives as being simply untenable. Instead, he proposes that the Yerushalmi intended only to limit public readings to Torah and Megillat Esther, while the canonical status and stature of the entire Tanach remains inviolate. Nonetheless, even in

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his qualified interpretation, Megillat Esther emerges with elite status that needs to be accounted for. The prooftext invoked by the Yerushalmi - (Megillat Esther 9:28) - is particularly intriguing as it presumably (emphasized by Radvaz, as we shall discuss) accentuates the unforgettable distresses and dangers leading to Purim, alongside and notwithstanding the ultimate joyous conclusion.

The Midrash (Mishlei 9) articulates a parallel perspective on the singular standing of Purim with respect to other moadim - "shekol hamoadim beteilim veyemei haPurim lo yihiyu beteilim". Rashba (Responsa 1:93) was queried about the astonishing assertion that the moadim excluding Purim are subject to cancellation. Even as he emphatically rejected, even dismissed the superficial reading and implication of this text, Rashba posited that the midrash identifies a unique facet shared only by Purim and Yom Kippur. He explains that although other festivals are also depicted as "chukat olam" in the sense of being unqualified annual obligations ("azharah"), only Yom Kippur and Purim are guaranteed ("havitachah") to be eternally relevant and immune to any historical disruption or dislocation, irrespective of Klal Yisrael's conduct! It is curious that while Rashba accounts for Yom Kippur's intrinsic status - the fact that the day itself conveys expiation ("itzumo shel yom mekaper"), perhaps even absent repentance (particularly according to Rebbe [Shavuot 13a] also the author of this midrash), he does not articulate the basis for Purim's special status, almost as if it is self-evident.

Radvaz (Resp. 2:666), responding to a query about the aforementioned Yerushalmi passage, notes the Rashba's discussion of the midrash, integrates the two sources, and provides additional insight into both texts. He suggests that the spiritually conducive climate of the messianic era might render the other festivals somewhat gratuitous, but that Purim's theme, rooted as the Yerushalmi prooftext indicates, in the challenge of severe crisis and calamity and its subsequent joyous resolution remains acutely compelling and ever regnant - "ki yihiyu Yisrael zochrim hatza'ar, vechi nimkeru lemitah, vekol mah she'ira lahem beoto zeman".

Indeed, the change in the Megillah's formulation of this festival reflects an acute focus on hashgachah, faith, spiritual resilience, and indomitable optimism. The Megillah (9:19) initially depicts Purim as a more conventional "yom tov" typically expressed by "simchah u-mishteh" in conjunction with the more specific focus on "mishloach manot ish le-reichu". The Talmud (Megillah 5b), weighing whether there is a prohibition against "melachah" on Purim ultimately dismisses this

ubiquitous and defining mo'ed standard, noting that several verses later, the Megillah (9:22) reformulated the holiday, dropping this typical feature - "Melachah lo kabilu alayhu demaikara ketiv simchah umishteh veyom tov, u-levasof ketiv la'asot otam yemei mishteh vesimchah, veilu yom tov lo ketiv". While the Talmud does not emphasize them, other equally important, albeit subtle changes were also introduced into the new and normative articulation of Purim. The precedence of "mishteh" to "simchah" conveys a different motif than a typical yom tov seduah, one in which the heightened consciousness of Hashem's mercy and generosity triggered by targeted physicality (a proper, reflective application of "ad delo yada") is appropriately employed. [See also the view and formulation of the Yerushalmi Megillah 1:4 regarding the exclusion of seudat Purim on shabbat. I hope to examine this fascinating text and issue elsewhere, as it possibly also crystallizes the unique focus of Purim with respect to the initiatives to formalize it as a festival, as well as its singular features that differentiate it from typical moadim.] Moreover, the exclusion of "yom tov" was accompanied by the inclusion of "matanot l'evyonim", a particularly crucial and defining theme, as we shall briefly elaborate. Especially in light of the elite elevated status of Purim, reflected by the Yerushalmi and midrashic texts, these differences should not be perceived as reflecting a less rigorous protocol, a concession to the rabbinic status of the commemoration. Rather, the changes characterize a bolder spiritual aspiration, one more conducive to highlighting the ubiquity and urgency of Hashem's special providence that stems from the irrevocable and inimitable bond with Klal Yisrael.

Let us briefly focus on the centrality of mattanot l'evyonim as it likely exemplifies Purim's special theme. Rambam (2:17, see Magid Mishnah and also compare with Hilchos Yom Tov 6:20) strikingly asserts that this facet of Purim commemoration surpasses mishloach manot, notwithstanding the fact that it was, unlike mishloach manot, only inserted into the later iteration of Purim. Apparently, the addition of "mattanot l'evyonim" in conjunction with the subtraction of "yom tov" is characteristic. Perhaps Rambam's assertion is further substantiated, maybe even inspired by the view of R. Yosef (Megillah 4b). The Talmud notes that the megillah is not read on shabbat and provides two different rationales. The normative view (Hilchos Megillah 1:13) is that, like lulav and shofar, there is a concern lest one come to violate the prohibition to carry on shabbat. However, the gemara also records R. Yosef's argument that one cannot separate mattanot l'evyonim from keriat ha-megillah inasmuch as there is an urgent expectation of support in conjunction with the keriah - "eineihem shel aniyim nesuot le-

mikra Megillah"- that cannot be met on shabbat! The fear of chilul Shabbat per se is not a sufficient obstacle, but the disappointment of evyonim is! This inextricable link is normatively manifest in the law (Megillah 4b and Rambam Hilchos Megillah 2:14) that although kefarim dwellers who advance their keriat ha-Megilah do not partake of the seudah or mishloach manot until Adar 14, mattanot l'evyonim is fulfilled in conjunction with the earlier keriah to avoid frustrating the hopes of evyonim! The choice of the term "evyonim" rather than "aniyyim" in this context underscores the theme of desperation and the urgency not only of assistance but equally of hope and optimism.

The danger and distress of am Yisrael in the aftermath of Haman's genocidal plot engendered a renewed and advance appreciation for Divine providence, and the role of faith, trust, and optimism. For this reason, Taanit Esther, defined by the charge of "leich kenos ha-Yehudim", plays an outside role on Purim. [I hope to demonstrate this elsewhere.] The themes of "ve-nahapoch hu", "balayalah hazeh nadedah shenat ha-melech", "u-mi yodea im le-eit kazot higa'at lemlachut" and others highlight the centrality of Divine providence and reflect the special bond that always defines the relationship between Hashem and Klal Yisrael. Rav Amram Gaon ruled that one should say tahanun on Purim, as it is a day that highlights the efficacy of prayer. His stirring articulation of this idea is vital reading. We read the Megillah closely as a "sefer" but equally with a broader vision of hashgachah as an "iggeret" for this very reason.

If the crisis background of Purim was merely the context for greater joy, appreciation, and hoda'ah alone that surely would have been very significant and merited a holiday, although one that was cast in a more conventional form. The decision to structure Purim in a singular manner that more broadly emphasizes the proper halachic way to process and respond to crisis and distress and that embodies the ubiquitous need for faith and trust catapulted Purim still further, establishing it as an elite indispensable moed, as crystallized by the ambitious statements of the Yerushalmi and the midrash.

The crises of recent years have again tested our perspective on Purim. The superficial and mistaken impression that Purim is a celebration or at least a pretext for frivolity precludes its full commemoration in somber times. In fact, as Rashba explains, there is no historical circumstances that would justify cancelling or even minimizing Purim. Indeed, its focus on optimism and faith - shekol kovecha lo yevoshu velo yikalmu lanezah, kol hachosim bach (see also Rambam's stirring depiction of Purim in his preamble to Yad

## Likutei Divrei Torah

Hachazakah) - establishes a properly appreciated and appropriately celebrated Purim as even more vital in times of uncertainty and crisis.

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### Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

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#### Brighter is the Result

Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they should take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continuously. (Shemos 27:20)

Pressed: He presses the olives in a mortar and does not grind them with millstones so that there should not be any sediment. After he has obtained the first drop, he puts them into a mill and grinds them. The second oil is unfit for the Menorah but fit for meal offerings. (Rashi)

We say every night before reciting SHEMA, "Ki Heim Chayeinu" – "Because they (words of Torah) are our life...". Whatever we find in Torah has current relevance to our lives. So, we can legitimately ask, "What are we to learn from this detail, that the first drop exuded from the olive is designated for the Menorah?!"

Years back, I was leaving New Square one late afternoon after Davening Mincha and a young man, who I recognized, and who lived near my house, asked me for a ride. I asked him his name and when he told me an alarm bell went off in my mind. It was the very same last name as the Morah that taught my boys in Pre I.A. I asked him if he is related and he told me that it is his mother. It was a week or so after Purim and so I took the opportunity in our brief ride to share with him what an incredible merit his mother has. I told him that my oldest son read the Megillah on Purim with great proficiency many times and every word is to her credit because she is the one that taught him how to read Hebrew.

He, then, tried to deflect the credit back to me by postulating, "It probably comes from you!" There are a few things I am pretty good at but Kriah and public reading is not one of them. I swiftly begged away from the honor but an older memory suddenly awoke in my mind. A bunch of years ago my wife and I merited making a Shidduch- a match. A suggestion we made actually worked. The couple was married and we were delighted to have a hand in the happening. A few months later, we received a handsome check in the mail from the groom. I didn't know what to do with the money.

The fellow was a friend of mine and we were only trying to help. We were not looking to make a living as matchmakers. It's a good thing because we haven't been successful to make one since.

I went to one of my Rebbeim and presented the problem. He told me that I should accept the money. It was entirely appropriate for him to offer a finder's fee. He also said that it was the cleanest money that one can earn. In other deals there may be some under or over selling and the commission may be less deserved. "This was a deal from heaven and you were privileged to be the broker." The deal was clean and true and good and so is the money. Then he advised me to use the money to pay for my son's tuition. My oldest child was in first grade at the time. That's when they were teaching him to read. We set aside an account and paid tuition monthly from that fund that entire year.

Oddly, and amazingly, that child has become not only a competent Baal Koreh, but a virtuoso, like someone with perfect pitch, sensitive to every subtle deviation and nuanced change. He is a reader of the Torah in Shul each week. Did he get this talent from me?! Not me! Looking back, I believe, his interest and talent in this area can be attributed mostly to the purity of that fuel that can create a lasting flame.

That we are told to extract a single pure drop from each olive and the rest can happily go on to join other Mitzvos is an open endorsement for the importance and the preeminence of Torah study, symbolized by the light of the Temple Menorah. The first and the best are to be invested to support and promote this holy activity. The mind is the engine of each individual and the driving force of the nation. It needs the purest and most powerful form of fuel.

Shlomo HaMelech, the valedictorian or humanity, tells us in Mishlei, "MiKol Mishmor, Netzor Libecha, Ki Mimenu Totzeis Chaim" – "From all the things you watch, guard your mind, because from it founts life!" The more one feeds the mind Torah and not junk food for thought, and the more honest the money for the Yeshiva tuition is, the holier and brighter is the result!

### **We Revel in Reality**

Purim is called by the name Yom HaKippurim... Zohar Purim and Yom Kippur, two seemingly opposite days, are really related to each other, according to the Zohar. The letter CHOF, as a prefix, which means "like", would indicate that Yom Kippur is compared to Purim. We would say that a child resembles his father and not the other way around. In that way Yom Kippur is superseded by Purim. This may all be very puzzling and even troubling. How is this possible? Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year. We fast all day and pray for forgiveness. Purim is a party!

In a certain way they are really two sides of the same coin. On Erev Yom Kippur we eat and on the Erev Purim we fast. On Yom Kippur we ask each other and HASHEM for forgiveness, while on Purim we deliver gifts and create bonds of love with our fellow Jews. One is animated by awe and fear while the other is an outpouring of love. They are very similar like the old time negative of the film and the picture that is developed from that negative. They are seeking to do the same thing from different angles.

One of my Rebbes once asked us in Shiur, "What can we learn from a clock that is right twice a day?" Obviously, he was referring to a stopped clock. He went around the room and everyone had something to say. One the great honors of my early days in Yeshiva was that at Sholosh Seudas that week, the Rebbe shared with the entire Yeshiva gathered there, that he had this question, and this was Lam's answer; "If you see someone eating a lot on Erev Yom Kippur and drinking heavily on Purim, that does not mean that you can learn from him the rest of the year."

For many years we have been part of a hotel program for both Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur. I remember well, one Yom Kippur, right near the end, during Neila, after more than 24 hours of fasting, and we were nearing the dramatic conclusion of a full day of Davening. The room was rocking. We said HASHEM HASHEM, the 13 attributes of mercy for the umpteenth time and the voices were choked with emotion, the tears were flowing.

Everyone was begging for life. At that poignant moment a side door suddenly opened from the front of the Shul near to where the Chazan was leading the Davening. It was one of those doors that leads to an undecorated hallway connecting the kitchen and the ballroom. One of the workers opened the door and immediately realized his mistake, but before he closed the door his eyes swept the room with a most curious look. Then he shut the door. It was a second or two at most.

I noticed and it was slightly distracting for that moment. It left me thinking about what he was thinking. What did he think about what was going on in that brief surveying glance? That's not what I should have been concentrating on at that time but my mind was seeking closure on that brief encounter. It occurred to me, based on the look of shock and alarm on his face that he thought that he had just entered a Bais Meshuga, a real crazy house. We must have seemed insane in his eyes, and I can easily understand why.

However, I was able to recover and remind myself that that moment when we all shout out

### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

SHEMA and BORUCH SHEM KAVOD MALCHUSO L'OLAM VA'ED and HASHEM Hu HaElochim, that is actually the most-sane moment in the whole year and the rest of the time we are highly suspect.

On the flip side, there is a time on Purim, when, after having heard the Megillah twice, and given out loads of Mishloach Manos, and Matanos Evyonim, with EMUNAH in HASHEM to the max and being connected with fellow Jews, we then imbibe a few extra glasses of wine. Everyone is singing and sublime feelings are flowing. A guy in a gorilla costume is hugging a guy dressed in a guerilla costume. They are crying and affirming how much they love one another. Someone peering in from the outside, could conclude that these people are drunk but in truth this is the most sober moment of the entire year and the rest of the year we may be drunk on our ego agendas For a few moments in the year we revel in reality.

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### **Mizrachi Dvar Torah**

**Rav Doron Perez**

#### **The Greatest Comeback**

Haman was the only person in history who almost succeeded in killing every Jew on one day. That was his diabolical plan. That is what Amalek is – this single-minded destruction, of evil against good.

Similarly in our generation, not as diabolical but it surprised us: how many of us could have foreseen the outpouring of support for a terror organization. All of a sudden the sense of how precarious we are – how people can turn on us and not see light from darkness.

Just like then in the time of Purim that moment got turned around, so to in our generation – October 8th Jews who are galvanizing for the future of Jewish destiny, wanting to identify more as Jews. So too then – we are told that the Jews reaccepted the Torah. Sometimes the spilling of Jewish blood ignites the passion of Jewish destiny.

We understand we are one people – no matter where we are. Yes, there are divisions and differences of opinion, but they cannot tear us apart. Indeed, they must bring us closer together.

#### **Hamas, Haman and Hitler; Our Generation's Battle Against Evil**

October 7th was a painful reminder of a truism of life – the existence of absolute, undiscerning evil.

Hamas lulled us to sleep with their brutal surprise invasion from ninety different places along the border. Evidence from Sinwar's communications made his plan clear – the absolute destruction of Israel. He attempted to

get Hezbollah to attack the same day, which would have paralyzed Israel so that others such as Iran and other Palestinians in Yehuda and Shomron would join in, leading, G-d forbid, to the destruction of the Jewish state. Not only was this an unprovoked assault, but it was perpetrated by Gazan terrorists and civilians alike in the most ghastly, barbaric, and inhumane way. Murdering and maiming, torturing and stealing innocent men, women, and children from their homes laid bare the depth and depravity of what human beings are unfortunately capable of.

The truth is that absolute evil has existed for millennia. It constitutes a single-minded, systematic focus to destroy all good in the world. According to Torah tradition, it has a name – Amalek. The Torah commands us to always remember and never forget what Amalek represents.<sup>1</sup>

This is the essence of Parashat Zachor. Our Sages instituted an annual public Torah reading on the Shabbat preceding Purim, lest we forget Amalek's role in world affairs. The saga of the most infamous Amalekite, Haman, at the heart of the Megillah, is a sobering reminder of the existence of absolute evil and our obligation to confront it.

**Final Solutions** - Most ethical situations are not black or white, with little being absolutely good or bad. Nevertheless, world and Jewish history are testament to the undeniable existence of destructive ideologies of significant and at times complete evil.

Haman's diabolical precision plan of Jewish genocide is unparalleled in all of human and Jewish history. A plan to kill every single Jew in the entire world – every last one in all of the 127 countries of Ahashveirosh's global empire – in one day.

What type of mind not only hates an entire people but conjures a plan to kill them all at the very same time in a 24-hour period everywhere in the world?! His Final Solution was on the brink of implementation, and it was only through the grace of G-d and the actions of Mordechai and Esther that his plan was thwarted at the last minute.

Thousands of years later, Hitler declared the same intention – the Final Solution. Tragically, he succeeded in murdering one-third of the Jewish people, and if not for the hand of Providence guiding the actions of the Allied forces, he would have gone much further. Unstopped and unchecked, this type of evil would, G-d forbid, destroy every last Jew wherever they are.

Today, Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, and the Ayatollahs of Iran wish to eradicate the Jewish state.

### **Douglas Murray – why do I support Israel?**

- Is this war only against the Jews? When asked how, as a gentile, he is so unapologetically supportive of the Jewish state, Douglas Murray, the British-American public intellectual, offered a penetrating answer. He said as follows: It is conceivable that fifteen million Christians or Muslims could be killed and if this happened, it would be a tremendous tragedy of unimaginable proportions. However, if fifteen million Jews were killed – meaning the fall of the State of Israel and death of all Jews – that would be the end of civilization as we know it. Western civilization, he believes, could not survive the destruction of the Jewish state. It would be like cutting off the whole tree that western civilization rests on – it would wither and die. The existential threat against the Jewish people is, in Murray's opinion, a threat of the forces of darkness and barbarism against the values of freedom, democracy, and everything the West and America stands for.<sup>2</sup>

Murray brilliantly highlights what the destructive Amalek-type battle against the Jews is about: unbridled barbarism – whether in the form of secular National Socialism or Radical Islam – against the values of civility, freedom, equality, and human dignity exemplified by Judaism, Western and Judeo-Christian values as the founders of the United States articulated it.

This is exactly what the battle that Amalek has declared against the Jewish people since time immemorial is all about.

**The perennial battle of good and evil** - Even though Amalek no longer exists as a nation, it most certainly exists as an ideology. Its goal is to eradicate everything good in the world – first the Jewish people, and all those who stand for morality and justice.

Remarkably, only two nations are called reishit, the first of nations – the Jewish people, and Amalek. The point is clear. These two nations are pitted against each other in the perennial battle of good versus evil. Just as on an individual level we battle constantly between our good and evil impulses, so too these forces struggle with one another on a cosmic level – the collective mission of the Jewish people as opposed to that of Amalek.<sup>3</sup>

It was not by chance that Amalek was the first nation to attack Israel as soon as we came out of Egypt, as we read on Parashat Zachor. Two remarkable points highlight Amalek's pursuit of evil: "How he happened upon you on the way and cut off all the stragglers at your rear,

### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

when you were faint and weary, and he did not fear G-d" (Devarim 25:18).

Firstly, there is no stated motive for this attack. Amalek was not motivated by any normative political or military reasoning. There was not a battle over land or religion nor a war of defense, deterrence, or display of regional power. They chose to attack for no reason other than to commit evil for its own sake. To sow darkness at the very dawn of Israel's aspirations to be "a light unto the nations."

Secondly, Amalek always intentionally targets innocent civilians. There is not a regular military confrontation but rather a purposeful and systematic attack on those lagging behind: the elderly, the young, the weak, and the infirm. They attacked not just any civilians, but the most vulnerable and defenseless in society.

**Amalek today** - Amalek-type evil has taken on a new name: Terrorism. The aim of terrorism is to do exactly what its name implies: to terrorize anywhere and everywhere. The acceptable international norm in military interaction is that one army confronts another, and only combatants in uniform fight against their counterparts. Targeting, capturing, and torturing civilians are totally beyond the pale of ideological and military conflict. Not for Amalek – for them it is specifically the civilians, the non-combatants, who are the aim of their terror. Terrorism, as fitting for an Amalek-type ideology, exists outside all norms of political, military, and societal conduct.

After 9/11, we thought we had witnessed the depths of what terrorist minds could devise. But October 7th revealed an even darker abyss, as Hamas demonstrated that human depravity knows no bounds.

History bears out another truism about Amalekite antisemitism – it may begin with the Jews but never ends with them. One can be sure it will spill over to all fair-minded, good people around the world. Buildings and planes in New York, trains in Madrid, buses in London, nightclubs in Bali, schools in Toulouse, stores in Paris, and coffee shops in Sydney are all fair game. Radical Islamic terror is the latest incarnation of Amalek's global mission. October 7th and Israel is the latest frontier in their barbaric battle against Judaism and the values of the West.

**Our crucial role today** - In the post-October 7th era, a younger generation of Israeli soldiers showed an astonishing spirit of courage and heroism. They put their lives on the line and continue to do so every day thereafter, displaying incredible resolve against our barbaric enemies.

So too in the Diaspora. Over the last sixteen months in communities and campuses across the globe, antisemitic and anti-Israel incidents have reached unprecedented proportions. Leaders in general and young leaders in particular have been called upon to stand up as the bulwark in the fight for the future of the Jewish state.

Like Mordechai and Esther who reversed Haman's decree and changed Jewish history, we are called upon to lead today. This edition is dedicated to many young leaders around the world making a difference – standing up and being counted on behalf of our people.

Yes, life is very nuanced and complex and must be viewed with great sophistication. And yes, this Amalek-type hatred is rooted in a small minority with the majority being good, peace-loving people. Nevertheless, we have to be very mindful that our own nuanced sophistication does not cloud our vision in dealing with this scourge of evil. The advantage of our open, democratic “live and let live” society must not become our greatest weakness. Hamas and their supporters believe in “murder and die.” We cannot prevail if we are not armed with robust moral clarity against this tyrannical ideology.

Parashat Zachor stands as our eternal reminder of vigilance, while Purim serves as our blueprint for confronting evil. Throughout history, the Hamans of the world have sought to sway the Achashveiroshes of their time, working to isolate, delegitimize, and persecute the Jewish people and the Jewish state. In response, we need modern-day Mordechais and Esthers who, with unwavering clarity and courage, will stand against this evil despite fierce opposition and seemingly insurmountable odds.

And behind it all stands the Almighty, orchestrating the unseen hand of Providence in the unfolding drama of Jewish and human destiny. Though His face may be at times hidden, as in the story of Purim itself, His presence guides the course of history, turning darkness into light and transforming moments of greatest peril into salvation.

1 Netziv (HaAmek Davar, Shemot 17:14)

distinguishes between the nation of Amalek which no longer exists and the ideology of Amalek which persists to this day.

2 Ben Shapiro, “Our Last Chance To Save The West | Douglas Murray”,

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5F0q6LPnT4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5F0q6LPnT4).

3 Regarding Israel: “Israel is holy to G-d, the first of His grain...” (Yirmiyahu 2:3). Regarding Amalek, in Bilaam's prophecy: “When he saw Amalek, he took up his parable and said, ‘Amalek was the first of the nations, and his fate shall be everlasting destruction’” (Bamidbar 24:20).

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### Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's

#### Derashot Ledorot

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#### Remember to Forget\*

Memory and forgetfulness are subjects for study by psychologists, neurologists, and cyberneticians. It is for them to learn and explain the “how” of these processes, the mechanisms, the dynamics.

But these themes are also the substance of spiritual life. Many commandments of the Torah refer to remembering and forgetting. We are commanded to remember, amongst other things: the Sabbath; the day we left the Land of Egypt; what the Lord did to Miriam—and, thus, the teaching that no one is infallible; how we angered the Lord in the desert—and, therefore, to be aware of our own penchant for ingratitude.

Similarly, there are commandments concerning forgetfulness. Most prominent is the commandment of shikhhah—that if one has harvested his field and forgotten a corner, he should not return to it but must leave that forgotten corner for the poor (Deut. 25:19). Even more paradoxical is a commandment to forget (although it is not worded explicitly in that manner). We must forget grudges, insults, hurt. Lo tikkom ve-lo tittor—you shall not take revenge, you shall not bear a grudge (Lev. 19:18). Forgetfulness is even considered a blessing.

Our Rabbis teach us: *gezerah al ha-met sheyishtakkah min ha-lev*, “it is ordained that the dead be forgotten from the heart” (Bereshit Rabbah 84:19). R. Bahya ben Asher pointed out that this is a great blessing, for if man were always to remember the dead, he soon would be laden with such grief that he could not survive emotionally or spiritually (commentary to Gen. 37:35).

But most often, and most usually, forgetfulness is regarded as an evil, as a sin. Thus, the Rabbis taught, *Ha-shokheah davar ehad mi-mishnato ma'aleh alav ha-katuv ke-illu mithayyev be-nafsho*, “If one forgets a single item from his studies, Scripture considers it as if he were guilty with his life” (Avot 3:10).

And, of course, the source of all these commandments is the one which gives the Shabbat before Purim its special distinction and its very name: Shabbat Zakhor. *Zakhor et asher asah lekha Amalek . . . lo tishkah* (Deut. 25:17–19)—remember what Amalek, that barbaric and savage tribe, did to you . . . you shall not forget.

But this commandment not to forget is problematic. After all, everyone forgets. Forgetting is natural, it is part of both our psychological and our physiological selves; it is not a volitional or deliberate act. How, then,

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can the Torah consider it a sin if we forget? Permit me to recommend to you an answer suggested by R. Yitzhak Meir, the Gerer Rebbe, known to posterity by the name of his great halakhic work, *Hiddushei ha-Rim*. Forgetfulness, he says, often depends upon man. For we are not speaking here of simple recollection of facts, but the kind of forgetfulness that implies the emptying out of the mind, the catharsis of the heart of its most basic spiritual principles, of the very props of its identity. And this kind of shikhhah is contingent upon *ga'avah*; it is a forgetfulness which has its roots in man's arrogance.

When a man's mind is preoccupied with himself, he has little place for what is really important—and he forgets it. Hence we read (Deut. 8:14): *Ve-ram le-vavekha ve-shakhahta et Hashem Eloekha ha-motzi'akha me-Eretz Mitzrayim mi-beit avadim*, “And thy heart shall be lifted up, and thou wilt forget the Lord thy God who taketh thee out of the Land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves.”

Similarly, we are commanded to remember and not to forget Amalek. Now, the numerical value of the Hebrew word Amalek is 240—the very same numerical value as the word ram, the heart being lifted, raised, exalted, supercilious! When man is filled with conceit, he falters and forgets.

Too much ego results in too little memory. An absent mind is the result of a swelled head. A high demeanor results in a low recall. If ram, you will forget Amalek. It is the arithmetic of mind and character.

Indeed, this is a human, if not a specifically Jewish, weakness. Rav Kook has taught us in effect that the root of all evils is that we forget who we are, our higher selves. We turn cynical and act as if man is only an amalgam of base drives, of ego-satisfactions, of sexual and material grasping. We forget that, in addition, man is capable of noble action, of sublime sentiment, of self-sacrifice. When we forget that, we are in desperate trouble. (See *Orot ha-Kodesh* III:97.)

Most Jews who assimilate today, so unlike those of the early and middle parts of this century, do not do so primarily because of self-hatred, but because of a massive act of ethnic forgetfulness. And such national absent-mindedness, such forgetting of our higher identity, is often the result of *ve-ram levavekha*.

Our memory is weakened by excessive affluence and too much self-confidence. We American Jews act as if our liberties and successes are self-evidently our right. We act as if our good fortune is deserved. And so ve-

ram levavekha leads to ve-shakhahta. And what do we most often forget? Amalek!

I read recently that a Swedish gentile woman, who has several times been proposed for the Nobel Peace Prize because of the hundreds of Jews she saved during the Nazi period, said in an interview that only once in her life did she entertain hatred for a fleeting moment. It occurred during a visit she paid to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum, in Jerusalem. She overheard an American Jew say to the guide: "I don't understand why they didn't fight? Why weren't they real men?" She was seized with anger, and said to him: "You look fat and prosperous! Have you ever been hungry a day in your life? Do you have any idea what it is like to be starved almost to insanity, surrounded by powerful enemies, aware that no one in the world cares for you—and you have the unmitigated nerve to ask that question?"

I confess that in reading the interview, I shared her hatred—but only for a fleeting moment. One cannot hate fools. One can only have contempt for them.

Certainly, we are subject to that weakness of forgetting time and again. Only a year ago Israelis—and Jews throughout the world—were afflicted by overconfidence, and the Yom Kippur War was the result. I should hope that we Jews are bright enough to have learned from this experience.

Most important, one of the things we must never dare to forget is the contemporary Amalek, the Holocaust. The news that the younger generation of Germans does not want to be reminded of it, that they feel they did not participate in it, comes as no surprise to me. But Jews must never fall into the trap of ve-ram levavekha and so forget Amalek. Remember and do not forget! The Holocaust must constantly be part of our education, commemoration, and motivation for further study and spiritual development.

Conversely, too, if we remember Amalek, that will lead to a realistic assessment of ourselves, and we shall be able to avoid the pitfall of a "lifted heart."

The United States and all the Western world are today in the doldrums. We are all of us in a pessimistic mood about the economy, something which affects each and every one of us. If the Lord helps, and we all escape economic disaster—if it will be, as we say in Yiddish, afgekumen mit a shrek, "escaped with a scare"—then perhaps we will have learned to rid ourselves of the cultural and psychological and moral signs of decadence in our culture, all these corruptions the result of ve-ram

levavekha, overconfidence inspired by affluence.

So the Hiddushei ha-Rim has given us an unforgettable Devar Torah about forgetfulness and arrogance.

It is a lesson worthy of our deep thought and meditation. Remember it, do not forget.  
*Excerpted from Rabbi Norman Lamm's  
Festivals of Faith, c0-published by OU Press  
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\*1974*



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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON Tetzave/Zachor - Purim - 5786

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**Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l's 40th Yahrzeit** is **Taanis Esther** this Monday; Rav Moshe died the evening of the 13th of Adar II, 5746 and the Levaya on Taanis Esther in MTJ and in all the surrounding streets was attended by more than 20,000 Jews; well over 100,000 attended his Levaya and Kvura Shushan Purim in Yerushalem; Rav Moshe is buried in Har Hamenuchos

### **Rav Moshe Feinstein**

#### **Torah, Work, and Keeping Torah "Fixed"**

Chatgpt summary of

**Shark Tank Podcast** February 23, 2026 coinciding with the **40th yahrzeit of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt"l** — offers exploration of Rav Moshe's worldview on how a Jew should live a Torah-centered life in the real world. Hosted by **Yaakov Wolff** with guest **Rabbi Moshe Kurtz**, and highlights lasting life principles from Rav Moshe's teachings: how to balance Torah and worldly responsibilities, how to make career and life choices with Torah values, and — most importantly — what it means to keep *Torascha keva* (your Torah fixed and central) amidst competing demands.

On the fortieth yahrzeit of Rav Moshe Feinstein ז"ל, it is fitting not only to recall his towering halachic genius, but to reflect upon the broader worldview that animated his life and leadership. Rav Moshe was more than the preeminent posek of his generation, more than the author of *Igros Moshe*, more than the Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem. He embodied a Torah that addressed the lived realities of Jews navigating work, family, community, and spiritual aspiration in the modern world.

Much has been written about Rav Moshe's responsa — thousands of teshuvot that charted the course of American Orthodox life in the twentieth century. Yet beyond the specific rulings lies a unifying theme: Rav Moshe offered a model for how a Jew can live a Torah-centered life fully engaged in the real world. His teachings speak directly to enduring questions: How should one structure a life in which *parnassah* and prayer compete for time? When does full-time learning make sense, and when must one turn to worldly responsibilities? How does one ensure that Torah remains central even when life grows complex and demanding? At the heart of Rav Moshe's legacy is a simple yet profound directive from Pirkei Avos: *aseh Torascha keva* — make your Torah fixed.

#### **Torah in the Real World**

The challenge of integrating Torah and worldly responsibility is not new, but in America it took on unique dimensions. Rav Moshe lived in an era when Torah observance had to take root in a culture defined by professional ambition, economic mobility, and social openness. He himself was a scholar

of unparalleled erudition, yet he was deeply engaged in communal leadership, public advocacy, and the daily realities of American Jewish life. For Rav Moshe, Torah was not meant to be confined to the *beis medrash*. It was not an island detached from commerce, medicine, law, or civic life. Nor was it meant to be diluted by those realities. Rather, Torah was to serve as the guiding framework through which every decision was filtered and every path evaluated. This is perhaps why Rav Moshe's guidance continues to resonate. He did not offer abstract ideals divorced from circumstance. His Torah addressed people where they were — young men considering *kollel*, parents worrying about *parnassah*, professionals navigating demanding careers, communities grappling with modern pressures. His message was not escapist, nor was it accommodationist. It was principled and practical.

#### **Kollel Is Not a Binary**

One of the enduring misconceptions in contemporary discourse is that Torah commitment is an all-or-nothing proposition: either one learns full-time or one has compromised. Rav Moshe's worldview was more nuanced. Full-time Torah study is an extraordinary calling. But the central question is not merely how many hours one sits in the *beis medrash*; it is whether Torah is truly "fixed" — whether it occupies the core of one's identity and priorities. A person whose schedule includes work can nonetheless live a life in which Torah shapes thought, aspiration, and daily conduct. Rav Moshe understood that life unfolds across stages. Circumstances shift. Responsibilities grow. The measure of a life is not solely the quantity of uninterrupted years in *kollel*, but whether Torah remains the compass by which decisions are made. The issue is not binary; it is orientational.

#### **Education and Parnassah Through a Torah Lens**

In a society that equates higher education with success and stability, Rav Moshe approached such assumptions with care. He did not dismiss secular education outright, nor did he embrace it uncritically. Instead, he insisted that choices regarding schooling and career must be grounded in Torah values. College is not automatically synonymous with *parnassah*, and *parnassah* itself is not the ultimate metric of a life well lived. Every educational path carries spiritual implications — environments, influences, priorities. A Jew must evaluate these not only in terms of income or prestige, but in terms of long-term spiritual direction. This perspective does not reject engagement with the world. It demands that engagement be deliberate and guided. Decisions about education and livelihood must be measured against a larger question: Will this path strengthen or weaken my ability to live a Torah-oriented life?

#### **Aseh Torascha Keva: Orientation, Not Just Hours**

Perhaps the most powerful lesson of Rav Moshe's life is his understanding of *aseh Torascha keva*. To make Torah "fixed" is not merely to assign it a regular time slot in the day. It is to make Torah the fixed point around which the rest of life revolves. Torah is a compass, not a clock. A person may spend hours in professional work and yet be profoundly Torah-centered if those hours are framed by Torah priorities. Conversely, one may sit in study without internalizing Torah as the organizing principle of life. To live with Torah as *keva* means that decisions — financial, professional, familial — are not made in isolation from spiritual purpose. It means that success is defined by fidelity to Torah values, not merely by external achievement. Rav Moshe's own life demonstrated this orientation. His schedule was crowded with communal burdens and halachic inquiries from around the world, yet Torah remained the fixed axis of his existence.

#### **Career as a Spiritual Decision**

Modern professions often demand more than time; they demand identity. Fields such as medicine, law, finance, and academia require intense commitment, continuous education, and emotional investment. Rav Moshe did not render blanket judgments about these careers. Instead, he invited individuals to evaluate them through a Torah lens. Does this path allow for sustained Torah growth? Will it strengthen family life or strain it? Will it elevate one's character or erode it? These are not peripheral questions. They are central. Career is not merely an economic choice; it is a spiritual

trajectory. To approach it without Torah guidance is to surrender orientation to circumstance. Rav Moshe's model encourages engagement with eyes open and values intact. One can pursue demanding professions, but only if Torah remains the master priority and not the casualty of ambition.

#### **Compassionate Psak**

Rav Moshe's greatness was not only intellectual brilliance. It was also profound human sensitivity. His responsa reveal not merely a command of sources but an acute awareness of the people who stood behind each question. Halachah, in his hands, was not cold abstraction. It was Torah applied to living souls. He listened carefully, understood context, and sought solutions that upheld fidelity to halachah while recognizing human complexity. This care-driven approach is one of his most enduring legacies. It teaches that Torah leadership requires both precision and compassion. A posek must be rooted in sources, but also attuned to struggle, vulnerability, and circumstance. Such halachah is not rigid; it is alive. It does not bend truth, but it recognizes the human being before it.

#### **Living Torah Beyond the Beis Medrash**

Rav Moshe's life affirms that Torah does not retreat from the world; it transforms it. Work, family life, communal activism — all can become vehicles for avodas Hashem when framed by Torah purpose. One cannot isolate oneself in a self-contained spiritual enclave and imagine that the broader community's condition is irrelevant. Rav Moshe consistently emphasized communal responsibility. Spiritual isolation is neither realistic nor desirable. A Jew's well-being is intertwined with the well-being of his community. Thus, activism on behalf of education, kashrus, moral standards, and communal stability is not optional. It is part of living Torah in the real world. Yet such activism must be guided by Torah authority, not driven by ego or impulse.

#### **Flexibility Without Compromise**

A remarkable feature of Rav Moshe's approach is that it allows for flexibility without compromise. Life circumstances vary. Not every individual's path will look the same. But flexibility in form does not mean surrender in substance. Torah remains central. Priorities remain clear. Orientation remains fixed. This balance — principled yet practical — enabled Rav Moshe to guide an entire generation navigating unprecedented change. He neither retreated from modern challenges nor capitulated to them. He responded with clarity, humility, and unwavering fidelity to Torah.

#### **Why This Matters Today**

Forty years after his passing, the questions Rav Moshe addressed remain urgent. Jews continue to grapple with balancing work and learning, ambition and devotion, engagement and separation. The pressures of contemporary life may be even more intense than in his time. Rav Moshe's message offers a path forward. Torah must be central, not peripheral. Career and education must be evaluated through Torah values. Communal responsibility cannot be ignored. And halachah must be applied with both rigor and compassion. To commemorate his yahrtzeit is not merely to honor a giant of Torah scholarship. It is to recommit to the model he lived — a life in which Torah is not an accessory but the foundation; not an isolated pursuit but the animating force of every decision. Rav Moshe Feinstein taught that one need not choose between Torah and life. Rather, one must choose to make Torah the life within life — the fixed axis around which everything else turns. May his memory continue to guide us in making our Torah truly *keva*, and in living it with integrity, wisdom, and heart.

Notes-to-Tetzaveh-Zachor-5777-529311.pdf

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#### **Points to Ponder – Tetzaveh/Zachor 5777**

**Pure Olive Oil (27:20).** Rashi notes that the oil for the Menorah had to be pure—without sediment—while that used for Menachos was more flexible. Why the difference? **Rav Moshe Feinstein** zt"l suggested that when illuminating individuals, leadership must be pure. People cannot suspect ulterior or impure motives. Their intentions must be zach (pure) from the outset.

**And They Shall Take the Gold and Techeiles (28:5).** Rashi explains that the Chochmei Lev themselves took the materials to make the garments. Why must they take the donations directly? **Rav Moshe** Feinstein zt"l explained that this teaches a valuable lesson: when beginning a mitzvah, one should complete it fully. While division of labor increases efficiency in physical matters, in spiritual matters the complete action is ideal. Additionally, Rav Moshe noted that donations should be directed to Gedolim who can properly guide which projects merit support.

**And the Mizbeiach Shall Be Kodesh Kodashim (29:37).** Why is the Mizbeiach HaNechoshes called Kodesh Kodashim, while the Mizbeiach HaZahav is called only Kodesh? **Rav Moshe** Feinstein zt"l offered two possibilities: (1) When one's actions are Kodesh near the Aron (in the Beis HaMedrash), they must be Kodesh Kodashim when farther away. (2) One in the Beis HaMedrash is already regarded as Kodesh Kodashim, and others assume his actions reflect that sanctity. Therefore, a Talmid Chacham must ensure his conduct is exemplary.

#### **Each Day When He Cleans the Candles He Shall Offer the Ketores**

**(30:7).** **Rav Moshe** Feinstein zt"l explained that although the Ketores was offered privately, its fragrance spread widely—the Gemara (Yoma 39b) teaches that women in Yerushalayim did not need perfume due to its scent. Similarly, someone who spreads Torah through personal example must recognize that private actions radiate influence far beyond the home.

**Remember What Amalek Did (Devarim 25:17).** Chazal teach that Zechira is verbal while not forgetting is in the heart. Yet memory functions in the brain—why emphasize the heart? **Rav Moshe** Feinstein zt"l explained that we are meant not only to remember Amalek's evil intellectually, but to feel it deeply—to recognize how low a person can descend and ensure we never reach such darkness.

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date: Feb 25, 2026, 8:31 PM

#### **Parshas Tetzaveh**

#### **Shoshanas Yakov Insights**

The Shoshanas Yakov poem which we recite following the reading of the Megilla contains the words “L’hodeea she’kol kovecha lo yeivoshu v’lo yeekolmu lanetzach kol hachosim Bach.” This statement really sums up what Purim is all about. Purim teaches us that all those “who put their hope and faith in You (kovecha) will never be embarrassed or humiliated forever, all those who take refuge (chosim) in You.”

This is one of the main lessons of the reading of the Megilla. Those who put their trust and reliance in the Ribono shel Olam will never come out wanting. This means to say that the story of the Megilla is a story of bitachon (trust) that salvation comes from Hashem. Klal Yisrael put their trust in the Ribono shel Olam and they were rewarded with the nes of Purim, the salvation of Klal Yisrael.

At first glance, it is not so apparent where we see Klal Yisrael placing this trust in the Ribono shel Olam. The simple reading is that when Klal Yisrael responded to the decree of Haman by fasting, crying, and wearing sackcloth, that represented teshuva, and by extension, bitachon on the part of Klal Yisrael.

In other words, they did not respond to Haman's decree by hiring lobbyists or engaging in “back door efforts.” Rather, they accepted the decree, they did teshuva, they fasted, and they went into mourning. That showed their bitachon in the Ribono shel Olam.

Perhaps on a deeper level, it is even more pronounced than that. When the gezeira was decreed and Klal Yisrael was on the verge of being annihilated, they could have taken solace in the fact that “we see the yad Hashem over here.” Of all the girls available from the entire empire of Achashverosh, it was Esther who was chosen as queen. This occurred despite the fact that, according to Chazal, she was not a “beauty.” Nonetheless, despite the fact that Esther had no royal Persian lineage, she was the one who was chosen. Mordechai could have said, “Ach! We see the hand of Hashem at work here.

She was chosen from among all the women. She is on our side. She is going to affect the salvation. That is how it is going to happen.” That, perhaps, is how they could have calmed themselves down.

And yet, we see an amazing thing. We see that when Mordechai sent a message to Esther and told her that he wanted her to go to the king and plead on behalf of the Jews, Esther was hesitant. She did not want to go. Esther knew that anyone who entered the chamber of the king without having been summoned was liable to be put to death.

At that point, what should Mordechai have said to Esther? He should have said, “Esther, if you don’t do this, Klal Yisrael is going to be lost. You are our last best hope. I don’t care about your fear. YOU NEED TO DO THIS!” In other words, Mordechai should have pushed the PANIC BUTTON. He should have ranted and raved, “You need to go to do this! You can’t think about yourself at a time like this!”

And yet Mordechai reacted calmly: “You don’t want to do this? So be it. No problem. Salvation will come to the Jews from another place and your father’s house will be lost.” In other words, “We don’t need you. We have faith in the Ribono shel Olam, who will figure out a way to save us.” It is your opportunity. It is your zechus. This could be your moment in history. If you want to do it, great, and if you don’t want to do it that is also fine. This is your decision. I am not going to worry because I know that ultimately “L’Hashem hayeshua!” (Salvation comes from the L-rd).

That equanimity that Mordechai demonstrated – that he didn’t panic and he didn’t freak out – is the lesson of “She’kol kovecha lo yeivoshu v’lo yeekolmu lanetzach, kol hachosim Bach – not only bitachon in the outcome, but also recognition that the method, too, is determined by Hashem.”

This is a practical lesson for all of us. Sometimes we are given a business opportunity and we can see how this is the thing that is going to really put us on the map, set for life! If this business opportunity comes through, then I am set! If it doesn’t, then I am back to square one. This is an incorrect approach. If the Ribono shel Olam wants to make someone into a millionaire, He will give him the money in one way or another. You think it needs to come through this particular deal? Not necessarily. If we believe – with more than just ‘lip service’ – that a person’s financial allotment for the year is determined the previous Rosh Hashanna, then if the Ribono shel Olam wants you to receive the money, you will receive the money. It won’t necessarily come the way you think it will come.

The same is true with all such situations in life. Sometimes a person needs a particular medical procedure or a particular surgery. Of course, like all of us, he wants to get “the top man in the field” to perform the procedure. If, for whatever reason, he can’t get “the top guy,” he moans, “Woe is me! What is going to be?” Truth be told, we think it is the surgeon who is going to perform the operation that is going to save our life. It is not the surgeon. It is the Ribono shel Olam. The Ribono shel Olam can make it happen whether you get the top guy or whether you get some surgeon who can’t speak the English language without an accent. He didn’t go to Harvard Medical School, he didn’t practice in the Cleveland Clinic, and he may not have been your first choice to operate on you, but that does not justify despair. It is the Ribono shel Olam who runs this world.

This is the lesson of the Megilla: “She’kol kovecha lo yeivoshu v’lo yeekolmu lanetzach kol hachosim Bach!”

This statement also provides insight into the interpretation of a pasuk we say every day in davening: Baruch hagever asher yivtach b’Hashem, v’haya Hashem mivtacho. This pasuk seems somewhat redundant. The first phrase stands by itself: Blessed is the man who trusts Hashem. What is added by the last few words “And Hashem is his trust?” It appears to be saying the same thing.

The Malbim explains: The meaning of Baruch hagever asher yivtach b’Hashem is believing that salvation will come from the Ribono shel Olam (bitachon in the result). The words v’haya Hashem mivtacho add that the means of how salvation will come will also be determined by the Ribono shel Olam (bitachon in the process, not only the result). Since, even the means of how salvation will come will be determined by Hashem, the

particular type of hishtadlus (personal effort) I invest in my salvation does not concern me as much.

We can add a further thought along these lines by analyzing the expression “kol hachosim Bach” (those who take refuge in You). In Lashon Hakodesh, lachasos and havtacha describe related but distinct concepts. Lachasos means to take refuge or seek shelter. By contrast, a havtachah implies an assurance or a guarantee upon which a person relies. When we say in Hallel, “Tov lachasos b’Hashem mi’betoach b’nedivim,” the Vilna Gaon explains that taking refuge in Hashem does not depend on receiving a formal guarantee. It is reliance upon Him even without an explicit assurance.

If there is a terrible windstorm or terrible hailstorm outside, and I run into a building that has a roof, I have “chisayon” in that roof. I am taking refuge in that building. The building does not say anything to me guaranteeing protection from the hail. But, I know the roof is there, it is a solid roof and I take refuge in it, relying upon it without any type of guarantee.

A guarantee is when you go to someone and you ask him for a loan for a business opportunity and he says “I guarantee to you that I will give it to you.” That is a type of havtacha.

The pasuk in Hallel is saying that it is better to put your reliance in the Ribono shel Olam (tov lachasos b’Hashem) without any type of guarantee. It is better to put your faith and trust in Him than to have a guarantee from a nediv (rich man). The guarantee from the nediv is not for certain. Things change. Life changes. This illustrates the difference between taking refuge without a guarantee and relying on an explicit guarantee.

Now this sentence of Shoshanas Yakov makes even more sense. L’hodeca – the purpose of Purim demonstrated that kol kovecha – all that put their faith and hope in You – lo yeivoshu v’lo yeekolmu lanetzach kol hachosim Bach – referring to those people who have this chisayon in the Ribono shel Olam. They look at Him as a Rock that they can take cover in, even without an explicit personal guarantee of how the outcome will unfold. They don’t need that. They put their total reliance in Him.

This is what the Megilla is trying to tell us. The nes of Purim teaches us how we need to approach crises in life. The approach is v’haya Hashem mivtacho – He is the means by which our salvation will occur. It may not happen in exactly the way we expect, but He will provide the means of salvation according to His plan. That is the way it is with parnassa. That is the way it is with refuah. That is the way it is with shidduchim.

That is why Mordechai’s name is associated with the word baruch (blessed) – Baruch Mordechai. Mordechai Hayehudi put his faith in the Ribono shel Olam, fulfilling the pasuk: Baruch hagever asher yivtach b’Hashem, v’haya Hashem mivtacho. He is a living demonstration of a person who put total faith in the Ribono shel Olam – not only bitachon in salvation, but also chisayon – taking refuge in Hashem – that the way it will unfold is according to His Divine plan.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com  
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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1372 A Purim Potpourri.

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from: **Ira Zlotowitz** <iraz@klalgovoah.org>

date: Feb 26, 2026, 7:02 PM

subject: **Tidbits for Parashas Tetzaveh** 5786 in memory of Rabbi Meir Zlotowiz zt"l

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Menachos 48 ..

Taanis Esther is this Monday, March 2nd. Purim begins Monday evening, March 2nd.

This Shabbos, the Shabbos before Purim, we fulfill the positive Torah commandment of Zechiras Maaseh Amalek, to remember Amalek’s attack,

through the special kerias haTorah of Parashas Zachor (Devarim 25:17-19). The baal korei must have in mind to be motzi the participants in this mitzvah through his leining, who in turn have in mind to be yotzeh the same. One should understand the meaning of the words of these pasukim (see Parashah section below). Many congregations say yotzros for Parashas Zachor during/after shacharis. Two sifrei Torah are taken out. The haftarah for Parashas Zachor is read. Av Harachamim is omitted.

One who inadvertently missed the leining may be yotzei with the kerias hatorah of Purim morning (“Vayavo Amalek”; in this case one should advise the baal korei to be motzi him in that mitzvah). The obligation of women in this mitzvah is a matter of dispute. The minhag in many communities is for women to try to attend Shul for the keriah. Many communities hold a special keriah for women who could not attend Shul, although some poskim advise against this practice. If a woman does not hear the leining, many poskim advise that she can simply read the pesukim from a chumash.

Summaries

**TETZAVEH:** First-squeezed olive oil should be used for the Menorah • Appointment of the Kohanim and description of their sacred clothing • Four additional garments worn only by the Kohen Gadol include: 1) the Ephod (an apron); 2) the Choshen (a breastplate with precious stones inscribed with the names of the Shevatim; it also holds the Urim V'Tumim, a parchment on which a most holy Name of Hashem was written); 3) the Me'il (a techeiles-dyed robe, its bottom hem adorned with gold bells and cloth ‘pomegranates’); 4) the Tzitz (a forehead-plate) • Consecration and anointing of Aharon and his four sons • The Korban Tamid • Description of the Mizbeiach HaKetores and the Avodas HaKetores • The Ketores (incense) shall be offered twice daily, plus a third time on Yom Kippur.

Parashas Zachor (Devarim 25:17-19): “Remember what Amalek did to you, on the way when you were departing Mitzrayim. He ambushed you on the way, and he killed some among you, all the weaklings (sinners - who are spiritually weak) trailing behind, when you were faint and tired; and he did not fear G-d. It shall be when Hashem your G-d gives you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land that Hashem your G-d gives you as an inheritance, you shall wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven - you should not forget!”

Haftarah: Having recalled Amalek’s brazen attack and our obligation to eradicate the nation, we recount the episode of Shaul HaMelech who was commanded to execute the Amaleiki nation along with their possessions. With misplaced mercy, Shaul Hamelech temporarily spared their king Agag (Shmuel Alef 15:1-34). We recall these events before Purim, as this delay led to Agag’s descendant, Haman, coming into existence and plotting to wipe out the Jewish nation. Shaul’s failure was redeemed by his descendants Mordechai Hatzadik and Queen Esther, who defeated Haman and foiled his wicked plan.

Dvar Torah

“וְאַתָּה תְּצַו אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִקְחוּ אֵלֵיהֶם שֶׁמֶן זַיִת נָדָה” And you will command the Bnei Yisrael that they shall take for you clear olive oil” (Shemos 27:20)

The Baal Haturim explains that “Tzav” in this pasuk means to be mezarev, to encourage and persuade in this mitzvah of Menorah. By the Korban Tamid as well, the word Tzav indicates the same, as these two daily mitzvos entailed a seemingly inefficient expense. For the Menorah only the first drop of each olive was used, and the korbanos tamid did not provide leftover meat or the like for the Kohanim’s consumption. Therefore, the performance of these mitzvos required Moshe’s encouragement. Now, one may wonder that surely the actual building of the Mishkan amounted to a far greater expense than these amounts of oil, and yet the Torah did not find the need to add any encouragement to donating construction materials. If so, why is there a concern for laxity in this area in the area of the Menorah or the Tamid?

Rav Elya Baruch Finkel z”l explains that something which occurs daily and comes at a cost is prone to lose its excitement and ‘glamor’ quite quickly. It is common that when institutions begin a ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ building campaign or similar campaign, people are likely to give easily and generously. Yet, when the same institution requires funds for the day-to-day

expenses, people have a harder time contributing. We must recognize that the entire purpose of the edifice is only to facilitate the continued learning and growth within it. The Midrash in Vayikra in fact explains that our pasuk is referring not only to the Mishkan, but also to the Mikdash Me’at in all future generations - meaning, our Shuls and Batei Medrash. One should overcome feelings of staleness and recognize the opportunity he has in facilitating and fueling Harbatzas Torah and communal causes on a constant and regular basis.

**MATANOS L’EVYONIM:**

“It is preferable to spend more money on gifts to the poor than on one’s seudah and mishloach manos, as there is no greater joy than making the poor and less fortunate happy” (Rambam, Hilchos Purim 2:17). On Purim day, each man and woman must give to two needy people the monetary equivalent of a small meal. An ‘individual in need’ is classified as someone who is struggling to cover his day-to-day expenses. Maaser funds may not be used for the obligatory amount. One should ensure that his wife and bar/bas mitzvah children fulfill this mitzvah (one can simply ask the gabbai tzedakah to acquire the money on behalf of his wife or child and provide it to a needy recipient on their behalf). It is proper to train one’s chinuch-age children in this mitzvah, although the extent of a minor’s obligation is a matter of dispute. Throughout the day, one should give freely to any needy individual who solicits without examining the legitimacy of their cause, just as Hashem performed the Purim miracle without examining our merits and deeds.

*Based on - Seeing Ourselves in the Story of Megillas Esther*

**Rabbi Shay Schachter**

<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/1167342/>

*[used AI to summarize audio]*

The highlight of Purim is not merely that we read the Megillah, but that we read it with understanding. We are meant to walk away with takeaways, inspiration, and connection. Too often, however, when we open Chumash or Tanach we slip into spectator mode. We watch Adam and Chavah, Noach, Avraham, Yosef in the pit, David and Goliath, Esther before Achashverosh—and we file it away as a gallery of great people who lived in another world. But Tanach was not written to be admired from a distance. It was written as a living guide, a manual for every Jew who comes after.

That is why the right way to learn Tanach is to ask: where am I in this story? Which character’s experience resembles what I am living through right now? “Lech Lecha” is not just a story about Mesopotamia. Avraham is told to step into uncertainty—“לך לך מארצך וממולדתך”—to leave comforts behind and go without being handed certainty. That experience repeats whenever a Jew is asked to take a moral stand that may isolate him, to live with integrity when others choose differently, to embrace a Torah path even when the surrounding culture pushes against it.

So too Yosef. Betrayed by his brothers, thrown into a pit, sold into slavery, falsely accused, imprisoned, forgotten—Yosef had every right to be angry and confused. Yet he names a child Menashe: “כִּי נִשְׁנִי אֱלֹקִים אֶת כָּל עַמּוּלִי”—because Hashem has brought me to where I am. It is not resignation; it is perspective. It is the refusal to let bitterness become identity. And it is hard to read Yosef without thinking of those who live in their own pits—rejection, illness, infertility, setbacks, loneliness—and hear in Yosef’s story the reassurance: you are not alone, and the pieces may still fit even when you cannot yet see how.

And then David and Goliath. Most of us will never face a nine-foot warrior, but we all know imposing fears: anxiety, self-doubt, social pressure, public opinion. The story becomes a mirror: what is my Goliath? And what is my sling? Because the lesson is not only that obstacles stand in our way, but that tools have already been placed in our hands.

All of this prepares us to read Megillas Esther properly. Hashem’s name is not written. Events unfold through what looks like ordinary politics: banquets, timing, rivalries, alliances, ambition, social forces, antisemitism. The story spans years. Read in one sitting it feels immediate; lived in real time it was long, slow, and uncertain. And the more one thinks about that,

the more the Megillah starts to feel current. We look at our world and do not see “G-d” printed on the headlines—yet the Megillah insists that hidden providence is still providence. The Name may not be written, but the Hand is present.

In the center of the story comes the line that should make a person shudder: “מי יודע אם לעת כזאת הגעת למלכות.” It is not only instruction to Esther. It is a whisper to every Jew: maybe this is why you are here. Maybe you are in that job, that community, that conversation, that position of influence, because you were placed there for a moment that demands moral clarity. Life is not random placement; it is purposeful positioning. “Mi yodea?” is the question that keeps a Jew awake.

From the very beginning, Esther’s defining trait is restraint: “אין אסתר מגדת / מולדתה ואת עמה.” In a world that equates leadership with being vocal and visible, where everyone is encouraged to post, disclose, and narrate every experience, Esther’s dignity looks almost foreign. But the Megillah teaches that privacy is not weakness; it is royalty. Not everything in life is meant to be public. Some things are sacred and meant to be protected. A dignified person is not the one who shares the most; it is the one who knows what to hold back.

That restraint is also a model of leadership. Esther does not force herself into the story. She waits until her presence can change the arc of history.

Sometimes leadership means not reacting to everything we see or hear, listening carefully until context becomes clear, and having the humility to admit that we do not fully understand. Counsel and mentorship are part of that humility. Even in the highest seat of power, Esther remains guided by Mordechai. The Torah itself models this when it describes creation as “נעשה / אדם”—“Let us make man.” Chazal explain לִיְמִידָה תִּרְרָה דֶּרֶךְ אֵרֶץ: the Almighty does not “need” counsel, yet He models it for us. The greater the authority, the more a person needs perspective from outside himself.

Toward the end of the Megillah, after וְנִפְקֵד הוּא, the Jewish people are given permission to defeat their enemies, and then the Megillah repeats a detail that seems almost incidental: “וּבְבִיזָה לֹא שִׁלְחוּ אֶת יָדָם”—they did not take the spoils. Why does this matter?

Because Jewish victory is not only whether we survive. Jewish victory is also how we behave after we survive. The real test is not who you become under threat; it is who you become when you have power—when it would be legally justified, socially understandable, even emotionally tempting to “take.” In that moment, the Jewish people demonstrate that power does not have to corrupt. *Just because it is accessible, just because it is justifiable, doesn’t mean it is for me.* That restraint proves that victory did not distort identity.

This is the test of prosperity as well. Under duress, Jews can unite magnificently. But comfort and control bring a subtler challenge: do we retain moral clarity when we feel secure? Moshe Rabbeinu, the ultimate leader, is described as “עַנּוּ מֵאֵד.” With extraordinary authority, he refuses to abuse his position and can say, in effect, that he took nothing that was not his. The Mishnah defines strength not as domination but self-mastery: “אִידוֹ / אִידוֹ? גִּבּוֹר? הַכּוֹבֵשׁ אֶת יָצְרוֹ.” A gibor is not intoxicated by victory. A gibor is in control.

This is what kedushah looks like in practice. Kiddushin, at its simplest, is restraint—“אֲסוּרָה לְכָל הָעוֹלָם.” To be kadosh is to know where to stop. A dignified life is not defined by the ability to do whatever one wants; it is defined by the ability to say no even when one can say yes—especially in a free society, especially when accountability feels distant, especially when advantage is available.

Even the Mishkan teaches this lesson. Shlomo HaMelech wonders how Hashem can “fit” into a finite space when the cosmos cannot contain Him. The answer given by later teachers is *tzimtzum*—a kind of self-limitation, allowing presence to dwell within boundaries. If the Ribbono Shel Olam models a kind of “contraction,” then a person can learn the same: to be talented, articulate, influential, successful—and still know how to limit himself. *Just because I can, doesn’t mean I should.*

That is why the Megillah repeats: “וּבְבִיזָה לֹא שִׁלְחוּ אֶת יָדָם.” The Jewish people

did not allow victory to reshape them. Purim invites us not only to relive a plot twist, but to enter the story—to hear “Mi yodea” as a call to mission, to learn that dignity includes privacy, that leadership includes restraint, that authority requires mentorship, and that true heroism is not only surviving—but staying ourselves after we survive.

<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/tetzaveh-and-zachor-war-and-the-urim-and-thummim/>

### **Tetzaveh and Zachor – War and the Urim and Thummim Ben Lazarus**

As I write this on February 26, 2026, many of us in Israel are carrying the same unspoken weight: will a larger war engulf us in the coming days. We can look to this week’s Parsha for some inspiration. The uncertainty is palpable. U.S. carriers and jets shift positions, deadlines regarding Iran approach and recede, hospitals prepare quietly, and diplomats receive evacuation options. No one truly knows what tomorrow holds. Like many of you, I find myself scanning X and news sites for signals in the noise, while others step away entirely, aware that the so-called experts understand little more than we do.

We want reassurance that we will be safe. Those defending us seek clarity on the road ahead. Our greatest kings, prophets, and leaders once had a G-d-given instrument intended for moments exactly like this, a tool to seek guidance from Heaven in times of existential uncertainty, especially in matters of war. It was called the Urim and Thummim.

What was this enigmatic device. How did it function. And in its absence today, does it still offer wisdom for our current fog of doubt. I believe that it does, and that it offers a measure of quiet comfort as well. The Ibn Ezra opens this week’s parasha with a tantalizing and poetic line: לְדַעַת אֱמֶת אִם לִבְבֶךָ יֵאָדָה רָאָה כֹּל גִּיּוֹה לִנְכַבֵּד בְּנוֹה וְאֹרִיִּים וְתוֹמִיִּים וְסוּדָם אֲחֻזָּה בְּסִתֵּר בְּסִדֵּר וְאִתָּה תִּצְוֶה “If your heart desires to know the truth, look at the body and consider the most glorious thing within it. I will secretly reveal the mystery of the Urim and Thummim in the portion ‘And Thou Shalt Command.’”

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Krinsky explains that the “most glorious thing” is the human soul. The Ibn Ezra binds the secret of this oracle, the instrument for national decision making, to the soul itself. He teaches that the essence of this device reflects the core spiritual command embedded in the very name of this week’s parasha. Far from a mechanical or magical object, the Urim and Thummim demanded an inner readiness and purity of spirit.

The Torah gives only a brief description. “*Inside the breastpiece of decision you shall place the Urim and Thummim, so that they are over Aaron’s heart when he comes before G-d*” (*Exodus 28:30*).

The Ramban paints a vivid picture. Unlike every other vessel in the Mishkan, the Urim and Thummim were not crafted or donated. They were placed directly into the breastplate and consisted of holy Names of G-d hidden within its folds. When the Kohen Gadol inquired, for example “Who shall go up first against the Canaanites,” he focused on the Urim, which means “lights.” Letters on the stones of the tribes would illuminate. But glowing fragments alone were insufficient. They could point toward the phrase “Yehudah Yaaleh,” Judah shall go up, yet the letters might also permit incorrect combinations.

This is where the Thummim, meaning perfection or integrity, entered. Through their power the heart of the priest was refined and granted divine clarity. He could assemble the illuminated letters into coherent and true words. The Urim offered the data. The Thummim granted the insight to interpret it. We see King David rely on this repeatedly during moments of danger with the Philistines.

This mysterious prophetic instrument is difficult to comprehend, and perhaps it is meant to remain so. It offered certain individuals, on a specific spiritual level, access to a prophetic realm that lies far beyond our experience. Most of the Torah focuses on practical living and collective memory, not on the mechanics of the spiritual world. To borrow from business language, its inner workings are beyond our pay grade.

Bringing this to our present moment and to the approach of Purim and

Parashat Zachor, the Urim and Thummim were primarily tools for war. The Netziv notes that the core purpose of the Choshen, the breastpiece, was national and military. He links the word Choshen to chash, to hurry, because war demands swift judgment and clear decisions. There was no room for endless debate. The king and the people turned to the Urim and Thummim especially for matters of national survival. The Talmud limits its use to the king, the Sanhedrin, or essential communal needs such as the anointed priest for war. It was the ancient equivalent of a war room, joining human planning with the guidance of Heaven when Jewish lives were at stake. This Shabbat we also read Parashat Zachor. “Remember what Amalek did to you.” We are reminded that there have always been enemies who seek our destruction without cause. Today we face such an enemy in the Iranian regime and its proxies.

The lesson of the Urim and Thummim aligns precisely with Zachor. Joshua fought Amalek below while Moshe prayed above. Victory required both physical effort and spiritual elevation. We are not meant to rely only on miracles. The story of Purim reinforces this as well. Its triumph came through human decisions, strategy, and courage, G-d’s hand hidden within natural events and our forebear’s bravery.

The Torah leaves the mechanics of the Urim undefined, and no blueprint has survived. We live in an age of hester panim, the hidden face of G-d. The link between this week’s parasha and Purim deepens this idea. Moshe’s name is absent from [Tetzaveh](#) and G-d’s Name is absent from Megillat Esther. In both, the hiddenness itself becomes the message. In Purim’s quiet miracles our ancestors prevailed not through visible signs from Heaven but through intelligence, loyalty, bravery, and faith.

We no longer have glowing stones or open revelations. What we have is ourselves and the responsibility to act in a concealed world.

Yet we are not without guidance. The Urim reminds us that spiritual strength must be joined with the ability to see beyond the surface. Israel’s enduring resilience has always emerged from this combination: the soul that G-d breathed into us together with the Yiddishe Kop, our ingenuity, our intelligence services, and our relentless determination. It is Torah joined with the IDF, spiritual awareness woven together with physical action.

Place G-d’s Name first, just as the Urim and Thummim rested over Aaron’s heart, and that becomes our center of balance. From this foundation, even as we face anxiety about the unknown, we can confront the frightening data of our world not with panic but with steadiness and direction.

Follow the heart and soul aligned with G-d’s instruction and we will endure. This is the essence of Purim. It teaches that victory is possible even in darkness, through courage, wise maneuvering, and trust in the unseen. Even when His Name is hidden, He walks beside us. May we find the strength to stand firm. May we be victorious. May clarity pierce the concealment, speedily and in our days.

The Urim and Thummim teach that neither action nor faith alone is sufficient. It is their union, body and soul, that will see us through whatever comes next.

Shabbat Shalom and Purim Sameach.

<https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-shemot/parashat-tetzaveh/tetzaveh-priestly-kutonet-undercoat-and-me%E2%80%99il-robe>  
Tetzaveh | The Priestly Kutonet (Undercoat) and Me’il (Robe)

**Harav Yaakov Medan**

07.03.2017

Translated by Kaeren Fish

### **Tekhelet and White**

The special garments worn by a Kohen in the mikhnasayim (pants), ketonet (tunic), avnet (belt) and migba’at (turban). The Kohen Gadol wears his headdress as a mitznefet (mitre), instead of the migba’at, and in addition he wears four garments that are unique to his station: the choshen (breastplate), efod (apron), me’il (robe), and tzitz (golden crown). On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol wears only the first four garments. The Mishkan refers to these as the “garments of white,” while the special garments that the Kohen Gadol

wears at other times are referred to as the “garments of gold.” An examination of the description of these garments as presented in the Torah suggests that the “garments of white” might more accurately be called the “garments of linen,” as they are referred to in the order of the service for Yom Kippur (Vayikra 16:4).

The “garments of linen” are worn, as noted, by all Kohanim, and are essentially “working clothes.” The Kohen Gadol, in performing the special Yom Kippur service before God, likewise wears only the garments of linen. The garments of gold, which he wears for the daily elements of service that are performed also on Yom Kippur, as well as for service throughout the rest of the year, are royal garb. The Kohen Gadol is, as it were, the “king” of the priestly tribe. On Yom Kippur, he cannot stand before God as a king wearing his golden garments, since “a prosecutor cannot speak for the defense.”[1] The Kohen Gadol therefore stands before God in the simple garments of a regular Kohen.

However, if we adopt the mishna’s term for the Kohen Gadol’s clothes for the special service on Yom Kippur – “garments of white” – then we might refer to his other garments (the “garments of gold”) as “garments of tekhelet (blue),” since the blue dye is a dominant feature of each of them.

The me’il is entirely blue. Concerning the tzitz, we find:

And you shall put it on a blue thread, that it may be upon the mitznefet. (Shemot 28:37)

The choshen and the efod also feature blue, along with gold, purple, and scarlet, but the blue seems to be the most prominent:

And they shall bind the choshen by its rings to the rings of the efod with a thread of blue, that it may be above the finely wrought girdle of the efod, and that the choshen not come loose from the efod. (Shemot 28:28)

Thus, the dominant colors of the priestly garments are white and tekhelet, like the tzitzit.

In Parashat Mishpatim, we discussed the combination of these two colors in the Revelation at Sinai:

And they saw the God of Israel, and there was under His feet a kind of paved work of sapir stone, and as it were the very heaven for clearness. (Shemot 24:10)

The clear sapir and the sky-blue tekhelet together formed a heavenly and inspirational sight.

In our consciousness, the color tekhelet – dominating the four special garments of the Kohen Gadol – represents the high heavens, with its pure clarity expressing, for us, the One God. The lower heavens – the clouds – are usually represented by the color white, which is the color of the garments of regular Kohanim. From there, God’s blessing of rain descends to us as a reward for fulfilling the commandments.[2] The “lower heavens” also have different shapes and changing hues, expressing the variegated manifestations of the One God.

Garments of the Garden of Eden In our shiur on Parashat Bereishit, we discussed the parallel between the Garden of Eden and the Temple. In terms of this parallel, Adam – who was placed in the Garden “to cultivate it and to guard it” – was a Kohen Gadol of sorts, serving in this Temple and bearing responsibility for its preservation. Thus, in light of the fact that God makes “coats of skins (kotnot or)” for Adam and his wife and clothes them, we might point to some sort of connection between these coats and the ketonet worn by the Kohanim. Indeed, we find in the midrash:

Adam was the firstborn of the world, and since he brought a sacrifice – as it is written, “And it shall please the Lord better than an ox or a bullock that has horns and hoofs” (Tehillim 69:32) – he wore garments of a Kohen Gadol, as it is written, “And the Lord God made coats of skins for Adam and for his wife, and He clothed them.” These were garments of honor, and the firstborn would use them. (Bamidbar Rabba 4)

“And the Lord God made coats of skins... and He clothed them” – What were these coats of skins? They were the garments of the Kohen Gadol, with which the Holy One, blessed be He, clothed them, for the honor of the world. (Tanchuma, Toldot 12)

These midrashim appear to conform mainly with the teaching of R. Meir:

In the teachings of R. Meir they found: It is written, “coats of light” [or, written with an alef instead of an ayin] – these were the garments of Adam. (Bereishit Rabba 20)

From these midrashim, it seems that the verse, “And the Lord God made coats of skins for Adam and for his wife, and He clothed them” actually precedes the sin; its proper “chronological” place would be after the verse, “And they were both naked, Adam and his wife, but they felt no shame” (Bereishit 2:25).[3]

However, since the text deliberately juxtaposes the story that begins, “And the serpent was cunning (arom)...” with “And they were both naked (arumim),” the fact that God made the garments for Adam and his wife appears only after the sin.

On this basis, we might propose a different understanding of the verse: And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. (Bereishit 3:7)

Perhaps the priestly garments were removed from them in the wake of the sin, and therefore they were forced to make themselves loincloths. Perhaps it was after that that God made them “coats of skins,” in accordance with the plain meaning of the text, instead of the “coats of light” which they had lost, in accordance with the teaching of R. Meir. Thus, R. Meir explains the verse in accordance with the midrash – “coats of light,” referring to what God made for them prior to the sin – and also in accordance with the plain meaning of the text – the “coats of skins” that He gave them after the sin. Let us dwell for a moment on R. Meir’s teaching concerning the “coats of light.” It seems that these coats might be an expression of man having been created “in the image of God.” Man’s resemblance to God was reflected in his garments, for indeed we find:

O Lord my God, You are very great, You are clothed with glory and majesty. Who covers Himself with light as with a garment; Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain; Who lays the beams of His chambers in the waters; Who makes the clouds His chariot. (Tehillim 104:1-3)

God is “clothed,” as it were, in light, and therefore He clothes Adam, too, in light. Moreover, there seems to be a connection between God’s garment of light and His stretching of the heavens like a curtain:

From where were the heavens created? God took from the light of His garment and spread it like a garment... for His garment produced light, as it is written, “Who covers Himself with light as with a garment.” (Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer 3)

This description of God’s “garment” seems most closely suited to the me’il, which is all techelet. God stretched the light of this me’il to form the blue curtain of the sky.

God’s voice, going about in the Garden in the breeze of the day, may likewise recall the sound of the me’il, which is decorated with bells and pomegranate:

And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the breeze of the day. (Bereishit 3:8)

And upon its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue and of purple and of scarlet, round about its hem, and bells of gold between them, round about... And it shall be upon Aharon when he comes to minister, and its sound shall be heard when he goes in to the holy place before the Lord, and when he comes out, so that he will not die. (Shemot 28:33-35)

The white ketonet was used to clothe Adam, and this, too, was a “garment of white” and one of the garments of the Kohen Gadol, as taught in the midrash. It seems, then, that Adam was dressed as though in the garments of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur.

Atonement for Bloodshed In a midrash concerning the respective function or significance of the various priestly garments, R. Anani teaches:

The ketonet atones for bloodshed, as it is written, “And they dipped the ketonet [Yosef’s coat] in blood.” (Arakhin 16a)

The ketonet referred to in this midrash and considered in comparison to the priestly ketonet is not that of Adam, but rather that of Yosef. It seems that R. Anani regards the striped coat (or long-sleeved coat) that Yaakov made for

Yosef as a priestly garment of sorts, for Yaakov raised him as a nazir: “They shall be upon the head of Yosef and on the crown of the head of him that was a nazir among his brothers” (Bereishit 49:26). This echoes the prohibitions pertaining to a nazir whose close relative dies – “for the crown of his God is upon his head” (Bamidbar 6:7) – as well as the similar commandment concerning a Kohen Gadol. Yosef receives the double portion of the birthright, which is also the priesthood, and his ketonet is also a priestly garment of sorts.

The brothers relented of their original plan to kill Yosef; ultimately, they took his ketonet, which was a garment befitting a free man, such that they were able to sell him as a slave when he was hauled out of the pit wearing only (short) pants, in the manner of slaves in the ancient world. In our discussion of Parashat Vayeshev, we focused on the sin of the sale of Yosef as a slave, but we must not forget the points in favor of the brothers. The ketonet “atoned,” as it were, for their original intention to spill his blood; it was taken instead of his life. We may assume that the ketonet that a Kohen wore while performing the regular sacrificial service in the Temple would sometimes be splattered with the blood of sacrifices, just as Yosef’s ketonet was dipped in the blood of the wild goat.

These blood stains are not insignificant:

And you shall take of the blood that is upon the altar and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it upon Aharon, and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and the garments of his sons with him, and he shall be sanctified, and his garments, and his sons, and his sons’ garments with him. (Shemot 29:21)

The verse describes the process of sanctification of the Kohanim and their garments. As part of this process, blood is sprinkled, among other places, directly onto the priestly garments.

This issue demands deeper consideration. The gemara (ibid.) draws a comparison between atonement achieved by means of the ketonet and atonement achieved by the eglarufah, the sacrificial calf whose neck is broken in the event that someone is found murdered outside of a city. For the purposes of our discussion, it is clear that the very fact that a comparison is made to the eglarufah indicates that in the case of the ketonet, too, the atonement is not for the murderer, but rather for the congregation as a whole, and for the sin of the ground, which concealed the blood that had been spilled.

More on the Me’il According to the plain text, the me’il is a service garment that expresses the idea that the Kohen Gadol goes about in the Temple as the servant of the Master of the house – God Himself:

And it shall be upon Aharon when he comes to minister, and its sound shall be heard when he goes in to the holy place before the Lord, and when he comes out, that he will not die. (Shemot 28:35)

The bells on the me’il – like bells on the garments of servants of human masters[4] – are meant to keep the master informed of the servant’s whereabouts, and to ensure that the servant, entering some unfrequented place to perform his service, will not catch the master by surprise, since he will be heard approaching. On the other hand, the me’il, which is all blue, is also meant to evoke the glory of God, Who is “clothed,” as it were, in the blue of the heavens, as discussed above. The blue of the sky covers God’s glory as the me’il covers the body of the Kohen:

It has been taught: R. Meir used to say: Why is tekhelet set apart from all other varieties of dye? Because blue resembles the sea, and the sea resembles the heaven,[5] and the heaven resembles the Throne of Glory, as it is written, “And they saw the God of Israel, and there was beneath His feet as it were a paved work of sapir stone, and as it were the very heaven for clearness” (Shemot 24:10), and it is written, “The likeness of a Throne, as the appearance of a sapir stone” (Yechezkel 1:6). (Sota 17a and elsewhere)

This dimension of significance of the Kohen Gadol’s garments also arises from the similarity between the me’il and the covering of the Ark of the Testimony, which represents the glory of the Divine Presence. The covering is put in place “when the camp journeys,” when the Mishkan is dismantled: And Aharon shall come, and his sons, when the camp sets forward, and they shall take down the veil of the screen, and cover the Ark of Testimony with

it, and they shall put on it the covering of skins, and shall spread over it a cloth wholly of blue, and shall put in its poles. (Bamidbar 4:5-6)[6] Atonement for Lashon Ha-Ra The midrash of R. Anani cited above has the following to say about the me'il:

The me'il atones for lashon ha-ra. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Let something that makes a sound come and atone for a sound that is made. (Arakhin 16a)

This midrash seems to contradict a different midrash, which teaches that it is the incense that atones for lashon ha-ra:

The school of R. Yishma'el taught: For what does incense atone? For lashon ha-ra. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Let that which is performed in concealment [for the incense is offered when no one else is present] come and atone for an act committed in concealment. (Zevachim 88b)

The first midrash emphasizes the sound – the loudness – of lashon ha-ra, while the second emphasizes its concealment or hiddenness, but both are correct. The incense and the me'il atone for different types of lashon ha-ra: there is lashon ha-ra that is spoken in public, and lashon ha-ra spoken in concealment.

We can understand the source of the idea that incense atones for lashon ha-ra. The gemara (ibid.) derives the general idea of atonement achieved by the incense from the incense that Aharon used to atone for the rebels in the episode of Korach. From here we learn that the essence of the sin of Korach and his company was the lashon ha-ra that they spoke against Moshe and Aharon, which caused the whole controversy in the camp, leading to the deaths of some fifteen thousand people.[7] But what does the me'il have to do with atonement for lashon ha-ra (aside from the idea of the voice, or sound, as explained in the midrash)?

In several different places, Chazal teach that the essence of the unit on tzara'at concerns lashon ha-ra:

R. Yitzchak said: "This shall be the teaching concerning the metzora (leper)" – [this may be read as,] "This shall be the teaching concerning one who is motzi shem ra (slanders someone else)." (Yerushalmi Sota 2:1 and elsewhere)

The Kohen makes atonement for the metzora, while the me'il – the prestigious priestly garment – is the main vehicle for atonement for the sin of lashon ha-ra when the sinner repents and mends his ways.

Notes [1] This is the view of R. Chisda (Rosh Hashana 26a). What he means, as suggested by the gemara and the commentators, is that gold recalls the sin of the golden calf. This explanation fits with our suggestion that gold is a "prosecutor" because it leads to arrogance, and this must be avoided during the special and holy service performed on Yom Kippur.

In the Second Temple, the practice reflected the opposite idea: the linen garments of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur were extremely luxurious (see Mishna Yoma 3:7, and in the gemara 35a-b). [2] See Devarim 11:10-17 and elsewhere. [3] Rashi (Bereishit 3:20) suggests a similar interpretation. [4] See Shabbat 58a concerning the pair of bells on the garment of a servant. [5] In the Yerushalmi (Berakhot 1:2) and other sources from Eretz Yisrael, we find in the midrash, "The sea resembles grasses, and grasses resemble the heaven." [6] Admittedly, the other items of furniture of the Mishkan are likewise covered with cloths of blue, but a garment that is wholly blue is mentioned only in connection with Aharon and the me'il. Furthermore, the blue cloths that cover the other vessels are themselves covered with other layers (of scarlet or purple, or tachash skins). Only in the case of the ark is the wholly blue cloth exposed to the outside – like the me'il of the Kohen Gadol. [7] The explanation given here appears to contradict the idea discussed previously of incense as atoning for lashon ha-ra that is concealed, since the lashon ha-ra of Korach and his company against Moshe and Aharon was spoken openly and publicly, while the metzora (leper), whose atonement is achieved by virtue of the me'il, would appear to have spoken in concealment. This contradiction requires some resolution.

From: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net>  
Thu, Feb 26, 2026 at 8:27 PM

Stop Arguing, Just Take a Look at Me!

**Why Did Esther Not Refute Haman's Vile Accusations against the Jews?**

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

"I wouldn't belong to a club that would have me as a member." -- Groucho Marx "The modern Jewish maxim is Incognito, ergo sum, I am invisible, therefore I am." -- Sidney Morganbesser.

The Case for Genocide In the biblical Book of Esther, which we read and study on Purim, there is a moment that is so timely and relevant, it could have been written today, for Purim 2026.

Haman, the Prime Minister in the large and powerful Persian Empire, makes a short but powerful presentation to the Persian king, Achashverosh (Ahasuerus), successfully persuading him to embrace his plan of Jewish genocide. "There is a certain people," Haman says to Achashverosh(1), "scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your realm. Their laws are different from all the other nations, and they do not observe the King's laws. Therefore, it is not befitting the King to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let it be recorded that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand silver talents ... for deposit in the King's treasuries." Haman's argument is straightforward: Jews are different. They are alien, outsiders, an obstruction to normal society, and a threat to your kingdom. They don't fit into the rest of the human family. They have their own faith and their laws, which in their mind are superior to the king's laws. They are a nuisance, a danger, a growth in an otherwise harmonious and integrated society. They ought to be disposed of.

The Talmud (2) records an oral tradition describing Haman's presentation in more detail. "They don't eat from our food," Haman lamented to the King; "they do not marry our women, and they do not marry their women to us. They waste the whole year, avoiding the King's work, with the excuse: Today is Shabbat, or today is Passover."

Haman also discusses gross Jewish habits: "They eat, they drink and they mock the throne. Even if a fly falls in a glass of wine of one of them, he casts away the fly and drinks the wine. But if my master, the King, touches a glass of wine of one of them, that person throws it to the ground and does not drink it (3)." The Jews, Haman argues, see themselves as superior to us; they will forever stand out. They are an enemy. Who needs them? Ilhan Omar did not invent the lie. She was repeating it.

Repeating Haman's Words Some six centuries after Haman, these same words would be repeated by Philostratus, a third-century teacher in Athens and Rome, who summarizes the pagan world's perception of the Jews. "The Jews," Philostratus wrote, "have long been in revolt not only against the Romans, but against humanity; and a race that has made its own life apart and irreconcilable, that cannot share with the rest of mankind in the pleasures of the table, nor join in their libations or prayers or sacrifices, are separated from ourselves by a greater gulf than divides us from Sura or Bactra of the more distant Indies (4)."

The same argument, in one form or another, would be repeated thousands of times throughout history. The greatest Roman historian, Tacitus, living in the first century CE, had this to say about the Jews: "The Jews regard as profane all that we hold sacred; on the other hand, they permit all that which we abhor... toward every other people they feel only hate and enmity, they sit apart at meals and they sleep apart, and although as a race they are prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women."

One example he mentions to describe the moral conflicts between the Romans and the Jews is worthy of note. "The Jews," Tacitus writes, "regard it as a crime to kill any newborn infant." The Romans, as the Greeks before them, killed mentally and physically handicapped infants. Keeping such children alive was unaesthetic and a burden for society who would have to support these disabled humans (5).

First Lady Intervenes Back to the Haman story of Purim. The viceroy's arguments persuade the King. A decree is issued from the Persian throne. Every Jewish man, woman, and child living under Persian dominance would be exterminated on a particular date. Then, in a stunning and gripping turn of events, the First Lady, the Jewish queen Esther, invites her husband and

Haman to a drinking wine feast. As we recall, Esther, from all the thousands of young women who were brought from across the Empire as potential candidates for the role of queen, succeeded in gaining the affection and grace of the King. "The King loved Esther more than all the women, and she won more of his favor and grace than all other women; he set the royal crown upon her head (6)." Years later, during this wine feast, the King pledges to Esther that he will fulfill every request of hers. She utilizes the opportunity to make the fateful pitch. "If I have won Your Majesty's favor and if it pleases the King," Esther tells the King (7), "let my life be granted to me as my request and my people as my petition. For we — I and my people — have been sold to be destroyed, slain and exterminated. Had we been sold as slaves and servant-girls, I would have kept quiet. The compensation our adversary [Haman] offers cannot be compared with the loss the king would suffer [by exterminating us, rather than selling us as slaves]." Clearly, Esther is attempting to approach the issue from two sides, a personal one, and an economic one.

First, she exposes her Jewish identity. The queen is a member of the people condemned to death. Esther knows, however, that this alone may not do the trick, so she continues to discuss dollars and cents (Haman too, as recorded above, used a two-point approach in persuading the King: logic and money). By selling the Jews as slaves, Esther argued, Achashverosh would be profiting far more than by exterminating them. The money Haman offered him is miniscule vs. the potential profit from their sale into slavery. The King, who never realized that Esther was Jewish, is outraged at Haman. He has his minister executed. In subsequent conversations with Esther, Achashverosh grants the Jews the right to self-defense against anybody who would dare to harm them. The entire climate in the Persian Empire toward the Jews is radically transformed. Esther's first cousin, the Jewish sage Mordechai, replaces Haman as Prime Minister.

Why Not Answer The Accusations? Yet, one question remains. Haman did not argue the case for Jewish extermination on the basis of senseless, venomous passion. He presented what was to the King a sound and persuasive case. The Jews, Haman argued, were an alien growth, a bizarre people, a separatist nation that did not accept the King's authority; they do now follow his orders, and consider their law superior to the King's. A leader could not tolerate such a superior nation with dual loyalties in his empire. This is a strong accusation. The King accepts it and, as a result, issues a decree demanding his subjects to dispose of all the Jews — men, women, and children. Yet nowhere in her entire dialogue with the King does Esther refute this argument.

Why did Achashverosh consent to the abolishment of his original plan if he believed Haman's accusations to be valid? You might say that Esther's charm and grace were the exclusive factors in the King's change of heart. Yet, as we have shown above, Esther does not rely on this alone. That is why she presents a logical argument for slavery vs. genocide. She refutes Haman's economic offer by demonstrating that the king would lose money. Esther thought through her argument to her husband. How, then, could she ignore Haman's powerful argument advocating a "Judenrein" society? It is clear from the entire story that Achashverosh was a successful and powerful leader who made sure to protect his position at all costs, even if that meant eliminating his own gorgeous queen (reminiscent of what happened to Stalin's wife). If the king truly felt that the Jews were a threat to his Empire, did Esther think that just because of her looks he would cancel his edict meant to safeguard his kingship? Esther should have refuted the accusation Haman made against her people!

When False Notions Face Reality

Some questions are canceled out via answers; some arguments are refuted by counter-arguments. But there are those beliefs that require neither debate nor dialogue to disprove them. When reality is exposed, the questions and distortions fade away into oblivion.

Haman's argument fell into this category. Esther responded to Haman's argument for Jewish genocide not by dialogue, but by her very presence. The moment she identified herself as a member of the Jewish people and as a

product of its faith, Haman's "thesis" vanished into thin air. Achashverosh knew Esther intimately. She was his wife for five years. As the Megillah tells us, he was enthralled by her. He adored her, cherished her nobility and refinement, and would do almost anything for her (he explicitly told this to her more than once). He chose her from thousands upon thousands of young women, all of them not Jewish. Yet the king never realized that she was a daughter of the Jewish people and a product of its upbringing. When the King suddenly discovered that she was a proud member of the Jewish people, an adherent of the Jewish faith, Haman's argument was moot. Esther's living presence demonstrated its absurdity.

"I am that horrific scary Jew Haman was walking about," Esther was saying. "Look at me, and you will know what a Jew is. I am a product of these people, an embodiment of their values and lifestyle." The King did not have to hear another word. He got it. The Jew was a blessing for society, a beacon of moral purity, justice, compassion, authenticity, and love. The last thing he needs to worry about is the Jewish people and their faith. If anything, they will prove to become the greatest blessing for his Empire.

Looking at Esther, the King grasped that this alien nation who lived by another code ought to be respected. They may be different, but it is an otherness that elevates other nations rather than threatens them. (Leo Tolstoy wrote: "The Jew is that sacred being who has brought down from heaven the everlasting fire, and has illuminated with it the entire world (8).") The Jew may be different, but it is this "otherness" that has the power to inspire all of the nations of the world to live and love deeper, to encounter their path to G-d, truth, justice, and kindness.

Should We Hide? The lesson for our times is clear. Sometimes, Jews think that by hiding the "otherness" of Judaism and the Jewish people, they will gain the approval of the world. Yet the facts prove otherwise: Assimilation, the eclipsing of the otherness of the Jewish people, has never assuaged anti-Semitism. Look at what happened on October 7th and its aftermath. The most left-wing assimilated and secular Jews were hunted down with the same hate as the most religious Jews. The Jews of Shushan (the capital of the Persian Empire at the time of the Purim story) were assimilated (9). Yet, this did not deter the Persian viceroy and king from believing that despite all of the Jews' compromises and attempts not to be "too Jewish," they were still strange and different. This pattern has repeated itself in every milieu. Never in history has assimilation solved the problem of Jew hatred. Jews in Germany were the most assimilated and integrated in mainstream society, yet it was in that very country where the worst Jew hatred in history sprouted. Jewish students at Harvard and Columbia have been integrated beautifully for decades, yet they have become the punching bag of so many haters, all in the name of freedom and human rights. The solution for the Jewish people is not to deny their otherness. That will never work. Rather, just like Esther, we ought to be proud of the lifestyle and moral ethic of the Torah. When we learn how to embrace our otherness with love and grace, rather than with shame and guilt, it will become a source of admiration and inspiration for all of humanity. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks would always say, the world respects Jews who respect Judaism. The are embarrassed by Jews who are ashamed of their G-d, faith, and history.

How Do We Survive? And there is one more grand lesson from this story: You can't argue with the facts. Jews often wonder what is our path forward? What is the tool for our continuity and success? How do we survive and thrive with such adversity and hatred? The answer is: Just take a look at the Jew. He has been around for 3300 years and remains fully intact, vibrant, and vivacious. Ancient Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Rome are gone. Which Jews survived and endured? Historically, all Jews who swayed from the Torah and Mitzvos and tried to emulate the other nations have been lost. They are not around any longer. Only the Jews who clung to Judaism have remained, millenia later. This is what Esther teaches us. We can argue as much as we want about the science and the sociology. But just take a look at me: I am the Jews you heard the rumors about. Now draw your own conclusion. Look at the Jewish people and draw your own conclusion. Take an honest look at the Jew who survived for 3300 years, and you got the

answer. The arguments are moot. (This essay is based on a talk delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, at a Purim farbrengen, Purim, 5729, March 4, 1969. (11)). 1) Esther 3:8.2) Megilah 13b.3) Wine poured in idolatrous service is, according to Torah law, forbidden to the Jew. The rabbis decreed that wine touched or poured by an idolator, even if not in service to his deity, be prohibited for a Jew to drink (See Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 123:1.4) Quoted in Why The Jews? (By Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, NY, 1983) p. 83.5) Ibid. pp. 86-88.6) Esther 3:17.7) Ibid. 7:3-4. The translation of the last clause of the verse follows Rashi's interpretation.8) Quoted in Radican Then, Radical Now (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, London 2000) p. 3 with reference noted there.9) See Talmud Meggillah 12a; Shir Hashirim Rabah 7:8. Introduction to Manos Halevi. Sicah, Purim 1941.10) Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil (Harmondsworth, 1978) p. 178.11) Published in Sichos Kodesh 5729 vol. 1 pp. 401-414. Toras Menachem 5729.

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### **Purim and Jewish History**

#### **By Rabbi Josh Kahn**

As the Purim story reaches a crescendo and Haman prepares to annihilate Klal Yisrael, Zeresh, Haman's wife, comments to Haman, "Im MiZera HaYehudim Mordechai Asher HaChilota Linpol L'Fanav Lo TuChal Lo Ki Nafol Tipol L'Fanav, "If Mordechai, before whom you have begun to fall, is from Jewish lineage, you will not prevail against him, but you will surely fall before him." (Esther 6:13). Until this point, the story has generally unfolded in Haman's favor. What makes Zeresh feel this sudden sense of pessimism? Furthermore, why does Zeresh express this pessimism by connecting Mordechai to the "Zera HaYehudim"? After all, there are many other ways to describe his lineage or our nation?

Zeresh intuitively understood Jewish history. Rav Yisrael Meir Druck points out that in describing Mordechai as coming from the "Jewish seed" she was sharing something profound. When a seed is thrown into the ground and trampled on, it does not get destroyed. Instead, it takes root in the ground, derives nutrients from its lowly place and then grows back bigger and stronger. Similarly, Zeresh notes, the Jewish people have been thrown to the ground and persecuted. In each case, they have not been destroyed, but rather rebuild. Zeresh felt she was starting to notice this shift take place at that moment. Until this point, Haman had great success in persecuting the Jewish people and preparing to annihilate them. Yet, as Haman paraded Mordechai through the streets, she expresses this vision of Zera HaYehudim.

This message remains timely in each generation and certainly is palpable today. In the face of anti-Semitism, we are reminded of the message of Zera HaYehudim and how we respond with growth

from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu> [Rabbi Shmuel Kraines]

#### **Taamei Hamitzvos - The Garments of the Kohen Gadol**

Mitzvos #99, #100, and #101 in Sefer HaChinuch

The Kohanim are commanded to wear eight majestic garments of the type worn by royalty at the time of the Giving of the Torah (Ramban). The garments accord honor to the service and also remind the Kohanim of its great importance. Glancing upward, a Kohen would see his turban; he would constantly feel his thick sash with his arms. This would help keep his mind focused on serving Hashem, in the same way tefillin help a person focus on Hashem (Sefer HaChinuch). Some garments, such as the tunic, were made of pure white linen, suggesting purity (Rav Hirsch). Lightly dressed and walking without shoes on cold marble stones, the Kohanim would serve Hashem with humility, sanctity, and alacrity. Each garment atoned for a different sin: The tunic atoned for bloodshed, the sash atoned for sinful thoughts, the pants atoned for immoral acts, the turban atoned for haughtiness, the ephod-apron atoned for idolatry, the breastplate atoned for perversion of justice, the me'il- cloak atoned for lashon hara, and the headplate atoned for brazenness (Zevachim 88b). In this article, we will focus on the latter four garments, which were worn only by the Kohen Gadol.

#### **APHOD (EPHOD)**

The Ephod was suspended by shoulder straps, upon which were affixed a pair of black gems called shoham stones, and inscribed on each gem were six names of the twelve sons of Yaakov. When Yaakov was on his deathbed, his sons affirmed their belief in Hashem's unity by proclaiming the first verse of Shema, and Yaakov blessed Hashem with the words: Baruch shem k'vod malchuso l'olam va'ed. In commemoration of this event, there are twenty-five letters on each shoham stone, representing the twenty-five letters in the first verse of Shema and the twenty-five letters in the accompanying phrase "Baruch shem k'vod..." (Malbim). As the Sages teach that the Ephod atones for idol worship because idolaters commonly wore such an apron. Wearing an apron to serve Hashem atones for wearing an apron to serve idols. Based on what we have explained above, we may add that the Ephod atones for idolatry also because the shoham stones represent the unity of Hashem and our subjugation to Him.

There was a third shoham stone on the breastplate itself that represented Yosef. Accordingly, the two shoham stones on the apron straps represent Yosef's two sons, Menasheh and Ephraim, who were raised amongst Egyptians but did not learn from their sinful ways (Pesikta D'Rabbi Kahana). The shoham stones allude to Egypt either because they can be excavated from the Nile River that runs through Egypt (Radal, citing Bereishis 2:12) or because the Egyptians were black-skinned (Rabbi Meir Shapiro), or because the Egyptians were "black" with sin and impurity.

We may explain the significance of this allusion based on Rabbi Avigdor Miller's observation that the Jewish people never invented an idol but rather copied the practices of neighboring nations. Thus, whenever Hashem sees the shoham stones, He is reminded of the Jewish people's origin in idolatrous Egypt, where they were exposed to the idolatry of the Egyptians. He recalls that this sin does not represent the true essence of the Jewish people, and He atones for them. Moreover, Hashem recalls those in every generation who, like Menasheh and Ephraim, retain their holiness despite anti-religious social surroundings.

#### **BREASTPLATE (CHOSHEN)**

The Kohen Gadol would wear an ornamental breastplate studded with twelve different precious stones, upon which are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes, the names of the Patriarchs, and the words "Shivtei Yeshurun - tribes of Yeshurun, i.e., the Jewish People. The breastplate is set upon a folded piece of fabric that contains Hashem's seventy-two-letter Name.

The Torah commands us to attach the breastplate to the Ephod and never to separate them. We may suggest that the idea behind this mitzvah is that the glory of the twelve tribes symbolized by the breastplate must never be seen as a value in its own right. Our glory is nothing more than an extension of Hashem's glory, by virtue of our being His servants. The breastplate must therefore always remain attached to the Ephod, which symbolizes our service to Hashem, as explained above.

#### **CLOAK (ME'IL)**

The cloak atones for lashon hara (evil speech/malicious gossip). There are seventy-two types of skin impurities, tzaraas, that a person might contract as a punishment for speaking lashon hara. Correspondingly, seventy-two articles hang from the hem of the cloak: thirty-six bells, in between which are thirty-six balls of fabric resembling pomegranates. Pomegranates allude to the Torah, because a pomegranate is filled with numerous seeds in the same way the Torah is filled with 613 Mitzvos; the noise produced by the bells clanging against the pomegranates suggests that a person should use his mouth to speak meritorious words and not malicious ones.

We may suggest that the clanging of a bell against the two adjacent pomegranates reminds us of this idea because the numerical value of rimon (קרימון/pomegranate) is 306, so two pomegranates have the value of 612, which is 613 including the bell (based on Lechem Rav to Perek Shirah, Rimon).

The cloak is made of wool dyed pure blue, the color of the sky, which signifies that one's speech should be as pure as the heavens. It is forbidden to tear the "lip" (neckline) of the cloak, signifying that one should not "tear" the holiness of the lips with improper speech (Malbim).

## HEADPLATE (TZITZ)

Upon the headplate is inscribed the phrase Kodesh La'Shem - sacred to Hashem. Wearing the headplate atones for brazenness because brazenness is associated with the brow, as in the term azus metzach (a brazen brow). The Kohen Gadol must constantly keep in mind the fact that he displays Hashem's Name on his brow (Yoma 8a); this instills within him a deep reverence for his service. The Sages (ibid.) infer from this that one who is wearing tefillin, which has not one but many Divine Names written within it, should certainly bear in mind that he carries Hashem's Name upon him.

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## Tetzaveh & Purim 5786: Garments of Eternity

By **Michal Horowitz** on February 26, 2026

In Parshas Tetzaveh we learn of the induction of Aharon as kohen gadol and his sons as kohanim. The pasuk tells us: And you shall bring near to yourself your brother Aharon, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel to be kohanim to Me: Aharon, Nadav, and Avihu, Eleazar, and Itamar, the sons of Aharon (Shemos 28:1).

The Torah then outlines, in precise and beautiful detail, the bigdei kehunah to be worn when they serve in the Mishkan (and later, in the BHM"K). The Kohen Gadol dons eight special vestments, and the regular kohanim (kohen hedyot) don four. The Torah tells us: וְעָשִׂיתָ בְּגָדֵי קֹדֶשׁ לְאַהֲרֹן אֶתִּידוּ לְכַבֹּד וּלְתִפְאֵרֶת, and you shall make garments of holiness for Aharon your brother, for honor and for glory, וְאֵתָּה תְּדַבֵּר אֶל־כָּל־חַמְמֵי־לֵב אֲשֶׁר מִלֵּאֲתֵיךָ יוֹם חֻכְמָה וְעִשׂוֹ אֶת־בְּגָדֵי אֶהְרֹן, and you shall speak to all the wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, and they shall make Aharon's garments to sanctify him, to be a kohen to Me (28:2-3).

Interestingly, the parsha of Tetzaveh coincides with the yomtov of Purim (in a regular, non-leap year), and will be read the Shabbos before Purim. This calendar confluence is not an accident, and there are connections between the parsha and Purim.

In the beginning of the Megillah, when Achashvairosh hosts his lavish party, the pasukim tell us: בְּשִׁנַּת שְׁלוֹשׁ לְמַלְכוּתוֹ עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֵּה לְכָל־שָׂרָיו וְעַבְדָּיו חַיִּל | פָּרַס וּמְלִי בְּשִׁנַּת שְׁלוֹשׁ לְמַלְכוּתוֹ עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֵּה לְכָל־שָׂרָיו וְעַבְדָּיו חַיִּל - In the third year of his reign, he made a feast for all his officers and his servants, the army of Persia and Medes, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces before him, בְּהִרְאֹתוֹ אֶת־עֲשָׂרֵי כְבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ, - When he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the splendor of his glorious majesty, many days, one hundred and eighty days (Esther 1:3-4).

Noting that in regard to the bigdei kehunah, the pasuk says: וְעָשִׂיתָ בְּגָדֵי קֹדֶשׁ לְכַבֹּד וּלְתִפְאֵרֶת - the garments of the kohen are for honor and glory, and in the Megillah, the clothing that Achashvairosh wore to his feast were to display וְיִקָּר תִּפְאֵרֶת גְּדוּלְתוֹ, the splendor of his glorious majesty, the Sages teach (Megillah 12a):

“בְּהִרְאֹתוֹ אֶת עֲשָׂרֵי כְבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ”, אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹסִי בַר חֲנִינְיָא: מִלְּמַד שֶׁלֹּבַשׁ בְּגָדֵי כְהוֹנָה. כְּתִיב: “וְיִקָּר תִּפְאֵרֶת גְּדוּלְתוֹ”, וְכִתִּיב הֵתָם: “לְכַבֹּד וּלְתִפְאֵרֶת”

“When he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom,” Rabbi Yosei bar Chanina said: This teaches that Achashvairosh wore the priestly vestments. For it says here (in the Megillah): “the splendor of his glorious majesty,” and it is written there (with regard to the priestly garments): “for honor and for glory.”

Rashi (to the Gemara) teaches: בגדי כהונה - שהיו בידו שם בגדי כהן גדול שהביאן מירושלים. Rashi explains these were the actual garments of the Kohen Gadol that were physically in his possession. They had been taken from Yerushalayim after the destruction of the first BHM"K and were now in the hands of the Persian monarchy. Achashvairosh wore those very garments at his feast!

These were the glorious and authentic priestly vestments that had once been worn by the kohen as he performed the avodah. They had been brought from Jerusalem as spoils of conquest and were now part of the royal treasury.

The message of Chazal is strikingly sad, on the one hand, and uplifting and hopeful on the other.

The bigdei kehunah were created וּלְתִפְאֵרֶת, לכבוד ולתפארת, garments designated for

Divine service and sanctity. In the BHM"K and its avodah, they elevated the Kohen Gadol and the entire nation. In Shushan, in the hands of the Persian kings, R"l, they were reduced to costumes of revelry at a political celebration.

This underscores the audacity of Achashvairosh's actions. He was not merely dressing in royal finery; he was using - and abusing - the holiest garments of the Jewish people and displaying them as evidence that Jerusalem had fallen and its sanctity was now under his control.

And yet... right here, at the beginning of the Megillah, as we read of the celebration of the wicked king, and his supposed victory over Am Yisrael, the Divine hand is moving the world stage to bring redemption to His nation. For at this very feast, the seeds for redemption are planted. Vashti refused to come, she was conveniently disposed of, Esther was chosen as queen, Haman's plot was foiled, the nation was saved and our enemies destroyed.

How powerful a lesson for all of us: what Achashvairosh treated as spoils of a defeated nation were, in truth, eternal symbols of a covenant, a nation, and a Torah, that could never - and will never - be erased. Far from being a symbol of a defeated nation, the garments were a Divine reminder and symbol that Am Yisrael will always remain undefeated, la'netzach.

How fitting that once Haman's plot is foiled and the Jews are saved, the pasuk tells us that it is Mordechai the Jew who goes out in the streets dressed in garments of royalty, reminiscent of the bigdei kehunah, the holy avodah, and the BHM"K that one day would stand again. וּמֵרָדֵי יָצָא מִלְּפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּלְבוּשׁ יָמָּה - מַלְכוּת תְּקַלַּת נְחוּר וְעִטָּרֶת נֹהֵב גְּדוּלָה וּמִתְכַרִּיד בִּיזָן וְאַרְגָּמָן וְהָעִיר שׁוֹשֵׁן צְהֵלָה וְשִׁמְחָה - And Mordechai went out from the before the king with royal garments, blue and white and a large golden crown and a wrap of linen and purple, and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad (Esther 8:15).

וְהָיָה לְיְהוּדִים הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אוֹרָה וְשִׂמְחָה וְשִׁשׁוֹן וְיִקָּר, to the Jews there was light and joy, gladness and honor (Esther 8:16). As they merited redemption, may we too merit salvation, in our days and in our time.

בברכת שבת שלום ופורים שמח

<https://aish.com/purims-counterintuitive-strategy-three-ancient-lessons-for-confronting-antisemitism-today/>

## Purim's Counterintuitive Strategy for Confronting Modern Antisemitism

by **Rabbi Raphael Shore**

February 24, 2026

The Purim story is Judaism's masterclass on antisemitism — and we're ignoring every lesson in it. Purim is Judaism's oldest playbook on antisemitism, why it happens and how to respond to it. And in many ways, Jews today are doing the exact opposite. Here are three critical lessons Purim teaches about confronting antisemitism and how so many are often getting them backwards.

1. Don't Be Fooled by the “Reasons” When Haman rose to power in the court of King Ahasuerus, he demanded that everyone bow to him. Mordechai refused. The Midrash records something astonishing: many Jews were furious at Mordechai. Why provoke him? Bow like everyone else! Don't stand out! Don't create trouble! You are going to cause antisemitism! And then Haman issued a decree of genocide against every Jewish man, woman, and child. The critics were vindicated, yet when the decree came, the Jews didn't blame Mordechai. Why not? Why did they change their minds?

Genocide does not happen because one Jew refuses to bow. The hatred was there already. Mordechai did not create it; he exposed it. They understood something profound. Genocide does not happen because one Jew refuses to bow. The hatred was there already. Mordechai did not create it; he exposed it. For 2,000 years Jews were told: You killed our god. You are a strange race. You are rootless cosmopolitans. You control the banks. You are communists. You are capitalists. Today it is: You are colonialists. You build settlements. You are white oppressors. You are too powerful. You are too nationalist. Different accusations, same hatred. People keep believing the surface explanations, thinking: If only we behaved differently. If only we adjusted. If only we improved our Israeli PR. If only we stopped building

settlements. Hamas did not attack on October 7 because of a border dispute. It was an unapologetic call to destroy Israel, a radical Islamist expression of ideological hatred that makes no secret of its goal to eliminate the Jewish state. The leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran has repeatedly framed its genocidal hostility toward Israel as central to its identity. Iran's doctrine rejects Israel's existence irrespective of its policies or borders. Just as the Jews in Shushan eventually recognized that hatred was not caused by Mordechai's refusal to bow, October 7 and its global reverberations revealed that much of the hostility directed at Jews and Israel today is not about specific actions or politics. The global antisemitic aftermath made that clear. Within hours, even before Israel responded militarily, Jews around the world were targeted. Synagogues were vandalized, students were harassed. "Globalize the intifada" echoed in Western capitals. That reaction exposed something many were reluctant to admit: this was not about settlements, checkpoints, or a particular government. Purim teaches that the excuses are not the cause. The hatred preceded the trigger. As I explore in my book *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Jew?*, antisemitism mutates across history but the "reasons" are always interchangeable. The justifications shift because they are not the root. The Rambam writes in *Laws of Fasting* that when suffering strikes the Jewish people, to dismiss it as coincidence or caused only by superficial sociological explanations is cruelty. History is not random. There is a deeper spiritual dynamic at play. Purim tells us: don't mistake the symptom for the cause. Failing to see that truth leaves us vulnerable, and misled.

2. The Response Is Not PR — It's Commitment to Judaism When the decree is issued, what do the Jews do?

They don't hire lobbyists. They don't launch a public relations campaign. They don't boast of Jewish contributions to science and medicine. They don't commission studies on antisemitism. They fast, repent, and gather in prayer. Esther calls for three days of fasting. Mordechai mobilizes the nation for spiritual return. This is counterintuitive to the modern Jewish instinct. Today our default response is: Strengthen the ADL to do more research on antisemitism. Improve our Israeli messaging. Explain how much Israel has contributed to technology, and Jews have enriched the world. Increase Holocaust education. Rabbi Gedalia Schorr, in *Ohr Gedalyahu*, describes history as "a wheel within a wheel" — an outer political layer and an inner spiritual layer. If you focus only on the outer wheel (the politics, the media, the narrative), you miss the true engine. The events in the Scroll of Esther appear to be pure chance — palace politics, royal banquets, intrigue, a series of remarkable coincidences. God's Name is absent from the entire book precisely because He is hidden within the unfolding of events themselves. And that's the point. The core lesson of Purim is not merely that God saves. It is that God operates invisibly. Purim teaches us how to see. It trains the Jewish eye to look beneath the surface layer of history — beneath politics, power shifts, headlines, and "coincidences" — and to recognize that what appears random is often directed, and what appears chaotic may be purposeful. We inhabit a civilization that explains everything through the outer layer — sociology, economics, geopolitics, science, psychology. The dominant worldview sees only visible causes and immediate triggers. Judaism insists there is always an inner layer. Purim challenges us to resist the superficial reading of events, to look past the costumes and coincidences and ask the harder question: not only what happened, but what does it mean? God's Name doesn't appear in the Book of Esther but His fingerprints are everywhere. The timing of Achashverosh's sleepless night, the precise moment Esther found favor in the king's eyes, Haman's lot falling on the month it did — none of it was random. Once that lens is applied, the entire story transforms. What looked like a series of fortunate accidents reveals itself as a carefully orchestrated divine drama. The hidden hand was there all along. That recognition changes everything about how one responds. If antisemitism were purely a political or sociological phenomenon, the appropriate response would be purely political and sociological — better lobbying, stronger alliances, sharper messaging. And while none of those things are unimportant, Purim insists they are incomplete. Because if there is

meaning behind the madness, then the response must go deeper than the surface. The Jewish response to antisemitism, then, begins not with PR, but with introspection. Not with marketing, but with meaning. What is being asked of us in this moment? What does it mean to be Jewish — not defensively, not apologetically, but fully and proudly? Mordecai models this perfectly. When Haman rises to power and the pressure mounts, Mordecai does not assimilate. He does not shrink. He sits at the king's gate and refuses to bow. His Jewish identity is not a liability to be managed — it is a commitment to be lived, openly and without shame. And it is precisely that refusal to disappear that sets the entire redemption in motion. This does not negate diplomacy or security. Both matter enormously. But Purim insists on a clarity that is easy to lose in moments of fear: the destiny of the Jewish people is not ultimately shaped by the whims of hostile empires or the calculations of political strategists. It is shaped by the willingness of Jews to see both the physical and spiritual dimensions of reality — and to live proud, distinctively Jewish lives in response to what they see. The antidote to Haman is not a better press release. It is Mordecai — unbowed, unashamed, and unambiguously Jewish.

3. Recognize Evil and Defend Yourself Without Apology The Scroll of Esther records that the Jews killed 75,810 of their enemies. Read that again. There is no handwringing in the text. No apologetics. No moral confusion. These were people who intended genocide. The Jews defended themselves. Today people struggle with this lesson. They rationalize our enemies and project our values onto them, assuming everyone ultimately wants peace. Mordechai didn't assume Haman merely needed economic opportunity. The Jews of Shushan did not say, "Surely they don't mean it." Purim forces a difficult but necessary recognition: some people choose evil. Not everyone shares Judaism's moral framework. Not everyone values life the way Jews do. October 7 forced people to confront this again. One of the most sobering themes emerging from the testimonies of hostages released from Gaza was not only the brutality of Hamas terrorists but the atmosphere of broad agreement and complicity. They described being hidden in civilian homes, guarded in family apartments, surrounded by people who knew exactly who they were. Most testified that they felt hatred was not isolated to masked gunmen, but woven into the environment around them. Israeli soldiers reported something equally sobering: weapons stored in living rooms, rifles in children's bedrooms, rockets launched from schools, terror infrastructure embedded in mosques and hospitals. The line between "militant" and "civilian space" was blurred. When an ideology of annihilation saturates a society, in schools, media, religious sermons, and homes, the hatred cannot be dismissed as fringe. The Jews of Shushan did not tell themselves that genocidal rhetoric was symbolic. They did not pretend the threat was limited to one man. They recognized that when a decree of extermination is signed, it reflects a broader willingness to act on it. Purim demands that we look at reality without flinching. And it shows us two simultaneous truths: Trust in God. Defend yourself decisively. Faith and strength are not contradictions. They are partners. The Jews of Shushan fasted, and then they fought. They prayed, and then they acted militarily and with courage. They recognized that redemption comes from Heaven but responsibility rests with us. The Scroll of Esther repeats three times that the Jews did not take the spoils. They were not driven by vengeance or conquest. They acted to survive. A people committed to life must be prepared to confront those committed to a cult of death and destruction. In a world still struggling to distinguish between victim and aggressor, between self-defense and hatred, that moral clarity may be one of the most urgent Jewish contributions of all. The Great Inversion Purim is the holiday of *v'nahafoch hu* — everything was turned upside down. The decree of annihilation became a day of survival and celebration. The hunted became the protected. The gallows built for Mordechai became Haman's. Jewish history has seen so many such reversals before and after. The Holocaust was not a "victory." Six million Jews were murdered. Entire worlds were lost. Nothing about that horror can be minimized. But Jewish history did not end as Hitler intended. Within three years of Auschwitz's liberation, the State of Israel was reborn.

The people marked for extinction returned to sovereignty. Nazi propagandist Julius Streicher understood the irony. As he stood on the gallows at Nuremberg in 1946, he shouted, “Purimfest 1946.” The regime that sought to erase the Jews was once again erased. That is v’nahafoch hu. The eternal Jewish people endure. Today we need another inversion. People think: If we are quieter, they’ll ignore us. If we assimilate more, they’ll like us. If we explain ourselves better, they’ll understand. If we shrink Jewish distinctiveness, hatred will shrink too. History says otherwise. Assimilation has never solved antisemitism. In fact, dilution of Jewish identity often intensifies it. Purim teaches: The excuses are not the cause. Don’t get fooled. The response begins with spiritual clarity. Evil must be recognized and confronted. The way to defeat those who hate the Jewish mission is to live it more fully.

### Parsha Potpourri

Parshas Tetzaveh / Purim – Vol. 21, Issue 20

#### Compiled by Ozer Alport

הַחֶבֶד הָאֶחָד תַּעֲשֶׂה בְּבֹקֶר וְאֵת הַחֶבֶד הַשֵּׁנִי תַעֲשֶׂה בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים (29:39) Toward the end of Parshas Tetzaveh, the Torah discusses the korban tamid that was brought twice daily, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. The section of the korban tamid is repeated in Parshas Pinchas (Bamidbar 28:1-8), where the Torah uses almost identical wording, with one minor difference. Parshas Tetzaveh, which refers to the first time the korban tamid was offered, says (Shemos 29:39) אֵת הַחֶבֶד הָאֶחָד (the one sheep), while Parshas Pinchas, which discusses the ongoing mitzvah to bring the korban tamid, says (Bamidbar 28:4) אֵת הַחֶבֶד אֶחָד, without a ה.

The Brisker Rav explains that throughout the history of the Beis HaMikdash, the morning korban tamid and the afternoon korban tamid were independent. If for any reason one of them could not be offered, the other one was still brought. There was one exception to this rule: The first time the korban tamid was offered to dedicate the Altar, they had to be brought as a pair. Even though the two sacrifices are not usually contingent upon one another, the first time the korban tamid was brought, it had to be done right. If they did not bring the korban tamid that morning, they could not bring one in the afternoon. For this reason, in Parshas Tetzaveh, which deals with the initial dedication of the Altar, the Torah refers to the morning korban tamid as הַחֶבֶד – the one sheep without which the other cannot be offered. In his sefer Shemen HaTov, Rav Dov Weinberger derives from here that whenever we start a new project, we should strive to begin in the best possible way. The Sfas Emes uses this concept to answer a question asked by the P’nei Yehoshua (Shabbos 21b). On Chanuka, we celebrate the fact that the Chashmonaim discovered a flask of pure oil that miraculously burned for eight days. The Gemara rules (Pesachim 77a) that if most Jews are tamei (impure), the Divine service in the Beis HaMikdash can be done in a state of impurity. If so, why did they need to find pure oil that burned for eight days when they were allowed to use tamei oil?

The Sfas Emes notes that the Menorah was plundered by the Greeks, and after the Chashmonaim’s military victory, a new Menorah was constructed (Avodah Zara 43a). Because it was being inaugurated and used for the first time, it had to be lit in the ideal manner. Even though impure oil would normally have been permitted under the circumstances, on the day of the dedication of the new Menorah and the rededication of the entire Temple, only pure oil was acceptable.

אִישׁ יְהוּדִי הָיָה בְּשׁוֹשׁן הַבִּירָה וְשָׂמוּ מִדְּכֵי בֶן יֵאִיר בֶּן שִׁמְעִי בֶן קִישׁ אִישׁ יְמִינִי (אסתר 2:5) Mordechai is one of the primary protagonists in Megillas Esther, yet the text seems somewhat vague and contradictory in identifying his tribal background. When we are introduced to him, we are first told that he was an אִישׁ יְהוּדִי who came from the tribe of Yehuda, but the pasuk (verse) ends by saying that he was an אִישׁ יְמִינִי from the tribe of Binyomin. The Gemara explains (Megillah 12b) that both are correct, as his father was from the tribe of Binyomin while his mother was descended from Yehuda. However, this is still perplexing. A person’s mother determines his status as a Jew, but his tribal affiliation is solely determined by his father. Why then does the pasuk

mention Mordechai’s maternal background? The Sfas Emes explains that the Megillah is teaching us that Mordechai possessed essential characteristics of both tribes. Yehuda represents dibbur (speech), as his name connotes hoda’ah (giving thanks), and he publicly confessed after Tamar returned his collateral to him (Bereishis 38:26). Binyomin was the opposite, associated with the concept of shtikah (remaining silent). He was the son of Rochel, who remained quiet about her father Lavan’s plan to replace her under the chuppah with her sister Leah. Binyomin’s stone in the Choshen was the Yashpeh, which is a contraction for יֵשׁ פֶּה (he has a mouth), referring to the fact that he knew about the sale of Yosef but did not disclose it. Mordechai embodied both attributes. When he heard about Haman’s decree, he cried out loudly and bitterly to inspire the Jews to daven and do teshuvah (Esther 4:1). At the same time, he insisted that Esther remain silent and not disclose her nationality (Ibid., 2:10). Still, why is Yehuda, from whom Mordechai was descended through his mother, mentioned before his paternal lineage through Binyomin, which was his primary tribal affiliation? The Rokeach explains that on his father’s side, Mordechai was descended from Shimi ben Geira, who cursed Dovid HaMelech. This yichus (ancestry) was considered a disgrace, so it is only listed at the end of the pasuk. Mordechai was also descended from Shaul HaMelech. Part of Mordechai’s mission was to rectify Shaul’s sin of not killing the Amalekite king Agag immediately, which allowed him to conceive a child from whom Haman was descended. In fact, the Nesivos writes that Mordechai’s lineage is not traced all the way back to Shaul because it was Shaul’s error that enabled Haman to come into existence and terrorize Klal Yisroel.

(3:7) הפיל פור הוא הגורל לפני המן מיום ליום ומחדש לחדש שנים עשר הוא חדש אדר Since the Jewish calendar begins in Nissan (Shemos 12:2), Rav Gedaliah Schorr points out that Adar is the final month of the year. On a spiritual level, Nissan represents renewal. It is the beginning of a new year and the first month of spring, when the earth begins to awaken from its winter slumber. It is full of potential, and for this reason, it was chosen as the month for the redemption from Egypt. The more distant a month is from the source of light and energy, the darker and more hidden it can seem. Haman was therefore ecstatic when his lots fell out on Adar, the last and darkest month of the year, and the month when Moshe Rabbeinu was taken from us, which he viewed as the most auspicious time to annihilate the Jews. Rav Schorr explains that, beneath the apparent concealment, a pool of light is hidden. In fact, this light must be even stronger than at other times to penetrate the darkness and not be completely eclipsed. In the midst of the darkness at the end of the year, the month of Adar contains a powerful source of radiance. When the Jewish people were inspired to repent wholeheartedly, they were able to access and reveal this brilliant light, transforming the darkness into growth and inspiration. This potential energy is present every Adar, available and waiting for us to tap into it to reveal the ultimate light – לַיְהוּדִים הָיְתָה אוֹרָה, – there was light for the Jews, so may there be for us!

(6:1) בלילה ההוא נגדה שנת המלך

The Gemara in Megillah (19a) quotes the opinion of Rav Shimon bar Yochai, who maintains that when we publicly read the Megillah on Purim, we should begin from the pasuk that records Achashverosh’s inability to sleep on one fateful night, as this represents the turning point of the Megillah, when Mordechai and Esther’s fortunes begin to overtake Haman’s. The Megillah records that Achashverosh’s sleepless night occurred בלילה ההוא – on that night – which implies that it happened on some well-known night. Rashi writes (Ibid., 16a) that this night was 16 Nissan, the second night of Pesach. Why did the turning point of the Megillah specifically take place at this time? Pesach is a time of redemption for the Jewish people. The night of 15 Nissan is well-known as a time when numerous miracles happened throughout Jewish history, as recorded in the piyut זבח פסח ואמרתי זבח פסח that we say at the end of the Seder. If so, why didn’t the critical miracle of Purim also happen on 15 Nissan instead of on the following night? Rav Dovid Feinstein explains that 16 Nissan is not Yom Tov in Eretz Yisroel. Only outside the land of Israel, where Jews in exile observe two days of Yom Tov, is this day also considered Yom Tov. In essence, the second day

of Yom Tov perfectly symbolizes the concept of Hashem appearing to hide His face from us by reminding us that we are in exile. Because one of the central themes of the Megillah is hester panim (Hashem's concealed face), the most appropriate time for the pivotal miracle to occur is on the "hidden" night of Pesach: 16 Nissan, which is only a Yom Tov for a person who is in exile and unable to experience Hashem's revealed Hashgacha (Divine Providence).

(7:5) מי הוא זה ואי זה הוא אשר מלאו לכו לעשות כן

At the second banquet that Esther arranged, Achashverosh asked for her request. Esther replied by telling him that she and her nation had been sold to be destroyed, slain, and exterminated. She added that if they had only been sold as slaves, she would have accepted the decree and remained quiet, but since they were faced with annihilation, she had no choice but to beseech him to rescind the decree. Achashverosh incredulously responded by asking who would dare to threaten the Queen and her people with mass extermination. This is quite difficult to understand. Why did Achashverosh act so surprised and question who would do such a thing when he had personally given Haman permission to destroy the Jews only three days earlier? Secondly, why did Esther say that she would have remained quiet if they had instead been sold as slaves, when nobody until this point had mentioned a word about becoming slaves? The Apter Rav explains that when Haman initially approached Achashverosh with his plan, he was afraid to reveal his true intentions, so instead he told Achashverosh that he wanted to purchase the Jews לעבוד – with an ע, which means to work with them – and he said that he was prepared to pay 10,000 talents of silver to buy them. They wrote and signed a contract to this effect to complete the transaction. Haman then went and secretly changed the ע to an א, so the contract said that he bought the Jews לאבד – with an א, which means to destroy them. When Achashverosh's scribes saw the contract, they accepted it at face value and sent out edicts proclaiming that the king had decreed להשמיד להרוג ולאבד – that the Jewish people should be destroyed, slain, and exterminated. This explains what Esther told Achashverosh. If you had proceeded with your original plan to sell us as slaves, I would have remained quiet, but now that Haman changed the ע to an א and my nation is threatened with destruction, I must speak up. When Achashverosh heard this, he legitimately questioned in wonderment who would dare do such a thing, as he had certainly never agreed to this plan.

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**Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky**

**Beauty and Honor: Divine or Empty?**

This week's parsha describes the garments worn by the kohanim. There is a general description of these garments as being there for "l'kavod u'l'tiferes - honor and glory" (Shemos 28:2). We naturally assume that important buildings and officials would look especially grand and dignified. But one wonders why Hashem's service would demand the grandness that we associate with human enterprises. As a matter of fact, when we speak of those terms, of 'glory and honor', we tend to see them in somewhat of a negative light. At best, it's a necessary contrivance.

Another fascinating point to note about the various adornments on the vessels in the Mishkan is that they all have to be of the item itself. Thus, the menorah had many intricate designs on it, but it all had to be hammered out from one piece (Shemos 25:31); they could not be made separately and then welded on. Similarly, the designs on the curtains had to be woven in, not sewn on. Obviously, this is a more refined form of craftsmanship. But one would expect that when we are dealing with items that are of Divine nature there is a lot more to it than merely eye-catching design and craftsmanship. We also find that the Torah will occasionally single out someone for their beauty. Thus, Rachel, Yoseph, and David are all singled out for their appearance, being of great beauty. Obviously, this is not simply a factual description but is telling us something of significance.

Let us think a moment of Hashem's purpose in creating the world. Hashem wanted a spiritual world that would penetrate even physical darkness, and within that darkness express itself and project its image and message. Thus, even a person who is of physical substance learns to understand that physicality is empty and that only the spiritual is worthy.

When an object expresses itself to others, we call that 'beauty', or tiferes. Thus, when I adorn a most important venue in a way that reflects the dignity and significance of its content, then I have actually furthered its goal. The point of beauty, kavod, and tiferes is that the content of the object project itself and impress itself on the people interacting with it.

But does not the passuk say that "charm and beauty are empty" (Mishlei 31:30)? The answer is, indeed, that is the point of it. When one takes a vessel that's empty and contains nothing of value but adorns the outside in a way that it seems to project value and importance, one is perpetrating a lie. But when dealing with something of great value and real content, by projecting its value one is actually delineating and highlighting the truth.

This helps us understand the constant emphasis on having the decorations on the divine vessels coming from within rather than being pasted on. If its beauty is something that came from the outside and is added to it, it inevitably is not really expressing the inner truth. But when the truth breaks through from the inside, and its beauty projects outwards, then the beauty is truly reflecting the content. Thus, Shlomo Hamelech says, "the wisdom of a person radiates from his face" (Koheles 8:1). Wisdom is inside one's mind, but if it is powerful enough it will radiate outwards.

Apropos of Purim this week, we see the exact opposite with Achashverosh. Chazal say that he took the garments of the kohanim and wanted to show them off (Megillah 12a). He made a huge party to show all of his glory and greatness. He embodies something that is all beauty and glory, and no substance whatsoever. His kingdom rises and falls on beauty, and nothing but that.

This gives us real understanding concerning the creations of beauty and glory. They are meant to be the final piece that connects us to Hashem. An orator with a profound message who is able to articulate it in a way that is beautiful and pleasing is really accomplishing something most worthy. He is taking the truth and connecting it to people in a way that they will absorb it. A person who lacks articulation and eloquence may have the truth, but the truth falls short of influencing, and being absorbed by, the listener.

But the person who is all articulation and beauty with no substance or content is a travesty. People grasp his words, but the words have nothing to tell them. Like a child who sucks a pacifier, eagerly thinking that they're drinking milk, but their stomach continues to hurt them because there is no nourishment forthcoming.

The Beis Hamikdash is Hashem's words, projected through the articulation of beauty and majesty, and that is why it has such a profound effect upon us.

# **Parshat Tetzaveh: Kohenization**

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

[Just a quick footnote to last week's shiur: besides Ibn Ezra, whom I mentioned, Ramban (35:1), Abravanel (35:1), and Cassuto all understand that the worship of the Egel results in the cancellation of the plan to build the Mishkan.]

## **PARASHAT TETZAVEH:**

Parashat Tetzaveh continues Hashem's description to Moshe of the structure of the Mishkan (portable Temple) and its accoutrements, but moves from the topic of the structure of the Mishkan and the details of the Kelim -- the topic of Parashat Teruma -- to the topic of the Kohanim, the Priests. The Priestly section (not to be confused with what Bible critics call "P") splits into three subsections:

- 1) Introduction: The command to select Aharon & sons as Kohanim.
- 2) Part I: Clothing of the Kohanim.
- 3) Part II: Initiation process of the Kohanim.

In the 'Kohenic context,' I want to deal with two basic questions:

1) Function: the Kohen has many specific jobs. But what is behind all of his responsibilities? What is the function of a Kohen in Bnei Yisrael? Does the Kohen work for God or for the people? We will approach this question by breaking it down into two smaller questions:

- a) What are the jobs of the Kohen?
- b) How do these jobs express the basic function of a Kohen?

2) Orientation: how does the Kohen's function -- his role in the nation -- affect his orientation toward God and toward the people? When he takes on all of the jobs included in being a Kohen, does he remain the same person with a new job, or does the new job redefine him? This is a question every religious leader has to answer for himself or herself: What is the relationship between one's function as religious leader and one's personal religious identity? Is there any room left for the religious leader's personal religious fulfillment and creativity? In looking at this question, we will look at two processes in the creation of a Kohen:

- a) "Depersonalization"
- b) "Repersonalization"

## **THE FUNCTION OF THE KOHEN:**

What are all of the Kohen's jobs? (We will focus on the Kohen Gadol in particular, since we have the most information about him and since the Kohenic qualities are most sharply expressed in him.) For those which are well known, we will leave out the sources:

1) AVODA (sacrificial service in the Temple): offering korbanoth (sacrifices), burning the ketoret (incense), lighting the Menora (candelabrum), maintaining the Shulhan (table) and its bread.

2) BLESSING Bnei Yisrael with the Birkhat Kohanim (Priestly blessing).

3) TEACHING:

a) VaYikra 10:8-11 -- "God spoke to Aharon: '. . . Distinguish between holy and unholy, between pure and impure, and . . . teach the Bnei Yisrael all of the laws which God has told them through Moshe.'"

b) Malakhi 2:6-7 -- (in context, the Navi [prophet] is criticizing the corrupt Kohanim of his time and reminding them of the Kohanim of old, whose exemplary qualities he describes): "The teaching of truth was in his [i.e., the priest of old] mouth; no evil was found on his lips. In peace and uprightness he walked with Me, and he returned many from sin; for the lips of the Kohen shall keep knowledge, and they [Israel] shall seek teaching at his mouth, for he is a messenger ["malakh"] of the Lord of Hosts."

#### 4) JUDGING:

a) Tzara'at: the Kohen is empowered to diagnose Tzara'at, the disease described by the Torah in detail in Sefer VaYikra (ch. 13-14) which, according to Hazal (Arakhin 15b), comes as a punishment for slander and other sins.

b) Sota: the Kohen is instrumental in the process of investigation and trial when a woman is caught sequestered with a man other than her husband, and is accused by her husband of infidelity.

c) Deciding difficult questions of halakha: Devarim 17:8-9 -- "When a matter of law escapes you, whether of blood, civil law, ritual lesions, or matters of strife in your gates, you shall get up and go up to the place which God, your Lord, will choose [referring to the future Temple]. You shall come to the Kohanim-Leviyim and to the judge of that time, and seek [the law], and they will tell you the judgment."

d) Decisions of national importance: the Urim ve-Tummim (Shemot 28:30), the divine oracle, is operated by the Kohen.

#### 5) REPRESENTING BNEI YISRAEL before God. Some examples from our parasha:

a) Efod: 28:6-13 -- the Kohen Gadol wears the Efod (a sort of apron) as part of his uniform; significantly, the Efod bears two special stones, one on each shoulderpiece, each of which has the names of six of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael carved into it. The Torah stresses that Aharon is to wear the Efod and thereby bring these names before God "as a remembrance": Aharon appears before God as the representative of the people whose names are carved into the stones he bears.

b) Hoshen: 28:15-30 -- the Hoshen, or breastplate, bears twelve stones in which are inscribed the names of the tribes; the Torah stresses also here that Aharon carries them "as a remembrance" before God, like the stones of the Efod.

c) Tzitz: 28:36-38 -- the Tzitz is a sort of headband made of gold which Aharon wears on his forehead; the words "Kodesh la-Shem," "Holy to God," are inscribed on it. Its function is to atone for all of the sacrifices the people bring under improper conditions (such as when the sacrifice has become ritually impure). The Tzitz 'insists' (see Rashbam) that despite the shortcomings of the people's korbanot, all of the offerings are ultimately "Kodesh la-Shem," dedicated wholly to God, and should therefore be accepted by God.

6) The Kohen creates the backdrop for God's "Kavod" to appear to the people: In VaYikra Perek 9, the inauguration of the Mishkan takes place. Its climax is when Aharon completes 'setting up' the Korban on the Mizbe'ah so that the 'Kavod' (glory) of God can be revealed to the people, who are assembled to watch. Aharon finishes his duties, and then the Kavod appears as a fire from heaven which descends and consumes the korban on the Mizbe'ah. This is a pattern which appears in several places in Tanakh (perhaps most notably in the story of Eliyahu's challenge to the prophets of Ba'al on Har ha-Carmel).

#### **Now that we have all of the Kohen's jobs in front of us, we can deal with the next question: What is the function of the Kohen?**

The Kohen mediates between God and the people; the Kohen is a bridge over which traffic moves in both directions. He represents God to the people and the people to God:

#### 1) Kohen acting as God's representative to the Bnei Yisrael:

- a) Teaching: he is a "malakh Hashem Tzevakot," an angel/messenger bearing God's word.
- b) Judging, especially using the Urim ve-Tummim, which express God's instructions.
- c) Creating the stage for God's revelation to the people.
- d) Birkhat Kohanim: passing down God's blessing to the people.

#### 2) Kohen acting as the people's representative to God:

a) Avoda: the Kohen conducts the national worship of God by bringing Korbanot Tzibbur (collective offerings from the entire nation) and maintaining the various functions of the Mishkan, the national center of avodat Hashem (service of Hashem). He facilitates individual worship/avoda by bringing the korbanot of individuals before God.

3) Wearing Bigdei Kehuna: the stones on the Hoshen and Efod with the names of the tribes represent the nation's coming before God; the Tzitz insures that even when the people's korbanot are not perfect, they are accepted by God.

## **ORIENTATION OF KOHEN:**

We now come to our second basic question about the Kohanim: how does the function of being a bridge between God and Bnei Yisrael impact on the orientation of the Kohen toward his own identity? Is there still a person under all of the Bigdei Kehuna (is there a man under that rabbinical beard), or does the office of Kohen overwhelm the Kohen's personal identity?

Part of the Torah's answer is communicated by the structure of Parashat Tetzaveh. The 'Kohanim' section, which takes up most of Parashat Tetzaveh, is surrounded by 'Mishkan' sections:

I: Instructions for Aron (Ark), Shulhan (Table), Menora (Candelabrum), Mizbah ha-Nehoshet (Brass Altar), Mishkan (portable Temple)

II: The "Kohanim" material of Parashat Tetzaveh

III: Instructions for Mizbah ha-Ketoret (Incense Altar), Shemen ha-Mishhah (oil of anointing), Ketoret (Incense), and Kiyyor (Washing-Cistern).

In other words, the Kohanim section appears to interrupt the Mishkan section. Why not first finish talking about the Mishkan and Kelim before starting with the Kohanim? The point of putting the Kohanim section here may be to show us that it is not an "interruption," that the Kohanim share something very basic with the Kelim of the Mishkan: becoming Kohanim means that Aharon and his sons are transformed by their function into Kelim, in a sense. Their personal identity is overcome by their function as bridges between God and Bnei Yisrael.

Imagine you're trying to get from Manhattan to New Jersey, and you want to take the bridge. If the bridge starts to dance as you try to cross it, twisting into different shapes, swaying to its own rhythm, bucking up and down, you'll never get across! Aharon and his sons have become this bridge: since they function as bridges between God and the people, their own identity must be subordinated to their function as mediators. Inserting their own personalities, their own religious orientations, their own spontaneity into their function as Kohanim would interfere with the 'traffic' trying to cross the bridge. Instead of representing God to the people and the people to God, they would be taking advantage of their powerful position to represent only themselves to the people and to God. A Kohen must become depersonalized; he must become objectified, almost dehumanized, in his function of Kehuna.

Now we can take a look at the parasha and see how this theme plays out: how the Torah depersonalizes the Kohanim and objectifies them so they can perform their function properly.

## **DEPERSONALIZING THE KOHANIM:**

1) "THE CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN": Kohen as the carrier of begadim (clothes):

a) The Torah gives detailed instructions for the construction of the Efod, Hoshen, and Tzitz; in fact, the Torah focuses so much on the clothing that the Kohen who is to wear them seems secondary to them! The Kohen is to wear the Efod and Hoshen with the names of the tribes on the stones so that the people will, symbolically, come before God. His function, then, is to be the wearer of the Begadim, the carrier of the people before God. The clothes are the point; the Kohen merely carries the clothes on his body. The Urim ve-Tummim, carried inside the Hoshen, also put the focus on the begadim and point away from the individual inside: the Urim ve-Tummim is an oracle of sorts, consulted on important issues, and the Kohen is merely a mediator for the expression of God's will through the oracle. He carries around this source of revelation. The Tzitz as well, with its message of "Kodesh la-Shem" ("dedicated to God"), relates not to \*Aharon's\* dedication to God, but to the \*people's sacrifices\* dedication to God. Aharon's clothing communicates to God and communicates to the people, but he himself is merely the nexus for this communication. He is secondary to it; instead of taking an active, participatory, human role, he is objectified, passive, facilitative.

b) Besides the appointment of the Kohanim and the creation of their clothing, the Torah also communicates a succession plan for the Kehuna Gedola. Here again, the Torah spends most of its space describing the transfer of the begadim, not the wearer and his qualities (29:29-30). One gets the sense that what is being created in Parashat Tetzaveh, and passed from father to son when the time comes, is an "office" of Kohen Gadol, an office which transcends (perhaps even ignores) the importance of its holder. This perspective is also implicit in the Torah's description of Aharon's death (BeMidbar 20:23-28), which takes pains to describe how Aharon's Bigdei Kehuna are removed and put onto his son before he dies. The

passing of the office is expressed most sharply by the passing of the begadim, not the passing of personal authority or honor, because the begadim truly express the character of the Kohen's function: carrier of the begadim, facilitator of a relationship.

c) In Shemot 28:35, the Torah says: "It [the Me'il, a robe with bells on it] should be upon Aharon for serving, so that its sound is heard when he enters the Holy, before God, and when he goes out, so that he will not die." Rashi comments, "'So that he will not die' -- from the negative you can infer the positive: if he has them [the begadim], he will not incur the death penalty; but if he enters [the holy area] without one of these pieces of clothing, he is condemned to death at the hand of Heaven." Ramban disagrees with Rashi that this particular pasuk expresses the general prohibition of the Kohen's serving without the requisite begadim, but he agrees that there is such a prohibition, derived from a different pasuk. He says: ". . . We learn this [i.e., the prohibition of serving without the requisite begadim] from . . . Sanhedrin (83a) and Shehitat Ha-Kodashim (Zev. 17b): 'One [a Kohen] missing clothing who serves [i.e., performs sacrificial service in the Temple], how do we know that he suffers death? Rav Avahu said in the name of Rav Yohanan . . . 'Gird them with the belt, and put the turbans on them, and their Kehuna should be a law to them forever' (29:9) -- when their clothing is upon them, their Kehuna [priesthood] is upon them; when their clothing is not upon them, their Kehuna is not upon them, and they are 'Zarim' [the halakhic term for non-kohanim]; and the Master has said, 'A Zar who performs sacrificial service, suffers death . . .'."

In other words, according to this Gemara, a Kohen without all of his begadim is not a Kohen! He is a "Zar," a "stranger," the Torah's term for a non-Kohen, and he suffers the same fate a Zar would suffer for illegally performing the Avoda: death by the hand of Heaven. For our theme, the point is clear: the focus is completely on the begadim; the Kohen is merely the carrier.

## 2) PARALLELS BETWEEN THE KOHANIM AND THE KELIM (vessels of the Mishkan):

In several contexts, the Torah draws parallels between the Kohanim and Kelim. This contributes to the theme of depersonalization and objectification, especially since many of the parallels appear in the initiation process of the Kohanim. The Kohanim's initiation objectifies them and depersonalizes them, perhaps to express to them what their orientation to their Kehuna should be. Examples of these parallels (besides the inclusion of the 'Kohanim' section inside the 'Mishkan' section, mentioned above):

a) God commands Moshe to "take" Aharon and his sons as Kohanim: "Bring close to you Aharon, your brother, and his sons . . . Aharon, Nadav, Avihu, Elazar, and Itamar, the sons of Aharon." This list of people sounds a lot like the lists of materials which we find in profusion all over the parshiot of the Mishkan. Usually, we find a command to build a certain Keli and then a list of materials: for example, the Torah commands the creation of Bigdei Kehuna and then lists the materials out of which they are to be made: ". . . The gold, blue, purple, red, and fine linen" (28:5). There are Kelim to be created -- the Bigdei Kehuna -- and the materials are gold, blue, purple, red, and fine linen. In parallel fashion, there is a Keli to be created -- the Kehuna -- and the 'materials' are Aharon, Nadav, Avihu, Elazar, and Itamar.

b) The Kohanim are anointed with oil, just as the Kelim are (see 30:25-33, 29:7, 29:21, and 40:9-16).

c) The Kohanim are anointed with blood, just as the Mizbe'ah (altar) is, and in fact, the blood used for the Kohanim is from the same animal as that sprinkled on the Mizbe'ah (see 29:12, 29:16, 29:20-21).

d) "Kiddush": the Kohanim are sanctified, as some of the Kelim are (see 29:37, 29:1, 29:21, 28:41).

e) Passivity: throughout the period of their initiation, the Kohanim are completely passive while Moshe does all of the Avoda (sacrificial service). Moreover, they remain passive while Moshe performs various functions on them! (See VaYikra 8:6-14.) Moshe is "makriv" (brings close) the raw human pre-kohen material to the Ohel Mo'ed; Moshe washes the kohanim; Moshe dresses them; Moshe anoints them with oil; Moshe sprinkles them with blood. They stand, passive, like the lifeless, personality-lacking kelim of the Mishkan.

f) Parallels between Kohanim and korbanot: Moshe is "makriv" the Kohanim, the same word used with regard to korbanot (and actually the root of the word "korbanot"!); see 28:1, 29:4, 29:8, 29:10); Moshe is "rohetz" (washes) them, a function also performed on some of the korbanot in the same context (see 29:4, 29:17).

3) REPRESSION OF HUMANITY: In several contexts, the Torah expresses the idea that the Kohen, particularly the

Kohen Gadol, is not allowed the 'luxury' of expressing his emotions at the expense of the Avoda to which he is bound. Even when a close relative dies, he must remain in the Mikdash, before God, doing the Avoda, rather than leaving the Mikdash to mourn his loss. For him, the religious and national responsibility of the Kehuna must always supersede the personal and human.

This is most painfully and dramatically expressed by Aharon's reaction to the death of his sons, Nadav and Avihu, when they bring a "foreign fire" before God and are consumed in His fire. Moshe instructs Aharon that he is not to mourn, not to interrupt his duties as Kohen, not to leave the Mikdash. He tells Aharon that God has said, "Through those who are close to Me I am sanctified; I am honored in front of the entire congregation"; in response, Aharon is simply silent (VaYikra 10:3).

Many mefarshim understand God's statement -- "Through those who are close to Me I am sanctified" -- as a reference to Nadav and Avihu; as sanctified kohanim, chosen servants of God, they are the ones "close to God." By killing them for their slight disobedience, God inspires the awe of the people, hence, "I am honored in front of the entire congregation." But Rashbam disagrees. He paraphrases Moshe's command to Aharon after the death of his sons:

**RASHBAM:**

"Moshe said to Aharon, 'Do not mourn, do not cry, do not stop doing the Avoda, because what I am telling you is the word of God, that 'I will be sanctified through those close to Me' -- 'through the Kohen Gadol, who is close to Me to serve Me, I wish to be sanctified, and I do not wish that My name be profaned along with My Avoda,' for this is what God has told me [Moshe], that 'the Kohen Gadol . . . should not undo his hair or remove his priestly clothing, and not leave the Mikdash, and not profane thereby the Mikdash of his God' -- so if you do not leave the Mikdash, it remains holy" . . . . Therefore, "Do not abandon your Avoda, for you are the Kohen Gadol, and do not leave [the Mikdash], and do not profane, but instead let God and His Avoda be sanctified through you. As a result, "Before the entire congregation shall I be honored" - - the honor of the Shekhina is that he [Aharon] sees his sons die, yet he puts aside his mourning for the service of his Creator. "Aharon was silent" -- silenced his mourning: he did not cry and did not mourn . . . ."

According to Rashbam, the function of the Kohen, especially the Kohen Gadol, is to remain always dedicated to God and to prioritize God over all personal needs. Aharon responds by silencing his mourning; he maintains his Kehuna and suppresses his humanity, as the Kohen must.

[There is also the inhumanity of Shevet Levi's vengeance against the worshippers of the Egel, even when they are his own relatives (see Shemot 32:26-29 and see Devarim 33:8-10, where Moshe praises their "inhuman" fealty to God), but we will leave that for another time.]

### **"REPERSONALIZATION":**

The 'depersonalization' of the Kohanim brings us to something we touched on last week: the potential danger in doing the Avoda. Evidence of this danger is all over the Torah: the Kohanim are warned to wear the Me'il, to wash from the Kiyyor, and to wear the Mikhnasayim (pants), all "so that they do not die" (!!); the Kohanim (and others) at Har Sinai are warned not to go up the mountain so that God does not "destroy them"; a Zar who does the Avoda suffers death at the hands of Heaven, as does a Kohen who serves without the proper begadim.

The function of the Kohen is to act as a bridge between God and the human community of Bnei Yisrael. This means that the Kohanim have to surrender their personal identity and humanity to a significant degree. What happens if a Kohen fails to surrender to his kohenic function, if he stubbornly insists on expressing his own personality and achieving his own spiritual goals through his privileged access to Hashem? Perhaps a look at Parashat Pekudei, several weeks ahead of us, will provide an answer:

Many have pointed out the pattern of the repeated phrase, "Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe" ("Just as Hashem had commanded Moshe") in Parashat Pekudei; this phrase appears there about fifteen times, describing how Moshe and the people built and prepared the Mishkan and each of its appurtenances exactly as instructed by God: "Just as Hashem had commanded Moshe." But the pattern of "Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe" does not end at the end of Parashat Pekudei. Parashat Pekudei is followed by a 'parenthetical' section, a "Manual for Korbanot" (AKA Parashat VaYikra and the first part of Parashat Tzav). This parenthetical section ends in the second half of Parashat Tzav, where the Torah picks up the Mishkan narrative once again, describing the eight-day process of the initiation of the Mishkan and the Kohanim. Tellingly, this narrative picks right back up with the "Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe" pattern we note in Parashat Pekudei; fifteen additional repetitions of this phrase appear here, describing how all of the events of the initiation take place "exactly as

Hashem had commanded Moshe." What is it all about? What is the Torah trying to communicate with this pattern?

In all, the Torah repeats the pattern of "Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe" thirty times, with slight variation, though Pekudei and then Tzav and Shemini. The people do exactly what God commands -- to the letter, to the "T," exactly, exactly, exactly. But then the pattern comes to a sudden end:

Shemot 38:22 -- ". . . Asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
Shemot 39:1 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
Shemot 39:5 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
Shemot 39:21 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
Shemot 39:26 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
Shemot 39:29 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
Shemot 39:31 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
Shemot 39:32 -- ". . . Ke-khol asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
Shemot 39:42 -- ". . . Ke-khol asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
Shemot 39:33 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem"  
Shemot 40:16 -- ". . . Ke-khol asher tziva Hashem oto"  
Shemot 40:19 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
Shemot 40:21 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
Shemot 40:23 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
Shemot 40:25 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
Shemot 40:27 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
Shemot 40:29 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
Shemot 40:32 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
VaYikra 8:4 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem oto"  
VaYikra 8:5 -- ". . . Asher tziva Hashem . . ."  
VaYikra 8:9 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
VaYikra 8:13 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
VaYikra 8:17 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
VaYikra 8:21 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
VaYikra 8:29 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"  
VaYikra 8:35 -- ". . . Asher tziva Hashem be-yad Moshe"  
VaYikra 8:36 -- ". . . Asher tziva Hashem be-yad Moshe"  
VaYikra 9:6 -- ". . . Asher tziva Hashem"  
VaYikra 9:7 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem"  
VaYikra 9:10 -- ". . . Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"

The pattern crashes to a catastrophic and tragic halt with VaYikra 10:1 --

VaYikra 10:1 -- "ASHER \*\*LO\*\* \*\*TZIVA\*\* OTAM."

The Torah sets up the pattern of "ka-asher tziva Hashem," reporting Bnei Yisrael's strict, unwavering obedience to Hashem's exact instructions for the Mishkan, in order to shatter the perfection with the report that Nadav and Avihu bring an offering of ketoret (incense) which God did NOT command - "asher LO tziva Hashem." For this crime, they die.

A Kohen qua Kohen must forfeit his identity, his humanity, his search for ways to express and experience his own spirituality; he does exactly "Ka-asher tziva Hashem" -- because he is a faithful Keli Mikdash, merely a bridge. The moment the Kohen's personal, self-representing religious identity returns -- the moment he uses his position as Kohen to pursue personal religious aspirations -- at that moment, he negates the process of depersonalization and objectification which made him a Kohen. Repersonalized, representing only himself, he is a Zar, a non-Kohen, and what he brings is Zara, "Eish Zara" (a "foreign fire").

Shabbat Shalom

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Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

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### PARSHAT TETZAVEH

Order in the 'court-yard'? Certainly that's what we'd expect to find when the Torah presents the laws of the mishkan; and that is exactly what we do find - most of the time.

However, there is one glaring exception - that relates to the placement of the laws of the **mizbach ha-ktoret** at the end of Parshat Tetzaveh (instead of at the beginning of Parshat Teruma).

In the following shiur, we will first clarify our question; afterward we will offer an explanation that relates once again to the thematic connection between the mishkan and Ma'amad Har Sinai.

#### INTRODUCTION

Recall, from last week's shiur how Parshat Tetzaveh forms part of the larger unit (chapters 25 thru 31), which we referred to as **tzivui ha-mishkan** [the commandment to build the mishkan]. This unit contains a complete set of laws in which God explains to Moshe how the mishkan is to be built and how it will operate.

In that shiur, we discussed the controversy concerning when and why this set of laws was first given to Moshe Rabeinu. In the following shiur, we analyze the internal structure of this unit, to show how (and why) it actually contains **two** distinct units - that overlap in a very special manner.

#### A VERY LONG 'DIBBUR'

Before we begin, we must make one general observation concerning why parshiot Teruma and Tetzaveh (i.e. Shmot 25:1-30:10) should be considered a distinct 'sub-unit'. Note how Parshat Teruma begins with God's commandment to Moshe to "speak to Bnei Yisrael and tell them..." (25:1) - followed by a lengthy set of instructions that continues all the way until the end of Parshat Tetzaveh (i.e. 30:10). To prove this, simply note how the next "dibur" doesn't begin until the opening pasuk of Parshat Ki Tisa. [See the new "dibur" in 30:11, while noting that there has not been any similar opening statement since 25:1. However, from 30:11 till the end of chapter 31, every parshia in a separate "dibur"! We'll return to this observation later in the shiur.]

Therefore, we begin our study with an analysis of this first 'sub-unit' (i.e. 25:1 thru 30:10). Afterward, we will discuss how the six short 'parshiot' in Parshat Ki Tisa (30:11 thru 31:18) that follow, even though they are outside this unit, complete the larger unit of "tzivui ha-mishkan" - the commandment to build the Mishkan.

#### AN OUTLINE OF TERUMA/TETZAVEH

The following outline summarizes the topic of each parshia within this unit of parshiot Teruma/Tetzaveh. Study it carefully, noting how it appears to follow in a rather logical order (at least until the very end). It will clarify our opening question.

[Follow this chart with a Tanach Koren at hand.]

**Introduction** - Donation of the **materials** (25:1-7)

& the purpose of this project:

"Ve-asu li mikdash ve-**shachantl** betocham" (25:8-9)

**Vessels in the Kodesh Kodashim** (innermost sanctuary)

**Aron** - the ark to house the "luchot" (25:10-16)

**Kaporet** - the special lid for the ark (25:17-22)

**Vessels in the Kodesh** (main sanctuary)

**Shulchan** - the table for the show-bread (25:23-30)

**Menora** - the candelabra (25:31-40)

**The Ohel Mo'ed** [The tent housing these vessels] (26:1-37)

**Yeriot** - The canvas of the tent - from cloth & goatskins

**Krashim** - the wooden beams supporting this tent

**Parochet** - the curtain to partition the Kodesh Kdoshim

**The Chatzer** [The outer courtyard & its vessels]

**Mizbeiach Ha-Ola** (the altar / 27:1-8)

**Chatzer** - the outer courtyard

its curtains and poles (see 27:9-19)

**Oil For The Menora** (27:20-21)

[A priori, we would have expected to find this commandment with the **menorah**. See further iyun.]

**The 'Bigdei Kehuna'** - (28:1-43)

Six parshiot describing the priestly garments

**The Seven-Day Inaugural Dedication Ceremony** (29:1-37)

**Olat Tamid** (29:38-46)

The daily offering on the altar (after its dedication)

**The Mizbach Ha-Ktoret** - the incense altar (30:1-10)

[This seems 'out of place', as we will discuss.]

As you review this outline, note the logical order of its progression. It begins by describing the 'aron' - the most sacred object in the mishkan, situated in the 'kodesh kodashim'; then continues with the vessels located in the 'kodesh', followed by the 'ohel mo'ed' [Tent of Meeting], which houses these vessels. Afterward we find the 'mizbach ha-ola' - which is located outside this tent - and the courtyard ['chatzer'] that surrounds it. This unit concludes with the 'bigdei kehuna' - the special garments for the kohanim who will officiate in the mishkan, followed by the details of its seven-day dedication ceremony (and the daily sacrifice that will be henceforth offered).

However, the final parshia describing the "mizbach ha-ktoret appears to be totally 'out of place'. After all, this golden altar is one of the three vessels situated in the kodesh. Clearly, this parshia should have been recorded in chapter 26 together with the laws of the "shulchan and menorah - the other vessels located in the ohel mo'ed.

To verify this point (that the mizbach ktoret is recorded out of place), simply note the parallel mention of these vessels in Parshat Vayakhel (see 35:13-15, 37:10-29, & 39:35-39). There the laws of the mizbach ktoret are consistently recorded together with the laws of the menorah and the shulchan.

Furthermore, this 'displacement' of the mizbach ha-ktoret is only half the problem. We will now explain how the psukim that precede this parshia place this golden altar in even greater 'isolation'!

#### OUT OF 'PLACE' and 'OUT' OF PLACE

Review the above outline once again, noting how the parshia of the olat tamid (29:38-46) forms what 'should have been' the conclusion of this unit. Let's take a closer look at this parshia, noting how its concluding verses forms a beautiful summary for this entire unit (see 29:42-44):

"Olat tamid for all generations, in front of the ohel mo'ed - the place where we will meet to speak to you from there."

[note how this pasuk 'matches' 25:22!]

And I will sanctify the **OHEL MO'ED** (& its vessels),

[summarizing chapters 25 & 26]

the **MIZBEIACH** (i.e. the **chatzer**),

[summarizing chapter 27]

and the **KOHANIM**... (i.e. their garments & dedication)

[summarizing chapters 28 & 29]

(see 29:44)

As you review these psukim, note how the words in **CAPS** correlate to the primary topics in the above outline! But that's not all, for the next pasuk forms almost a perfect 'bookend' for this entire unit: "ve-**shachanti** betoch **bnei Yisrael**..." (see 29:45) - matching: "ve-asu li mikdash ve-**shachanti** betocham" (see 25:8) - the opening commandment of this entire unit - found at the beginning of Parshat Teruma!

Finally, to top it off, this parshia concludes with its 'grand finale' - that connects the purpose of this mishkan to the very purpose of the entire process of Yetziat Mitzrayim:

"And they shall know that I am their God who took them out of Egypt - **le-shochni betocham - in order** to dwell among them; I am the Lord their God" (see 29:42-46).

Thus, chapters 25 thru 29 form a clearly defined unit with 'matching bookends'. But this only magnifies our opening question regarding the placement of the laws concerning the **mizbach ha-ktoret** (in the next parshia / see 30:1-10) - for it is not only 'out of place' - it is totally isolated - outside this 'shechina' unit!

This total isolation of the mizbach ha-ktoret forces us to search for a thematic reason for the Torah's intentional placement of these laws after the closure of the shechina unit.

### BACK TO HAR SINAI

To suggest an answer to this question, let's return once again to the conceptual parallel between the mishkan and Har Sinai, as discussed in last week's shiur, and as explicated by Ramban:

"... the hidden purpose ['sod'] of the mishkan is for God's **glory** which dwelled ('shachan') on **Har Sinai** to dwell upon it..." (Ramban on 25:1, see TSC shiur on Teruma).

According to Ramban, the very purpose of the mishkan was to serve as a vehicle that could perpetuate the Sinai experience! This purpose is reflected in the numerous parallels that exist between Ma'amad Har Sinai and the mishkan. For example:

\* The **aron**:

contains the **luchot ha-eidut** (25:21), the everlasting testimony of the covenant forged between God and bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai (see 24:3-12).

\* The **keruvim**:

situated above the **kaporet** (on top of the **aron**), serve as the site from where God will continue to speak to Moshe. There, Moshe will receive the remaining mitzvot, just as he had received the dibrot from God on Har Sinai.

\* The **mizbach ha-ola** -

where Bnei Yisrael will offer their **olot & shlamim**, is similar to the **mizbeich** that Bnei Yisrael built at the foot of Har Sinai, upon which they offered **olot & shlamim** (see 24:4-8).

Following this train of thought, we should expect to find a parallel as well between the mizbach ha-ktoret and Ma'amad Har Sinai - a parallel that may shed light on why the Torah places the mizbach ha-ktoret after the Shechina unit of the mishkan was completed. To find it, we must first consider a more general parallel between Har Sinai and the mishkan.

### THREE MECHITZOT

One of the most striking parallels between the mishkan and Har Sinai relates to the concept of '**mechitzot**' - boundaries. At Har Sinai, the **people** are instructed to remain at the **foot** of the mountain while the **kohanim** are permitted to come a bit closer (see 19:22; 24:1-2 & 24:9). Only **Moshe** is granted access to the **top** of the mountain (see 19:20-24 & 24:2 & 24:12).

In regard to the mishkan, we find a very interesting parallel. The **people** are permitted to proceed only as far as the outer courtyard of the mishkan (where the **mizbach ha-ola** is located). The **kohanim** are allowed into the "**kodesh**" (where the **shulchan** & **menorah** are located), and only Moshe (and Aharon) can enter the "**kodesh ha-kodashim**" (where the **aron** & **keruvim** are located).

[Additionally, Bnei Yisrael may enter the courtyard only after first purifying themselves (i.e. they must be "tahor"), just as a purification process was required in preparation for Ma'amad Har Sinai (see 19:10-15).]

The following table summarizes this parallel:

GROUP	HAR SINAI	THE MISHKAN	FUNCTION
<b>Moshe</b>	top of mountain	Kodesh kodashim	<b>dibur</b>
<b>Kohanim</b>	mid-mountain	Kodesh (ohel mo'ed)	<b>meeting</b>
<b>People</b>	foot of mountain	Chatzer (courtyard)	<b>korbanot</b>

So how does the **mizbach ha-ktoret** fit into all this?

In our shiur on Parshat Yitro, we discussed the dialectic nature of the encounter between God and Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai. Ideally, Bnei Yisrael should have heard the commandments directly from God [**panim be-panim**]. However, as mortal man is incapable of withstanding God's Presence (see Devarim 5:4-5, 20-25), God found it necessary to 'buffer' this encounter. due to this tension, God found it necessary to cover Har Sinai with a **cloud** before revealing himself:

"Behold I am coming to you **be-av he-anan** - in the **thickness** of a **cloud** - in order that they can hear as I speak to you..." (see 19:9)

"... And Har Sinai was full of **smoke** ['ashan'], for God had come down upon it with fire..."

(see 19:16-18 and the TSC shiur on Parshat Yitro).

In this manner, the **anan** (cloud) on Har Sinai effectively served as a **buffer** between:

- Bnei Yisrael at the **foot** of the mountain, and
- God's revelation at the **top** of the mountain.

One could suggest that the **mizbach ha-ktoret** serves a similar function. When the **ktoret** [incense] is offered on the coals of this small altar, it creates a cloud of smoke (see Vayikra 16:13) in the "kodesh". In this manner, this "anan" [cloud of smoke] forms a buffer between Bnei Yisrael, who stand outside in the **chatzer** - and God, whose presence dwells in the "**kodesh ha-kodashim**".

### THE AXIS: -Aron -- Mizbach Ktoret -- Mizbach Ola

This interpretation is supported by two key psukim that describe the relationship between the **mizbach ha-ola**, **mizbach ha-ktoret**, and the **kodesh kodashim**.

The first pasuk stresses the connection between the **mizbach ha-ola** and the **ohel mo'ed**. As you study this pasuk, note how redundant it appears to be:

"**olat tamid** [the daily offering on the mizbach ha-ola]

- for all generations,
- in front of the entrance to the **ohel mo'ed** -
- before God [lifnei Hashem]
- from where **I will meet you**
- to **speak** to you there" (see 29:42).

Surely, the Torah could have explained where this public offering is brought in half the words; yet for some reason the Torah wishes to emphasize a thematic connection between the "olat tamid" and the place where God will speak to Bnei Yisrael.

Then, in the next 'parshia', the Torah provides explicit instructions concerning where to place the **mizbach ha-ktoret**. Note once again the 'wordiness' of this pasuk, and how it relates to the pasuk above:

"And you shall **place** it [the mizbach ktoret]

- in front of the **parochet**,
- which is over the **aron ha-eidut**,
- in front of the **kaporet** which is upon the **eidut**
- from where **I will meet with you.**" (see 30:6).

It is for this reason that the Torah emphasizes that the mizbach ktoret must be located between these two focal points, i.e. along this very same **axis** that connects the **mizbach ha-ola** with the **kodesh kodashim**.

In fact, later on in the same chapter, when the Torah explains how the ktoret was made, it emphasizes this point once again:

"...and you shall grind it very fine, and **put it**:

- before the testimony [lifnei ha'eidut]
- in the tent of meeting [**ohel moed**],
- where **I will meet with you**; - it shall be for you most holy." (see 30:36)

The above table shows how (1) the **mizbach ktoret** and (2) the mitzvah to make the **ktoret** delineate a second unit, which contains several peripheral commandments regarding the mishkan.

## A 'PROTECTED' DIVINE ENCOUNTER

In a manner very similar to what took place at Har Sinai, God 'comes down' from the heavens, as it were, to the **kodesh kodashim**; while Bnei Yisrael come from their camp, to stand before God in the **chatzer** of the mishkan.

Hence, the main section of the **ohel mo'ed** serves as a buffer between God and Bnei Yisrael. There, the **ktoret** must be offered each time the **kohen** enters to perform his service, which creates an **anan** [cloud of smoke] to 'protect' the **kohen** when he enters the **kodesh**:

"And Aharon shall offer the **ktoret** daily, in the morning before tending to the **menorah**, and when lighting the **menorah** in the evening..." (30:7-8).

[Note also Vayikra 16:2, where Aharon must also offer ktoret to create a similar cloud of smoke to protect himself before entering the kodesh ha-kodashim on Yom Kippur!]

With this background we can answer our opening question. One could suggest that by placing the commandment to build the **mizbach ha-ktoret** after the summary psukim at the very end of this unit, the Torah alludes to its unique function as a 'buffer' in this covenantal encounter. As - 'realistically' - Bnei Yisrael may not be worthy of this encounter, the Torah commands Bnei Yisrael to place the **mizbach ktoret** in the kodesh to serve as a buffer, to protect them for the Shechina that dwells in the kodesh kedoshim.

[Note the similarity between the nature of this 'protected encounter' in the mishkan and what we referred to in our shiur on Parshat Yitro as '**plan A**,' by which God speaks to Moshe while 'covered by a cloud' so that the people can only overhear their conversation. See Shmot 19:9! See also Devarim 5:5.]

Furthermore, the dialectic nature of this encounter is highlighted by the placement of the laws of the mizbach ha-ktoret outside this Shechina unit, yet within the same dibur!

## THE KTORET UNIT

Up until this point, we have treated parshiot Teruma/Tetzaveh as one, integrated unit, as indicated by the single **dibur** that introduces these two parshiot. Now we must consider the remaining parshiot (in Parshat Ki Tisa) that form the final six paragraphs of the greater **tzivui ha-mishkan** unit.

Take a minute to review the beginning of Ki-Tisa (i.e. 30:11-31:17), noting how it describes several other mitzvot concerning the mishkan that were also 'left out' of the **Shechina unit**.

When we list these parshiot in order, we find once again a set of 'bookends':

30:1-10 **mizbach ha-ktoret** (\* bookend 1 \*)  
(as explained above)

30:11-16 **Machatzit ha-shekel** -  
money collected to fund the **ohel mo'ed**

30:17-21 **Ki'yor**  
the faucet for the kohanim to wash their hands

30:22-33 **Shemen ha-mishcha**  
special oil to anoint the mishkan's accessories and the kohanim

30:34-38 **Ktoret** (\* bookend 2 \*)  
the incense for the **mizbach ktoret**

[At this point, the **laws** concerning the mishkan end. Chapter 31 discusses the appointment of Betzalel to build the mishkan and the prohibition to work on **Shabbat** (to preclude the possible, mistaken notion the work for the mishkan on shabbat is permissible). Whereas these do not involve laws directly relating to the construction of the mishkan and its accessories, we have omitted them from this table.]

## A PARALLEL STRUCTURE

As your review these parshiot, note how a rather amazing parallel structure emerges; pointing to the direct connection between this **Ktoret** unit and the previous **Shechina unit**. Note how each of these peripheral commandments in the **Ktoret unit** corresponds (in the same order!) to a related topic in the **Shechina unit**!

The following table illustrates this parallel:

TOPIC	SHECHINA UNIT	KTORET UNIT
Accessories in the mishkan	<b>aron, kaporet, shulchan, menorah</b>	<b>mizbach ktoret</b>
<b>Ohel Mo'ed</b>	<b>yeriot, krashim</b>	machatzit ha-shekel le-avodat ohel mo'ed
<b>Chatzer</b>	<b>mizbach ha-ola</b>	<b>kiyor</b>
<b>Dedication</b>	bigdei <b>kehuna</b> & <b>milu'im</b> (to anoint the kohanim)	shemen ha-mishcha
<b>Daily Offering</b>	<b>korban tamid</b> on mizbach ha-ola	<b>ktoret tamid</b> on mizbach ha-ktoret

The mitzvot found in the **Shechina unit**, which focus on God's 'hitgalut' in the mishkan, are complemented by the mitzvot in the **Ktoret unit**, which focus on the need to protect Bnei Yisrael in this special encounter.

Note as well how all of the mitzvot in the Ktoret unit emphasize either kapara (see shiur on Yom Kippur, where we explained how kapara involves protection from God's hitgalut) or warn of impending death if not performed properly (see 30:10; 30:12; 30:21; 30:33; 30:38; relate to Devarim 5:21-23!). Protection is required from the potential punishment enacted should man not prepare himself properly for this encounter with God in the mishkan.

In this manner, the laws of the mizbach ktoret can serve as an eternal reminder of how man must not only value his ability to enjoy a relationship with God, but also remain aware of the natural limits of this encounter.

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

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## FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Be sure to see Ramban on 30:1, where he explains why the mizbach ha-ktoret is at the end of the unit. See also Seforno & Chizkuni. Relate these approaches to our analysis of this unit in the above shiur.

B. In our discussion of the overall structure, we noted that (B) comprises the complete unit of **tzivui ha-mishkan**. Note that this complete unit includes **seven** dibur's. [A dibur is each time the Torah introduces God's speech to Moshe with, "Va-yedaber Hashem el Moshe leimor" or "va-yomer ...", etc.

[See 25:1, 30:11, 30:17, 30:22, 30:34, 31:1, and 31:12.]

One could view these dibur's as allusions to the seven days of creation. The first **dibur**, covering the entire **Shechina unit**, may reflect the concept of God's creation of **light / Shechina** (see Rashi on Breishit 1:3). The next four deal with other mitzvot of the mishkan. [Admittedly, they don't work out as good as the rest.] The sixth **dibur** describes the appointment of Betzalel to build the mishkan. This may parallel God's creation of man on the sixth day. Just as man in Creation [ **perek aleph**] was to master the material world and utilize his God-given talents towards a divine purpose, so must Betzalel organize the materials collected and use his God-given talents to oversee the construction of the mishkan. To do so, he requires 'ruach Elokim' (31:3/ relate to the creation of man 'be-tzelem Elokim').

The seventh **dibur** is the mitzvah to keep **Shabbat!** (See 31:15.) This may serve as the basis for the many Midrashim that describe the mishkan as the pinnacle of the creation process. This reflects, once

again, the biblical theme that the natural world needs to be directed towards a divine purpose. This is the duty of man not only in the mishkan, but also throughout his daily life, as well.

### C. A FULL TIME JOB

Recall from our original outline how the first two psukim of Parshat Tetzaveh (i.e. the mitzvah to light the menorah /see 27:20-21) also appears out of place. If we follow the logic of the structure of the **Shechina unit**, it should have been recorded together with the mitzvah to build the menorah (just as the mitzvah to offer the **lechem ha-panim** is included with the mitzvah to build the **shulchan** / see 25:30).

Nevertheless, the Torah transfers these psukim from chapter 26 and juxtaposes them with the mitzvah to make the **bigdei kehuna** (in chapter 28). Why?

One could suggest that in doing so, the Torah alludes to a more important role of the **kohanim**. Aside from the honor and glory of their position, as reflected by their special garments, their primary job is to 'spread the light' of Torah - the message of mishkan, as represented by the **aron ha-eidut** at its focal point - to Bnei Yisrael.

It is this mitzvah of the **kohanim**, to disseminate the Torah, which may explain why it referred to as a "chukat olam le-doroteichem - an everlasting law for all generations" (see 27:31). Even when the mikdash lay in ruins, this mitzvah forever remains the obligation of our religious leaders.

### D. ADDITIONAL SOURCES & RESEARCH

Re: The 'displacement' of the mizbach ha-ktoret

We explained that the Torah 'transferred' the discussion of the mizbach ha-ktoret to the end of the mishkan unit to emphasize its role as a 'buffer', protecting Bnei Yisrael from the 'hashra'at ha-Shechina' that occurs in the mishkan. This general idea appears in the Vilna Gaon's "Aderet Eliyahu". The Gaon explains that neither the ktoret nor the machatzit ha-shekel (which the Torah discusses immediately following its discussion of the mizbach ha-ktoret) was indispensable for 'hashra'at ha-Shechina'. They come into play once the Shechina has already descended, in order to bring kapara for Bnei Yisrael. Though the Gaon does not mention the 'buffer' idea developed in the shiur, his explanation does feature the concept of a need for kapara when the Shechina descends and the mizbach ha-zahav as filling that role. Like the Gaon, the Seforno also writes that the mizbach ha-zahav is not necessary for the Shechina to descend. However, rather than pointing to atonement as the ktoret's primary function, the Seforno views it as an expression of kavod to Hashem, and hence a prayer of sorts asking the Almighty to accept the korbanot offered on the other mizbeich. The Ramban also writes along the lines, describing the mizbach ha-zahav as an expression of kavod rather than a means of bringing the Shechina.

This point, whether or not the ktoret is required to bring the Shechina, appears to be subject to dispute. The Midrash Tanchuma, Tetzaveh 15, writes clearly that the Shechina would not descend into the mishkan until after the ktoret was offered. This is also the view of the Da'at Zekeinim mi-Ba'alei ha-Tosafot on Shmot 25:6. This view would oppose the position of the Seforno and Vilna Gaon.

Several different answers to the question of this parsha's location appear in other mefarshim. Some Acharonim, including the Meshech Chochma (30:1), view the location of this parsha as an allusion to the halacha allowing the offering of ktoret even without the mizbach ha-ktoret. The Or Ha-chayim (25:9) also sees here a subtle allusion to a technicality, that Shlomo Ha-melech built his own mizbach ha-ktoret rather than using Moshe's. (This assumption is somewhat controversial - see Torah Shleima, milu'im to Parshat Tetzaveh, 29.) The Tzror Ha-mor (30:1) writes that the Torah places this parsha last to indicate the unique stature of the mizbach ha-ktoret as the most important of all the klei ha-mikdash. A similar theory is advanced by Rav Dov Rabinowitz ("Da'at Sofrim"), who claims that Bnei Yisrael are worthy for the ktoret, the most exalted of all the offerings, only after they have loyally executed all the commands of the previous chapters and the Shechina has taken its residence in the mishkan. Rav Zalman

Sorotzkin (Oznayim la-Torah 30:1) suggests precisely the opposite: lest one afford too much importance to the mizbach ha-zahav over the mizbach ha-nechoshet, the Torah extracted the former from the discussion of the klei ha-mikdash in order to emphasize that the mizbach ha-nechoshet actually constitutes the primary altar. The Netziv understands the Torah's structure as intended to underscore the distinct themes symbolized by the two mizbachot. The mizbach ha-nechoshet - along with the menorah - represents Torah, whereas the mizbach ha-ktoret symbolizes gemilut chasadim. The Torah emphasizes their symbolic distinction by separating them; their coexistence in the heichal points to the need for the two to work in tandem. The Malbim, who develops an elaborate system of symbolism with regard to the mishkan and its accessories, views the mizbach ha-ktoret as representing the spiritual result of the avoda performed in the mishkan. It is therefore presented last and apart from the rest of the mishkan's components, as it represents that which is attained as a result of that was discussed beforehand.

# Parshas Tetzaveh: A Continual Offering

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

## I. A CONTINUAL OFFERING

Over these few weeks, we are reading about the command to construct the Mishkan (Sanctuary) and the fulfillment of that command by the B=nei Yisra=el. After being commanded to build the Mishkan, all of its vessels and accouterments, the B=nei Yisra=el were adjured to sacrifice the Olat haTamid -the continual burnt offering. The Olat haTamid is offered up twice daily:

The one lamb you shall offer in the morning; and the other lamb you shall offer between the evens (between noon and the end of the day).@ (Sh=mot 29:39) The Olat haTamid claims primacy not only as the first sacrifice mandated (besides the Pessach); its significance is alluded to in many Parashiot relating to the sacrificial order: Ybesides the Olat haTamid and its libation appears fourteen (14!) times in Bamidbar (chapters 28-29). Every sacrifice brought is to be offered up Ybesides the Olat haTamid i.e. after the daily Acontinual@ sacrifice. It is from these verses that the dictum AFrequency causes precedence@ is derived:

Kol haTadir meHavero Kodem et Havero (That [ritual] which is more frequent than another precedes that other.) (Mishna Zevachim 10:1) An example of the application of this concept is found in the eighth chapter of Berakhot (and its parallel Sugya in the last chapter of Pesachim) where Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel disagree about the order of the two B=rakhot recited at Friday night Kiddush. The Gemara explains Beit Hillel=s position (that the blessing over the wine is recited before the blessing over the Shabbat), by applying the rule of frequency generates precedence. Since the recitation of the blessing over wine (YBorei P=ri Haggafen) is performed more frequently than the recitation of the blessing over Shabbat (YM=kaddesh haShabbat), the blessing over wine precedes the blessing over Shabbat.

## II. DEFINITIONS OF \*TAMID\*

I would like to raise two questions about the Olat haTamid; one formulaic and the other fundamental. The formula used to describe the daily sacrifices: Tamid, is somewhat misleading here. In other usages in Tenakh, the term Tamid indicates unceasing presence or action. For example:

The fire shall be Tamid (constantly) burning on the altar, it shall never go out.@ (Vayyikra 6:6 B see MT Hilkhos T=midin uMusafin 2:1).

The fire is always to be burning on the altar B this constitutes Tamid. The well-known prayer of David:

I have set God before me Tamid (constantly)@ (T=hillim 16:8) expresses David=s unceasing awareness of the Divine Presence.

In our case, however, the constancy of the daily offerings is much more limited, indeed occasional. AThe one lamb shall you offer in the morning, and the other lamb shall you offer between the evens.@

How can the Torah describe these offerings as Tamid when they are brought at two separate junctures of the day?

One might argue that the meaning here of Tamid is not the same as in the verses quoted above; that here it indicates that the practice is to be constant, i.e. day in and day out (without missing a day). This could be termed Arelative constancy@-relative to the demands of the ritual, it is practiced constantly. For instance, we would describe someone who keeps Shabbat regularly as one who Aalways keeps Shabbat@, even though there are six days out of seven when this is impossible. Relative to the Mitzvah of Sh=mirat Shabbat, however, he fulfills them regularly; this justifies the appellation ASomer Shabbat.@

One might argue that B except for R. Yose. (BT Menahot 99b): The Lehem haPanim (showbread) is to be before God ATamid@. The old loaves were replaced each week with the new loaves. According to the first opinion in the Mishna, four Kohanim slid the old loaves off of the table as four others slid the new loaves on to the table; this in order to fulfill the

requirement of Tamid. R. Yose disagreed, saying that even if one set of loaves was removed totally and the other then put in its place, this still fulfilled the requirement of Tamid. In the Gemara, a more detailed opinion of R. Yose is quoted:

R. Yose says: Even if they removed the old set of loaves in the morning and set up the new set of loaves in the evening, this is Tamid.

R. Yose could have argued Arelative constancy@ and explained that as long as the bread was there every week, it is considered Tamid. R. Yose's refusal to use this argument indicates that the demand of Tamid is not relieved via relative constancy; we must redefine constancy for each case individually.

### III. GENERATING PRECEDENCE

Kol haTadir meHavero Kodem et Havero (That [ritual] which is more frequent than another precedes that other.) This legal concept is derived from the law of the Olat haTamid . A fundamental question, shooting its curious arrows of inquiry beyond the formula of Tamid, begs to be answered here. Why does frequency translate into precedence in Halakhah? Conventionally, occasional and unusual occurrences are more exciting, exotic and inspiring. That which is constant is mundane, humdrum and usual; the religious psyche seeks and thrives on the occasion, the festivity; that which removes us and helps us to transcend our everyday existence. How can we compare an everyday sunset to Halley's comet? Isn't the Sh=ma Yisra=el of Nei=la [at the end of Yom haKippurim] a hundredfold more inspiring than the Sh=ma Yisra=el of a midwinter=s Tuesday evening?

One answer that is tempting utilizes a reversal of assumption: Precedence itself does not indicate significance; contrariwise, precedence indicates a lack of significance. That which is more common goes first B in order to build up to the less common, more exciting event or ritual. This sense of ordering practice with the intent of creating a spiritual climax is inviting; it appeals to our dramatic and suspenseful entertainment mentality. This answer, however, cannot withstand the test of the juxtaposed Halakha.

Following the formulation of the rule that Afrequency generates precedence@, the next Mishnah in Zevachim (10:2), asserts a comparable principle: ASanctity generates precedence.@ Kol haM=kudash meHavero Kodem et Havero (That [ritual] which is holier than another precedes that other.) Clearly, the precedence of that which is holy is comparable to the precedence of that which is frequent. Since we would not assume that the holier ritual is practiced first in order to build up to one less holy; our theory of spiritual climax which explains the precedence of that which is frequent is apparently disproved.

We now have two problems to solve: Why does frequency generate precedence; and how can we refer to the daily offerings as Tamid when they are not an unceasing practice?

### IV. RAMBAM=S APPROACH

Alt is a Mitzvat >Aseh to offer in the Sanctuary two lambs of the first year every dayY@ (Sefer haMitzvot, Mitzvat >Aseh #39; Mishneh Torah: introduction to Hilkhot T=midin uMusafin, Mitzvah #1).

Rambam defines the two daily T=midin as one Mitzva. This is similar in formula to Rambam=s definition of the Mitzvah of Reading the Sh=ma. (Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat >Aseh #10; Mishneh Torah: introduction to Hilkhot K=ri=at Sh=ma; see, however, Sefer haMitzvot of R. Sa=adia Ga=on where K=ri=at Sh=ma is counted as two Mitzot, morning and evening separately; see also Ramban=s critique on Sefer haMitzvot, Shores #9). The two daily offerings (as well as the two daily readings of the Sh=ma) are not two separate Mitzvot; each pair constitutes one Mitzvah. This presentation is itself difficult; how can two separate actions, each defined separately (at the very least, each has its own time parameter. For another distinction, see B.T. Menahot 50a and MT T=midin uMusafin 1:12) be considered one Mitzva?

One possible avenue of response is that of >Ikkuva (interdependence). We find other Mitzvot which are composed of various actions; since each one is necessary for the fulfillment of the Mitzvah, each is regarded as an Ikkuva to the performance of the Mitzvah; it therefore becomes part of the same Mitzvah. By way of example, each of the four species taken on Sukkot is an Ikkuva to the performance of the Mitzvah (Mishna Menahot 3:6; Mishneh Torah: Hilkhot Lulav 7:5).

Therefore, if one lacked an Etrog, and took the Lulav, Hadas and Aravah, it would be (from an Halakhic standpoint) a meaningless action. Since all four species are an Ikkuva B a necessary component B to performing the Mitzvah, they must be considered one Mitzvah (one could, of course, define causality in the inverse direction thusly: Since all four comprise one Mitzva, each then becomes a necessary component to its fulfillment).

Applying Ikkuva to the T=midin would have to work as follows:

Since each offering (morning and afternoon) is necessary for the fulfillment of the Mitzvah, they must be defined as one Mitzvah. The same rule would have to apply to the morning and evening readings of the Sh=ma=, in order to defend Rambam=s grouping of these two readings into one Mitzvah. The Halakhah, however, does not bear this out. Rambam (Hilkhot T=midin uMusafin 1:12) following the Gemara in Menahot (50b), rules that if the morning Tamid was not brought, even if this neglect was intentional, the afternoon Tamid is still brought. The one exception to this rule (Rambam, BT Menahot ad loc.) is rooted in a concern extrinsic to our problem. Similarly, regarding the reading of the Sh=ma=, if one neglected to read the Sh=ma= in the morning, this does not exempt him from the obligation to read the Sh=ma= in the evening, neither does neglecting the evening reading prevent the morning reading from being a complete obligation (see BT Berakhot 26a).

Clearly, Ikkuva is not Rambam=s reason for considering both T=midin (and both readings of the Sh=ma=) as one Mitzva. How very frustrating! Instead of answering the two questions above, we have compounded the problem by adding a third. Why does Rambam count the two daily T=midin (and, correspondingly, the two daily readings of the Sh=ma=) as one Mitzva? We can answer this by returning to the Gemara=s discussion of the demand for Tamid in the fulfillment of the Mitzvah of Lehem haPanim B a section we referred to above (end of Section II).

## V. THE \*LEHEM HAPANIM\*

The Torah states:

You shall take choice flour, and bake twelve loaves of it; two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. You shall place them in two rows, six in a row, on the table of pure gold. You shall put pure frankincense with each row, to be a token offering for the bread, as an offering by fire to YHVH. Every sabbath day Aaron shall set them in order before YHVH Tamid as a commitment of the people of Israel, as a covenant forever. They shall be for Aaron and his descendants, who shall eat them in a holy place, for they are most holy portions for him from the offerings by fire to YHVH, a perpetual due. (Vayyikra 24:5-9) The Lehem HaPanim (showbread), which rested on the Shulhan (table) Tamid was replaced with the new set of loaves every Shabbat. According to the Mishnah (Menahot 11:7) , there are two opinions of how the bread was replaced while maintaining the constancy of Tamid. According to the first opinion, as the new bread was placed on the Shulhan, the old bread was slid off.

R. Yose, however, was of the opinion that such temporal proximity was unnecessary. In a Baraita (quoted in BT Menahot 99b), R. Yose is quoted as saying that even if the old bread was removed in the morning and the new bread replaced in the evening, this still constitutes Tamid.

R. Ami (ibid) derives the following rule from R. Yose=s statement:

Even if one only read one chapter [of T=nakh] in the morning and one chapter in the evening, he has fulfilled >The scroll of this Torah shall not disappear from your mouth= [and you shall study it day and night] (Yehoshua 1:8).@ R. Yohanan, quoting R. Shim=on b. Yohai, states: AEven if one only read the Shema= in the morning and in the evening, he has fulfilled >It shall not disappear= @ (BT Menahot ibid)

## VI. TWO DEFINITIONS OF CONSTANCY

There are two ways of defining constancy. The simplest, most common way is Aconstancy = continually recurring@ (American Heritage Dictionary). Rambam=s formula in the enumeration of the Mitzvot, counting both daily T=midin as one Mitzvah helps us (and even forces us) to reevaluate the definition of constancy. A less common, but possibly more valid definition within the oeuvre of Halakha is: Aconstancy = frequent expression of an unceasing relationship.@

By way of example, a happily married couple is endlessly in love. Nevertheless, the expression of their mutual affection must, perforce, be limited by the other demands and manifestations of their lives. Each member works, studies and perhaps plays separately. By delegating birthdays, anniversaries, certain holidays and the like, the frequent Aromatic interlude@ serves as an indication of their unending love for each other. These days function as A signposts@ in the relationship; the mood and spirit of such occasions helps to define the ongoing nature of the relationship (Within the pale of the Shir haShirim model, this can serve as an analogy for the relationship between God and the Jewish people. Shabbat is a beautiful example of a Relationship signpost@ which helps define the relationship during the rest of the week).

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All three questions which we asked can be answered as one: The daily offering is called Tamid, for it is the symbol of constant devotion to God. Since the daily T=midin function as daily Apoles@ to the relationship (the morning Tamid is the first sacrifice of the day. Except for the Pessah, the afternoon Tamid is the last), they are one Mitzvah; a continuous Mitzvah of Olah which has its expression at the extremes of the day. So, too, is the reading of the Sh=ma; Awhen you lie down and when you rise up@ is a way of assigning special times to that relationship- instructively, these times are, once again, at the extremes of man=s day, just as the times for the Tamid are at the extremes of the Sanctuary day (there are no sacrifices offered at night; MT Ma=aseh haKorbanot 4:1).

Kol haTadir meHavero Kodem et Havero (That [ritual] which is more frequent than another precedes that other) is now understood. All Mitzvot are a symbol of the covenant between the Jewish people and God; that Mitzvah which is more frequent indicates that it represents a more significant element in that relationship (much as we remain in closer contact with close friends and family than with mere acquaintances); therefore it demands precedence. QED

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# **Megillat Esther: She'Asah Nissim La'Avoteinu**

by Rabbi Yitzzhak Etshalom

## **I. WHERE IS GOD IN THE MEGILLAH?**

Every year on Purim, Jews all over the world fulfill the Mitzvah of K'riat haMegillah – reading the complete Book of Esther from a proper scroll. Before beginning, the reader/leader recites three B'rakhot – the middle of which is Birkat haNes (the blessing recited at the commemoration of a miracle): Barukh...she'Asah Nissim la'Avoteinu baYamim haHeim baZ'man haZeh (Who performed miracles for our ancestors in those days at this time [of year]). Considering that, unlike the Exodus (and all other Biblical miracles), God's hand is nowhere to be found in the text of the story of Esther and Mordechai, we have to wonder which miracle is the focus of this thanksgiving to God? For which Nes are we praising God? (Parenthetically, the same question could be asked in reference to Hanukkah, where the most central "miracle" we celebrate is a military victory which did not, from the accounts we have, include any miraculous intervention in the conventional understanding of the word. To whatever extent this shiur answers the question vis-a-vis Purim, that answer should carry the same validity for the Hanukkah question. Significantly, Purim and Hanukkah are the two occasions when this B'rakhah is recited.)

A second question, certainly related to the first, focuses on one of the unique features of the Megillah. As is well known, Esther is the only book in T'nakh with absolutely no mention of God (by any Name). Much as the Midrash interprets some occurrences of "the king" in Esther (e.g. 6:1) as a reference to God, this is certainly not p'shat. Why is this story even included in the Biblical canon?

Before moving on, it is prudent to note that some approaches within Rabbinic literature see "hidden Nissim (miracles)" throughout our story; these are, however, not evident from the p'shat. In keeping with the general approach of this shiur, we will try to identify the Nes/Nissim within the text of the Megillah.

In order to provide satisfactory answers to these two questions, we will have to address two issues – the nature of a Nes and a new understanding of the story line in Megillat Esther.

## **II. NES L'HITNOSES**

The root of Nes is N-S-S – which means "banner". See, for instance, the verse in T'hilim (60:6): "You have given those who fear You a Nes l'hitNoses – (a raised banner), to rally to it out of bowshot."

A miracle (i.e. deliberate suspension of the laws of physics in order to save the righteous individual or people) is a raising of the banner of God's Name in the world – hence the word Nes. (See also B'reshet 22:1 and see if this approach explains Avraham's "trial" – see also Midrash Rabbah ad loc.)

There is more than one way in which God's Name becomes glorified in this world. Besides an overt intervention, it is possible for human beings to make His Name manifest by demonstrating the most noble of traits. Keep in mind that we are all created in God's "Image" (whatever that may mean...conscience, free will etc.). When we demonstrate the most noble side of human existence and utilize those traits in the most productive manner possible, this is another (certainly more subtle) demonstration of God's power and glory. It is possible for a Nes to take place within the realm of human valor; although it should be stated that unless the people in question take the next step and utilize this experience to enhance their direct relationship with God, it may be that the whole enterprise would be considered a vain effort.

I would like to suggest that the two most noble human traits, each of which is a reflection of the Tzelem Elokim (Image of God) which sparks all of us, are Wisdom and Courage. I am not talking about wisdom or courage in the usual sense; rather about a special kind of wisdom, a unique type of courage and a special synthesis of the two. We will explore these two characteristics throughout the story and clarify how each was utilized in the most productive and positive manner to bring about the successful salvation of the Jews.

Instead of focusing on one or two passages in the Megillah, we're going to read through the whole story and point out the key "Nes-points" along the way. You'll need a copy of the text – all citations, unless otherwise noted, refer to chapters and verses within the Book of Esther.

As we read through, I will point out several other "layers" of the story – or, alternately, several other ways to read the story and the various messages embedded in the text. As usual, we will be reading the text alone; I will point out various Rabbinic interpolations and interpretations as needed for support and illustration.

## **III. CHAPTER 1**

### **A) THE PARTY (1:1-1:8)**

One other "layer" of the story is satiric; especially when viewed within the context of the rest of T'nakh (as will be explained later), the text

is a clear parody. Of what...we will see.

As the story opens, we meet our first player: Achashverosh. Although he is described as a powerful king, ruling over 127 provinces from Hodu (India?) to Kush (Ethiopia?) – we soon find that his power is more illusion than reality.

First of all, the party about which we read in the first chapter (1:3-8) seems to be his inauguration ball (see v. 2); yet it only takes place in the third year of his rule. This seems to indicate that the transfer of power into his hands was not so smooth. We will soon see that plots abound in and around his court and that his control over the realm is not very secure.

The description of the party brings three issues to the fore:

The many allusions to the Mishkan (Tabernacle) / Mikdash (Temple). Keep in mind that the Ba'al haMegillah (author) expects every reader to be familiar with T'nakh and will pick up any word-associations made here. Among the materials described here are several which are prominent in the Mishkan: T'khelet (royal blue), Argaman (purple), Kessef (silver) and Shesh (marble). Indeed, the Midrash posits that the vessels which Achashverosh used at this party were the vessels of the Mikdash – this interpretation was probably motivated by the many Mikdash-associations in the description of the party.

(Rav Menachem Liebttag has a fascinating shiur on exactly this point – with many more illustrations. You can find it at his Tanach Study Center Website: it comes highly recommended!)

Achashverosh seems to be very insecure – both personally and politically. He spares no expense to show off his wealth – and specifically invites the governors, ministers and soldiers of the Persian and Medean armies. It seems that he is trying to consolidate his power and bring the military into his good graces. At the end of his six-month party (!), he invites all the citizenry of Shushan to his gala bash. This insecurity will increase and become a prominent feature in the events of the Megillah.

The image of Achashverosh's kingdom, a monarchy governed by protocol. Note how often the word Dat – a Persian word meaning "custom" or "protocol" – shows up in the Megillah: 20 times! (Save for one verse in Daniel, it doesn't appear in any other books of the T'nakh). This would seem to indicate that everything in Achashverosh's realm was done "properly" and that the system was orderly and just. We soon find that this kingdom of Dat is just as illusory as his power.

## **B) VASHTI (1:9-22)**

Vashti is not, properly speaking, a "player" in this narrative. She is much more of a foil, presented as the set-up for the story to unfold. Even after she is gone (dead? exiled?), her shadow hangs over the palace – but more on that later.

The first indication that Achashverosh's power is a lot of fluff is when he decides to show off his beautiful queen (presumably to outshine the beauty of their wives) – and she refuses to come out! This great king, protector of the realm, defender of the empire, ruler of Persia, etc. etc. controls nothing! His own queen refuses him and is not obeisant to his wishes. (Although in modern times this would seem to prove nothing about his political power – in Persia of 2500 years ago, this "failing" was quite telling – as we see from the tone of the letters sent out at the end of the first chapter).

We soon learn something else about the king. For all of his power – he never makes any decisions (is he passive-aggressive?). As a matter of fact, he doesn't ever say "no" to any of his advisors! A strange king – a classic "yes-man" sitting on the throne.

We get some insight into how his advisors have learned to "play him". Memuchan (who the Gemara identifies as Haman) knows that if he advises the king to kill (or banish) Vashti on account of her defiance of the king – the drunk monarch may wake up on the morn and feel foolish and humiliated that he had to exile the queen for his own honor – and take out his anger on Memuchan. In order to get the king to "get rid" of Vashti, Memuchan appeals to Achashverosh's sense of justice. He is the defender of men's rights throughout the kingdom and must act decisively on behalf of all the poor princes and governors throughout the Empire whose wives will surely rebel, following Vashti's (unpunished) lead. By appealing to Achashverosh's sense of nobility, the wise advisor allows the king to do what he wants without feeling a sense of humiliation.

Two more notes about the first chapter. First of all, as the Gemara points out, this first set of letters (v. 22) seems to be quite foolish. The king sends out letters to every province, announcing that every man rules in his own house!????! (According to the Gemara, this caused the second letters – announcing the "loosing" of Jewish blood – to be taken less seriously by the citizenry who already cast a jaundiced eye on this king's pronouncements).

Second, as R. David Hentschke points out (Megadim vol. 23), the king has to send these letters to each province in their own language (v. 22 – this phrasing shows up several times in the Megillah). As powerful as the king may be, he hasn't been successful in establishing Persian as the language of the realm; perhaps his rule is not so ironclad as it might seem (reminds us a bit of the USSR???)

## **IV. CHAPTER 2**

### **A) A NEW QUEEN (2:1-4)**

We are quickly reminded of Achashverosh's inability to decide anything for himself. It takes his servants to suggest finding a new queen by gathering all of the maidens to Shushan for a "tryout" with the king.

As any student of T'nakh remembers, such a call went out once before – when David was old and near death. As we read in the beginning of Melakhim (Kings), they searched for a young maiden throughout Yisra'el – and found Avishag haShunamit. Note the contrast – whereas the one girl was found (although many undoubtedly would have wanted to be chosen); here, all the girls have to be forcibly brought to Shushan (note the wording in v. 3). And why not...who would want follow Vashti?

There is another interesting allusion in v. 3: The phrase v'Yafked haMelekh P'kidim v'Yik'b'tzu reminds us of a nearly similar phrase used in the first "Jew in the foreign court" story. When Yosef successfully interprets Pharaoh's dreams, he advises that Pharaoh appoint officers to collect the wheat of the seven plentiful years – Ya'aseh Pharaoh v'Yafked P'kidim...v'Yik'b'tzu... (B'reshet 41:34-35). This allusion is not for naught; the Ba'al haMegillah is showing us how Achashverosh and his servants viewed these young girls – just like wheat to be collected and brought to the palace.

## **B) MORDECHAI AND ESTHER (2:5-20)**

We are immediately introduced to our two heroes – Mordechai and Esther. It is critical to note that both of these names are not only Persian (and not Hebrew) – they are both pagan names related to various gods of the pantheon! The Esther-Ishtar-Astarte connection is well-documented (besides the fact that the Megillah explicitly gives her "real" name – Hadassah); our heroine is named for the goddess of fertility. The Gemara (BT Menahot 65) gives Mordechai a more "Jewish" name – Petah'ya – and, again, the Mordechai-Marduk (god of creation in many mythologies throughout the Near East) connection has been extensively written up.

Why do these two righteous people, through whom God saves His people, have such names?

[note: Jews taking – or being given – non-Jewish "alternate" names when in the foreign court is the norm in T'nakh. Note Yoseph, who is named "Tzoph'nat Pa'a'ne'ach" by Pharaoh; Daniel, who is named "Belt-Shatzar" by N'vuchadnetzar, as well as Daniel's three companions. Note that Jews were occasionally given names which were associated with pagan gods – compare Daniel 1:7 with 4:5. Mordechai and Esther seem to be two examples of the same phenomenon. Note that according to the Gemara (BT Megillah 13a), the name "Esther" was given to her by the non-Jews, in response to her beauty.]

Even more curious is Mordechai's insistence that Esther not reveal her identity (as a Jewess) while in the palace (v10, 20). As we shall soon see, even Mordechai's identity was not obvious; he was not distinguished in any external way from any other citizen.

There are a couple of verses which are telling within the scope of Esther's successful entrance into the palace.

(v. 16) – Esther was finally chosen in the seventh year of Achashverosh's reign – in other words, the selection of a queen took four years. (One very tired king! – See 2:12; even in his hedonistic behavior, he followed Dat!).

(v. 17-19) Compare the royal feast in honor of his queen (ironically – "in place of Vashti" – the dead (or exiled) queen's shadow hangs over the palace and Esther is likely aware that her fate may be no better than her predecessor's) with v. 19. As much as the king loves Esther – his servants are bringing more virgins into the palace! Insecure is the best description of anyone with a position of power in this court.

## **C) THE PLOT (2:21-23)**

As we all know, this little paragraph is critical to the later success of our heroes. Note, however, that it is Achashverosh's own guards – who are charged with defending him – who are plotting against him. This kingdom is, indeed, unstable and always ready for a shake-up.

## **V. CHAPTER 3**

### **A) ENTER HAMAN (3:1-7)**

Suddenly – and very much out of the blue – Haman is elevated to a position of importance in the kingdom. This again demonstrates – despite the appearance of Dat – the helter-skelter way in which power and impotence, success and failure – even life and death – are handled most capriciously in the palace.

As much as we know about Achashverosh's terrible insecurity – we quickly learn about Haman's personal devil – his ego. Imagine that the king of the greatest empire on earth has just appointed a relative nobody (as it seems Haman was beforehand) to be grand vizier and that all citizens should pay him homage. Wouldn't he be too enthralled with the sudden attention and respect to care about one or two people who don't bow down? Not Haman – his ego just takes him right past all the knee-benders and focuses his attention on the one person who refuses to bow – Mordechai. As much as we would expect him to be happy with the new position – he is merely enraged (and seemingly obsessed with that rage) at Mordechai.

Note that it isn't obvious to Haman that Mordechai is Jewish – Haman has to find that out from someone else in order to figure out which

nation to destroy (as he wants to annihilate all of Mordechai's people. By the way, this paints Haman as much less of an ideological anti-Semite than we are used to thinking – but that belongs to another shiur.) Evidently, Mordechai's behavior – or, at least his dress and external demeanor – did not mark him as a Jew. Just like his niece, he seems to have been quite assimilated (see the Book of Ezra for more background on this phenomenon).

Now – Haman, the grand vizier of the kingdom of Dat, decides to wipe out an entire nation due to the slight to his ego. How does he decide when to do it? By lottery (Pur)! What a joke this Dat proves to be!

## **B) ACHASHVEROSH AND HAMAN (3:8-15)**

There isn't a whole lot say here; the dialogue between these two speaks for itself. Although everything is done properly, the reader instinctively feels that a king who is willing to condemn a people without even finding out who they are (read 3:8-11 carefully) is not doing a good job of running his empire.

In order to keep an eye on the story, let's put together the chronology of events. The king's party (Vashti's farewell bash) took place in the third year of his reign. Esther was crowned – and Mordechai saved the king's life – in the seventh year. Haman had the letters (allowing the anti-Semites to kill the Jews) sent out on Nissan 13 in the twelfth year of the king's reign. In other words, Esther has been queen for a bit more than four years by this time – and her identity was still a total secret.

## **VI. CHAPTER 4**

### **A) ESTHER AND MORDECHAI (4:1-17)**

Mordechai finds out about this plot – and begins to demonstrate signs of "Teshuvah" (repentance). (Compare 4:1,3 with Yonah 3:5,6,8) He does not, however, do this in front of the palace gate, where he seems to retain his composure. He does, however, get the message in to Esther as to what is going on and he pleads with her to go to the king and have Haman's order overturned.

We are immediately reminded of how capricious this king really is. The beloved queen hasn't seen the king in thirty days (v. 11) (and probably wonders in whose arms he sleeps tonight) – and even she is subject to death if she comes to him unbeckoned unless he agrees to see her (shades of Vashti again!)

At this point, Mordechai sends the message which turns Esther around – and she begins to demonstrate not only her tremendous commitment and courage to her nation; but also an amazing type of wisdom – those very characteristics which reflect her Tzelem Elokim in the most powerful way.

For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this. (4:14)

Mordechai told her about the B'rit (covenant) between God and the B'nei Yisra'el. We are promised that we will outlive all of the Hamans – but that B'rit only applies to the nation as a whole, not to individuals or families. Esther – you may make it through this next upheaval – and you may not. In any case, the Jews will be saved, as God always has His ways of keeping the B'rit.

Esther realizes the wisdom and truth of this argument and acquiesces to Mordechai's plea. Now, she plans her strategy...let's take a peek behind the scenes. First, a few words about this remarkable type of wisdom.

It is natural to see everything in life through the eyes of our experience. This is why honest people often find it difficult to disbelieve others or question their motivations; they cannot recognize the lie in the other person's words because they have no such possibility inside of their own hearts. In the same way, kind people often ascribe positive motives to questionable behavior of others – because they could never recognize mean thoughts in others as they have no such thoughts in their own persona.

It takes a tremendous type of wisdom to separate yourself from what you instinctively feel and how you usually view the world and to see it from the other person's perspective. While this may be easy in a sympathetic conversation (although not nearly as easy as it seems); it is most difficult when deciding how to fight an enemy. The trick is to learn how to think like the enemy – without becoming the enemy.

This was perhaps the greatest miracle of Hanukkah – that the Maccabees were able to think like Greeks (it certainly took great strategy to outfox that mighty army with a small band) – without becoming Greeks (well, not for a couple of generations at least).

In the same way, we will see how Esther manipulates Achashverosh and Haman into a fateful (and, for Haman, fatal) collision course – simply by playing them according to their own personalities and weaknesses.

## **VII. CHAPTER 5**

### **A) ESTHER AND ACHASHVEROSH (5:1-5)**

Let's keep in mind that Esther is risking her life to come into Achashverosh's throne room – and she knows that the king knows this. In other words, she is aware that Achashverosh will consider her request to be very important – important enough to risk her life. We would think that when the king favors her and agrees to grant nearly any request – “even until half the kingdom” – that she would seize this opportunity and ask for salvation and for Haman's orders to be rescinded.

Instead, she invites Achashverosh and Haman to a special party she has prepared for that very evening. Why didn't she ask for salvation at this point?

Esther understood a great deal about politics. Remember – she hasn't seen the king for thirty days. Even if she is still his favorite – she is still not on the “inside” right now. Haman, on the other hand, has just had a drinking party with the king (3 days earlier), celebrating their letters sent out to kill the Jews. If she were to accuse Haman, the king might not believe her and the whole effort would be lost.

She invites the two of them to a party. As disgusting as the prospect sounds, it is the first step in a brilliant plan of psychological warfare.

Let's consider how each of them would react to this invitation:

Haman, as the consummate egotist, has his ego blown up even bigger than before (as we will soon see). He alone is invited to sup with the king and queen!

Achashverosh, on the other hand, must be suspicious. There has already been (at least) one plot on his life – now, Esther risked her life just to invite him and Haman to a party? Is something going on between the two of them (more on this later)? Are they plotting against me?

### **B) THE FIRST PARTY (5:6-8)**

At this party, the king expects to find out what Esther really has on her mind – maybe his suspicions were for naught? Instead, she surprises him by asking him to return – with Haman – for another party the next night!

Following the psychological makeup of our two party guests – each of the states of mind described above became exacerbated.

Esther knew that Haman's ego would continue to grow – and she also knew that he would leave the palace via the gate – and see Mordechai sitting there. Just feed his ego – and he will self-destruct.

### **C) HAMAN AT HOME (9-14)**

Indeed, Haman becomes so enraged when he sees Mordechai that, after a short bragging session with his family, he runs back to the palace to ask Achashverosh to allow him to hang Mordechai immediately. He cannot wait eleven months to kill his arch-nemesis – he needs satisfaction right away (ah, the impetuous egotist.)

## **VIII. CHAPTER 6**

### **A) HAMAN AND ACHASHVEROSH (6:1-10)**

Why couldn't the king sleep? The Gemara provides the obvious answer – he had thoughts of plot and coup on his worried mind. Why did he call for his chronicles to be read? It seems that this powerful king, ruler over 127 provinces – had no friends. There was no one he could trust or turn to. Esther had planted a terrible bug in his mind – two parties in a row with Haman – what are the two of them planning to do? Indeed – what have they already done?

Just as the king discovers that he owes Mordechai a favor from over four years ago – and decides that the way to gain the allegiance of the citizenry is to publicly demonstrate the rewards of loyalty to the crown – Haman turns up in the outer courtyard of the palace. The king had to wonder what Haman was doing there so late at night (!?!). The king summoned Haman for some advice – and for a chance to take him down a peg or two. Now, the king demonstrates some acumen of his own.

In 6:6, the king asks Haman what to do for someone he really favors. Haman, that old egotist, is so caught up in his own power, that he describes a truly regal parade which he assumes will feature him as the honoree. How very surprised he is when the king orders him to take the self-same Mordechai and lead him on the king's horse.

(Note that the phrase to be called out while leading this honoree: Kakhah ye'Aseh la'Ish Asher... shows up in one other place in T'nakh. This is the beginning of the formula of Halitza – the refusal of Levirate marriage, which accompanies the woman's disdainful spit. [D'var[D'varim 25:9]ur own conclusions about the satiric effect accomplished by the Ba'al haMegillah).

### **B) HAMAN AND MORDECHAI (6:11-14)**

Haman returns to his house “in mourning”. The Rabbis have a lot to say about the events of this morning – but, even on a p’shat level, it is clear that Haman’s fortunes have taken a significant turn for the worse. He is quickly rushed to the second party – and, in his case, his own farewell.

## **IX. CHAPTER 7**

### **A) THE SECOND PARTY (7:1-9)**

This is the denouement of the story as far as we are concerned. Haman still doesn’t know who Esther is – but he is clearly shattered and his ego is as fragile as ever. Achashverosh is equally disturbed and must be getting more confused by Esther’s repeated parties without asking for what she really wants (it is clear that the king knows she wants something more – which is why he keeps asking her).

Now, she pulls out all the cards. The king thinks that she and Haman are hatching a plot against him (and have been having an affair?) – and suddenly Haman is revealed as the villain who is plotting against her. Haman thinks that he is still on the road to satisfaction in the matter of the Jews; he’ll just need to wait until Adar. He has no idea that Esther is one of “them”.

Esther points to Haman and all is lost. The confusion and anger of the king, the confusion and fear of Haman – create an emotional jumble which ultimately leads to the king’s explosion when he finds Haman lying on Esther’s divan, begging for mercy. Haman is erased and (here we go again) Mordechai takes his place (compare 8:2 with 3:10). The capricious king has (for the meantime) elevated the Jews and they are saved. We all know, however, that the happy ending of the story isn’t permanent and that the rocky shores of existence in exile (which is probably one of the sub-messages of the Megillah) are not safe for Jews.

## **X. POSTSCRIPT**

We have taken a cursory look at some of the events as described in the Megillah and found that Esther displayed extraordinary wisdom and courage in her successful effort to save her people. We are very right to regard this as a Nes as it is a reflection of God’s Image as found within our heroine. God’s Name is not found – because, unlike Pesach, this is not a story about the suspension of the laws of nature. It is, rather, a story about human strength and nobility used in the most positive and productive effort imaginable – the salvation of Am Yisra’el. (That and a really great satire of the Persian Kingdom)

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### **MEGILLAT ESTHER, ITS 'HIDDEN' MESSAGE**

Is the Megilla a satire? It certainly contains many strange details that beg interpretation. But if so, why would a satire be included in the Tanach. In the following shiur, we attempt to 'unmask' Megillat Esther by considering its historical and prophetic setting.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

We begin our study with one of the most well known psukim of the Megilla:

"Ish **yehudi** haya be-Shushan ha-**bira** - u-shmo **Mordechai**" (see Esther 2:5).

Even though this pasuk is proudly read aloud by the entire congregation, most people do not appreciate its prophetic 'sting'. However, an ear tuned to the prophecies of Zecharya and familiar with Tanach immediately catches its irony, as:

**ish yehudi** - implies more than simply someone who is Jewish;  
**ha-bira** - implies more than just 'the capital city'; and  
**Mordechai** - is not a Jewish name!

\* The phrase **ish yehudi** is mentioned only one other time in the entire Tanach - in Sefer Zecharya 8:23. There it describes a devout Jew in the city of Jerusalem - leading a group of non-Jewish followers in search of God.

\* the word **ha-bira** in Divrei Ha-yamim (see 29:1 & 29:19) is used by King David to describe specifically the bet ha-mikdash (the Temple). Prior to the time period of Megillat Esther, the Hebrew word bira finds no other mention in Tanach.

\* The name **Mordechai** is probably the most provocative word in the entire Megilla for it stems from the name of the Babylonian deity -Marduk (see II Kings 25:27 & Yeshayahu 39:1!). Prior to the Babylonian exile, no one would have dared give his son such a 'goyish' name.

[This does not imply that Mordechai was assimilated, rather his name may reflect the assimilation of his generation.]

And this may be only one of many psukim of the Megilla that are filled with irony and possibly satire. Yet, if this conclusion is correct, we must explain why the Megilla would employ satire to deliver its prophetic message. Furthermore, we must also determine more precisely what that prophetic message is, and how it relates to our celebration of Purim.

To answer these questions, our shiur will take the following steps:

- I. Base our above assumption that the Megilla should contain a prophetic message, related to its historical setting.
- II. Review both the historical and prophetic setting of the time period of the Megilla.
- III. Search for a thematic connection between this setting and the story in the Megilla, and support it with both textual and thematic parallels from other books in Tanach.
- IV. Explain why the Megilla employs this unique style.
- V. Explain how the celebration of Purim, as defined in the Megilla, relates to this theme.

#### **PART I - 'HESTER PANIM'**

As every book of the Tanach contains a prophetic message, Megillat Esther should be no different. It is commonly understood that the Megilla teaches us how to see the 'hidden hand' of God behind the events that ultimately lead to Bnei Yisrael's salvation from Haman. Some even suggest that the Megilla's use of the name Esther (from the Hebrew verb 'lehastir' - to hide) instead of her real name - Hadassa (see 2:7) teaches us this very lesson.

However, if the Megilla wants to show us how God saved His people, why isn't this message explicit? Furthermore, why isn't God's Name ever mentioned? Most every other sefer in Tanach expresses this point explicitly. Why is Megillat Esther different?

Furthermore, most all other seforim in Tanach explain not only how God saves Am Yisrael, but also why they are being punished. This theme of divine retribution is explicit in the Torah in the tochachot (Vayikra 26:3-46, Devarim 11:13-17, 28:1-69, etc.) and reiterated over and over again by all of the prophets. In fact Chazal's explanation of the name Esther reflects this very same concept:

"Esther min ha-Torah minayin?"

[What is the source in Torah for the story of Esther?]

"ve-Anochi haster aster panai ba-yom ha-hu"

[I will surely hide my face from you on that day.]

(Devarim 31:18 / See Chullin 139b).

However, if we take a closer look at that pasuk in Devarim, we find that its message is significantly different. Rather than explaining how God 'saves' Am Yisrael in a 'hidden manner', it explains how God 'punishes' them:

"And God told Moshe, after you die... this nation will leave Me and break My covenant...And My anger will be kindled against them on that day and I will forsake them, ["ve-histarti panai"] and I will hide My face from them... and many evils and troubles shall befall them - & they will say on that day, these evils are because God is not among us.

- Ve-anochi haster astir panai ba-yom ha-hu -

and I will hide My face from them on that day because of all the bad that they have done... [Therefore,]

- Write down this song and teach it to Bnei Yisrael, so that it will be My witness..." (see Devarim 31:16-18).

In these psukim, God warns Bnei Yisrael that should they betray His covenant, great evil will befall them. Even though it may appear to Bnei Yisrael that God has left them, these psukim teach them that God only appears to be 'hiding His face' ["hester panim"] from them. Nonetheless, Bnei Yisrael are expected to realize that their punishment is from God. Therefore, Moshe is to teach Bnei Yisrael Shirat Ha'azinu in order that they recognize this. The shira will teach Am Yisrael to contemplate their predicament and relate their punishment to their wayward behavior. To verify this point, simply read Shirat Ha'azinu [note especially 31:19-20.]

Above all, Shirat Ha'azinu explains how we are to determine why we are being punished. In that song, we are told:

"Zechor yemot olam, binu shnot dor va-dor..." (Devarim 32:7).

[Remember the days of old; consider the years of ages past.]

The shira teaches us to contemplate our history, especially how and why we were chosen (see 32:8-9), in order to realize why we are being punished. It reminds us that when something does go wrong, it is our fault, not God's (see 32:4-6!).

Even though God may hide His face, Shirat Ha'azinu does promise that God will ultimately redeem His people, however, not necessarily because they deserve redemption. Rather, God will have mercy on our pitiful predicament (see 32:26-27, also 32:37-38) and save us at the 'last minute'.

Most all of the prophets deliver a very similar message. They explain to Bnei Yisrael what they have done wrong, and hence why they are being punished. Prophecy teaches man not only to thank God for salvation, but also to recognize his faults and correct his mistakes.

Therefore, the Megilla should be no different, and especially because its name alludes to the pasuk in Chumash that commands us to search for a reason why we are punished.

[This supports the Gemara's question in Masechet Megilla 12a (middle) "sha'alu talmidav et Rashb"i: mipnei ma nitchayvu..."]

Even though the Megilla does not provide an explicit reason for this impending punishment, this background and its name suggest that we search for a 'hidden' (or implicit) one. To find that reason, we must consider prophetic and historical setting of that time period.

## PART II - HISTORICAL AND PROPHETIC SETTING

The opening psukim of the Megilla immediately point us to its time period (see 1:1-3). Achashverosh is a Persian king who reigns from India to Ethiopia in the city of Shushan. Considering that Cyrus (=Koresh) was the first Persian king, the story in Megillat Esther takes place during the Persian time period and thus after the time period when the Jews had an opportunity to return to Jerusalem.

Even though there is a controversy concerning precisely which Persian King Achashverosh was, he most certainly reigned after Koresh (the first Persian king), and thus, after Yirmiyahu's seventy years were over.

[Note: If you are not familiar with this time period, it is highly recommended that you review Kings II 23:31-25:12, Ezra 1:1-10 and 3:1-4:7, and Yirmiyahu 29:1-15. As you read Ezra 1:1-9, note how the Jews who did not make 'aliya' were encouraged to send 'money' instead! Seems like not much has changed in 2500 years!]

For those of you unfamiliar with this time period, here is a quick overview:

In the first year of his reign, Koresh issued his famous proclamation allowing and encouraging all of the Jews of the Persian Empire to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. The prophets clearly understood this historic decree as the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu's prophecy (see Ezra 1:1-9, II Divrei Ha-yamim 36:20-23). As God had promised, the time of redemption from the Babylonian Exile had come.

## YIRMIYAHU'S SEVENTY YEARS

To appreciate the prophetic importance of this opportunity, we need only quote Yirmiyahu's final message to the Babylonian Exile in regard to what was 'supposed' to happen when these seventy years were over:

"Thus said the Lord, when the 70 years are complete, I shall remember you and keep my promise to return you to this land.... [At that time.] you shall call out to Me - you shall come and pray to Me - and I will hear you...and you will ask for Me and find Me; if you will search for me with all your heart. Then I will be there for you, and I shall turn away your captivity and gather you from all the nations wherein you may be dispersed... and I will return you to the land from which you were exiled ..." (29:10-14).

According to Yirmiyahu, the return of the Exile would not be automatic. Rather, it was God's hope that their return would be catalyzed by sincere repentance and a yearning to return. In other words, God intended for the Babylonian Exile [as the word 'exile' implies] to be temporary. People don't stay in 'exile' unless they are forced to be there. Exile implies that one cannot return to his own land. [Otherwise the translation of 'galut' would be 'diaspora' instead of 'exile' / hey, not a bad idea!]

Note as well how Yirmiyahu's message is congruent with a primary theme of Chumash, i.e. God's desire for the Jewish people to become His 'model' nation - a vehicle through which all nations will come to recognize God (see Devarim 4:5-8 & Shmot 19:4-6). Recall as well that in that ideal setting, the bet ha-mikdash in Yerushalayim was to serve as a symbol of this national purpose.

[See previous shiurim on Parshiot Re'eh, Noach, and Vayetze. Recall that the mikdash is referred to as: "ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem le-shaken **shmo** sham"/ see Devarim 12:5-14.]

God's decision to destroy that Temple and exile his people was for a rehabilitative purpose. According to Yirmiyahu, God's hope was for the Exile to 'learn its lesson' during these seventy years in Bavel. Afterward, God hoped that the nation would be spiritually ready and anxious to return to their homeland, and to reconstruct their symbolic shrine - the Temple in Jerusalem.

Precisely as Yirmiyahu had predicted (seventy years after Bavel had risen to power), the opportunity to return arose when the Babylonian empire fell to Koresh (= Cyrus the Great), the first king of the Persian Empire (see Yirmiyahu 25:11-12, Ezra 1:1).

## A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Unfortunately, the response of the Exile to this historic opportunity was less than enthusiastic. A group of some forty thousand did return; however, the majority of Am Yisrael remained in Bavel. For an insight into the tragedy of the missed opportunity we need only quote the explanation given by Rav Yehuda Ha-Levi in Sefer Ha-Kuzari (II.24):

"Had the entire nation enthusiastically answered the divine call to return to the Land, the idyllic prophecies of the return to Zion would have been fulfilled and the Shchina would have returned. In reality, however, only a small portion returned. The majority remained in Bavel, willfully accepting the exile, as they did not wish to leave their homes & businesses etc." (sounds familiar...)

Even those who did return lacked enthusiasm. The apathy of the returnees is echoed in the prophecies of Chagai and Zecharya, the prophets of this time period (see Chagai 1:1-3; 2:3 see also Zecharya 4:10; 6:15; 7:4-7; 8:6).

How does all of this relate to Megillat Esther?

How could it not relate!

Could the fact that Am Yisrael remained scattered among the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire, while they could have returned a generation or two earlier to Jerusalem, not relate to the prophetic message of the Megilla?

Considering that Yirmiyahu's seventy years are over, why are so many Jews living in Shushan and all over the Persian empire during the time period of Achashverosh?

Could not this fact alone supply sufficient reason for God to consider Am Yisrael negligent of their covenantal responsibilities?

With this in mind, we must now take a second look at the Megilla in search of at least a 'hint' of this theme.

## PART III - THE THEME OF THE MEGILLA AND ITS SATIRE

Based on this historic and prophetic setting, one could suspect that the impending destruction of Am Yisrael by Haman may be a Divine punishment for their apathy. After all, the Jews living in the Persian empire appear to have:

- \* preferred Shushan over Yerushalayim;
- \* opted to subjugate themselves to Achashverosh rather than respond to God's call to return to their land;
- \* Replaced the bet ha-mikdash with the palace of Achashverosh!

["ve-nahafoch hu"]

Even though this prophetic message is not explicit in the Megilla, we will now show how it may be hidden in its satire.

[Note: Before we continue, it is important to clarify a problematic issue. We are about to relate many elements in the story of the Megilla to a satiric commentary on Persian Jewry. This does not mean that these events did not actually occur. The story of the Megilla is true and based on historic facts. However, its prophetic message is conveyed through the use of literary tools, such as satire and irony. Often, criticism is more poignant when delivered implicitly rather than explicitly. (Lehavdil, take for example George Orwell's criticism of the Russian revolution in 'Animal Farm'.)]

## TEXTUAL AND THEMATIC SUPPORT

For a start, we will bring two examples where there appears to be an 'echo' of God's voice behind certain statements in the Megilla.

For example, the story of Vashti may reflect God's utter disappointment with Am Yisrael for not returning to Israel to fulfill their divine purpose, to become God's 'model' nation:

"[Vashti was called to] come to the king and show all the nations her beauty... but she did not come as the King commanded, and he became very angry..." (see Esther 1:9-12).

Is not Vashti's behavior similar to that of Am Yisrael? Is not the King's conclusion similar to God's? Is not the fear that all the women in the Persian kingdom will now disobey their husbands ironic? If Am Yisrael (destined to be an 'or la-goyim') does not respond to its divine call, what could God expect from other nations?

[Note that in earlier prophecy, Am Yisrael is often compared to God's wife - see Hoshea 2:4,16-18. See also Zecharya 1:1-3, note 'shuvu elai...' and 'va-yiktzof, compare 1:12.]

Furthermore, who is the real king in the Megilla? Chazal raise the possibility that the word 'ha-melech' [the King] in the Megilla may be 'kodesh', as it often [in a hidden manner] may be referring to God and not to Achashverosh.

Even Haman's petition to Achashverosh to destroy Am Yisrael may echo a similar complaint that God may have against His own nation:

"There is a certain nation scattered among the nations whose laws are different than any other nation, but the laws of the King they do not keep, and it is not worthwhile for the King to leave them be" (3:8).

In a certain way, Haman's accusation is similar to God's threat in Shirat Ha'azinu to destroy Am Yisrael for not keeping His laws (32:26). After all, what purpose is there for God to keep His people if they refuse to obey Him and fulfill their divine goal?

Even though these first two examples may appear a bit 'stretched', a more convincing textual proof is found in the parallel between Achashverosh's palace and the bet mikdash. This parallel is significant for it reflects the fact the Bnei Yisrael had neglected the bet ha-mikdash in Yerushalayim, preferring instead to be dependent on the palace of Achashverosh. We begin by comparing the overall structure of each:

#### **KODESH KODASHIM - CHATZER PNIMIT**

The Megilla refers to the most inner chamber of the king's palace as the 'chatzer ha-pnimit' (5:1), where entry to anyone is forbidden under threat of death - unless called to enter (as Esther feared in 4:11). Here we find an obvious parallel to the kodesh ha-kodashim in the mikdash (Purim - kippurim!).

#### **KODESH - CHATZER CHITZONA**

The 'waiting area' outside the inner chamber is called the 'chatzer ha-chitzona' (6:4). Here 'ro'ei pnei ha-melech' (1:14) like Haman himself are allowed to enter freely. This is parallel to the kodesh where kohanim are permitted to enter.

[See description of the Temple in Yechezkel 40:18-19.]

#### **AZARA - SHA'AR BET HA-MELECH**

In front of the palace is 'sha'ar bet ha-melech' where people like Mordechai are permitted to stand (2:18,21). However, here one must dress properly ('aveilut' is not permitted), therefore he cannot be there dressed in sackcloth (see 4:2!). This area is parallel to the azara in the mikdash.

#### **YERUSHALAYIM - REHOV HA-IR SHUSHAN**

This is the area 'lifnei sha'ar ha-melech' (4:2) or 'rechov ha-ir' (4:6) where Mordechai can dress in sackcloth. This is parallel to the city of Yerushalayim surrounding the mikdash.

This parallel is strengthened by the Megilla's use of the word bira to describe Shushan. As we explained in our introduction, in Divrei Ha-yamim, the only other time in Tanach prior to Megillat Esther where this word is mentioned, bira describes specifically the bet ha-mikdash, and in the context of its purpose to serve as a national center and symbol of God's Name. [See DH I 29:1 & 19, you should read from 29:1-25 to see the context. (You'll find there a familiar passage from davening, which maybe you will now understand a little better.)]

[See also Masechet Middot I:9, where the Mishna refers to the bet ha-mikdash as the bira.]

Other parallels to mikdash are found in the use of key words such as 'yekar ve-tiferet' (1:4); 'tekhelet, butz, ve-argaman' (1:6) in the Megilla's description of the king's party.

[Based on these psukim, the gemara (Megilla 12a) claims that Achashverosh donned the 'bigdei kohen gadol' at his party!]

Even the 6-month party followed by a seven-day special celebration may parallel the six months that it took to build the mishkan (from Yom Kippur till Rosh Chodesh Nissan) followed by

the seven-day 'milu'im' ceremony. Likewise, Chazal explain, 've-keilim mi-keilim shonim' (1:7) as referring to the vessels of the bet ha-mikdash.

Chazal even suggest that Haman's decree may have been Am Yisrael's punishment for drinking from these keilim or alternately for their participation in and enjoyment of the royal party (see Megilla 12a).

[Note that according to pshat, the keilim had returned with Sheshbatzar during the time of Koresh (see Ezra 1:7-8).

However, the Midrash emphasizes the thematic connection between the party and Bnei Yisrael's lack of enthusiasm to build the mikdash.]

Hence we can conclude that the Megilla's satire suggests that during this time period Am Yisrael had replaced:

- \* God with Achashverosh;
- \* God's Temple with Achashverosh's palace; and
- \* Yerushalayim ha-bira with Shushan ha-bira! ['ve-nahafoch hu']

#### **70 DAYS / 70 YEARS**

Another seemingly unimportant detail in the Megilla concerning when the two decrees were sent might also allude to this prophetic backdrop.

Recall that the original decree calling for the destruction of the Jews was sent out on the 13th day of Nisan (3:12). Several days later Haman was hanged and Esther pleaded from the king to repeal this decree (8:3-6). Achashverosh agreed; however, the actual letters were not sent out until the 23rd of Sivan - some two months later (8:9)! What took so long?

By carefully comparing these two dates, we again find an amazing reminder of Yirmiyahu's prophecy of the seventy years. Between the 13th of Nisan until the 23rd of Sivan - 70 days elapsed (17+30+23). During these seventy days, all of the Jews throughout the Persian empire were under the tremendous peril of impending destruction, thinking that their doom was inevitable. Could this be an ironic reminder to the Jewish people that they had not heeded Yirmiyahu's prophecy of what he expected from Bnei Yisrael once the seventy years had expired (see 29:10-14!)?

A similar concept of suffering for a sin, a day for a year (and vice versa), is found twice in Tanach in related circumstances. After the sin of the 'meraglim', the forty days are replaced by the punishment of forty years of wandering. Here, too, the nation opted not to fulfill their divine destiny, preferring a return to Egypt to the conquest of Eretz Yisrael. Yechezkel, too, is required to suffer 'a day for each year.'

[For 390 days followed by an additional 40 days, he must lie on his side and repent for the sins of Israel and Yehuda that led to the destruction of Yerushalayim (Yechezkel 4:1-14!).]

A similar claim is made by the Midrash which suggests that Achashverosh threw his 180 day party in celebration of the fact that Yirmiyahu's seventy years were over and the bet ha-mikdash was not rebuilt. In pshat, this explanation is unreasonable. Why should the most powerful king of civilization worry about the prophecies of Yirmiyahu, while the Jews themselves do not listen to him? However, on the level of drash, this explanation is enlightening. Chazal, in the spirit of the Megilla - 've-nahafoch hu' - put into Achashverosh's mind what should have been in the mind of Am Yisrael, i.e. the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu's prophecy of seventy years and the desire to return.

#### **PESACH AND PURIM**

Based on our understanding thus far, it is also understandable why Israel's salvation from Haman's decree comes only after Am Yisrael collectively accept a three day fast. This fast takes place on the 15, 16, & 17th of Nisan. Interestingly enough, the events that led to the repeal of Haman's decree take place 'davka' during the holiday of Pesach - the holiday on which we celebrate our freedom from subjugation to a foreign nation and the beginning of our journey to the Promised Land.

#### **PART IV - WHY SATIRE?**

We have shown that the Megilla is laced with allusions to the fact that Am Yisrael does not answer its divine call during the Persian time period. But the question remains, why is this message only hinted at but not explicitly stated by Chazal? Most probably for the same reason that it is not explicit in the Megilla.

This is the power of satire. In order to strengthen the message, a powerful point is not explicitly stated, but only alluded to. The direct approach used by the other 48 nevi'im of Tanach had not been very successful.

[See Masechet Megilla 14a (top) - "gedola hasarat ha-taba'at shel Haman yoter mi-48 nevi'im...!"]

One could suggest that Anshei Knesset Ha-gdola, in their decision to write (see Bava Batra 15a) (and later canonize) Megillat Esther, had hoped that a satirical message would be more powerful than a direct one. Hence, Midrashim of Chazal that comment on the Megilla may follow a similar approach.

[Note how the prophet Natan's message to David ha-melech in regard to his sin with Bat-sheva was much more powerful because he used the 'mashal' of kivsats ha-rash" (see II Shmuel 12:1-7!).]

#### **PART V - THE MINHAGIM OF PURIM**

Up until this point we have explained how the satire in the Megilla may reflect a prophetic censure of Am Yisrael in Bavel for not returning to Yerushalayim when the opportunity arose during the time of Koresh. However, if our assumptions are indeed correct, then we would expect the outcome of the Megilla, or at least the celebration of Purim for future generations to reflect this theme.

Instead, we don't find any 'mass aliya' movement after our salvation. Nor does the celebration of Purim (with 'mishteh' and sending 'mishloach manot') appear to reflect this theme in any manner.

However, with a 'little help' from the prophecies of Zecharya, we can suggest an answer for these questions as well. To do so, we must first identify who the specific Persian King Achashverosh was.

#### **SOME MORE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The topic of the history of the Persian time period is very complicated and the subject of a major controversy between most Midrashei Chazal and the historians (& a minority opinion in Chazal). To explain this controversy is beyond the scope of this shiur, instead we will simply present the two conflicting opinions concerning when Achashverosh reigned.

According to Seder Olam (and hence the majority opinion in Chazal), Achashverosh was the Persian King immediately after Koresh, but before Daryavesh, and thus the story of the Megilla takes place after 'shivat tzion' (the return to Zion during the time of Koresh) but before the second bet ha-mikdash is actually built.

According to this opinion, the events of the Megilla had a tremendous affect on the situation in Yerushalayim. Only two years after the story of Megilla, King Darius, son of Esther gives the Jews permission to return and build the Second Temple. Construction began during the second year of Darius (= Daryavesh).

The events of the Megilla also appear to have catalyzed a major aliya movement. According to Chazal, Ezra's aliya from Bavel took place only a few years afterward, during the seventh year of his reign of Daryavesh (who Chazal identify with Artachshasta / see Ezra 7:1-9).

Thus, according to Seder Olam's opinion, the events of the Megilla indeed had a major effect on the rebuilding of the Temple and shivat tzion - the return to Zion.

According to most historians (and a minority opinion in Chazal / see Targum ha-shiv'im & Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer chapter 49), Achashverosh was the Persian king who succeeded Darius (486 - 465 BCE), and thus the story of the Megilla takes place some forty years after the second Temple was built, and thus after Chagai & Zecharya's plea to return and fulfill the potential of Bayit Sheni. [Its construction began in 521 BCE / in the second year of Darius the Great; hence the story in the Megilla takes place in 474 BCE.]

According to this opinion, no major event takes place

immediately after the events in the Megilla. In fact, over two decades pass before a new wave of olim come with Ezra and Nechemya to help strengthen the city of Yerushalayim. [The historians identify Artachshasta with Artaxerxes, not the same king as Darius.]

If our assumption concerning the satire of the Megilla is correct, why don't we find a mass aliya movement immediately after the miracle of Purim. [Jews of the twentieth century could ask themselves a similar question!]

Furthermore, according to either opinion, shouldn't the manner by which we celebrate Purim relate to this theme and satire?

Finally, why is it necessary to celebrate Purim for all generations? Purim is not the only time in our history when Bnei Yisrael are saved from terrible enemies. Chazal go even one step further. They claim that Purim will be the only holiday kept at the time of the final redemption! (See Rambam Hilchot Megilla, Esther 9:28 and commentaries).

#### **THE MEGILLA AND SEFER ZECHARYA**

If we follow the opinion of the 'historians' in regard to the time period of Megillat Esther, then the prophecies of Zecharya concerning the potential of Bayit Sheni precede the story in the Megilla. If so, then we posit that numerous textual parallels between the Megilla and Sefer Zecharya are intentional. In other words, when 'anshei knesset ha-gedola' wrote Megillat Esther (most likely during the time period of Ezra / see Bava Batra 15a), they assumed that anyone reading the Megilla was familiar with Sefer Zecharya, and hence would understand the implicit meaning of these parallels.

We will now show how the Megilla may suggest that Am Yisrael's predicament during the time period of Achashverosh was caused because of Zecharya's prophecies (a generation earlier) were not taken seriously! To appreciate this message, we must study Zecharya chapters 7->8.

For a background, review the first six chapters of Sefer Zecharya, noting how they focus on one primary theme - the return of the Shchina to Yerushalayim. However, Zecharya warns numerous times that the Shchina's return will be a function of Am Yisrael's covenantal commitment (see 6:15). Redemption is indeed possible; however, Zecharya insists that the 'spiritual' return of Am Yisrael was no less important than their physical return:

"Shuvu eilai.. ve-ashuva aleichem" (1:3, see also 8:7-8).

[It is highly suggested that you read at least the first two chapters of Zecharya (note 'hadassim' and 'ish rochev al sus' in chapter 1, and 'prazot teshev Yerushalayim' in chapter 2) and then chapters 7-8 before continuing.]

#### **SHOULD WE FAST ON TISHA BE-AV?**

According to Chagai 2:18, construction of the Temple began on this same year, i.e. during the second year of Daryavesh. Zecharya chapter seven opens two years later when an official delegation from Bavel arrives in Jerusalem to ask Zecharya a very fundamental question:

"Ha-evkeh be-chodesh ha-chamishi?" Should we continue to fast in the 5th month (i.e. the fast of Tisha Be-av)? (see 7:3)

The question appears to be quite legitimate. After all, now that the Temple is rebuilt, there no longer appears to be a need to fast. However, Zecharya's lengthy and official reply (7:4-8:23) to this question contains an eternal message that relates to the very nature of the ideal redemption process.

In Zecharya 7:4-7, God appears to be quite disturbed by the people's question regarding the need to fast. Instead of showing their interest in the greater picture of the redemption process, the people seem only to be interested in whether or not they have to fast. In the eyes of the prophet, their question reflected a general attitude problem in regard to the entire redemption process.

God's answer implies that the fast of Tisha Be-av is not a divine commandment - rather it was a 'minhag' instituted by Chazal to remember not only the Temple's destruction, but also the reason why the churban took place (see 7:5-6). Thus, God explains, feasting or fasting is man's decision, while God is interested in

something much more basic - that Bnei Yisrael keep the mitzvot which they had neglected during the first Temple period (see 7:5-14).

Zecharya continues his answer with two chapters of 'musar' (rebuke) in which he emphasizes the most basic mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael must keep in order for the Shchina to return:

"EMET u-mishpat shalom shiftu be-sha'areichem, ve-chesed ve-rachamim asu ish et achiv. Almana, ve-yatom ve-ani al ta'ashoku..." (7:8-10).

- Truth, social justice, helping the poor and needy, and thinking kindly of one's neighbor, etc.

God is anxious for His Shchina to return, but in order for that to happen, Yerushalayim must first become a city characterized by truth (8:1-3). God foresees the return the exiles from lands in the east and west. With their return, God and His nation will become once again covenantal partners, through "emet & tzedaka" (see 8:7-8).

Finally, after many words of encouragement and repeated 'musar' (see 8:11-17), God finally answers the original question concerning the fast days. Should Am Yisrael return to Israel and keep "emet ve-shalom, the four fast days commemorating the destruction of Yerushalayim will become holidays:

"tzom ha-rvii, v'tzom ha'chamishi... [The four fast days] will be instead for Yehuda days of celebration... [on the condition that] they will love **emet & shalom**" (see 8:18-19 / note parallel to Megilla 9:30-31!)

After two chapters of rebuke, Zecharya finally answers the people's original question. Should Bnei Yisrael indeed show their devotion to God, i.e. if they practice 'emet u-mishpat shalom', then the fast days, the days of crying for Jerusalem, will become holidays instead.

Should Bnei Yisrael indeed love keeping emet & shalom (these two words simply summarize the primary points raised by Zecharya in this perek), then the redemption process will be complete.

## ISH YEHUDI

Zecharya concludes this prophecy with his vision of numerous people from many great nations will one day come to Yerushalayim in search of God. They will gather around the ish yehudi, asking for his guidance, for they will have heard that God is with His people (8:20-23).

Had Am Yisrael heeded this prophetic call in the time of Koresh and Daryavesh, then they would not have been scattered among 127 provinces during the time of Achashverosh. One could suggest that instead of celebrating with the Persians at the party in Shushan, the Jews could (& should) have been celebrating with God at His bet ha-mikdash in Yerushalayim.

The ish yehudi would have been in the bira in Yerushalayim, making God's Name known to other nations; instead, the Megilla opens as an ish yehudi is found in the bira of Achashverosh in Shushan, ironically carrying the name of foreign god.

[One could also suggest that Mordechai's institution of the yearly celebration of Purim relates specifically to this prophecy. First of all, note how this day is described as one that turns around from 'yagon' to 'simcha', from 'mourning to holiday' (see Esther 9:22). Purim may symbolize the manner in which the fast days for Jerusalem will one day become holidays.]

This parallel to Zecharya could explain the reason for the special mitzvot that Mordechai instituted for Purim in his first letter (see 9:20-22). They reflect Zecharya's repeated message of helping the needy (matanot le-evyonim/ note 7:10) and thinking nicely of one's neighbors (mishloach manot ish le-re'eihu / note 8:16-17!). Once a year we must remind ourselves of the most basic mitzvot that we must keep in order that we become worthy of returning to Yerushalayim and rebuilding the Bet ha'mikdash.

Certain halachot instituted by Chazal may reflect this message. Interestingly, Shushan Purim is replaced with Yerushalayim Purim for the walled cities from the time of Yehoshua bin Nun replace the walled city of Shushan! [See Yehoshua 21:42 and its context,

compare to Esther 9:2.]

## SHALOM VE-EMET

Although this explanation for certain minhagim of Purim may seem a bit 'stretched', textual proof is found in the closing psukim of the Megilla (9:29-32 / read it carefully!).

Mordechai and Esther need to send out a second 'igeret' (letter) explaining and giving authority ('tokef') to the minhagim of Purim explained in the first igeret. What was the content of this special second letter? To our surprise, one short phrase:

"Divrei shalom ve-emet"! [See 9:30, read carefully.]

These two key words point us directly back to Zecharya's prophecy about the fast days becoming holidays (read Zecharya 8:18-19 again)! They explain not only when, but also why the fast days will become holidays - i.e. if Bnei Yisrael keep shalom and emet! The second igeret may simply be an explanation of the purpose of the minhagim of Purim - Mordechai and Esther use this letter to explain to Am Yisrael why Purim has been established - a yearly reminder of the prophecies of Zecharya which remain unfulfilled.

The continuation of this igeret strengthens this interpretation. Under what authority (tokef) does Mordechai institute these halachot?

"Ka'asher kiymu al nafsham divrei ha-tzomot ve-za'akatam" (9:31) [Compare these psukim carefully to Zecharya 8:18-19.]

Recall, God had told Zecharya that fast days and feast days are up to man to decide. Now, according to the second igeret, just like ('ka'asher') the prophets instituted four fast days in order that we remember Yerushalayim, Mordechai institutes a 'feast day' to remember Yerushalayim.

[Note that this pasuk cannot be referring to our Ta'anit Esther, for if it refers to the three day fast, that fast was a one time event and was not "al nafsham ve-al zar'am". Likewise, it cannot be the fast of the 13th of Adar, as that custom only began during the time period of the Ge'onim. Therefore, it must refer to the four fast days on Jerusalem.]

So why didn't everyone return immediately afterward to Israel?

Most probably, after the events of the Megilla, a mass return to Yerushalayim was not realistic. Nonetheless, Mordechai wanted to institute a holiday that would remind Am Yisrael that should such an opportunity arise (once again), that they will know how to relate to it properly. Sefer Zecharya and its theme of shalom ve-emet serve as the spiritual guide.

[This interpretation may help explain why the celebration of Purim will remain even after our final redemption.]

Purim, therefore, has deep meaning for all generations. Its message may have been 'hiding' behind the costumes, the drinking ("ad de-lo yada"), the 'purim Torah', and 'shalach mannos'. It may have been lost within our ignorance of Tanach. Its message, however, remains eternal, just as our aspirations for Yerushalayim and the establishment therein of a just society - remain eternal.

purim sameiach,  
menachem