

**[CS Late breaking addition:**

**Rabbi YY Jacobson <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net>**

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The Truth About Anti-Semitism Is Hard for Jews to Accept

If October 7th Didn't Wake You Up, What Will?

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

Dedicated by Daniel Penn to my children, Gabrielle, Adin and Elon who continuously help me to realize the potential G-d has blessed me.

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The Uniqueness of Jew-Hatred

Hatred of the Jew has been universal, permanent, and deep.[1] Death for the Jews has been desired and plotted by the tyrants of every age. Pharaoh, Sancheriv, Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus, the Roman Caesars, the Turks, the Christians, the Muslims, Stalin, Hitler, and almost every great power that ever lived and flourished, defined the Jew as a target for abuse or complete annihilation. Jews have been expelled from nearly every country in which they resided—England, France, Hungary, Austria, Germany, Italy, Greece, Lithuania, Spain, Portugal, Bohemia, Moravia, Russia, Poland and the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, and of course, from their ancient homeland, Eretz Israel. It is estimated that every 22 years Jews have been exiled from another country.

Throughout the centuries, many millions of Jews were murdered, including millions of infants and children. The Babylonians and Romans killed three million Jews. The Christians and the Muslims in their Crusades, inquisitions, conversion decrees, blood libels, and general religious fervor over a span of 15 centuries slaughtered millions of Jews, often wiping out entire communities. Chmelnitzky and his bandits beheaded 300,000 Polish Jews during 1648-49, while Hitler put to death a third of our people, including one-and-a-half million children. In nearly every country, Jews have, at some time, been subjected to beatings, torture, and murder solely because they were Jewish.

And though many of us thought that the evil of anti-Semitism perished in a post-Auschwitz world, we have been rudely awakened during the last few years as it once again rears its ugly face, particularly among Arab nations and in Europe.

Then came October 7th, 2024. 1200 Jews were murdered brutally, Jewish children burned alive, Jewish women were tied down, raped, and beheaded during the horrific crime, and so many people here in America celebrated such unspeakable horrors, and are now blaming Israel for trying to avoid a second Holocaust, which Hamas would crave to commit.

Why such hatred and fear of a people who never constituted more than a small minority? Why did almost every great culture and civilization see us as their ultimate enemy? Are we such an evil people as to threaten the well-being of virtually every civilization for the past 4,000 years? Why is it that otherwise sophisticated and educated men and women of academia are filled with irrational hatred toward Israel for literally trying to defend its citizens from murder while ignoring the horrors perpetrated en masse by its Arab neighbors?

Most scholars and historians, including many Jews themselves, choose to view this ongoing obsession not as something uniquely connected to Jews or Judaism but rather as a multitude of isolated events erupting as a result of distinct circumstances.

For example, why do millions of Muslims hate Jews today? Why would the leader of Hamas speak about the need to murder every Jew alive? Because — the common explanation goes — we are occupiers occupying their country, and they yearn for liberation. If Israel would only grant the Arabs independence and hope, the venom would dissipate.

But why did they kill us before the "occupation" of 1967? Why did six Arab countries try to destroy Israel at a time when there were no settlements or settlers? Because during the War of Independence in 1948

between the newly created State of Israel and its Arab neighbors, hundreds of thousands of Arabs fled their homes and ended up in refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza. The Arabs were seeking to return to their homes inside pre-1967 Israel.

But why did the Arabs initiate this war against Israel in 1948 and thus create, through their own error, the refugee problem? Why did they not accept the United Nations partition of Palestine and accept the reality of Jewish existence in the Jews' ancient homeland? And why were scores of Jews murdered during the 1920s and 1930s? For this, we must search for yet another explanation. The excuses go on and on.

The attempt removes the notion of anti-Semitism from anything distinctly Jewish. The Germans, we are told, hated the Jews because they were scapegoats for the humiliating defeat of Germany in World War I and a depressed economy, and so many Christians wanted the Jews dead because they claimed we killed their god. Stalin murdered Jews because he believed they were capitalists, while Europeans of the Middle Ages were repulsed by the Jew because of his economic success, and on and on.

Yet this approach is unconvincing. To deny that there is a single pervasive cause for anti-Semitism and to reject that an underlying reason has sparked the hatred of billions of non-Jews for four millennia contradicts both common sense and history. Anti-Semitism has existed for too long and in too many disparate cultures to intellectually maintain a claim that each culture hated the Jews because of some distinct factor disconnected from them being Jewish. To believe that Jew-hatred is just another form of racial or religious bigotry, lunacy, ethnic hatred, lack of tolerance, xenophobia, resentment of affluence, and professional success is to turn a blind eye to the core cause of this unique loathing. Of course, various factors may exacerbate anti-Semitism and cause it to erupt at a given time, but these factors do not explain the origin and genesis of this hatred. In "Why the Jews?" Authors Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin put it well: Economic depressions do not account for gas chambers.[2]

Haman's Attempt

The famous Purim story, recorded in the biblical Book of Esther and read during the upcoming Purim festival, relates one more attempt made some 2,400 years ago to exterminate the Jewish people, this time by a Persian minister named Haman.

Haman approached the then-king of Persia, Achashverosh, and offered him a tremendous sum in exchange for permission to arrange a "Final-Solution." He desired that every member of the Jewish nation, men, women, and children, be put to death. The king responded:[3] "The money is given to you (Haman), and the nation (of Israel) is yours to do with, as you see fit."

This interaction seems quite understandable. Achashverosh, no less a miserable anti-Semite than Haman, happily embraces the idea of a world devoid of Jews. Yet the Talmud feels it necessary to illustrate the situation employing a parable.

A Mound and a Ditch

Here is the Talmud's parable:[4]

"Achashverosh and Haman are compared to two people, one of whom had a mound of dirt in his field, and another one who had a ditch in his field. The owner of the ditch said to himself, 'How I wish the owner of the mound would give me his mound in exchange for money, so that I can fill my ditch.' And the owner of the mound said to himself, 'How I wish the owner of the ditch would sell me the use of his ditch, so that I can remove the mound of dirt from my field and dump it into his ditch.' "After some time," relates the Talmud, "these two men encountered one another. The owner of the ditch said to the owner of the mound, 'Sell to me your mound!' The owner of the mound responded: 'Please, take it for free.'"

The Talmudic illustration is clear. Achashverosh is compared to the owner of the mound—the mound being a metaphor for the Jewish people who lived under his rule. He desperately seeks to get rid of it. Haman is seen as the owner of the ditch, eagerly attempting to obtain the

mound. When Haman offers to purchase the "mound" for money, Achashverosh gladly gives it to him for no payment at all, enthusiastically consenting to the annihilation of the Jews.

But here is the question: Parables quoted in Talmudic literature are never meant as entertainment, but rather as tools to clarify and crystallize an abstract or complex concept. But what is so difficult to understand about a story of two people who despise the Jews with similar intensity and eagerly cooperate to destroy them? Why do we need a parable about a mound and a ditch to clarify the situation between Haman and Achashverosh?[5] It is not like this is the first or last instance of a king craving to kill the Jews. Sadly, this has happened repeatedly, from Pharaoh to Achashverosh and subsequently. Did the Talmud find it to be so strange to require some parable?

And even if it is difficult to understand what transpired between Haman and Achashverosh, how is it explained by means of this seemingly simple and superficial parable of a mound and a ditch?

Moreover, the parable doesn't fit the story it attempts to illustrate. In the parable, the owner of the mound seeks to dispose of his mound, while the owner of the ditch craves to obtain the mound and fill it with it. In the actual story, however, both the owner of the "mound," Achashverosh, as well as the owner of the "ditch," Haman, wish to dispose of the "mound"—the Jewish people—and get rid of it completely. You can't fill a ditch with a mound you crave annihilating![6]

#### Two Layers of Anti-Semitism

What the Talmud is attempting to convey via this parable is an answer to the question of why. Why, nearly always and nearly everywhere, have Jews been hated? Why did Haman crave to kill every single Jew, down to an infant? Why would King Achashverosh be so eager to purge his country of all Jews? What have the Jews done to attract such profound universal animosity? Why are they obsessed with us? From the Russian Czars to the Christian Popes, from the Muslim rulers to the Third Reich, from Voltaire to Wagner, to Martin Luther, to Yasser Arafat, the great and perhaps only common denominator between all of the above was this: The Jew evoked the profoundest disgust.

It is this question — perhaps one of the great questions of history — that the Talmud is attempting to confront in this little passage.

Anti-Semitism, the Talmud is telling us, sees Jews as a "mound." The anti-Semitism harbored by many non-Jews throughout history sees the Jew as a stranger in world history, a foreign creep, a "mound" that obstructs one's free movement and enjoyment in his orchard. The Jew somehow "irks" him—and he is not even sure why. This Jew hater feels uncomfortable with the presence of the Jew. The Jew is a mound that does not belong here. The Jew may attempt to do everything possible to assuage the annoyance the anti-Semite feels toward him; he may try to do everything to eclipse his Jewishness. But it is usually to no avail: As long as the Jew is alive, he will remain, in many a non-Jewish eye, an irritable, cumbersome "mound." [7]

But why? Why can't they just see us as another ethnic group doing its own thing? This crude bigotry, says the Talmud, is born of a deeper and subtler space within the consciousness of the anti-Semite. Jewish existence opened a "ditch," a vacuum, in the heart of the human race, and every non-Jew, in one way or another, is aware of this void, causing him to look at the Jew either with admiration and affection, or with hate and repulsion, or with a mixture of the two.

#### Confronting a Ballad of Eternity

"What is the meaning," asks the Talmud, "of the term Mount Sinai? Sinai, in Hebrew, means hatred. Sinai is the mountain that gave birth to Jew-hatred." (Talmud Tractate Shabbat).[8]

Some 3,400 years ago, at the foot of a lone mountain, the Jewish people received a gift that transformed their lives and destiny for eternity. Whether religious, secular, or assimilated, that moment imbued Jewish life with a unique richness and nobility. The gift of Torah inculcated Jewish life with tremendous moral and spiritual responsibility, but it simultaneously granted the Jewish mind, the Jewish family, and the Jewish community—rich and poor alike—a taste of heaven. The day-to-day life of the Jew became imbued with a depth of meaning and a sense

of purpose born of an appreciation of the Divine present in life, love, family, pain, values, and money.

When the non-Jew encounters the Jew, he is, consciously or subconsciously, struck by a grandeur of spirit, a depth of living, a resonance of eternity, an echo of the Divine, that is not easily described but very palpable. There is something about the Jew and Judaism that is larger than life, and the non-Jew feels it, sometimes more acutely than the Jew.

The Jewish presence, challenging the world with a call from the infinite living moral G-d, opened a hole, a "ditch," a mental and emotional void in the heart of humanity, craving the fullness and richness of life that the Torah has given the Jew. The Jewish people opened a profound wound in civilization, allowing it to experience its own meaninglessness. At Sinai, Jews redefined their lives by the notion that there is one G-d, who makes moral demands on all of humanity. Thus, at Sinai, the Jewish nation became the target of the hatred of those who could never forgive the Jew for creating the "void" that grows from a sense of inner guilt when you are living an empty life, an immoral life when you hurt your fellow man, or you worship yourself. Concepts such as basic human rights, the notion that the sick and the elderly should be cared for—not murdered or left to die—and the idea of society assisting the poor and disadvantaged are not easily embraced by the barbarian. The concept that we are all responsible to a moral G-d that there is right and wrong, limits to power, and that each of us has a duty to righteousness is toxic to the human-animal who cherishes the moral jungle. So the non-Jewish response to this "ditch," the void, and the guilt exposed by the Jewish presence came—and still comes—in two different forms.

#### Two Responses to Moral Guilt

Many non-Jews from various religions and cultures responded by elevating their lifestyles to a higher plateau. They saw the Jew and his Jewishness as a model that they could, in their own way, emulate. They assuaged the feelings of emptiness and moral guilt by creating a life and value system grounded in the Torah's weltanschauung. The American nation is a great example of that. Founded on the Judaic ethic of respecting the liberty and individuality of every human being formed in the image of G-d, most of the Founding Fathers and so many of its citizens were and are authentic Philo-Semites, cherishing and celebrating the Jew and his Jewishness.

John Adams wrote, "I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize man than any other nation." He wrote as a Christian, but added that even if he were an atheist and believed in chance, "I should believe that chance had ordered the Jews to preserve and propagate to all mankind the doctrine of a supreme, intelligent, wise, almighty sovereign of the universe, which I believe to be the great essential principle of all morality, and consequently of all civilization." [9]

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. The Jew is the religious source, spring, and fountain out of which all the rest of the peoples have drawn their beliefs and their religions." [10]

This path, though, requires extraordinary discipline and sacrifice. Living with the G-d of the Torah is a tremendous burden. It demands that one challenge his or her ego, laziness, and selfishness on a daily basis; it requires one to surrender many instincts, cravings, lusts, and natural dispositions. It is rewarding and fulfilling, but not easy. Sadly, most non-Jewish cultures and civilizations in the past opted for an easier and more instinctive method through which to "fill" their mental and psychological "ditch": Rid the world of the Jew, they said, and the void will be gone. Many people simply can't cope with the burden of being good. However, when they act in bad ways, they can't cope with the resultant feelings of guilt. Try as they may, they can never cut themselves loose from the standards of absolute morality dictated by the Torah. Stuck in this "Catch-22" situation, people turn, with their mounting frustrations, against the Jews, whom they perceive as personifying humanity's collective conscience. Deep down, they know that Judaism got it right, but it is too difficult to embrace.

This is the "soul" behind anti-Semitism. It is a form of resentment and hostility directed toward the cause of a profound emptiness in life. Adolf Hitler once remarked that his mission in life was to "destroy the tyrannical G-d of the Jews" and His "life-denying Ten Commandments." [11]

Herman Rauchning had been Hitler's personal confidante, but he abandoned Nazism and attempted to alert the free world to the scope and danger of the Nazi threat. He wrote: It is against their own insoluble problem of being human that the dull and base in humanity are in revolt against anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, Judaism, together with Hellenism and Christianity, is an inalienable component of our Christian Western Civilization—the eternal "call to Sinai," against which humanity again and again rebels. [12]

This means that anti-Semitism is not only a "Jewish problem," it is a disaster for every moral and decent non-Jew as well. Watch how a nation, religion, or political movement treats Jews, and you will have an early and deadly accurate picture of that group's intention toward others. Anti-Semites wish to destroy the perceived embodiment of that higher call to the good, the Jews. But they do not hate the Jews alone. They hate whatever and whoever represents a higher value, a moral challenge. Anti-Semites begin with the Jews, but they never end with the Jews alone.

#### Haman's Rage

Not all anti-Semites were aware of the "soul" of their hatred. Some, like Achashverosh, were only cognizant of the outer component of their Jew-hatred, seeing the Jew as a "mound" that disturbs and obstructs. They were unaware of the underlying motives behind their hatred.

Haman, on the other hand, was aware of this truth. He understood that he despised the Jews because they generated a "ditch" in the depths of his heart. That is why when the entire Persian elite bowed to Haman daily, excluding one Jewish rabbi, Mordechai, the Bible tells us [13] that Haman "was filled with rage."

Why? Imagine thousands of people prostrating themselves before you on a daily basis, except one old ultra-religious man with a white beard. Big deal! Why was Haman so perturbed by the sight of one obstinate Jew not falling on his knees to worship him?

Because Haman, in a very deep place, knew that Mordechai had it right. Mordechai's behavior resonated in Haman's inner heart. It exposed the truth that Haman was not a demi-god.

He thus approached Achashverosh and said: I have a ditch in my heart, which I cannot bear anymore. I must rid the world from its Jewish presence. Achashverosh, a far less intelligent and complex person, responded: Great! The Jews, for some reason or another, always irked me regardless. I'd be more than happy if you could remove this cursed mound from my presence.

#### The Conclusions

History has proven that appeasing and trying to bend over backward to those who hate us will not supplant their hate with love. Why? Because the animosity stems from too deep a place for it to be transformed through money or appeasement. It may be hard for us to accept, but the real Jew hater is driven by deeply powerful forces; for him the Jew disturbs the core of his existence.

We can bend over backward, but it will not change a thing. We can shorten our noses, we can assimilate, we can compromise—yet as long as we are alive, the anti-Semites will remain restless. There is nothing we can do or not do to change the anti-Semitism. It is the anti-Semite who must change himself.

The proper method of dealing with Jew hatred in all of its manifestations is not to attempt to eclipse or deny one's Jewishness and the unique role of the Jewish people in history. The gentile, instinctively and accurately, feels the "otherness" of the Jew; the non-Jew innately senses the holiness embedded within the Jewish soul. When the Jew denies this holiness, when the Jew, embarrassed by his Judaism, tells the world, "I am just like you," the non-Jew senses a lie, a secret conspiracy. The world will forever dislike Jews who dislike themselves.

What can we do about anti-Semitism? We can and must stand guard against it. We must protect ourselves in every possible way. We must

fight hatred with unwavering determination, resolve, dignity, and purpose. We must never duck or show weakness, which only intoxicates our haters into thinking they might prevail. We must never be ashamed of who we are and what we stand for, as it is not our evil triggering the animosity; it is our goodness and holiness that drive our haters mad. Israel must declare the truth that the entire land is an eternal Divine gift to the Jewish people, as the Bible states hundreds of times, and that every attempt to hurt a Jew will be dealt with in the most powerful way. Most importantly, our primary and eternal hope remains in our relationship with G-d, the sole master of the universe. As long as we are connected with the core of all reality, our existence is guaranteed. Trying to eliminate anti-Semitism by appeasing them produces no results. The hate is simply too deep. And we are, as the Midrash puts it, "a lamb surrounded by seventy wolves." The lamb ought to be strong, decisive, powerful, and unapologetic, but we always need the protection of our Divine creator to deal with these odds.

That is why, when Mordechai and Queen Esther learned of Haman's decree, the first thing they did was engage in fasting, prayer, repentance, and good deeds. Only after three days of fasting and introspection did Esther use her position as the beautiful wife of the king and attempt to influence him, in the midst of a drinking party, to obliterate the decree against the Jews. Now, if Esther wished to impress her husband, she should have gone to a beauty parlor not fast for three days!

To answer this question, the Talmud offers the parable of the mound and the ditch. Mordechai and Esther both knew that this hatred was not coming from some misunderstanding or social malady. They keenly grasped that we were dealing with a mound and a ditch! No bending over backward will help the crisis. What we need most is the Creator of the world, who guarantees that as long as we remain connected to His truth, we will live and thrive. Esther knew, as every Jew knows deep down in his heart that salvation will not come from a man who sees the Jews as an eternal "mound." Salvation will come from G-d. Therefore, the first and foremost objective is strengthening her relationship with G-d. Only afterward are we called to follow the course of nature and attempt to influence world leaders to help secure the survival of the Jewish people. For G-d wants us to work through the venues of nature.

Once we have secured our relationship with G-d, through the Torah and its Mitzvos, can we hope that G-d will manipulate the hearts of the Jew-haters to assist rather than destroy the Jews.

When the non-Jew encounters a Jew who is proud of his otherness, who cherishes and embraces his Jewishness and its unique role in history, more often than not the non-Jew is overtaken by a sense of admiration and respect; he can begin to appreciate the Jew, learn from him and adore him.

(This essay is based on an address, a "sicha," by the Lubavitcher Rebbe presented on Purim 5725-1965. [14])

[1] For a comprehensive discussion of this subject, the history and dynamics of antisemitism, as well as a convincing refutation of many of the popular reasons given for antisemitism, see *Why The Jews?* (Prager and Telushkin, Simon and Schuster, 1983.) [2] Ibid. p. 21 [3] Esther 3:11 [4] Megilah 14a. [5] See Maharsha, Benayahoo to Talmud Megilah ibid. and Chasam Sofer - Toras Moshe L'Purim for their symbolic explanations of this parable. [6] Of course, one may answer that the parable is an imperfect one and it is just here to illustrate the point that the owner of the mound is willing to dispose of his mound without receiving payment. Yet anyone familiar with the Talmudic literature is aware of its extraordinary profundity and meticulousness. It is thus clear, that the comparison between Haman and an owner of a ditch seeking to fill it is precise and meaningful. Yet in the actual story, Haman's role is reversed, seeking to dispose of the mound and not have it remain in his territory? [7] Perhaps we can add: The Mound represents the significance and the dignity that Judaism confers upon all peoples; and that is why, as a dictator who wanted to subjugate his populace, he couldn't stand the Judaic disciple, which affords such tremendous rights to all peoples. [8] Shabbas 89a. See Eyon Yaakov to Ein Yaakov ibid. -- The explanation for anti-Semitism that follows has been articulated by Maimonides in *Igeres Taiman* chapter 1. [9] Quoted in *Why The Jews?*

p. 30, see reference there. Cf Faith After the Holocaust (Eliezer Berkowitz, Ktav, 1973) pp. 114-127, where this point is brilliantly demonstrated. [10] Quoted in Why The Jews? p. 30, see reference there. [11] Quoted ibid. [12] The Beast From the Abyss, by Hermann Rauchning [13] Esther 3:5 [14] Sichos Kodesh 5725 pp. 444-454.)]

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**[CS late breaking addition:**

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subject: Rav Frand - Avnei Miluim and Avnei Shoham: Stones of Empathy and Stones of Action

Parshas Tetzaveh

Avnei Miluim and Avnei Shoham: Stones of Empathy and Stones of Action

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1326 Wearing A Gartel? Are the Chasidim Right? Good Shabbos!

The pasuk in Parshas Tetzaveh 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 Tetzaveh 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 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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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion.

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**TETZAVE**

The Torah ordains that the olive oil used to light the eternal menorah - candelabra - must be of the purest and best available. There is obvious logic to this requirement. Impure oil will cause the flames to stutter and flicker. Impure oil also may exude an unpleasant odor and make the task of the daily cleaning of the oil lamps difficult and inefficient. Yet I feel that the basic underlying reason for this requirement of purity of the oil positive things in life - the necessity to do things correctly, enthusiastically and with exactitude.

In' halachic' parlance this is called 'kavanah' - the intent to perform the commandment and deed properly and in the best possible way. That is the story of the pure container of oil that is the core of the miraculous story of Chanuka. The Hasmonians could have used regular, even impure oil and still not have violated any strong 'halachic' stricture. Yet the idea of 'kavanah', of doing the matter in the best way possible, introduces an element of special dedication and holiness into what

otherwise would be an event of rote and habit. This is what drives the spirit of holiness and eternity that accompanies the performance of 'mitzvot.' So the requirement of the Torah for the purest possible oil to fuel the holy and eternal menorah - candelabra - is readily understandable when the concept of 'kavanah' is factored into the value system of the Torah.

The light of the menorah has never been dimmed over the long history of the Jewish people. Though the menorah itself has long ago disappeared from the view of the Jewish public - it was no longer present even in Second Temple times - the idea of its light and influence has continued to be present in Jewish life. The flame is not a tangible item - it is, in reality, an item of spirit more than of substance.

It provides light and warmth and psychological support in very difficult times and circumstances. Yet, its influence and support is somehow directly connected to the investment into actually kindling it. That is the import of the words of the rabbis in Avot that according to the effort invested so is the accomplishment and reward.

All things spiritual are dependent upon the effort invested in creating that sense of spirit - the purer the oil, the brighter and firmer the flame. This simple yet profound message forms the heart of this week's 'parsha.' It also forms the heart of all values and commandments that the Torah ordains for us.

The 'parsha' of 'Tetzave' speaks to all of us in a direct and personal fashion. It encompasses all of the goals of Judaism and is, in itself the light of spirituality that lights our souls and lives.

Shabat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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### **Parshat Tetzaveh: Each Person a Priest; the Entire World a Sanctuary**

#### **Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone**

"And you shall bring forth your brother Aaron and his sons together with him from among the children of Israel, to serve as priests before Me..." (Exodus 28:1) In the portion of Tetzaveh, Moses' name is not mentioned even once, while Aaron's name appears over thirty times. This is the week of Aaron, the song of praise of the priesthood.

But the truth is that it is the week of all Israel as well, not just those who claim Aaron as ancestor. After all, the entire nation of Israel was created to be a nation of priests, dedicated to God. At the revelation at Sinai, the entire nation was charged with the ideal of being a holy nation and a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6). To be sure, during the Sanctuary and Temple periods, there was a separate priestly class of the descendants of Aaron which maintained the unique obligations of this special family, of which we retain a remnant even today, when the descendants of Aaron rise to bless the congregation during the repetition of the Amidah and when the kohanim are called first to the Torah. However, our eventual vision calls for a universal priesthood, when every Jew will dedicate their life to divine service.

We eternalize and emphasize the universal ideal of the priesthood in the most prosaic way possible: how we wake up in the morning. Before anything else, we fill a large cup or vessel with water. With the left hand we pour some water over the right hand, and with the right hand, some water over the left hand, for three cycles. Placing our hands directly under the faucet would save time, but this act, recalling the priestly ablutions in the Temple, is to be performed be-ko'ah gavra (from one's own vitality), and with the use of a special vessel. The blessing we make, netilat yadaim, literally means the "lifting of the hands":

"Blessed art Thou O Lord our God, king of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to uplift our hands [in divine service]." (Siddur, Morning Service)

This is the way the priests began their day of service to the divine in the Holy Temple, and this is the way every Jew begins their day of service to the divine in the world at large.

This ideal of "every person a kohen" continues into the daily prayers. Our prayers begin with two separate blessings that emphasize our relationship to Torah, the heart of every Jew's existence. Commentators

explain that the first blessing is for the Written Law and the second for the Oral Law. Following the blessing, every individual reads two passages, one from the Torah and one from the Talmud. After all, after making a blessing over a fruit, one must eat some fruit, and so after making a blessing over Torah, one must study a passage of Torah. It is fascinating that out of the entire written Torah the passage chosen by the Men of the Great Assembly (who are generally considered the original compilers of the liturgy) is the priestly benediction, the very words intoned by the kohanim when they bless the congregation with peace.

On Shabbat, the ritual of blessing one's children is performed each Friday evening, when the parent, placing both hands on each child, recites the priestly blessing. Once again every parent becomes a priest and priestess.

During Passover and Yom Kippur, the custom is for married adults to wear a special white robe, the kittel, like the sacred garb of the priests in the Temple. During the Temple periods, we all actually became priests on the festival of Passover, as the head of each family sacrificed the paschal lamb in Jerusalem. Even today at every Seder this priestly role is extended by the fact that we wash our hands before eating the vegetables that are to be dipped in the salt water. This act is intended to evoke the priestly custom of eating in special purity by washing before eating any vegetables touched by water. On Yom Kippur, one of the most dramatic parts of the synagogue service occurs when we fall prostrate during the Musaf Amidah, and repeat the exact words which the priests chanted in the Temple.

Since the destruction of the Temple, the synagogue, with replicas of Temple furnishings such as the ark, the table, the menorah, and the eternal lamp, functions as a mini-sanctuary devoted to prayer. Over the years what has evolved is that all Jews, not only priests and Levites, possess a feeling of equal opportunity inside the sanctuary in miniature.

Walk into a synagogue on a regular Shabbat, and the person leading the prayers may be the local butcher. Another individual, a pharmacist by trade, opens the ark. A third person, an architect, calls the people up to the Torah by name, and the person who actually chants the week's Torah portion may be a teenager. Many synagogues do not even have official rabbis.

Other religions have a clear demarcation between the laity and the ministry, while for us all such distinctions are blurred. We are all part of the service. We are a nation of priests. Ask a non-Jewish visitor who enters the synagogue when every adult male is bedecked in the prayer shawl, swaying, eyes closed, to distinguish between the laymen and the clergy. He or she will not be able to, because we all look like priests.

We have already seen how every home is to be a mini-sanctuary (see last week's commentary on Terumah), how the lighting of the candles by the woman of the house at the advent of Shabbat and festivals evokes the kindling of the Temple menorah; the passing of the sweet smelling spices at havdala recalls the priestly offering of the Temple incense; the dispensing of the challah loaves reminding us of the Temple shewbread, and the table replete with food, song and prayer bringing us back to the Temple sacrificial meals led by the kohen-priests. Our tradition desperately wants us to express our truest calling, that we are to be a nation of priests and priestesses, dedicated to God and the humanity He created.

This dramatic idea expresses yet another message. If every person is a priest, then we must view the entire world as a sanctuary, a sacred cosmos in which the God of love may be truly comfortable dwelling within our midst. And if every Jew is a kohen-priest, and the priestly calling is that of a Torah teacher - "Teach your statutes to Jacob, Your Torah to Israel" (Deut. 33:10) - then every Jew must teach the gentile world the seven Noahide laws of morality, the vision of a God of love, justice and compassion who desires world peace. When every individual Jew realizes his or her true calling, the world will indeed be redeemed and humanity will not learn war any more...

Shabbat Shalom

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### **The Aesthetic in Judaism Tetzaveh**

## Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

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?

The answer lies in the two-word phrase that appears twice in our Parsha, defining what the priestly vestments were to represent: *le-kavod ultifaret*, '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 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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## The Attitude of Halakha Toward Buddhism

## Revivim

### Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

#### Idolatry in Association

Most Buddhists in the Indian subcontinent also worship Buddha statues, which classifies them as practitioners of avodah zarah b'shituf (idolatry in association) \* However, Buddhism itself primarily focuses on calming human desires and achieving a life of tranquility rather than addressing God \* Therefore, many people in the West who adopt Buddhist concepts and practices do not view it as a religion and are not considered idol worshippers

After discussing the relationship between Judaism, Halakha, and Hinduism last week, I will continue to address the other Dharmic religions. The Dharmic religions originate from the Indian subcontinent and include Hinduism and the three religions that emerged from it: Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism.

#### Idolatry in Association

According to Halakha, Hinduism is considered avodah zarah b'shituf—idolatry in association—which is absolutely forbidden for Jews. However, according to most Halakhic authorities, it is permitted for Bnei Noach (non-Jews), although some say it is forbidden for them as well.

Idolatry in association refers to a belief that God is the supreme deity, the source of all powers, and the one who controls them. Nevertheless, adherents also believe that God created various forces that independently influence the world for better or worse. As a result, they worship the statues representing these forces and perform rituals before them, believing that these deities reward their worshippers and punish those who neglect them. This type of worship combines belief in God with belief in other divine powers.

#### Buddhism

Approximately 1,000 years after the emergence of Hinduism, about 2,500 years ago, Buddhism developed from it. According to Buddhist tradition, its founder was Siddhartha Gautama, an Indian prince who lived at the foothills of the Himalayas (circa 563–479 BCE). Upon encountering the pervasive suffering in human life, he embarked on a spiritual quest to find a solution.

Leaving his palace, he adopted ascetic practices and studied under Hindu teachers but found their methods ineffective in addressing suffering at its root. Through prolonged meditation, he achieved enlightenment and became known as the “Buddha”—the Enlightened One.

In his enlightenment, the Buddha realized that human suffering stems from desires and that liberation comes through relinquishing them. He advocated for a “middle path” between indulgence and extreme asceticism. Through meditation, one could suppress desires for wealth, honor, physical pleasures, and recognition, ultimately attaining a state of deep inner peace known as nirvana—eternal tranquility and liberation from suffering.

#### Differences Between Hinduism and Buddhism

Unlike Hinduism, which encourages its followers to experience life in all its fullness and imbues every aspect of life with spiritual meaning, Buddhism seeks to extinguish worldly desires and emotions. Instead of emphasizing the external world, it focuses on connecting to an absolute void, which is also the ultimate reality and light.

Hinduism emphasizes the empowerment of the inner self (atman) through meaningful life experiences, aiming to merge with the divine source. This belief holds that external misfortunes do not truly harm a person; rather, they serve as a path for self-empowerment and unity with the ultimate reality.

Conversely, Buddhism teaches that the self is an illusion, and attachment to this illusion causes suffering. For Buddhists, the ultimate truth is the non-existence of the individual self and its desires. By shedding these illusions, one can achieve peace and happiness. Consequently, Buddhist teachings view Hindu rituals as unnecessary since they reinforce harmful illusions.

#### The Buddhist Path

Devout Buddhists adopt monastic vows, withdrawing from worldly life to eliminate the ego and desires, thus striving for enlightenment and

ultimate nirvana. Lay Buddhists, on the other hand, follow ethical guidelines: avoiding adultery, theft, harm to others, and intoxicants. They practice compassion, support monastics, and engage in meditation to cultivate detachment from desires and a calm, observant mindset.

Through meditation, Buddhists strengthen their identification with Buddhist values and reduce their attachment to material desires. This leads to emotional stability and an inner sense of peace. By consistently performing good deeds and following the correct path, they accumulate karma (spiritual merit), which improves their future lives through the cycle of rebirth.

#### Reincarnation and the Caste System in Hinduism and Buddhism

Influenced by Hinduism, Indian society developed a rigid caste system consisting of four main castes (varnas):

Brahmins (priests)

Kshatriyas (warriors)

Vaishyas (workers)

Shudras (servants)

Below these was an additional group—the “untouchables,” who performed the most menial tasks and lived in severe poverty.

This system is rooted in the belief in reincarnation: a person's actions (karma) in past lives determine their birth in the present life. Misdeeds lead to rebirth in a lower caste or even as an animal, while good deeds lead to a higher caste and ultimately to liberation. Accepting one's social status and fulfilling its duties is considered essential for spiritual progress.

Buddhism also upholds the doctrine of reincarnation based on karma. However, it rejects the Hindu caste system as an illusory and harmful structure that causes suffering. For Buddhists, spiritual advancement depends on ethical living and personal choices rather than caste.

Those who follow the Buddhist path and accumulate positive karma can eventually escape the cycle of samsara (endless rebirth) and attain nirvana, a state of eternal peace.

#### Buddhism Today

More than half a billion people practice Buddhism globally (compared to over a billion Hindus). While fewer than one percent of Buddhists adopt a monastic lifestyle, many find inspiration in Buddhist teachings for a peaceful and ethical life. They strive for contentment in everyday life through self-improvement, kindness, and meditation.

#### Is Buddhism a Religion and Is It Idolatrous?

Fundamentally, Buddhism does not focus on God but on guiding individuals toward freedom from suffering and inner peace. In this sense, it can be described as a religion without a deity, which is why many Westerners are drawn to its ethical and meditative practices without committing to a theistic belief system.

However, since humans are naturally inclined to believe, most Buddhists worship Buddha statues, believing that divine powers manifest through them and bring blessings. This practice makes mainstream Buddhism avodah zarah b'shituf—idolatry in association—prohibited for Jews.

Nevertheless, Buddhists who reject idolatry and believe in a transcendent source beyond physical representations are not considered idol worshippers. Even if they honor statues, they do so as a gesture of respect rather than worship.

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#### [cs – another late breaking addition:

from: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com>

date: Mar 6, 2025, 9:02 PM

BS"D March 7, 2025

#### Potomac Torah Study Center

8 Adar, 5785; Tetzaveh, Zachor 5785;

Tanis Esther is Thursday; Purim is Friday March 13-14

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the first phase of the agreement continue with the remaining hostages coming home, hostilities ending, and with a new era of security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

Tetzaveh continues Hashem's conversation with Moshe (from Terumah) in which He tells Moshe exactly how to construct the Mishkan, a structure that will become a "home" for Hashem's presence in the midst of B'Nai Yisrael. Because both Terumah and Tetzaveh are the same conversation, the Torah does not need to repeat Moshe's name. One result is that Tetzaveh becomes the only parsha from the beginning of Shemot through the end of Sefer Bemidbar in which Moshe's name does not appear. (I have discussed many aspects of the reasons for constructing a Mishkan and the absence of Moshe's name in this parsha in my messages in previous years.)

In a non-leap year, we always read Tetzaveh very close to the date of Moshe's birthday and *yahrzeit* (7 Adar). The Maftir reading of Zachor has many connections to Purim (the week after we read Zachor) and to Tetzaveh. For example, Hashem's name is hidden (does not appear) in the Megillah, and Moshe's name does not appear in Tetzaveh. The historical event that led to Purim (Haman's attempt to kill all the Jews in Persia) took place after the destruction of the first Temple in Jerusalem and before the rebuilding of the second Temple. After the Assyrian ruler Sancheriv defeated much of the Northern kingdom of Israel, exiled the Jews, and intermixed all the conquered tribes, it became impossible to identify most of the original tribes. After Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the first Temple, there were no more sacrifices. Even without the ability to identify all the tribes, the Megillah states that Mordechai and Esther still knew how to contact Jews in other parts of Persia, so not all the Jews from the remaining tribes had disappeared by the time of Queen Esther. The historical events leading up to Purim were very close to the time when prophecy ended, and many Jews feared that God would no longer protect B'Nai Yisrael when there were no more *korbanot* and there was no prophet to relay Hashem's messages to B'Nai Yisrael.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander focuses on the importance of Zachor now, as we Jews face grave dangers from enemies throughout the world. The Maftir reading of Zachor is one of very few Torah readings that all Jews are obligated to read or hear being read in synagogue (on the Shabbat before Purim). Rabbi Brander observes that Amalek and the seven Canaanite nations from the time of the Exodus are all gone, either killed off or merged into ethnically different nations who are no longer ethnically distinct nations. Even so, the *mitzvah* of Zachor is eternal, so we must observe the *mitzvah*. The Talmud adds that all Jews must observe and participate in a war for the survival and security of the Jewish people. Rabbi Brander claims that we are in such a period now, with our enemies attacking our fellow Jews in every country in the world.

Rabbi Marc Angel observes that Mordechai was not universally popular among Jews even in Persia. Mordechai worked for the good of all Jews, spoke peace to all, and was a warm, conscientious, and thoughtful leader. As the Megillah states,

"For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went forth throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai waxed greater and greater (Esther 9:4)."

Mordechai, from Rabbi Angel's description, sounds very much like Aharon, Moshe's brother, the most beloved Jew during the period of the Exodus.

My beloved Rebbe Leonard Cahan, z"l, reminded us often of the dangers we face from those who hate Jews – and always found a way to make Purim happy and interesting. (There is much that Hebrew School normally does not teach us about Purim!).

Shabbat Shalom,  
Hannah and Alan

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.

Please daven for a Refuah Shleimah for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; 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; 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.

Shabbat Shalom Hannah & Alan]

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## Drasha

### By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Tetzaveh

The Heart Before the Force

It takes a lot to build a Sanctuary in the desert. And it takes perhaps, even more to adorn the Kohanim (priests) who serve, in beautiful vestments that both symbolize deep spirituality while depicting splendor and glory. You need more than golden threads and fine tapestry. You need more than the ability to weave and design ornate garments. You need devotion, and you need heart. Not ordinary heart. Not the heart that pennant winners have or athletic coaches call for. You need a special type of heart. You need a heart filled with wisdom — Divine wisdom. That is why Hashem commands Moshe to gather "all the wise-hearted people whom I have invested with a spirit of wisdom" to make the priestly garments (Exodus 28:1).

But the Torah is unclear. Were these select people Divinely ordained with a spirit of wisdom for this particular mission, or were intrinsic "wise-hearted" people imbued with an extra "spirit of wisdom"?

If the former is correct, then what did Hashem add? And if all their wisdom was divinely-gifted, then why didn't Hashem simply ask Moshe to "gather all the people in whom I have invested a spirit of wisdom"?

Rav Sholom Shwadron, the Magid of Jerusalem, of blessed memory, once told a story about the famed Dubno Magid, Rabbi Yaakov Kranz.

The Dubno Magid once spoke in a town and a few maskilim (members of the enlightenment movement) attended. After the talk one of the cynics, who was totally unaffected by the warm and inspiring message, approached the famed Magid. "The sages tell us," began the skeptic, "'that words from the heart, penetrate the heart.' Rabbi," he snickered, "I assume that you spoke from your heart. Your words, however, have had no impact on me whatsoever! How can that be? Why didn't your words penetrate my heart?"

Rabbi Kranz smiled. In his usual fashion, he began with a parable. "A simpleton once went by the workplace of a blacksmith, who was holding a large bellows. After a few squeezes, the flames of the smith's fire danced with a rage. The man, who always found it difficult to start a fire in his own fireplace, marveled at the contraption. He immediately went and purchased the amazing invention. Entering his home, he smugly announced, "I just discovered how to make a raging fire with the simple squeeze of a lever!"

He set a few logs in the cold fireplace and began to push the two ends of the bellows together. Nothing happened. The logs lay cold and lifeless. Embarrassed, the man returned to the blacksmith and explained his predicament. "I want a refund!" he shouted. This blower doesn't work!" "You yokel," laughed the experienced blacksmith. "You were blowing on cold logs! You must start a small fire on your own! If you don't start with a spark, a fire will never erupt!"

The Magid turned toward the maskil and sadly shook his head sadly. "If there is no spark, the largest bellows will not make a fire."

In telling Moshe whom to choose for the sacred task of designing the Mishkan, the Torah tells us how G-d invests. He wants people that were imbued with a *ruach chachmah* – a spirit of wisdom. But he prefaces the statement by telling us how one receives spiritual wisdom. The gift of spiritual wisdom does not go to just anyone. Hashem looks for those who have wisdom of heart. Those who understand what it means to be kind, compassionate, and loyal. Those who have the devotion to His will and the desire for more enlightenment get His ordination. The people who were imbued with Hashem's Divine spirit previously had a spark.



And from that spark grew a force – a Divine force – that propelled wise hearts into a Divine spirit of wisdom.

Hashem tells us that we must begin the process on our own. If we supply the heart, He will supply the power to have deep, spiritual, even holy insight. He will supply the force. We must make sure, however, that we put the heart before the force.

Dedicated by the Gluck Family in memory of Edith Gluck

Good Shabbos!

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