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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

Why is the Torah so specific and emphatic, in this week's parsha, about the clothes to be worn by the Cohen and the Cohen Gadol? "These are the vestments that they shall make: a breastplate, an 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" (Exodus 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 physical 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 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 cohanim 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 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, 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. 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 Mussaf on Yom Kippur that that expresses this to perfection. It is about mareih cohen, 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 cohen 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. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel* ***zt"l*** *© 2025 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"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 Tezaveh, 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 Amida 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 Amida, 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 menora, 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' 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 menora; the passing of the sweet smelling spices at havdala recalls the priestly offering of the Temple incense; the dispensing of the challa 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…*The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Shemot: Defining a Nation, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid.*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

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 lies in the value that the Torah advances in the performance of all 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 Hasmoneans 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 'mitzvoth.' 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. *© 2025 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Torah tells us that on the hem of the me'il (priestly robe), bells will be sewn. As the priest enters the sanctuary with the bells on his robe, "v'nishma kolo" (its voice will be heard; Exodus 28:33–35). What is the significance of these bells? And to whose voice is the Torah referring?

On its simplest level, the voice refers to that of the bells. Among his many duties, the priest would offer atonement for his own sin. As it would be embarrassing for others to be present during this personal teshuvah process, the bells signal that those present should leave, allowing the priest private moments with God.

An important teaching emerges from this small moment: There are times when we must allow others, even our most righteous and pious, personal space to grieve, to rejoice, or to reflect.

A more straightforward possibility also exists: With many people in the sanctuary, they should know when the priest entered so they not be taken by surprise.

Even from this possibility we can derive a significant lesson. Whenever entering a room, it's important in the spirit of the priestly bells to knock, protecting the privacy of those inside. Privacy, when it does not interfere with safety, is highly valued, and therefore Jewish law tells us to be careful to knock before entering anywhere – even one's own home or a child's room (Pesachim 112a).

The detail of these bells also teaches us about the atmosphere of the holy sanctuary; if small priestly bells could be heard, the environment must have been serene – there prevailed the kind of decorum, the kind of quiet necessary for the Temple service.

Once again, the bells help us to recognize a key message: In a place of holy worship, it is important to maintain a level of decorum in order for people to dialogue with God.

Finally, the bells were placed aside pomegranate-shaped objects. The Talmud teaches that the pomegranate, which is full of seeds, is symbolic of the capacity of even the greatest sinner to sprout forth goodness (Berachot 57a). As the high priest entered the sanctuary, the bells could be heard ringing out as they clanged with the pomegranates to teach that even the most wicked could wake up and reconnect.

This concept can help us to understand whose voice was heard in the bells. The word v'nishma in v'nishma kolo reminds the reader of the most famous Jewish prayer, the Shema, in which we profess faith in God: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

From this perspective, it could be argued that the voice present in these verses is that of God. God's voice can be heard in the hearts and souls of everyone – even a wrongdoer. The bells tinkling against the pomegranates is a soft call telling each of us that no matter how far we've strayed, we have the capacity to hear His voice, the inner voice of God, and to return. *© 2025 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale*

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Tzitz, the Headband

Parashat Tetzaveh deals with the special clothes that the Kohanim wore in their service in the Temple. There were four garments worn by the Kohein Hediot, the regular Kohanim, and four special garments that were added to these for the Kohein Gadol. Among the garments for the Kohein Gadol was

the Tzitz, a headband that fit over his forehead with bands that were extended from it in order to tie it in place. On this headband were written the words "Kodesh Lashem, Holy to Hashem." It is this garment that is the focus of our attention this week.

The Torah tells us, "You shall make a Tzitz of pure gold and you shall engrave on it like the engraving of a signet 'Holy to Hashem'. You shall place it on a turquoise woolen string and it shall be on the Mitznefet (that turquoise string) opposite the face of the Mitznefet it shall be. It shall be on Aharon's forehead and Aharon will bear the sin of that which is holy that the B'nei Yisrael consecrate of any gifts of their holy offerings and it shall be on his forehead always for appeasement for them before Hashem." It is not clear how the Tzitz was positioned on or attached to the Mitznefet. Rashi explains that there are conflicting opinions based on two p'sukim. In our passage we are told "And you shall place it on a turquoise woolen string," whereas elsewhere it is written "And you shall place on it a turquoise woolen string." In the first case the words indicate that the Tzitz rests on the wool yet in the second case (39:31) it implies that the woolen string is attached to it but that the Tzitz is against the forehead. In the Gemara Zevachim (19a) we find that the Kohein's hair was visible between the Tzitz and the Mitznefet to accommodate the tefillin of the shel rosh, implying that the Mitznefet was above the Tzitz. For this reason Rashi demonstrates that the Mitznefet was actually made up of six strings which were attached two-each to either side of the Tzitz and to the top at the center in three holes. These all met at the back of the neck where the strings were tied together and held the Tzitz in place. The Ramban argues that the pasuk lists only one string for the Mitznefet and Rashi uses the verses to indicate six strings. The Ramban also disagrees that these two p'sukim about the Mitznefet are contradictory. Both Rashi and the Ramban however agree that the Torah indicates that there was a space on the hairline between the Tzitz and the Mitznefet for the tefillin shel rosh.

The breastplate which contained the stones assigned to each tribe was used by the Kohein Gadol to judge the people through a sign given to him by Hashem. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin compares the breastplate to the tefillin shel yad, the phylacteries of the arm, and the wearing of the Tzitz to the tefillin shel rosh, the phylacteries of the head. The tefillin shel yad are like the Choshein that directs our desires and our emotions towards the service of Hashem. The tefillin shel rosh are like the Tzitz which directs our souls and our strengths toward the service of Hashem. The Kohein Gadol is different than all other Jews in that all Jews are required to have one sign on their hands and one on their heads that direct all of their beings to the service of Hashem. The Kohein Gadol wears two signs upon his hand and his head. Sorotzkin gives two reasons for this difference. First, the Kohein Gadol cannot help but be somewhat arrogant because of his elevated position and this may influence him and distract him from his service to Hashem. He therefore needs the extra set of "signs" to remind him and to separate himself from that arrogance. This is similar to the King. In Gemara B'rachot (34b) we are told that the Kohein Gadol bows at the beginning and end of every b'racha in the Shemoneh Esrei and the King, once he has bowed, does not stand upright until he completes the Shemoneh Esrei. Both the Kohein Gadol and the King must demonstrate humility to remind them of the True One Who is to be served.

The second need for two signs is seen in the Halacha that every Jew must write a Sefer Torah, yet the King must write two Sifrei Torah. This is to remind the King that it is not enough for him to study the Torah, he must spend time teaching Torah to others at the least by his example in the way that he acts. The people will follow his example and lead a life of study and service to Hashem. The Tzitz acts in that same way for the Kohein Gadol. Just as the Kohein Gadol is careful with his offerings which guarantees their holiness and purity, so the other Kohanim will follow his example and exercise care to maintain the holiness and purity of the korbanot under their responsibility.

HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that avon (sin or guilt) applied to the idea of kodoshim designates "removing them from the path which is set for them by their being dedicated to Hashem's Sanctuary, bringing them to a condition which would impress upon them a removal from that which was their purpose…. Their condition is one that contradicts the idea of their consecration, one that would make them invalid, pasul, for the idea of that consecration." The Tzitz with its words of Kodesh Lashem eliminates that avon, that misdirection of consecration, and imbues the sacrifice with holiness once again.

How does the Tzitz accomplish this? With a communal offering such as the daily tamid or the musaf sacrifices that accompanied every Rosh Chodesh and Holiday, the Torah tells us to bring them at their appointed times. We are told in Gemara Pesachim (77b and 80a) that if the majority of Jews are tamei the sacrifice is brought anyway and the Tzitz affects its acceptance. In addition when an individual brings a sacrifice and the blood becomes tamei it should not be sprinkled and the sacrifice is rendered unfit. If the blood was sprinkled inadvertently on the altar, the power of the Tzitz allows it to become acceptable even though the meat may not be eaten. It can still cleanse a person of his sin and offer him forgiveness.

We too can easily become distracted and misdirected by all of the irrelevant stimuli that are in our world today. We are often discouraged because we slip and lose our concentration on our path of righteousness. The words of Kodesh Lashem can still

help us to refocus our lives and serve Hashem properly. May Hashem help us to become Kodesh Lashem once again.

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Adar Rishon & Adar Sheni

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The Jewish leap year, which occurs seven times in a 19-year cycle, has 13 months instead of the regular year's 12. The additional month is added after Adar and is known as *Adar Sheni* (the second Adar). The question arises: During a leap year, if someone simply refers to Adar without specifying the first or the second, what does he mean? The *Tannaim* (Mishnaic Sages) disagree. Rabbi Yehudah says that if someone simply refers to Adar, we assume he means the first Adar. Thus, if a legal document is written during a leap year, when it is written during the first Adar the month may be written simply as Adar; if it is written during the second Adar, it must be specified that the month is the second Adar.

Rabbi Meir disagrees. He maintains that during a leap year, if someone refers simply to Adar, he can be assumed to be speaking of the second Adar (*Nedarim* 63a). While most of the halachic authorities accept the view of Rabbi Yehudah, the Rambam follows the view of Rabbi Meir. In any case, when writing a bill of divorce we always specify during which Adar the document was written, *Adar Rishon* or *Adar Sheni.*

This disagreement has many ramifications. For example, if a person rents a house during a leap year, and the lease expires in Adar, does this mean the start of the first Adar or the start of the second Adar? The landlord would likely claim the lease ends with the start of the first Adar, while the renter would likely insist it ends with the start of the second. In such a case, some rabbis suggest that the renter pay half for the second month (in effect splitting the difference). Others state that the landlord has the upper hand, as he owns the property. Accordingly, the burden of proof is on the tenant (to prove that the lease was meant to extend through the end of the first Adar). This is because there is a principle that "*Ha-motzi mei-chavero alav ha-re'aya*." This means that whoever wishes to extract something (here the right of tenancy) from its current owner must prove that he is entitled to it.

The controversy also affects the commemoration of a *yahrzeit* (the day on which a relative died). For example, let us say someone passed away on the tenth of Adar. During a leap year, some recite the Mourner's *Kaddish* on the tenth of both the first Adar and the second Adar.

When it comes to the *yahrzeit* of Moshe Rabbeinu on the seventh of Adar, there are indications that it should be commemorated during the second Adar, close to Purim (which during a leap year is celebrated in the second Adar).

On the Shabbat preceding the start of a new month in the Jewish calendar, a prayer is recited in *shul*, ushering in the new month by name. It is questionable which name we should use to usher in each Adar during a leap year.

In short, the disagreement about this topic extends to many areas. Therefore, the prudent thing to do is to always clarify which Adar we mean, by specifying either *Adar Rishon* or *Adar Sheni*.

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And Aharon shall carry the names… in the breastplate of Judgment on his heart, when he enters the holy, as an eternal remembrance before Hashem." (Shmos 28:29) The special vestments of the Kohanim, and especially the Kohain Gadol, are the focus of this parsha. Each of them represented a different type of salvation for the Jews and atoned for various sins. The breastplate of Aharon served a dual role. It contained the Urim V'Tumim, a means of asking for Divine guidance, and also, it served to "remind" Hashem of the Children of Israel, as this posuk states.

The idea that Hashem needs a reminder is ridiculous, though we find elsewhere that certain things are done in order to "remind" Hashem. For example, the Yizkor prayer, recited for deceased loved one several times a year, includes a supplication that Hashem "remember" them. What is the meaning of this concept of reminding Hashem, and what are we supposed to take from it?

One seemingly superfluous phrase appears both here in and the next posuk. It says that Aharon should wear the breastplate, "upon his heart," and the next verse says, "he shall bear the judgment of the Children of Israel (the choshen) upon his heart, before Hashem, always." We know the breastplate was to be worn affixed to the shoulders and placed on the chest. Why does the Torah add and repeat the words, "on his heart," when it is the only place to wear it?

The Sforno comments two things. One, that Hashem sees the names and recalls the merits of the Avos, which he uses to benefit their children. Two, that when bearing the "judgments" of the Jews upon his heart, Aharon would pray on behalf of the Children of Israel to be judged as righteous. This means the phrase, "on his heart" doesn't merely refer to the physical placement of the breastplate, but rather to the concern and care for his people that the Kohain Gadol had to embody. He had to carry their names upon his heart, meaning that he had to be worried and concerned for each of them constantly. He had to want them to be helped by Hashem.

This explains how we "remind" Hashem.

Hashem is the True Judge, and forgets nothing. He is also more merciful than any human being. When we show love and care for each other, Hashem responds by acting even more lovingly, and more caringly, than we did. It is a means of effecting the desired response from Hashem when we truly care about others. When we say Yizkor, we are causing Hashem to remember those who impacted us positively, by remembering them ourselves.

The Torah is telling us, "Do you know why Hashem never "forgot" the Jewish People? Because they didn't forget about each other."

This week we will commemorate the three days that the Jews not only fasted, but UNITED in prayer and brotherhood. This was the catalyst for our salvation in the times of Mordechai and Esther, and this unity will be the catalyst for bringing Moshiach, may it be speedily and in our days. Let us take this message… ahem… to heart.

After delivering a shiur at Yeshivas Kol Torah, R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l went to visit a child in the hospital. On the way, he asked the driver to stop at a kiosk, so he could buy a candy bar for the boy.

Picking one up, the sage turned the snack this way and that, looking at the label. Seeing this, the driver commented, "I know that candy bar. It has a very good hechsher (Kosher certification.)" "Thank you," said the Rav with a smile, "but I wasn't looking for the hechsher, I was looking to see if it tastes good, and he will enjoy it." © 2025 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI YITZCHAK ZWEIG

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

It appears that society is becoming incredibly sensitive. When I have the temerity to include a current political example to illustrate a point about Jewish values, people take offense. When I discuss the evils of Hamas -- a truly vile terrorist organization whom I cannot imagine anyone seriously defending -- I receive emails such as this: "But murdering Palestinians is just fine by you. Hypocrite. You're okay with genocide. Disgusting." I said nothing about murdering Palestinians nor justified genocide of any kind. It's amazing to me how people twist reality -- including my writing -- to conform with their own world view (or delusion). To be clear, if I'm criticizing Hamas, I am not pro-genocide (Palestinian or other).

Of course this is a function of the society in which we live. In general, people love echo chambers; they love hearing their long-held beliefs and views reiterated and reinforced. Both the right-wing media and the left-wing media exploit this tendency and manipulate the news to fit their narrative. In this way, they continually preach to their true believers and give them exactly what they want to hear -- instead of the actual news, which may not conform or -- God-forbid -- provide insight into another perspective.

Because of this, people have become trained to see anything that is not exactlyin line with their personally held narrative and world views to be views from the opposite extreme, which they cannot tolerate. It's a rather sorry commentary as to where we are as a civilization. At the end of the day, we have become a society that can be offended by almost anything (and nothing).

Consider the following joke. A priest, a minister, and a rabbi are trying to decide how much of what they've collected to give to their respective charities. The priest begins and says, "We'll draw a circle on the ground, we'll throw the money way up in the air, and whatever lands inside the circle we'll give to charity." The minister says, "No, we'll draw a circle on the ground, throw the money way up in the air, and whatever lands outside the circle we'll give to charity." The rabbi says "No, no, no, we'll throw the money way up in the air and whatever God wants, He can keep."

Would anybody be surprised if I received emails decrying me portraying the rabbi as being interested in promoting some sort of fraud? Maybe I should substitute the name Vladimir Putin for the rabbi? Then I will have people complaining that I am idealizing the wisdom of Putin. People forget that sometimes a joke is just a joke. You can't be offended by everything.

In truth, this sort of prejudice has been around for thousands of years. In the New Testament there is the allegorical story of the "good" Samaritan. Why? Because at the time Samaritans were considered the bad guys, the foreigners, the enemy. The fact that a person of such presumed low character could do a kindness for a stranger qualified him as being "good." Of course, it still implies that the rest of the Samaritans were still "bad."

The lesson here is that when a person comes to situations with an a priori axiom of what the truth is, it is nearly impossible to dissuade him; even evidence to the contrary will be ignored. Everything is about how someone is predisposed. So this begs the question, how are we to obtain the wisdom to be circumspect in all aspects of our life?

This week's Torah portion opens with "You [Moses], must command the Israelites to bring you clear and pure olive oil for illumination, to keep the Menorah lit continuously" (Exodus 27:20). As we shall see, this illumination from the Menorah or "candelabra" was the source of all wisdom.

When King Solomon dedicated the First Temple, he already knew prophetically that one day the Jewish people would be exiled from the Land of Israel. Thus, as part of his dedication ceremony, he mandated that if/when the Israelites were ever taken captive and exiled, they should pray toward the city of Jerusalem, home of the Holy Temple, and God would hear their prayers: "If they return to You with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies [...] and pray to You

toward their land, which You gave to their ancestors, toward the city You have chosen and the Temple I have built for Your Name [...]" (1 Kings 8:44-48). Jews face toward Jerusalem when praying because of the city's central religious significance: the location of the Holy Temple (Beit HaMikdash). The prophet Daniel, while in Babylonian exile, prayed three times a day facing Jerusalem (Daniel 6:10). In the Talmud (Brachot 30a) the Mishnah states that Jews outside Israel should pray toward the Land of Israel, and those in Israel should pray toward Jerusalem. If in Jerusalem, they should face the Temple Mount; if in the Temple, they should turn toward the Holy of Holies. This is also codified in Jewish law (Orach Chayim 94:1).

In synagogues worldwide, the "Aron Kodesh -- Holy Ark" containing Torah scrolls is placed on the wall facing Jerusalem, and the congregation faces that direction while praying. Likewise, Jews praying individually also try to orient themselves towards Jerusalem.

Regarding this we find a fascinating teaching in the Talmud (Baba Basra 25b), "Said Rabbi Yitzchak, a person that wishes to obtain wisdom should orient the focus of his prayers towards the south. If he wants wealth he should focus his prayers to the north." The Talmud goes on to explain that wisdom can be found facing south because that's where the Menorah was located in the Temple.

This means that although we, in the United States, always face east during prayers because that's the direction of Jerusalem, if one specifically desires to pray for wisdom one should orient his prayers a little to the south on the synagogue's eastern wall -- and if desiring wealth one would orient them a little to the north on the synagogue's eastern wall (where the Table of Shew Bread was kept).

But this is quite curious. One would imagine that if seeking wisdom one should turn his prayers directly toward Aron -- the original Ark of the Covenant that was in the area of the Temple known as the Holy of Holies. After all, within it were the two tablets with the Ten Commandments that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai, which represents the wisdom of the Torah. Why do the sages teach that wisdom may be obtained by turning one's focus toward the Menorah?

In the book of Job -- an epic work on philosophy -- we find the following questions, "Wisdom, where can it be found? Where is the place of understanding?" (Job 28:12). The answer comes a few verses later, "[God] said to man, 'Behold, awe of the Almighty is the source of wisdom, refraining from evil is understanding'" (28:28).

It seems rather strange to articulate the question of where can wisdom be found -- the question should be, "how does one obtain wisdom?" Why is it a question of location (where)? Furthermore, how does the prophet answer this question of location by stating that fear of God is the source of wisdom?

It is interesting to note that King Solomon -- "wisest of all men" -- also came to the exact same conclusion: "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). Likewise, he ends the book of Ecclesiastes with, "This is the sum of all matter, when all has been considered: Fear God and keep His commandments, for that is the entirety of man's duty" (12:13).

What the prophets and sages are teaching us is that the only way to really achieve wisdom is to live in a theocentric universe. This is because a person left to his own devices will always conflate the right thing with his own desires, and a person cannot be trusted to make a decision if the "right thing" conflicts with his desires. A person will always find a way to make what he wants to do "the right thing."

For example, I have been in the field of Jewish education for close to forty years. Over that time, I have found that while parents always claim (and actually believe!) that they place their children's education at the top of their priorities -- they rarely do. In my experience, the top three priorities for parents when choosing a school are 1) location/convenience for the parents 2) which families they want to associate (and carpool) with, and 3) cost.

Parents convince themselves that the place that they want to send their children to school is actually the best place for them, even though the actual education of that particular school is rarely the most important factor in school selection. Parents rarely look at each individual child and try to choose a school that best fit that child's needs -- especially if there are other children already in a particular school (who wants more carpools?).

This is why getting wisdom is about location. A person living in God's universe is subject to the wisdom of the Almighty and following His path to wisdom. By doing this he eliminates his own personal desires and takes them out of the equation. This is what it means to have awe -- we view ourselves as constantly being in His presence and adhering to the truths that the Almighty provides.

This is represented by the light of the Menorah. Throughout the Torah God's presence is presented as the light of illumination. In fact, people who have near death experiences describe coming to the Almighty as moving closer to the light. The sages are teaching us that the light and illumination of the Menorah represents God's immanence in this world. We just have to choose to bathe ourselves within it. This is why the ultimate wisdom comes to us through the illumination of the Menorah. We are making the decision to live in a theocentric universe and accept the truths of the Almighty; regardless of how we ourselves perceive them.