

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Terumah/ Shabbat Zachor
February 20, 2021 *** Adar 8, 5781

Terumah in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1311/jewish/Terumah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The people of Israel are called upon to contribute thirteen materials—gold, silver and copper; blue-, purple- and red-dyed wool; flax, goat hair, animal skins, wood, olive oil, spices and gems—out of which, G-d says to Moses, “They shall make for Me a Sanctuary, and I shall dwell amidst them.”

On the summit of Mount Sinai, Moses is given detailed instructions on how to construct this dwelling for G-d so that it could be readily dismantled, transported and reassembled as the people journeyed in the desert.

In the Sanctuary’s inner chamber, behind an artistically woven curtain, was the ark containing the tablets of testimony engraved with the Ten Commandments; on the ark’s cover stood two winged cherubim hammered out of pure gold. In the outer chamber stood the seven-branched menorah, and the table upon which the “showbread” was arranged.

The Sanctuary’s three walls were fitted together from 48 upright wooden boards, each of which was overlaid with gold and held up by a pair of silver foundation sockets. The roof was formed of three layers of coverings: (a) tapestries of multicolored wool and linen; (b) a covering made of goat hair; (c) a covering of ram and tachash skins. Across the front of the Sanctuary was an embroidered screen held up by five posts.

Surrounding the Sanctuary and the copper-plated altar which fronted it was an enclosure of linen hangings, supported by 60 wooden posts with silver hooks and trimmings, and reinforced by copper stakes.

Shabbat Zachor Haftarah in a Nutshell: I Samuel 15:2-34

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/647445/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week’s special *haftarah* discusses G-d’s command to destroy the people of Amalek. This to avenge Amalek’s unprovoked attack on the Israelites that is described in the *Zachor* Torah reading.

Samuel conveys to King Saul G-d’s command to wage battle against the Amalekites, and to leave no survivors—neither human nor beast. Saul mobilizes the Israelite military and attacks Amalek. They kill the entire population with the exception of the king, Agag, and they also spare the best of the cattle and sheep.

G-d reveals Himself to Samuel. “I regret that I have made Saul king,” G-d says. “For he has turned back from following Me, and he has not fulfilled My words.”

The next morning Samuel travels to Saul and confronts him. Saul defends himself, saying that the cattle was spared to be used as sacrificial offerings for G-d. Samuel responds: “Does G-d have as great a delight in burnt offerings and peace-offerings, as in obeying the voice of G-d? Behold, to obey is better than a peace-offering; to hearken, than the fat of rams. . . . Since you rejected the word of G-d, He has rejected you from being a king.”

Saul admits his wrongdoing and invites the prophet to join him on his return home. Samuel refuses his offer. “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you, today; and has given it to your fellow who is better than you.” Samuel then kills the Amalekite king.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Home We Build Together (Terumah 5781) by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z”l

The sequence of parashot that begins with Terumah, and continues Tetzaveh, Ki Tissa, Vayakhel and Pekudei, is puzzling in many ways. First, it outlines the construction of the Tabernacle (Mishkan), the portable House of Worship the Israelites built and carried with them through the desert, in exhaustive and exhausting detail. The narrative takes almost the whole of the last third of the book of Exodus. Why so long? Why such detail? The Tabernacle was, after all, only a temporary home for the Divine Presence, eventually superseded by the Temple in Jerusalem.

Besides which, why is the making of the Mishkan in the book of Exodus at all? Its natural place seems to be in the book of Vayikra, which is overwhelmingly devoted to an account of the service of the Mishkan and the sacrifices that were offered there. The book of Exodus, by contrast, could be subtitled, “the birth of a nation”. It is about the transition of the Israelites from a family to a people and their journey from slavery to freedom. It rises to a climax with the covenant made between God and the people at Mount Sinai. What has the Tabernacle to do with this? It seems an odd way to end the book.

The answer, it seems to me, is profound. First, recall the history of the Israelites until now. It has been a long series of complaints. They complained when the first intervention by Moses made their situation worse. Then, at the Red Sea, they said to Moses: “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!” (Ex. 14:11-12).

After crossing the sea they continued to complain, first about the lack of water, then that the water was bitter, then at the lack of food, then again about the lack of water. Then, within weeks of the revelation at Sinai – the only time in history God appeared to an entire nation – they made a Golden Calf. If an unprecedented sequence of miracles cannot bring about a mature response on the part of the people, what will?

It is then that God said: Let them build something together. This simple command transformed the Israelites. During the whole construction of the Tabernacle there were no complaints. The entire people contributed – some gold, silver, or bronze, some brought skins and drapes, others gave their time and skill. They gave so much that Moses had to order them to stop. A remarkable proposition is being framed here: It is not what God does for us that transforms us. It is what we do for God.

So long as every crisis was dealt with by Moses and miracles, the Israelites remained in a state of dependency. Their default response was to complain. In order for them to reach adulthood and responsibility, there had to be a transition

from passive recipients of God's blessings to active creators. The people had to become God's "partners in the work of creation" (Shabbat 10a). That, I believe, is what the Sages meant when they said, "Call them not 'your children' but 'your builders'" (Brachot 64a). People have to become builders if they are to grow from childhood to adulthood.

Judaism is God's call to responsibility. He does not want us to rely on miracles. He does not want us to be dependent on others. He wants us to become His partners, recognising that what we have, we have from Him, but what we make of what we have is up to us, our choices and our effort. This is not an easy balance to achieve. It is easy to live a life of dependency. It is equally easy in the opposite direction to slip into the mistake of saying "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me" (Deut. 8:17). The Jewish view of the human condition is that everything we achieve is due to our own efforts, but equally and essentially the result of God's blessing.

The building of the Tabernacle was the first great project the Israelites undertook together. It involved their generosity and skill. It gave them the chance to give back to God a little of what He had given them. It conferred on them the dignity of labour and creative endeavour. It brought to closure their birth as a nation and it symbolised the challenge of the future. The society they were summoned to create in the land of Israel would be one in which everyone would play their part. It was to become – in the phrase I have used as the title of one of my books – "the home we build together."^[1]

From this we see that one of the greatest challenges of leadership is to give people the chance to give, to contribute, to participate. That requires self-restraint, *tzimtzum*, on the part of the leader, creating the space for others to lead. As the saying goes: A leader is best when people barely need to acknowledge him. When his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: 'we did it ourselves.'^[2]

This brings us to the fundamental distinction in politics between State and Society. The state represents what is done for us by the machinery of government, through the instrumentality of laws, courts, taxation and public spending. Society is what we do for one another through communities, voluntary associations, charities and welfare organisations. Judaism, I believe, has a marked preference for society rather than state, precisely because it recognises – and this is the central theme of the book of Exodus – **that it is what we do for others, not what others or God does for us, that transforms us.** The Jewish formula, I believe, is: small state, big society. The person who had the deepest insight into the nature of democratic society was Alexis de Tocqueville. Visiting America in the 1830s, he saw that its strength lay in what he called the "art of association", the tendency of Americans to come together in communities and voluntary groups to help one another, rather than leaving the task to a centralised government. Were it ever to be otherwise, were individuals to depend wholly on the state, then democratic freedom would be at risk.

In one of the most haunting passages of his masterwork, *Democracy in America*, he says that democracies are at risk of a completely new form of oppression for which there is no precedent in the past. It will happen, he says, when people exist solely in and for themselves, leaving the pursuit of the common good to the government. This would then be what life would be like:

Above this race of men stands an immense and tutelary power, which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications and to watch over their fate. That power is absolute, minute, regular, provident and mild. It would be like the authority of a parent if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks, on the contrary, to keep them in perpetual childhood: it is well content that the people should rejoice, provided they think of nothing but rejoicing. For their happiness such a government willingly labours, but it chooses to be the sole agent and the only arbiter of that happiness; it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry, regulates the descent of property, and subdivides their inheritances: what remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living?[3]

Tocqueville wrote these words almost 200 years ago, and there is a risk that this is happening to some European societies today: all state, no society; all government, little or no community.[4] Tocqueville was not a religious writer. He makes no reference to the Hebrew Bible. But the fear he has is precisely what the book of Exodus documents. When a central power – even when this is God Himself – does everything on behalf of the people, they remain in a state of arrested development. They complain instead of acting. They give way easily to despair. When the leader, in this case Moses, is missing, they do foolish things, none more so than making a Golden Calf.

There is only one solution: to make the people co-architects of their own destiny, to get them to build something together, to shape them into a team and show them that they are not helpless, that they are responsible and capable of collaborative action. Genesis begins with God creating the universe as a home for human beings. Exodus ends with human beings creating the Mishkan, as a 'home' for God. Hence the basic principle of Judaism, that we are called on to become co-creators with God. And hence, too, the corollary: that leaders do not do the work on behalf of the people. They teach people how to do the work themselves.

It is not what God does for us but what we do for God that allows us to reach dignity and responsibility.

[1] Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together: Recreating Society* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2009). [2] Attributed to Lao-Tsu. [3] Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, abridged and with an introduction by Thomas Bender (The Modern Library, New York, 1981), 584. [4] This is not to imply that there is no role for governments; that all

should be left to voluntary associations. Far from it. There are things – from the rule of law to the defence of the realm to the enforcement of ethical standards and the creation of an equitable distribution of the goods necessary for a dignified existence – that only governments can achieve. The issue is balance.

“The Torah Speaks in the Language of Humanity” 1

by Rabbi Yitz Greenberg

https://mechonhadar.s3.amazonaws.com/mh_torah_source_sheets/GreenbergParashatTerumah5781.pdf?utm_campaign=Dvar%20Torah%205781&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=111398917&_hsenc=p2ANqtz--ubjyFQTCjUICt-i-E7gOnUmA-wYEQNICiaD0PNeTIPrDf4FzeQ2fjFJPnEAWfuBmqempCTY9ZHziyyGFzNfRT-k1vkQ&utm_content=111398917&utm_source=hs_email

In the last sections of the book of Exodus, the Torah’s focus switches from the epic Exodus journey and entering into covenant. Instead, these chapters deal with the construction of the tabernacle (mishkan) and its appurtenances, down to the nuts and bolts. But if we look beyond the details, this new focus teaches us an important lesson about how Torah can reach people even today.

The Torah dwells lovingly upon the details of the ark, curtain, table, menorah, the beams, pillars, and foundation, as well as the priestly vestments. It describes the dimensions of each and the materials from which they were made. It tells of the amounts of gold, silver, and brass used and their value. It then describes the actual construction of the items. Finally, a third time, the narrative describes putting the whole sanctuary together and installing everything in its place. The dedication process climaxes with a cloud of glory over the mishkan and the Divine Presence saturating the building.

Both midrash and modern critical studies identify these repetitious sections as part of the priestly Torah (as is the Book of Leviticus with its sacrifices, which is called Torat Kohanim). Still, although I am personally of priestly descent and love the privilege given me to bless the people with the priestly benediction, this multi-chapter treatment is a bit much. Why do we need to know that the total gold used in the sanctuary and ritual objects added up to “twenty nine talents and seven hundred and thirty shekels...” whereas the silver used added up to “one hundred talents and one thousand, seven hundred and seventy five shekels?” (Exodus 38:24-25). Perhaps my low level of interest simply reflects my own cultural mindset. The Israelites who received the Torah loved the minutiae, doting on every detail of the Torah’s account, including that the screen for the gate of the mishkan courtyard was beautiful embroidery of “blue, royal purple, scarlet and fine twined linen” (38:18). For them, this was how you heighten access to God—a spiritual, non-material Presence—through external architecture.

This recalls Maimonides’ teaching that the Torah offers sacrifices as a central worship mechanism because belief in the efficacy of sacrifices was so strong in the culture in which biblical Israel lived. In Maimonides’ thinking, sacrifice was not the highest level of divine service—in fact, not up to the level of communicating with

God through prayer and silence. Nevertheless, he says, if the Torah had not included sacrificial rituals it would have had little credibility or impact on the Israelites or other people at that time. **2**

I had always read Maimonides' judgment as a downgrade of the liturgical value of sacrifices; now, I understand he was offering an implied counter-message. The Torah was given as an act of love by the Lord. As we say in the daily liturgy, "With everlasting love you loved your people, the house of Israel. Therefore, you taught us Torah and mitzvot." **3** In giving over a message to a loved one, there is a push to focus on what is of greatest interest and will be most pleasurable to the other. The Torah dwells on tabernacle and sacrifices because these gave the Israelites the sense that they were truly in touch with God and earning divine blessing, forgiveness, and love through the sacred activities.

There is also a pull in this direction because people hear divine revelation only to the extent of their capacity and maturation. The Torah expanded its treatment of sanctuary and sacrifice because the people listened more deeply and responded more fully to requests in this religious area. The proof is that giving to the building of the tabernacle was purely voluntary; yet the appeal for the tabernacle was so oversubscribed that the creators had to ask the people to stop bringing their offerings (Exodus 36:5-7). Do my reservations mean that these chapters of the Torah are so culture bound that they no longer move us? Since these commandments are not so resonant, is the Torah left behind in the ancient Mesopotamian religious setting? The answer in actual history is: no. Unlike its contemporary ancient Near Eastern religious texts, many of the Torah's passages are being taught and continue to resonate—some even more powerfully—in our very different culture. This is the role of interpretation and of a community of tradition: to continue to study and understand the Torah's words and values so they apply to our times. This continuous rearticulation moves people to live covenantally and keep the Torah as a guide to living as well as play their part in the ongoing movement toward tikkun olam, world repair.

The effect of placing the Torah so firmly in the context of each generation is maximum impact and real life influence in that time. The cost is implicating the tradition in a system which may depart from the Torah's fundamental standards or ultimate goals, because the Torah functions within that system. **4** This means that the Torah's rulings—the halakhah—is in many cases not the ideal religious response but the best possible compromise between the ideal and the real. The guideline is to do what is possible to do, given the modus operandi and assumptions of the local culture. The Messianic standards—articulated in the prophetic writings and in the ideal institutions places in each generation to manifest the ultimate standard **5**—continue to serve as attractors, pulling the covenant practice toward the ideal standards when upgrading becomes possible. Those who treasure Torah must revisit the traditions and rulings continuously to make sure that

they are recalibrated closer to the Torah's ideals.

There is one more implication of this analysis. Far from ghettoizing, the interpreters and spiritual leaders should seek maximum penetration of the Torah in the local, generational culture. They have to articulate and bring out to the greatest extent possible the Torah's meaning in the current civilization. The more the tradition can be expressed in the contemporary idiom, the more it can serve as a light for the whole nation. The eternity of the Torah—and the continuity which will enable reaching the covenantal goals—is best realized, not by staying out of the time and avoiding the ceaseless development of culture, but by expounding the tradition and living it fully in each era and time.

This approach raises the danger of simply identifying Torah with the local culture. This can lead to diluting the tradition and turning it to parroting the superficial and the trendy. Unchecked, such conformism will lead to assimilation and loss of distinctiveness. Therefore, when the local civilization is one-sided, or shallow, or excessively materialistic or universalistic, we must strive to expound the Torah as a counter-culture.

The eternity and the immediacy of the Torah is best upheld when the Torah is illuminated by the best in ethics and knowledge of the current culture, and the culture is reviewed and explicated by the best in Torah. The Torah's dialectic of revolutionary utopian goals and gradualist, traditionalist, family-centered process will make its greatest contribution when it is applied to all aspects of current civilization. This will assure that Torah is not party line liberal or conservative. Torah should blend and critique and enrich all classes and all categories of understanding. Such a Torah becomes not a foreign body in the body politic, but a religious and moral home for God, even as it infuses divine justice and love into the culture and the living generation. If we engage the current culture deeply—but also correctly—then we can repeat, spiritually, the goal of this week's parashah: "They shall build me a sanctuary/a home and I [God] shall dwell in their midst." (Exodus 25:8).

1 Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 31b. As presented by Heschel, a major school of rabbinic interpretation stresses that the Torah speaks in the language of the people so interpretation should not over determine the nuances of words and their meanings; see Abraham J. Heschel, *Heavenly Torah* (Continuum, 2005). I am using the phrase to stress that in each generation and civilization, the Torah should be articulated in the language that best speaks to people in that time. **2** See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, part 3, ch. 32. In his words "to discontinue all these manners of service... would have been contrary to the nature of man, who generally cleaves to that to which he is used..." **3** Koren Sacks *Daily Prayer Book*, Maariv, p. 244. **4** See the examples in my essay on Parashat Mishpatim, "The Book of the Covenant," available here: <https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/book-covenant> **5** Shabbat as a day of Messianic anticipation and Yovel/Jubilee as exemplifying the future economic equality.

[From Sanctuary to Study House by Ilana Kurshan](https://drive.google.com/file/d/180cn2ixLc9NyedKuHDgePE60ikpHlKF3/view)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/180cn2ixLc9NyedKuHDgePE60ikpHlKF3/view>

Parshat Terumah contains elaborate instructions for the construction of the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary where the divine presence resided throughout the

Israelites' desert wanderings. For those of us living in an age without a Temple, it may seem difficult to find religious meaning in all the architectural details – how many cubits long and wide the ark must be, how many rings should be affixed to the table, which colors of linen should be used for the curtains that covered the entire edifice. Fortunately, we can look to the Talmudic rabbis—who were also living after the Temple's destruction – to learn how these verses may take on new meaning such that spirituality is less about structure than about study.

Throughout the Talmud, the details of the Mishkan's construction serve as an occasion for extolling the virtue of Torah study. The rabbis (Yoma 72b) note that three of the Temple vessels—the altar, the table, and the ark—contained a *zer*, an ornamental golden rim that resembled a crown (the modern Hebrew word *zer* refers to a wreath or a garland). The rabbis associate each of these crowns with a different religious value. The crown of the altar, where the sacrifices were offered by the priests, symbolized the priesthood, which Aaron took for himself and his descendants. The crown of the table, which connotes abundance and wealth, symbolized the kingship, which David took for himself and his descendants. But the crown of the ark—where the tablets given on Sinai were housed—symbolized Torah, which “is still sitting and waiting to be acquired, and anyone who wishes may come and take it.” Torah study thus becomes the great equalizer – it is accessible to anyone who wishes to pursue it, regardless of wealth or lineage. Although the Mishkan is generally regarded as the domain of the priestly class, the Talmudic rabbis, who were champions of Torah study, found a way to ensure that all Jews had a place at the table – or at least in the ark.

The Talmudic sage Rava pursues this association between the ark and Torah study in commenting on the verse, “From within and without you shall cover it” (Exodus 25:11). The ark had to be overlaid with a cover of pure gold on both the inside and the outside. Rava interprets this architectural requirement as a description of the proper character of a Torah scholar. He states that any Torah scholar whose inside is not like his outside is not a true Torah scholar. A scholar of Torah must uphold the same values in her private life as in her public life, just as the ark must have the same pure gold on the inside and the outside.

The “showbread,” the *lechem hapanim*, was also employed by the sages to espouse the value of *Talmud Torah*. The Talmud in Menachot teaches that there were twelve loaves made of fine flour and arranged in two piles on the table in the sanctuary. The Torah states that they had to be before God “always,” meaning that they had to be on the table at all times. The Mishnah in Menachot (11:7) describes the elaborate choreography whereby one set of priests would remove the previous week's loaves at the very same instant as another set of priests set down the new bread. The Talmudic rabbis, struck by this obsessive concern with ensuring that the table was not left bare for even an instant, make an implicit analogy between the bread and Torah, invoking the verse “This Torah shall not depart from your mouth, you shall contemplate it day and night” (Joshua 1:8). Just as the bread had to be on the table at all times, a person should always be occupied with Torah study. When it comes to sustaining life, it is as important to speak words of Torah as it is to ensure

there is bread on the table, as the Torah reminds us: “Man cannot live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from God’s mouth” (Deuteronomy 8:3). At this point the Talmud quotes a figure identified as “Ben Dama, son of Rabbi Yishmael’s sister,” who inquires cheekily whether he may be granted an exception from this injunction to study Torah at all times, since, as he claims, he has already learned the entire Torah. May he leave aside the study of Torah and engage in Greek wisdom? Rabbi Yishmael responds to his nephew by quoting the verse from the book of Joshua. He must contemplate Torah day and night. If he can find an hour that is neither day nor night, then he may use that time to pursue his extracurricular interests. Just as the bread always had to be in the presence of God, a Jew should always be engaged in the study of Torah. (It is worth noting that as understood by the rabbis, Torah was a broad category that subsumed many other disciplines as well, such that Ben Dama could not have been missing out on all that much.) Moreover, the study of Torah brings us closer to God, as per the Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (3:6) which teaches that even if only one person is engaged in the solitary study of Torah, the divine presence rests upon that individual. The proof text for this Mishnah in fact comes from a description of sacrificial worship: “Make for me an altar of earth... in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned, I will come to you and bless you” (Exodus 20:24). God’s presence will reside not just on the altars where sacrifices are offered, but also in any place where God’s name is mentioned by scholars of Torah.

Our parsha, on its surface, more closely resembles an architectural blueprint than a moral code. But the rabbis understood that the Torah is more concerned with building a society than with building a structure. They knew that Judaism through its disciplines has the potential to fashion a morally beautiful life, just as an architect fashions a beautiful structure. And so they used the verses about the Mishkan to teach about the supreme religious pursuit, the study of Torah. Accessible to every Jew, Torah study has the potential to transform us within and without, affecting who we are and what we think about, such that no matter what we are doing, we are always at the same time contemplating the divine will. When read through the eyes of the rabbis, Parshat Teruma is a reminder that a world devoid of God’s Temple may nonetheless be permeated by God’s presence.

[Remembering Ourselves by Bex Stern Rosenblatt](https://drive.google.com/file/d/180cn2ixLc9NyedKuHDgePE60ikpHlKF3/view)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/180cn2ixLc9NyedKuHDgePE60ikpHlKF3/view>

In the cosmic battle against evil, evil has a face and a name. Evil is Amalek and the Amalekites. Their story runs through the Tanakh, emerging at important points in our history to threaten our people’s existence. However, in the cosmic battle, there is a question of what role we play. If Amalek is the evil, are we the good? Are we merely the victims of Amalekite aggression? Does the introduction of evil into the world force us to perpetuate evil?

This Shabbat, Shabbat Zachor, the Shabbat of Remembering, we remember one of the more difficult stories about Amalek. We tell it in advance of Purim, the holiday on which Haman, descendant of Agag the Amalekite, tries to exterminate our people

but instead Esther and Mordechai, descendent of Saul, exterminate him and all who would do harm to us. Our haftarah features their ancestors, Agag and Saul, pitted against each other.

In 1 Samuel 15:3, Samuel the prophet tells Saul, King of Israel, to “strike down Amalek, and commit *herem*, utter destruction, against him and all that is his. You shall not have pity on him. You shall put everyone to death, man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” Why do the Amalekites deserve total destruction? Why should we kill the babies? Because, as 1 Samuel 15:2 says, God remembers how the Amalekites had craftily attacked us on our way out of Egypt. Deuteronomy 25:18 adds to this story, noting that the Amalekites had waited till we were weary and then attacked us from behind. And so, Samuel reminds Saul of his responsibility to destroy this nation. But Saul fails. He kills almost all the people. But the Israelites and Saul have pity on Agag, King of the Amalekites, and they do not kill him. They do not kill the animals and they do not kill “all that was good.” In response, Samuel strips the kingship from Saul and kills Agag himself. The way the story is told, Saul seems to be the bad guy and Samuel seems to be the good guy. God is on Samuel’s side. Midrash Tanhuma, Ki Teitzei 9:1 dives into exactly how Samuel accomplishes the killing, how he positions himself on the right side of God. “R. Abba bar Kahana said, ‘He cut olive-sized pieces from his flesh and fed them to ostriches.’ ...but the masters say, ‘[Samuel] set up four poles and stretched him upon them.’” Another opinion describes how he castrated him. Here, we come back to the questions posed at the beginning. If the Amalekites are evil in the cosmic battle, what are we? What does it mean to wage war against evil itself? In the story from the Tanakh, we see Saul punished for trying to save ‘all that was good.’ In the imaginings of the Midrash, we let our fantasies run wild, delving into sadistic modes of death. As we confront evil in our generation, may we remember just how dangerous the battle is. May we remember who we want to be even when evil seeks to destroy us.



Yahrtzeits

- * Mel Zwillenberg remembers his father Nathan Zwillenberg (Nathan Mordechai) on Saturday February 20th (Adar II 8)
- * Merna Most remembers her mother Minna Handleman (Merel bat Avraham) on Sunday February 21st (Adar 9).
- * Karin Brandis remembers her father Stanley Grossel (Shlomo Zaiman) on Friday February 26th (Adar II 14).

Our regular weekday evening minyan will take place on Monday, February 22nd, beginning at 8:00. Your presence allows mourners and those observing yahrzeits to say Kaddish. **Please support your Kol Rina friends by attending.** Use the following Zoom link to attend:

<https://zoom.us/j/97663987468?pwd=NjFhaVZUZkpSZ3pxQWJjOU5UWFR4QT09>

Meeting ID: 976 6398 7468 Password: 080691





PURIM

Join us on **Thursday evening**, February 25 at 7:30 pm for our **Purim service** and Megilla reading. **Wear your costume**, **bring your grogger**, and **feel free to have a wee drinkie on hand for ritual purposes**. Use this link to attend the service and **Megilla reading**:

<https://zoom.us/j/97663987468?pwd=NjFhaVZUZkpSZ3pxQWJjOU5UWFR4QT09>

Meeting ID: 976 6398 7468

Password: 080691

[PURIM 5781 by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l](https://rabbisacks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/CandC-Purim-FINAL.pdf)

<https://rabbisacks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/CandC-Purim-FINAL.pdf>

Purim in a Nutshell

PURIM IS the Jewish carnival of happiness, commemorating the rescue of the Jewish people during the ancient Persian Empire from the evil Haman (a descendant of the Jewish archenemy, Amalek) who tried “to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, infants and women, in a single day,” (Esther 3:13). The story is recorded in Megillat Esther. The word “purim” means “lots” in ancient Persian and became the name of the festival because Haman drew lots to determine when he would carry out his plot.

THE STORY

The Persian Empire of the 4th century BCE extended over 127 lands, and Jews were spread across the Empire. When King Achashverosh had his wife, Queen Vashti, executed for failing to follow his orders, he arranged a beauty pageant to find a new queen. A Jewish girl named Esther found favour in his eyes and became the new queen, but she hid her nationality.

Meanwhile, the Jew-hating Haman was appointed Prime Minister of the Empire.

Mordechai, the leader of the Jews, refused to bow to Haman, which was in defiance of the royal decree. Haman was furious, and he persuaded the King to issue a decree ordering the destruction of all the Jews on the 13th of Adar, a date randomly chosen by drawing lots.

Mordechai urged Esther to confront the King and inform him of Haman's plans. Esther, although reluctant at first for fear of her life, agreed. She asked Mordechai to gather all the Jews in Shushan and convince them to spend three days repenting, fasting, and praying to God. On the third day, Esther invited the King and Haman to join her for a feast. At a second feast, Esther revealed her Jewish identity to the King and accused Haman of attempting to destroy her people. Haman was hanged, Mordechai was appointed Prime Minister in his stead, and a new decree was issued, granting the Jews the right to defend themselves against their enemies. On the 13th of Adar, the Jews mobilised and killed many of their enemies. On the 14th of Adar, they rested and celebrated. In the capital city of Shushan, they took one more day to finish the job, and so in areas which have been 'walled cities' from the time of Joshua (like Shushan), Purim is celebrated on the 15th of Adar instead of the 14th. Today, this only applies to the city of Jerusalem, which celebrates "Shushan Purim" the day after all other Jewish communities.

HOW WE CELEBRATE PURIM

There are four mitzvot on the day of Purim, and they all begin with the letter M (or mem in Hebrew). These are:

- The reading of the Megillah (the Book of Esther), which tells the story of the Purim miracle. We listen to the Megillah-reading once on the night of Purim and then again on the following day.
- Matanot La-Evyonim – giving money gifts to at least two poor people.
- Mishloach Manot – sending gifts of two kinds of ready-to-eat food to at least one person.
- Mishteh – a festive Purim feast, which often includes wine or other intoxicating beverages (Seudat Purim).

There is a general spirit of liveliness and fun on Purim that is unparalleled in the Jewish calendar. It is also customary for children especially (but adults also if they desire) to dress up in costumes. This is because the role of God is hidden in the story of Purim (and in fact even the name of God is starkly missing from the Megillah).

A traditional Purim food is Hamantaschen (three-cornered pastries bursting with sweet fillings such as poppy seeds). "Taschen" means "pockets" in Yiddish and German, but some believe these pastries represent Haman's favourite three-cornered hat, and in Hebrew we call them "Oznay Haman", meaning "Haman's ears"!

On the day before Purim (or on the Thursday before, when Purim is on Sunday), it is customary for those over Bar and Bat Mitzvah age to fast. This commemorates

Esther leading the people in fasting and praying to God that He save His people.

Purim for Our Time: The Therapeutic Joy of Purim

THERE IS a unique law in the approach to Purim. Mishe-nichnas Adar marbim besimcha: “From the beginning of Adar, we increase in joy.” This is stated in the Talmud (Taanit 29a) and is based on the passage in the Megillah (Esther 9:21-22) in which Mordechai sends a letter throughout the land instructing all Jews “to observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and the fifteenth day, every year – the days on which the Jews obtained rest from their enemies and *the month which for them was turned from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday.*”

This in turn refers back to the text in which Haman decided on the timing of his decree: “In the first month, the month of Nissan, in the twelfth year of Achashverosh, they cast pur (that is, “lots”) before Haman from day to day, and from month to month until the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar” (Esther 3:7).

The difficulties are obvious. Why do we increase our joy for an entire month? The key events were focused on a few days, the thirteenth to the fifteenth, not the whole month. And why is this a time of simcha? We can understand why the Jews of the time felt exhilaration. The decree sentencing them to death had been rescinded. Their enemies had been punished. Haman had been hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordechai, and Mordechai himself had been raised to greatness.

But is joy the emotion we should feel in perpetuity, remembering those events? The first warrant for genocide against the Jewish people (the second if one counts Pharaoh’s plan to kill all newborn Jewish males) had been frustrated. Is simcha the appropriate emotion? Surely what we should feel is relief, not joy. Pesach is the proof. The word “joy” is never mentioned in the Torah in connection with it.

Besides which, the Talmud asks why we do not say Hallel on Purim. It gives several answers. The most powerful is that in Hallel we say, “Servants of the Lord, give praise,” – meaning that we are no longer the servants of Pharaoh. But, says the Talmud, even after the deliverance of Purim, Jews were still the servants of Achashverosh, still living in exile, under his rule (Megillah 14a). Tragedy had been averted but there was no real change in the hazards of life in the Diaspora.

REFLECT: Is it possible to command the emotion of joy? How does Purim try to ensure that we experience this during the festival?

It seems to me therefore that the simcha we celebrate throughout the month of Adar is different from the normal joy we feel when something good and positive has happened to us or our people. That is expressive joy. The simcha of Adar, by contrast, is *therapeutic joy*.

Imagine what it is to be part of a people that had once heard the command issued against them: “to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews – young and old, women and children – on a single day” (Esther 3:13). We who live after the Holocaust, who

have met survivors, heard their testimony, seen the photographs and documentaries and memorials, know the answer to that question. On Purim, the Final Solution was averted. But it had been pronounced. Ever afterward, Jews knew their vulnerability. The very existence of Purim in our historical memory is traumatic. The Jewish response to trauma is counter-intuitive and extraordinary. You defeat fear by joy. You conquer terror by collective celebration. You prepare a festive meal, invite guests, give gifts to friends. While the story is being told, you make an unruly noise as if not only to blot out the memory of Amalek, but to make a joke out of the whole episode. You wear masks. You drink a little too much. You make a Purim spiel.

Precisely because the threat was so serious, you refuse to be serious – and in that refusal you are doing something very serious indeed. You are denying your enemies a victory. You are declaring that you will not be intimidated. As the date of the scheduled destruction approaches, you surround yourself with the single most effective antidote to fear: joy in life itself. As the three-sentence summary of Jewish history puts it: “They tried to destroy us. We survived. Let’s eat.” Humour is the Jewish way of defeating hate. What you can laugh at, you cannot be held captive by.

REFLECT: How do joy and humour help us deal with tragedies, both in our personal and national life?

I learned this from a Holocaust survivor. Some years ago, I wrote a book called *Celebrating Life*. It was a cheer-you-up book, and it became a favourite of the Holocaust survivors. One of them, however, told me that a particular passage in the book was incorrect. Commenting on Roberto Begnini’s comedy film about the Holocaust, *Life is Beautiful*, I had said that though I agreed with his thesis – a sense of humour keeps you sane – that was not enough in Auschwitz to keep you alive. “On that, you are wrong,” the survivor said, and then told me his story. He had been in Auschwitz, and he soon realised that if he failed to keep his spirits up, he would die. So he made a pact with another young man, that they would both look out, each day, for some occurrence they found amusing. At the end of each day they would tell one another their story and they would laugh together. “That sense of humour saved my life,” he said. I stood corrected. He was right.

REFLECT: How can humour be the ultimate defence against those who wish to take away our freedom and destroy us?

That is what we do on Purim. The joy, the merrymaking, the food, the drink, the whole carnival atmosphere, are there to allow us to live with the risks of being a Jew – in the past, and tragically in the present also – without being terrified, traumatised or intimidated. It is the most counter-intuitive response to terror, and the most effective. Terrorists aim to terrify. To be a Jew is to refuse to be terrified. Terror, hatred, and violence are always ultimately self-destructive. Those who use these tactics are always, as was Haman, destroyed by their very will to destruct.

And yes, we as Jews must fight antisemitism, the demonisation of Israel, and the intimidation of Jewish students on campus. But we must never let ourselves be intimidated – and the Jewish way to avoid this is marbim be-simcha, to increase our joy. A people that can know the full darkness of history and yet rejoice is a people whose spirit no power on Earth can ever break.

REFLECT: What role do you think joy has played in the survival of the Jewish people throughout Jewish history?

I AM proud to be part of a people who, though scarred and traumatised, never lost their humour or their faith, their ability to laugh at present troubles and still believe in ultimate redemption, who saw human history as a journey, and never stopped travelling and searching.

I am proud to be part of an age in which my people, ravaged by the worst crime ever to be committed against a people, responded by reviving a land, recovering their sovereignty, rescuing threatened Jews throughout the world, rebuilding Jerusalem, and proving themselves to be as courageous in the pursuit of peace as in defending themselves in war.

It Once Happened on Purim...

THERE IS a story of a man named Eddie Jacobson that reminds us of the role Esther played in the Purim story. Eddie was an ordinary Jewish guy from the Lower East Side of New York. When Eddie was a child, his parents moved to Kansas City and there he met a boy named Harry. Soon they became close school friends, did military service together during the First World War, and decided that when the war was over, they would go into business together. They set up a clothing store in Kansas City, but the business was not a great success and soon they drifted apart. Eddie Jacobson went on to become a travelling salesman, selling clothes. His friend, Harry S. Truman, took a slightly different route and landed up as President of the United States.

In 1947–48, the Jews of the world needed the support of the United States of America for the state of Israel to be proclaimed and recognised. The State Department was against it and advised the President not to support the creation of the State of Israel. Jews and Jewish organisations tried their utmost to see the President in the White House, and every single attempt was refused. Even the leader of the Zionist movement, Chaim Weizmann, the man who would become the first President of the State of Israel, was refused a meeting.

As time became desperate, somebody remembered that Harry S. Truman had a childhood friend called Eddie Jacobson. So they reached out to Eddie and asked if he could get the President of the United States to meet with Chaim Weizmann. So Eddie phoned up President Truman and said he had to come and see him. Truman's officials tried to block the meeting, but Truman said "This is my old friend, Eddie, from school, Eddie, from the Army, Eddie, from our shop together! How can I not see this man?"

When Eddie arrived at the White House, Truman said “Eddie, you can talk to me about anything, except Israel.” “Okay”, said Eddie and he stood in the Oval Office, in front of the President of the United States, and began to cry. “Eddie, why are you crying?” asked the President. Eddie pointed to a marble statue in the room and asked, “Who is that, Harry?” “That’s my hero, Andrew Jackson”, Truman replied. “You really admire this man?” asked Eddie. “Yes.” “And he had an influence over you?” “Yes” said Truman. Then, said Eddie, “I have a hero. His name is Chaim Weizmann. Harry, for my sake, please meet this man.” Harry looked at Eddie and he knew that he couldn’t say no to his old friend. That is how Chaim Weizmann got to see President Harry S. Truman, and that is how America voted in favour of the creation of the State of Israel. If they had not voted, Israel would not have been brought into being. What’s more, Harry S. Truman made the United States the first country in the world to recognise the State when David Ben Gurion pronounced it. Towards the end of the fourth chapter of Megillat Esther, we find Esther telling her uncle, Mordechai, about all the problems there might be in interceding with King Achashverosh regarding the fate of the Jewish people. Mordechai listens and then responds to her with the famous words, Im haharash tachrishi, ba’et hazot revach v’hatzlah ya’amod layehudim mimakom acher, “If you are silent and you do nothing at this time somebody else will save the Jewish people.” U’mi yodeia im l’et kazot, higa’at lamalchut? “But who knows, was it not for just this moment that you became a Queen, with access to King Achashverosh in the royal palace?” Just like Eddie Jacobson and Esther HaMalkah, Hashem is calling on each of us, saying there is a reason why we are here, because He has something for us to do, something that only we can do.

A people that can know the full darkness of history and yet rejoice is a people whose spirit no power on Earth can ever break.