



Yeshiva University THE RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS-HERENSTEIN CENTER FOR VALUES AND LEADERSHIP

Dear Friends,

Rabbi Aviad Tabory opens his excellent new book *State of Halakha: Israel's History in Jewish Law* (Maggid) with a discussion of the sanctity of *Yom Ha'atzma'ut*, Israel's Independence Day. In support of its holiness, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, son of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the first chief rabbi of Palestine, cites the Talmud that when a shepherd rescues one of his flock from the clutches of a lion or a bear, it is a miracle (BT *Bava Metzia* 106a). One can argue that the most basic responsibility of a shepherd is to protect his flock; the shepherd is just doing his job. What's the miracle here?

Commentators on the Talmud explain that although protection is a fundamental role of a shepherd, the decision to take on a ferocious animal expresses the "spirit of courage and willingness to fight." This decision is itself a miracle each and every time.

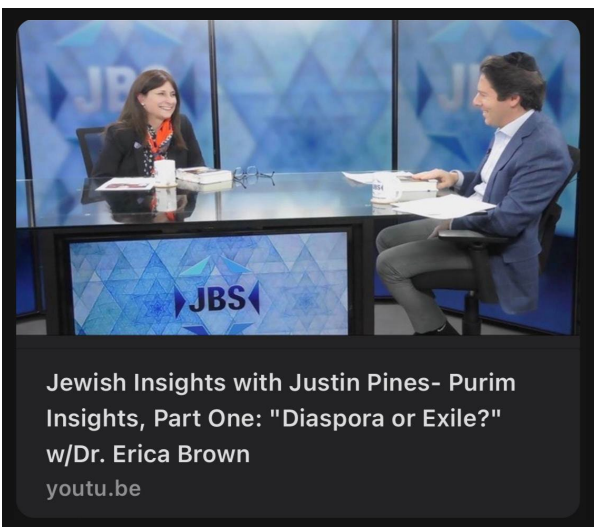
These few words offer us an appreciation of the work of every Israeli soldier and citizen defending the State right now, those on the front lines and all those who are supporting those on the front lines. Every day, every hour, that a person fights is a miracle because it represents the bravery the Talmud identifies.

With Purim fast approaching, we think about both moral and military courage. When we think about morality, we wonder how we can become better human beings. Please join us for our free online three-part series on ethics with Dr. David Shatz, one of my role models, to stretch yourself and your thinking. And enjoy the parsha essay below by Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman.

Who is the most courageous person you know in Israel right now? Drop that person a line to share your admiration.

Shabbat Shalom,
Erica

Dr. Erica Brown
Vice Provost, Rabbi Sacks-Herenstein Center for Values and Leadership



Purim Insights Part 1: Diaspora or Exile?

The Jewish Broadcasting System hosted Dr. Erica Brown in the first in a series of conversations on Purim. Justin Pines in conversation with Dr. Brown, author of [Esther: Power, Fate and Fragility in Exile](#), discussed themes of Purim as they relate to our world today.

[Click here](#) to view the conversation.



Yeshiva University
THE RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS-HERENSTEIN
CENTER FOR VALUES AND LEADERSHIP

presents



Dimensions of Jewish Ethics with Dr. David Shatz

A 3-part virtual series: Tuesdays at 8 p.m. on Zoom

SESSION 1: MARCH 12
**Divine Command
and Human
Decision-Making**

SESSION 2: MARCH 19
**Ethics and The
Problem of Evil**

SESSION 3: MARCH 26
**Sacrificing Oneself
for Others**

[To register, click here](#)

Please contact Dr. Shira Weiss with questions: sweiss2@yu.edu



Book Launch

An Ode to Joy: Judaism and Happiness in the Thought of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks and Beyond

DURING THE MONTH OF ADAR, WE ARE ENJOINED TO INCREASE OUR JOY. BUT WHAT IS JOY, HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM HAPPINESS, AND HOW CAN WE GET MORE OF IT?

JOIN **DR TAMRA WRIGHT** IN CONVERSATION WITH **DR SHIRA WEISS**, CO-EDITOR OF *AN ODE TO JOY: JUDAISM AND HAPPINESS IN THE THOUGHT OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS AND BEYOND*, AND **GILA SACKS**, DAUGHTER OF RABBI SACKS, ABOUT THE LEGACY OF RABBI SACKS AS IT IS CONVEYED THROUGH THIS COLLECTION OF ESSAYS AND REFLECTIONS BY 45 EDUCATORS, SCHOLARS, AND MEMBERS OF THE SACKS FAMILY.

PLEASE MAKE A NOTE OF THE START TIME IN YOUR TIME ZONE, AS THE CLOCKS WILL HAVE CHANGED IN NORTH AMERICA BUT NOT IN THE UK.

TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2024

LONDON (UNITED KINGDOM – ENGLAND) 8:00 PM GMT

NEW YORK (USA – NEW YORK) 4:00 PM EDT

LOS ANGELES (USA – CALIFORNIA) 1:00 PM PDT

JERUSALEM (ISRAEL) 9:00 PM IST

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

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Vayakhel 5784

Motivated Action

Despite its heavily technical, famously repetitious, and externally focused descriptions, *Parshat Vayakhel* is deeply concerned with the inner dimensions of the human psyche. The verses are saturated with heart, as the word *lev* appears a dozen times. *Lev* connotes not just emotion, but indicates many psychological constructs such as thinking, memory, inclinations, desire, and motivation. In *Parshat Vayakhel* we encounter hearts that are lifted, generous, and wise.

Many commentators focus and elaborate on these internal descriptions, portraying the Israelites as virtuous volunteers who are inspired and committed to both donate generously and dedicate their time and energy to build the Tabernacle.

Some commentaries accentuate the importance of the inner world over the external manifestations. Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski argues that God asked for donations solely so the giver can be uplifted and perfected. The entire goal was development of virtue. Likewise, according to Malbim, the essential aspect of the contributions wasn't the act of giving, but the passionate desire to donate, the generosity of spirit, and the accompanying character growth. In the language of 20th century *mussar* master Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, "the essence is the heart that accompanies the *mitzvot*." God wanted them to bring their hearts along with the gifts. This required the cultivation of proper thoughts, intentions, emotions, and motivations before contributing.

While inner motivations are no doubt important, focusing too much on intentions can backfire. Rashi, quoting a Midrash, critiques the princes for contributing last to the Tabernacle (Ex. 35:27). Even though they had noble objectives to provide whatever was needed after everyone else donated, their ultimate lack of expedient action was problematic.

Questioning the repetitiveness of *Parshat Vayakhel* when compared to the previous descriptions of the Tabernacle in *Parshat Terumah*, Rabbi Avraham Pam notes that the fundamental difference between the two is that in *Terumah* there is a command to make the Tabernacle (*"ve'asita"*), and *Vayakhel* describes the follow through (*"ve'asu"*). It was worth repeating the entire narrative just to emphasize that they executed the tasks.

Rabbi Aaron Levine, known as the Reisha Rav, also emphasizes the importance of quick commitment and performance of action. This is why, he contends, Moses appeals to the skilled laborers to “come and make,” the emphasis on the exuberant commitment and expedient follow through (Ex. 35:10). These enterprising characteristics, writes Rabbi Yeruchom Levovitz, are key to both entrepreneurial and spiritual success. This was the trait of “everyone whose spirit was moved” to work on the Tabernacle (Ex. 35:21). Even though they had yet to learn the craft, they made a bold commitment to an important undertaking. Generating drive, taking initiative, and implementing ambitious action can lead to exponential achievement.

Ideally, these two different emphases are ultimately complementary. Perfecting our internal thoughts, emotions, and motivations should engender tangible constructive expressions. Our goal is to produce sanctified actions that are infused with virtuous intentions, spiritual striving, and a burning desire to connect to the Divine.

Character Challenge: Notice a need in the community and commit to action. Actively work on cultivating the proper spiritual intentions and plan for expeditious and successful follow through.

Quote from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks *zt”l*: “Turning ideals into codes of action that shape habits of the heart is what Judaism and leadership are about. Never lose the inspiration of the Prophets, but never lose, either, the routines that turn ideals into acts and dreams into achieved reality” (“Sprints and Marathons,” *Covenant & Conversation*).

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