

## Tezaveh – 5782

There are too many years age difference between myself and my eldest cousin on my mother's side of the family to have been invited to Harvey Abram's (Z'L) Bar Mitzvah. But I can remember very well what it was like to go to his brother Lionel's special day. Lionel sadly also Z'L was only 1 year older than me & his brother Michael and I are only two weeks apart. My Aunt Miriam and Uncle Sam were members of the Holy Blossom in Toronto and so the Bar Mitzvah's were at what has sometimes been referred to as the Temple on the Hill, meaning on Bathurst just south of Eglinton in Toronto. I felt that I had entered foreign territory – there were absolutely no Tallitot or Kippot in sight and almost everything was in English. But there was majesty in the sanctuary and glory in the singing of the cantor accompanied by the choir high above us in the back of the sanctuary.

That was my first exposure to the magnificent structures that so many of the synagogues in Toronto and elsewhere are. As I grew older and could afford to travel and sightsee elsewhere beyond the shores of Canada, I found that same majesty in various churches and cathedrals. It would NOT be a stretch intellectually or emotionally to believe that all of these holy places drew their inspiration from the mishkan we read about every year when we read these parshiot in the book of Shemot or Exodus. But in this week's parsha we read about something more than just the holy space within. We are reminded each year that the holy space was tended to be a holy group of people, the Kohanim. My readings in genealogy and research shared with us done by our Rebecca indicate and almost definitively prove that the Kohanim have genetic markers that still exist down to this day, believe it or not.

For years, whenever we had strangers come to our services on Thursdays or Shabbatot, we would have to go and ask them if they were a Kohen or a Levi because, when we read the Torah, the first aliya must always go to a Kohen and the second to a Levi and if there is no Kohen, then the Levi has to have both the first AND the second aliya. They cannot even be called up for any other aliyot, which always presents a challenge with a Bar or Bat Mitzvah is a Kohen or a Levi. But that's another whole story for another time. For now, I just want to emphasize that Jewish law insists that a Kohen come first and cannot be overlooked for a Levi. So, it became important to ask. It was and still is a matter of respect and custom and tradition.

Respect is one aspect of the Kohanim that Rabbi Jonathan Sacks refers to in a Davar Torah for this parsha written before he passed away. He argues that with the construction of the Mishkan and the dedication of Aaron and his sons as the Kohanim given the care of that Mishkan, the real nature of the Jewish people as a nation came to fruition. How so, you might ask? Imagine being around the mishkan the day described so carefully in today's parsha when the priesthood was conferred on Aaron and his sons. Great care was taken to ensure that the mishkan was built with only the finest of materials. The ceremony was conducted to elicit the greatest respect for the figure of Aaron and his sons. The majestic nature of what was conducted, and the sacrificial cult created around the Mishkan first and then the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem reinforced the expected holiness of the business of Judaism. Although it is no longer considered fashionable, probably because so many people have not been taught this, but one does not leave the bimah with one's back to the Aron HaKodesh and we take three steps back when we are davening the Amidah and there is an entire

choreography to our prayers all to indicate the loyalty, respect, and sanctity of what we are doing in the holy space.

What does this have to do with nationhood though? This week's parsha opens with the commandment to bring oil for the kindling of the Menorah which will burn eternally. The commandment goes on to point out that the oil must be of the purest quality and the sages comment on why this is so and why it is olive oil, as expensive as it always was and always will be because of the process of growing and pressing it. It must be as holy and pure as the Jewish people are supposed to be forever. In fact, in the commentaries in our Eitz Chaim chumash, it uses as metaphor to emphasize the need for purity. Most of us know exactly what olive oil with balsamic vinegar looks like. Olive oil doesn't mix well with anything else. The message is that, just like the olive oil must be holy and pure without mixing with other substances, the Jewish people are to be equally holy and pure, unmixed with the OTHER.

Now think back to my illusion to Genealogical research before. That research shows that while other parts of the Jewish people have mixed and merged and disappeared, the Kohanim, true that original charge after Sinai, still have that same marker and distinction. In the cemeteries all over the world, you can see references to so and so, HaCohen, or sometimes there is a symbol on the matzavah, monument, to indicate a Kohen. One has to be humbled even today to these links we have with our forefathers in Sinai. WE don't need any other indicators than that. What other people in history have the same remarkable trail through time?