

WHY NOT CELEBRATE OUR HERO'S BIRTHDAYS?

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Today's Learning:

Eruvin 2:5-6

Orach Chaim 248:4-249:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yevamot 81

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Sotah 43

Why, asks R' Gedaliah Silverstone z"l (see page 4), do Jews not observe the birthdays of their heroes in the same way that Americans observe the birthdays of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln? He answers as follows:

In Devarim (17:8) we read, "If a judgment is hidden from you, between blood and blood, between verdict and verdict, between blemish and blemish, matters of dispute in your cities . . ." This may be interpreted: G-d's judgment seems to be hidden. Why is Jewish blood different from non-Jewish blood, that Jewish blood should be spilled so freely? Why is a verdict involving a Jew different from a verdict involving a non-Jew, that a Jew cannot get a fair trial in many parts of the world? Why is one Jew's moral blemish attributed to the entire Jewish people?

The answer, writes R' Silverstone, is that it is because of disputes in our cities. All of our troubles in exile are caused by our own lack of unity. When we fight among ourselves, gentile governments listen gleefully and take advantage of our weakened state. Moreover, it has not been uncommon in Jewish history for Jews to resolve their personal or communal disputes by filing false reports with the government against their opponents, thus giving our enemies opportunities to oppress us.

A Jew's ability to turn against his own people is the reason that we do not celebrate our heroes' birthdays. When a George Washington or an Abraham Lincoln is born, his nation can be reasonably certain that he will be loyal to his people. If he is not destined to serve his nation, at least he is unlikely to turn against his nation. This is not true, unfortunately, among our own people. We do not know until a Jew dies whether or not he will turn out to be an enemy of his own people. (Bet Meir, Vol. III, p.31)

"And you [Moshe] shall command Bnei Yisrael that they shall take to you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually." (27:20)

Why does it say here, "[T]hey shall take to _you_," whereas regarding the command to build the mishkan/tabernacle it says (25:2), "[T]hey shall take to _Me_"? R' Gavriel Ze'ev Wolf Margolis z"l answers as follows:

The gemara (Nedarim 38a) states that Moshe was commanded to teach the laws of the Torah to all of Bnei Yisrael. However, the ability to study the Torah in depth and to reason through it was given to Moshe and his family alone, and Moshe, because of his kindness, shared this gift with the Jewish people.

The purpose of the mishkan was to house the aron/ark. The aron, in turn, held the luchot, i.e., the Torah. Thus, the mishkan represents the main body of the Torah, which was given to all of the Jewish people with which to serve Hashem. Therefore, regarding the mishkan it says, "[T]hey shall take to Me."

The menorah represents the wisdom of the Torah (see, for example Bava Batra 25b - "One who wants to become wise should turn toward the south [the location of the menorah] in prayer"). The wisdom of the Torah is primarily Moshe's, and therefore it says, "[T]hey shall take to you." (Torat Gavriel)

The following comment on the above verse is quoted by R' Margolis in the name of "my relative, the gaon, R' Ben Zion Aryeh Leib the son of R' Yosef Zeisling":

There is a custom in many communities to light extra candles in shul on the seventh of Adar, the yahrzeit of Moshe Rabbenu. The reason is that one is obligated to honor a teacher as one honors a parent, and Moshe was the teacher of all of us. This is alluded to in the above verse, which may be read as follows: "And you Moshe will command Bnei Yisrael [the laws of the Torah; therefore] they

will take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually [when your yahrzeit comes]." It should be noted that the seventh of Adar typically falls during the week in which this parashah is read. (Nachal Geivim)

R' Gedalyah Schorr z"l explained the above verse as follows: The midrash says that Moshe was troubled when Hashem told him to draw Aharon near to become Kohen Gadol. Hashem answered with the words of Tehilim 119:92, "Were not Your Torah my preoccupation, then I would have perished in my affliction."

At first glance, the midrash appears to mean that Moshe did not want Aharon to be the Kohen Gadol, and that Hashem consoled Moshe by reminding him of his own important role as the teacher of Torah. However, this cannot be correct! In fact, Moshe initially refused to be Hashem's prophet because he was concerned that his older brother, Aharon, would feel slighted (see Rashi to Shemot 4:13-14). What then does the midrash mean?

R' Schorr explains that Moshe felt that it would be a slight to Aharon if Moshe had to appoint Aharon to be Kohen Gadol. Moshe preferred that Aharon be acclaimed as Kohen Gadol without any intervention on Moshe's part. Hashem answered him, "No! There can be no leadership independent of the Torah, and you, Moshe, represent the Torah."

This is why the Torah says, "[T]hey shall take to _you_ . . . olive oil for illumination." Any service that is performed in the mishkan must be done through Moshe, i.e., through the Torah. Any attempt to serve G-d that is done independently of what the Torah demands is worthless. (Ohr Gedalyahu)

The two most prominent of the Kohen Gadol's garments (all of which are described in this week's parashah) were the tzitz and the choshen, notes R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l. The tzitz was the golden band worn on the Kohen Gadol's forehead; the choshen was the breastplate full of gemstones. The tzitz was opposite the Kohen Gadol's mind; the choshen was opposite his heart. The tzitz represented the wisdom with which the Kohen Gadol decided questions of halachah: of ritual purity, of kashrut, of business relationships, etc. The choshen was the vehicle by which the Kohen Gadol answered political questions: should the Jewish people go to war, should the king be rebuked, etc.

For millennia, there was no doubt that the same Kohen Gadol, who wore the tzitz, should wear the choshen as well. Political leadership and halachic leadership were inseparable. The same Kohen Gadol whose mind was saturated with the wisdom of the holy Torah of R' Akiva and R' Elazar, of Abaye and Rava, of the Rambam and the Ra'avah, of the Bet Yosef and the Rema, was the individual who was divinely inspired to see the solutions to the political and social questions of the day.

Only recently, says R' Soloveitchik, has a new way emerged among us: a distinction has been created between the gaon/sage of the generation and the manhig/ leader of the generation. This

view says that the sage who busies himself with the most complex halachic questions is not sophisticated enough to deal with the "real" problems which we face. In truth, though, Chazal have said, "If a kohen is not divinely inspired, do not ask anything of him."

No so-called leader can love his fellow Jews if his mind is not permeated with the holiness of the Jewish Torah. There is no choshen without the tzitz. (Divrei Hagut Ve'ha'arachah p.191)

Rabbis of the New World

R Gedaliah Silverstone z"l was born in Eastern Europe in 1871, and he studied in the yeshiva of Telshe under R' Eliezer Gordon. In 1901, R' Silverstone became Chief Rabbi of Belfast (Ireland). In approximately 1906, he moved to Washington, D.C. where he served several congregations, including Tifereth Israel (which was then Orthodox) and Ohev Sholom. During the 1930's he settled in Eretz Yisrael, and he died there on 2 Av 5704/1944. His works include Bet Meir, Yeshuah Gedolah, Pirchei Aviv, Sukkat Shalom and a Haggadah commentary entitled Korban Pesach.

In Bet Meir, a collection of sermons, R' Silverstone gives the reader glimpses of Jewish life in America before World War One. He writes:

I know that many of the rabbis who know me, both in this country and in England, will wonder why I am occupying myself with homiletics rather than "negaim ve'ohalot" (esoteric areas of halachah). However, I know that in this country there are few people who learn such things (i.e., learned works) and they become fewer in number every day. Furthermore, those who would learn such books cannot afford to buy them.

He also writes:

A sinner once asked me, "Why do rabbis in America ask for payment for their services? They will learn with you for money, they will deliver a sermon for money, they will eulogize for money, etc."

I answered him, "Assuming you are correct - tell me, what do you do for money? You transgress Shabbat for money, you interlope on other people's businesses for money, you cheat for money, etc. You will commit any abomination for money. At least rabbis earn their money from doing good deeds."

R' Silverstone's father, R' Yeshayah Meir Silverstone, was rabbi in Liverpool, England beginning in 1901. (Sources: Otzar Harabbanim Nos. 4344, 11779; Introductions to Bet Meir, Vols. II and III)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
