

COVENANT AND CONVERSATION

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Tetsaveh

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Prophet and Priest

Judaism is unusual in that it recognises not one form of religious leadership but two: the prophet and the priest.

The sedra of Tetsaveh, as commentators have noted, has one unusual feature: it is the only sedra from the beginning of Shemot to the end of Devarim that does not contain the name of Moses. Several interpretations have been offered:

The Vilna Gaon suggests that it is related to the fact that in most years it is read during the week in which the seventh of Adar falls: the day of Moses' death. During this week we sense the loss of the greatest leader in Jewish history - and his absence from Tetsaveh expresses that loss.

The Baal HaTurim relates it to Moses' plea, in next week's sedra, for G-d to forgive Israel. "If not," says Moses, "blot me out of the book you have written" (32: 32). There is a principle that "The curse of a sage comes true, even if it was conditional [and the condition has not been satisfied]" (Makkot 11a). Thus for one week his name was "blotted out" from the Torah.

The Paneach Raza relates it to another principle: "There is no anger that does not leave an impression"

When Moses, for the last time, declined G-d's invitation to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt, saying "Please send someone else", G-d "became angry with Moses" (Ex. 4: 13-14) and told him that his brother Aaron would accompany him. For that reason Moses forfeited the role he might otherwise have had, of becoming the first of Israel's priests, a role that went instead to Aaron. That is why he is missing from the sedra of Tetsaveh which is dedicated to the role of the Cohen.

All three explanations focus on an absence. However, perhaps the simplest explanation is that Tetsaveh is dedicated to a presence, one that had a decisive influence on Judaism and Jewish history.

Judaism is unusual in that it recognises not one form of religious leadership but two: the navi and Cohen, the prophet and the priest. The figure of the prophet has always captured the imagination. He (or she) is a person of drama, "speaking truth to power", unafraid to challenge kings and courts or society as a whole in the name of high, even utopian ideals. No other type of religious personality has had the impact as the prophets of Israel, of whom the greatest was Moses. The priests, by contrast, were for the most part quieter figures, a-political, who served in the sanctuary rather than in the spotlight of political debate. Yet they, no less than the prophets, sustained Israel as a holy nation. Indeed, though Israel were summoned to become "a kingdom of priests" they were never called on to be a people of prophets (Moses said, "Would that all G-d's people were prophets", but this was a wish, not a reality).

Though Israel were summoned to become "a kingdom of priests" they were never called on to be a people of prophets.

Let us therefore consider some of the differences between a prophet and a priest:

- “The role of priest was dynastic. It passed from father to son. The role of prophet was not dynastic. Moses' own sons did not succeed him; Joshua, his disciple did.
- “The task of the priest was related to his office. It was not inherently personal or charismatic. The prophets, by contrast, each imparted their own personality. "No two prophets had the same style" (This, incidentally, is why there were prophetesses but no priestesses: this corresponds to the difference between formal office and personal authority. See R. Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, Responsa Binyan Av, I: 65).
- “The priests wore a special uniform; the prophets did not.
- “There are rules of kavod (honour) due to a Cohen. There are no corresponding rules for the honour due to a prophet. A prophet is honoured by being listened to, not by formal protocols of respect.
- “The priests were removed from the people. They served in the Temple. They were not allowed to become defiled. There were restrictions on whom they might marry. The prophet, by contrast, was usually part of the people. He might be a shepherd like Moses or Amos, or a farmer like Elisha. Until the word or vision came, there was nothing special in his work or social class.
- “The priest offered up sacrifices in silence. The prophet served G-d through the word.
- “They lived in two different modes of time. The priest functioned in cyclical time - the day (or week or month) that is like yesterday or tomorrow. The prophet lived in covenantal (sometimes inaccurately called linear) time - the today that is radically unlike yesterday or tomorrow. The service of the priest never changed; that of the prophet was constantly changing. Another way of putting it is to say that the priest worked to sanctify nature, the prophet to respond to history.
- “Thus the priest represents the principle of structure in Jewish life, while the prophet represents spontaneity.

The priest speaks the word of G-d for all time, the prophet, the word of G-d for this time.

The key words in the vocabulary of the *Cohen* are *kodesh* and *chol*, *tahor* and *tamei*, sacred, secular, pure and impure. The key words in the vocabulary of the prophets are *tzedek* and *mishpat*, *chesed* and *rachamim*, righteousness and justice, kindness and compassion.

The key verbs of priesthood are *lehorot* and *lehavdil*, to instruct and distinguish. The key activity of the prophet is to proclaim "the word of the Lord"

The distinction between priestly and prophetic consciousness (*torat cohanim* and *torat nevi'im*) is fundamental to Judaism, and is reflected in the differences between law and narrative, halakhah and aggadah, creation and redemption. The priest speaks the word of G-d for all time, the prophet, the word of G-d for this time. Without the prophet, Judaism would not be a religion of history and destiny. But without the priest, the children of Israel would not have become the people of eternity. This is beautifully summed up in the opening verses of Tetsaveh:

Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives, to keep the lamp constantly burning [leha'alot ner tamid, literally, "to raise an eternal light"] In the tent of meeting, outside the curtain that is in front of the Testimony, Aaron and his sons shall keep the lamps burning before the Lord from evening to morning. This is to be a lasting ordinance among the Israelites for the generations to come.

Moses the prophet dominates four of the five books that bear his name. But in Tetsaveh for once it is Aaron, the first of the priests, who holds centre-stage, undiminished by the rival presence of his brother. For whereas Moses lit the fire in the souls of the Jewish people, Aaron tended the flame and turned it into "an eternal light".

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המלאכה
לגמור
ולא אתה
בן חורין
להבטל
ממנה

Laughter Defeats Tragedy and Re-Affirms Hope

Reviewing a book of mine in the Spectator two years ago, Bruce Anderson began with the sentence, "The Chief Rabbi has written an almost great book." In *Life is Beautiful* Roberto Benigni has made an almost great film. In it he has attempted the impossible - a comedy about the Holocaust.

We are so used to the festival that rarely do we stop to wonder at the fact that this, the most boisterous and rowdy of Jewish days, commemorates the first warrant for genocide.

The story begins in Italy in 1939. Benigni, who wrote and directed the film and plays the starring role, acts the part of a clown, Guido, around whom crazy things happen and who is capable of turning any situation into a joke. Cars run out of control. Girls fall out of the sky. Hats get switched. There are already ominous rumblings of danger to come. The Fascists have come to power. Racist doctrines are being

taught in school. But somehow Guido manages to laugh on the edge of the precipice. He charms a local beauty and whisks her off from her engagement to the local town clerk on the back of a horse that has been painted with anti-semitic slogans. Thus far we are in Chaplinesque territory, the little man who mocks the system.

Then the film fast-forwards and we are in a different world. Guido and his five-year old son Joshua are transported to a concentration camp. His wife, a non-Jew, voluntarily joins them. To save his son, Guido begins a sustained pretence that the whole thing is a game. If Joshua stays out of sight, they will win the prize, a tank. As the reality of the camp grows ever more grim, so Guido's act becomes ever more surreal. From here on the question is, which of the two madresses will prevail, the Final Solution or irrepressible humour?

The film has received considerable acclaim. It has won seven Oscar nominations, including three for Benigni himself. It is certainly powerful and moving and will long linger in the memory. Its theme is profound and eloquently portrayed, namely that humour is a protest against inhumanity, our way of breaking through the confines of injustice and pain, an ultimate assertion of the human spirit. If we can laugh we are not yet broken. If we can make others laugh we can keep them alive.

Ultimately, though, in setting his tale in the concentration camps Benigni has gone too far. A fable needs a happy ending. The Holocaust had no happy ending. Humour may have kept the victims sane. It did not keep them alive. There are evils before which laughter fails and the human imagination loses its grip, and this was one. To sustain his fiction Benigni has to hide from us the fact of death. It is there in the film, but only off-screen. Perhaps only Kaddish and the Book of Job are adequate to such darkness, and neither soften the impact of grief.

Ironically, it is Purim that comes closest to the mood of *Life is Beautiful*. We are so used to the festival that rarely do we stop to wonder at the fact that this, the most boisterous and rowdy of Jewish days, commemorates the first warrant for genocide, Haman's decree to annihilate the Jewish people. What makes Purim possible is that the decree was averted. In this case, unlike the Holocaust, there was a happy ending.

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Purim's festivities are the most eloquent testimony I know to the unbreakable spirit of a people who, more than most, have walked through the valley of the shadow of death but kept an unshakeable hold on life.

people who, more than most, have walked through the valley of the shadow of death but kept an unshakeable hold on life. The American sociologist Peter Berger calls humour a "signal of transcendence", something within us that points to something beyond us. Nowhere do we sense this more than on Purim, when laughter defeats tragedy and re-affirms hope.

And there is something else that links Purim to Benigni. In the sedra of Ki Tissa, after the Israelites have made the golden calf, Moses prays to G-d to forgive them "because they are a stiff-necked people". Ramban asks why Moses says "because", not "despite the fact that". He answers that what was then a vice would one day become a virtue. A people who are stiff-necked find it hard to bow down. They may find it hard to worship G-d, but they will certainly never worship anyone else.

So it has been from Purim to the present. Mordechai refused to bow down to Haman. Jews refused to bow down to Hitler. There is something indomitable about the Jewish personality "that perennial stiff neck" that refuses to prostrate itself before pretension or power. Life is Beautiful may fail as a film about the Holocaust but it succeeds as a story about courage. As Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor, taught: everything can be taken from us except one thing, the freedom to choose how to respond. To know how tragic life can be, and yet never bow down to the angel of death - that is the awe-inspiring strength of the Jewish soul.

Yet there is a profound wisdom in Purim, and it is precisely this which Benigni has captured in his film. Contemplating their so nearly catastrophic fate, Jews found that laughter was stronger than tears. The Megillah turns tragedy into comedy. The banging and clapping at Haman's name teaches us, even as children, to recognise evil but not to fear it. Purim's festivities are the most eloquent testimony I know to the unbreakable spirit of a

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Sourcesמקורות

<p>¹ Shemot Chapter 32 verse 32 Now, if You would, please forgive their sin. If not, You can blot me out from the book that You have written.' Return to text</p>	<p><u>שמות פרק לב</u> (לב) ועתה אם תשא חטאתם ואם אין מחני נא מספרך אשר כתבת:</p>
<p>² Talmud Masechet Makkot 11a The curse of a sage comes true, even if it was conditional Return to text</p>	<p><u>תלמוד בבלי מסכת מכות דף יא עמוד א</u> א"ר אבהו: קללת חכם אפילו על תנאי היא באה.</p>
<p>³ Baal Haturiim on Tetzaveh 27, 20 <i>And you will command</i> - Moshe's name is not mentioned in this Torah reading. In contrast, in the entire Chumash from the time of Moshe's birth, there is no Torah reading in which his name is not mentioned. The reason for [its omission] is because [Moshe said:] "Wipe me out of Your book which You wrote." The curse of a sage comes true, even if it was conditional. Return to text</p>	<p><u>בעל הטורים, תצוה, כז, כ</u> ואתה תצוה – לא הזכיר משה בזה הסדר, מה שאין כן בכל החומש, שמשעה שנולד משה אין סדר שלא הוזכר בה. והטעם משום שאמר מחני נא מספרך אשר כתבת, וקללת חכם אפילו על תנאי באה.</p>
<p>⁴ Midrash Agadah Bemidbar (Buber) Chapter 11 :15 And if you say kill me as with the golden calf, and if not blot me out. Moshe knew that Hashems anger is vehement and there is no anger that does not make an impression, he was prepared to sacrifice himself for the Jewish people. Return to text</p>	<p><u>מדרש אגדה (בובר) במדבר פרק יא ד"ה [טו] ואם ככה</u> [טו] ואם ככה את עשה לי הרגני נא הרג. כשם שאמר במעשה העגל, ואם אין מחני נא (שמות לב לב). לפי שידע משה רבינו כי חרון אף ה' קשה, ואין חרון אף בלי רושם נתן נפשו על ישראל: ואל אראה ברעתי. ברעתם היה לו לומר, אלא שכינה הכתוב:</p>

<p>⁵ Rashi on Shemot Chapter 4 verse 14 Rav Yehoshua ben Karchah says, Every time the "burning of God's anger" is mentioned in the Torah a lasting mark is mentioned with regard to it, but this burning anger has no lasting mark mentioned with regard to it, and we do not find any punishment coming about through that burning anger. Rav Yose said to him, A mark is mentioned with regard to this one, too, "It is there not Aaron your brother, the Levite..." who had been destined to be a Levite, not a Kohen, and I had intended that the Kehunah would come forth from you. Now, it will not be so. Rather, he will be a Kohen and you will be the Levite, as it says, "But as for Moses, the man of God, his sons will be reckoned among the tribe of Levi." Return to text</p>	<p><u>רש"י שמות פרק ד פסוק יד</u> (יד) ויחר אף - ר' יהושע בן קרחה אומר כל חרון אף שבתורה נאמר בו רושם, וזה לא נאמר בו רושם, ולא מצינו שבא עונש על ידי אותו חרון. אמר לו רבי יוסי אף בזו נאמר בו רושם, הלא אהרן אחיך הלוי, שהיה עתיד להיות לוי ולא כהן, והכהונה הייתה אומר לצאת ממך, מעתה לא יהיה כן, אלא הוא יהיה כהן ואתה הלוי, שנאמר (דברי הימים א' כג כד) ומשה איש האלהים בניו יקראו על שבט הלוי:</p>
<p>⁶ Shemot Chapter 19 Verse 6 You will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to Me.' These are the words that you must relate to the Israelites.' Return to text</p>	<p><u>שמות פרק יט</u> (ו) ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש אלה הדברים אשר תדבר אל בני ישראל:</p>
<p>⁷ Bemidbar Chapter 11 Verse 29 'Are you jealous for my sake?' replied Moses. 'I only wish that all of God's people would have the gift of prophecy! Let God grant His spirit to them [all]!' Return to text</p>	<p><u>במדבר פרק יא</u> (כט) ויאמר לו משה המקנא אתה לי ומי יתן כל עם ידוד נביאים כי יתן ידוד את רוחו עליהם:</p>
<p>⁸ Talmud Masechet Sanhedrin 89a Rabbi Yitzhak said: the same communication is revealed to many prophets, yet no two prophets prophecy in the identical phraseology. Return to text</p>	<p><u>תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף פט עמוד א</u> דאמר רבי יצחק: סיגנון אחד עולה לכמה נביאים, ואין שני נביאים מתנבאין בסיגנון אחד.</p>

<p>⁹Rambam Sefer Hamitzvot Mitzvot Aseh 32 The 32nd Mitzvah is that which commanded us to honour the seed of Aharon and to exalt him, to raise his status to be the first and even if he refuses, you should not listen to him. All of this is due to the greatness that Hashem gave them when he took them and chose them to do his service, to sacrifice his offerings. <i>You must [strive to] keep him holy, since he presents the food offering to God. He must be holy,</i> The Gemara (Gittin 59b) explains you should make him holy in all things to do with holiness. He should get the first Aliyah, he should be the first to be offered to bless and be given the first choice of any portion. Return to text</p>	<p><u>ספר המצוות לרמב"ם מצות עשה לב</u> והמצוה הל"ב היא שצונו לכבד זרע אהרן ולנשאם ולרוממם ונשים מדרגתם מדרגה קודמת וראשונה ואפילו ימאנו אותו לא נשמע מהם. וזה כלו הגדלה לאל יתעלה אחר שהוא לקחם ובחרם לעבודתו ולהקריב קרבנותיו. והוא אמרו יתעלה ויתברך שמו (ר"פ אמור) וקדשתו כי את לחם אלהיך הוא מקריב קדוש יהיה לך. ובא הפירוש (גטין נט ב וש"נ) וקדשתו לכל דבר שבקדושה לפתוח ראשון ולברך ראשון וליטול מנה יפה ראשון.</p>
<p>¹⁰Rambam Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah Chapter 7 Halachah 7 Not everyone who presents a sign and proof is believed as a prophet, but only those people who are known to be suitable to receive prophecies on account of their wisdom and actions, and that they went in the ways of prophecy in its holiness and exegeses. When such people present a sign and proof and say that God sent them, it is a commandment to listen to them, for it is written, "...to him you shall listen". Return to text</p>	<p><u>רמב"ם הלכות יסודי התורה פרק ז הלכה ז</u> ולא כל העושה אות ומופת מאמינים לו שהוא נביא, אלא אדם שהיינו יודעים בו מתחלתו שהוא ראוי לנבואה בחכמתו ובמעשיו שנתעלה בהן על כל בני גילו והיה מהלך בדרכי הנבואה בקדושתה ובפרישותה ואח"כ בא ועשה אות ומופת ואמר שהאל שלחו מצוה לשמוע ממנו שנאמר אליו תשמעון.</p>

<p>11 Vayikra Chapter 10 Verses 8-11 God spoke to Aaron, saying: When you enter the Communion Tent, neither you nor your descendants may drink wine; or any other intoxicant; otherwise you will die. This is an eternal law for all your generations. [You will thus be able to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the ritually unclean and the clean. [You will also be able] to render decisions for the Israelites in all the laws that God has taught you through Moses. Return to text</p>	<p><u>ויקרא פרק י</u></p> <p>(ח) וידבר ה' אל אהרן לאמר: (ט) יין ושכר אל תשת אתה ובניך אתך בבאכם אל אהל מועד ולא תמתו חקת עולם לדרתכם: (י) ולהבדיל בין הקדש ובין החל ובין הטמא ובין הטהור: (יא) ולהורת את בני ישראל את כל החקים אשר דבר ידוד אליהם ביד משה:</p>
<p>12 Hoshea Chapter 2 Verse 21 And I will betroth you to me forever, and I will betroth you to me in righteousness, and in judgement, and in lovingkindness and in mercy</p> <p>Yermiyahu Chapter 9 22-23 So says Hashem, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the lord that exercises lovingkindness, judgement and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, says Hashem. Return to text</p>	<p><u>הושע פרק ב</u></p> <p>(כא) וארשתיך לי לעולם וארשתיך לי בצדק ובמשפט ובחסד וברחמים:</p> <p><u>ירמיהו פרק ט</u></p> <p>(כב) כה אמר ידוד אל יתהלל חכם בחכמתו ואל יתהלל הגבור בגבורתו אל יתהלל עשיר בעשרו: (כג) כי אם בזאת יתהלל המתהלל השכל וידע אותי כי אני ידוד עשה חסד משפט וצדקה בארץ כי באלה הפצתי נאם ידוד: ס</p>

<p>¹³Yishayahu Chapter 1 Verse 10 Here the word of the Lord you rulers of Sodom, give ear to the law of our G-d, you people of Gomorrah</p> <p>Yermiyahu Chapter 2 Verse 4 Hear you, the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob and all the families of the house of Israel.</p> <p>Yechezkel Chapter 13 Verse 2 Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy and say you to them that prophesy out of their own heart. Hear you the word of the Lord.</p> <p>Return to text</p>	<p><u>ישעיהו פרק א</u></p> <p>(י) שמעו דבר ה' קציני סדם האזינו תורת אלהינו עם עמרה:</p> <p><u>ירמיהו פרק ב</u></p> <p>(ד) שמעו דבר ה' בית יעקב וכל משפחות בית ישראל:</p> <p><u>יחזקאל פרק יג</u></p> <p>(ב) בן אדם הנבא אל נביאי ישראל הנבאים ואמרת לנביאי מלבם שמעו דבר ה':</p>
<p>¹⁴ Shemot Chapter 27 Verses 20-21 You, [Moses], must command the Israelites to bring you clear illuminating oil, made from hand-crushed olives, to keep the lamp constantly burning. Aaron and his sons shall arrange for [the lamps to burn] from evening until morning in God's presence, in the, Communion Tent outside the cloth partition that conceals the [Ark of] testimony. It is a rule for all time that [this oil shall come] from the Israelites.</p> <p>Return to text</p>	<p><u>שמות פרק כז</u></p> <p>(כ) ואתה תצוה את בני ישראל ויקחו אליך שמן זית זך כתית למאור להעלת נר תמיד:</p> <p>(כא) באהל מועד מחוץ לפרכת אשר על העדת יערך אתו אהרן ובניו מערב עד בקר לפני ידוד חקת עולם לדרתם מאת בני ישראל: ס</p>
<p>¹⁵Rashi on Bemidabar Chapter 8 Verse 2 Why was the passage of the Menorah put next to the passage of the princes? Because when Aaron saw the inauguration of the princes he felt badly about it, for neither he nor his tribe was with them in the inauguration. The Holy One, Blessed is He, said to him, "I swear by your life! Your role is greater than their's, for you kindle and prepare the lamps."</p> <p>Return to text</p>	<p><u>רש"י במדבר פרק ח פסוק ב</u></p> <p>(ב) בהעלתך - למה נסמכה פרשת המנורה לפרשת הנשיאים, לפי שכשראה אהרן חנוכת הנשיאים חלשה דעתו, שלא היה עמהם בחנוכה, לא הוא ולא שבטו, אמר לו הקב"ה חייך, שלך גדולה משלהם, שאתה מדליק ומטיב את הנרות:</p>