

Lila and Noah, Yashar koach! You have shared some very beautiful Torah here this morning.

Noah, you taught us how human it is to crave something tangible, something that reminds us of our connection to God and holy things. That it's hard to have a God that we can't see, and that people seek tangible ways to feel closer to God, including through acts of justice and kindness, which can be their own evidence of God's presence. You helped us see that to touch things with our hands means we are also touching them with our hearts.

And Lila, you taught us how the many complex tasks given to the Israelites in this parsha are not just minutiae to be skipped over, but rather that they actually served to bring our people together in shared purpose. You reminded us that one person alone can't do everything, can't have the impact we want to have in this world. But with everyone working together toward being who we collectively want to be - so much more is possible.

I think that in times such as these - your teachings are essential elements for how to participate in this moment in history.

But before we talk about "in times such as these," let's talk about "in a time such as that." Because what's happening in Parshat T'tzaveh at this time is totally fascinating. We have these people, our ancestors, who were not all that long ago slaves to Pharaoh in Mitzrayim. And so far, they've been doing a pretty great job of doing what they're told, en masse.

But now, beginning in this parsha, something shifts. Instead of a posture of passivity, in parshat T'tzaveh, they will be tapped to lead. They will be tapped to play roles in this community that they have never done before. They will be tapped to do things that they do not know how to do. RaMBaN teaches that the enslaved Israelites in Mitzrayim were engaged in backbreaking manual labor - not in the artistic and Priestly work they're now called to do.

So imagine how this goes. Moses, speaking on behalf of God, turns toward his brother and says: Aaron, you and your sons will be the Priests. You'll be responsible for caring for all of the people's souls. And then he turns to the artisans: and you, you, and you . . . we need you to make the embroidery on the priest's robe. You and you, we need hammered works of bells and pomegranates for the bottom of the robes. And you - will you engrave the precious stones on the breastplate? And you'll create the headdress. And so on.

They've never done *any* of this before. But the wildest thing happens in this parsha . . . they say YES anyway. "You want me to figure out how to make the Priestly vestments so that my buddy Aaron, who I knew since we were kids, can go talk to God? (deep breath) Yeah I can do that."

This took a truly stunning amount of courage. To not know how to do the thing but to know that you want to, and that your community needs you to, and so you say yes anyway. To play your part. To do something that matters not just to you, but to everyone, and not just for the present, but for the future of your children, your entire people, and the world. They were at a huge turning point in history - This was the chapter when they would begin to live all the laws and the

values that they received in this covenant with God. Where they'd set into motion Jewish peoplehood.

Imagine if they had demurred. Had said no. I don't know how to do that - pick someone else. Who would we even be? What would Jewish tradition look like today? *We* are the future that they were courageous *for*.

Now *WHY* did they say yes? That's a good question. I think it has something to do with this verse: When God told Moses to go talk to them, God said: וְאֵתָהּ תְדַבֵּר אֶל-כָּל-חַכְמֵי-לֵב - Speak to all who are *chachmei-lev*, wise of heart.

Many commentators find this phrase illuminating. The Netziv, for example, teaches that *chachmei lev* are people who trust and believe that through effort and learning, they can succeed at tasks previously untried. *Chachmei lev* describes people who come to a difficult task or a difficult moment with a growth mindset - believing that even if they don't know how to do this now, the task is so important, the big picture is so compelling, the need is so great, that they believe they can learn, that they have it in them, in their heart, in their kishkes, to do this thing, to create something beautiful, something important, to lead.

Noah, The Netziv goes on to say that what this person possesses is an ability to be in awe of God, to have a connection, through their work, through this tangible action that they take, to draw closer to God, to find inner meaning in their work. Just as you build with your hands for the sake of immigrants and so feel closer to God, so these *chachmei lev* accessed deep personal meaning by taking on the tasks in Parshat T'tzaveh.

And Lila, the Kli Yakar teaches that what gave the *chachmei lev*, the people tapped in this moment, the courage to say yes is that when Moses spoke to them, he shared some of his own ruach, his spirit, his skill and talent and strength, with them - so that they would know that they didn't have to do this thing alone, that they were part of a community that had a shared purpose and could move forward together.

Your teachings together manifest what it means to be *chachmei lev*, wise of heart, to be able to say yes to things we don't yet know how to do, but that we know are important enough to try.

So now, we can talk about "times such as these." We're living through some of the most challenging times that many of us have ever experienced in this country. Our immigrant neighbors are being terrorized and brutalized, including children. Trans folks are under attack. Free and fair elections are being openly threatened. Antisemitism is rising, hate of all kinds is being stoked by our administration. Our climate crisis is being amplified by rampant greed. And today, we are embattled across the ocean. I could go on, and certainly, we in this community are doing our best to live our values to meet this moment well. In many ways, we have been tapped for leadership on these urgent issues - often times to do things that we have never done before, but are learning as we go.

We believe we've also been tapped for another task. One of the things we are doing in this moment is called our New Futures Project. You may have heard me speak about it this past Yom Kippur, or perhaps you've attended one of our fall Imagination Sessions. It's a multi-year project to come together as a community and to look far down the road - 50 years, 100 years, more even - and to ask ourselves - what is a future that we actually **want**, what would a future look like that we'd be genuinely proud to hand down to our children's children's children. And once we can articulate that, or even pieces of that, we can then say: okay, then - if that's where we want to end up, what do we need to be doing now to get there.

This moment we're living through, not unlike the moment our ancestors lived through, is a defining moment in history. And we know that if we can bring into view a future reflective of our communal Jewish values, grounded in belonging, connection, joy, being able to engage across our differences with respect and love, abundance, learning and curiosity, care for the other, and care for our planet - if we can paint that picture thoughtfully - then *that* future becomes as possible as any other future. If we don't do this, we'll always be on our back foot, always responding to what is urgent, but never getting a shot at the world that our children and their children and all children deserve.

But we are also like the Israelites in that we are being tapped for roles we have never done before and don't entirely know how to do. Yes, we are learning, and yes, we're working with a brilliant futures consultant. And yes, we have an incredible Leadership Team of 17 wise and creative CBE members, but, this is still new, and we are all going to need to be *chachmei lev* - as we figure out together, in shared purpose, how to do this. Because just as the Israelites concluded, the task is so important, the big picture so compelling, and the need is so great, that we, too, need to believe that it is in our kishkes to do this thing. A sustainable and just and compassionate future won't appear from nowhere. It's something we need to choose. So that one day *our* descendants will reflect on how, for their sake, for their peace, for their safety, for their joy, we said yes to something we didn't know how to do.

Lila and Noah, you have taught this morning that finding meaning and a connection to that which is greater than us is utterly possible by participating in holy work together as a community. This afternoon, we'll gather across the street in the Ballroom to do just that, for what's called the Text of Imagination. And we'll study the values we hope to ground the future in. And then we'll imagine what a 50 year from now future could look like if *those* values win the day and we'll write commentaries from 2076, from that future. And then on March 14th, we'll be back in a completely transformed Ballroom with immersive art and play, artifacts from the future, a lifesize dice game called Thing from the Future, and more, as our picture begins to come into view. And I believe we'll find that it changes how we think about everything, including what is possible for this world. Come and be part of this as we are tapped as *chachmei lev* in our day.

Our ancestors said yes when their yes seemed absurd, but because they did, their journey unfolded to right this very moment. Picture, if you will, even three or four of your generations from now. They are the future that we will be courageous for.

Lila and Noah, you have helped us this morning begin to see ourselves as *chachmei lev*. And now, as you step into your own roles as adults in the eyes of the Jewish people, we cannot wait to see all the ways that you will find yourselves tapped to lead - in this community, in this Jewish people, and in the world. Yashar koach on your excellent work today and mazal tov.

Shabbat shalom.