



*“Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart”*

SHEMOT > Ki Tisa

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March 7, 2015

Ki Tisa

**The Anointed One: Are You
Uncomfortable Talking
about Moshiach?**



Meaningful Sermons *“Words from the Heart Enter the Heart”*

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ABSTRACT

What’s this Moshiach thing?

Coming off the joyous holiday of Purim, let’s discuss a light, unloaded, easy topic like Moshiach (Messiah). Indeed, the two are connected: The redemption of Purim brings us to the redemption of Pesach, which in turn brings us to the final redemption.

Many people are uncomfortable talking about Moshiach.

Truth be told, the secret to Moshiach – both what the concept means and how to usher it in – lies in a classic camp song, which many of us have sung around a campfire (or at least on a Birthright trip):

Hinei ma tov uma naim shevet achim gam yachad, “See how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together!”

Mystified? Well consider the verse that follows: “Like the goodly oil upon the head of Aaron, flowing down his beard, flowing down to the borders of his garments...”

This goodly anointing oil, *shemen ha’ mishcha*, is the subject of this week’s Torah reading, *Parshat Ki Tisa*, and it’s not a coincidence that the Hebrew word *Moshiach* means “the anointed one.” As it is no coincidence that the secret of redemption is revealed here in this week’s portion where this special aromatic oil is discussed.

Moses had difficulty formulating this sacred oil until God showed him how. How hard could it be to make oil?

So hard. Impossibly hard. This is why it takes Moshiach.

THE ANOINTED ONE:

ARE YOU UNCOMFORTABLE TALKING ABOUT MOSHIACH?

1. Messianic Fervor (Joke)

A Jew comes home from synagogue and tells his wife: “They say that Moshiach (the Messiah) is coming any day and will take us all to Israel.”

The wife becomes hysterical. “Oh no! That would be terrible. It took years till we could finally move into this neighborhood and buy the house we wanted. Now we’ve spent a fortune fixing it up. I don’t want the Moshiach to take us away.”

“Okay, okay, don’t worry,” the husband, says. “We survived Pharaoh, we survived Haman. With God’s help, we’ll survive Moshiach too!”

2. Talking About the Moshiach

We are coming off of the joyous holiday of Purim, where we did in fact survive Haman, that evil triangular-hatted fellow, and we did certainly survive Pharaoh, as we shall celebrate in exactly one month on the holiday of Passover.

But what is this thing about Moshiach, the Messiah? While belief in the Final Redemption and Moshiach who will usher it in is fundamental to Jewish belief – the same way faith in one God is fundamental to Jewish belief – many Jews are apprehensive about the changes to their lives that his coming will bring.

Having a conversation about Moshiach is not something most Jews are comfortable getting into.

But, as is well known, the job of a rabbi is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, so here I will be discussing the idea of Moshiach – albeit in a very comfortable and hopefully inspiring way.

And Moshiach is indeed connected with Purim: The redemption of Purim brings us to the redemption of Pesach, which in turn brings us to the final redemption.

3. Why Now?

You may be asking yourself: Why did the rabbi suddenly feel it necessary to talk about Moshiach now? Did something happen to him on Purim? Was a circuit blown with all that gragger twirling, and perhaps one l'chaim too many?

No, I have not been suddenly afflicted with the Jerusalem syndrome, a very real mental illness, by the way – a delusional psychosis where the subject often believes that he or she is a messianic figure.

It's quite simple really: this week's Torah reading, *Parshat Ki Tisa*, speaks of Moshiach (albeit indirectly).

After describing the various elements, vessels and vestments of the Sanctuary, the Torah states that God instructed Moses to make a very specific apothecary mixture:

“You shall make this into an oil of holy anointment, a perfumed compound according to the art of a perfumer; it shall be an oil of holy anointment. And you shall anoint with it the Tent of Meeting and the Ark of the Covenant, the table and all its implements, the menorah... the altar...the washstand and its base. And you shall sanctify them so that they become holy of holies; whatever touches them shall become holy. And with it you shall anoint Aaron and his sons and sanctify them to serve Me.

“And to the children of Israel you shall speak, saying: ‘This shall be oil of holy anointment to Me for all your generations. It shall not be poured upon [any unauthorized] human, and according to its formula you shall not make anything like it. It is holy; it shall be holy to you. Any person who prepares anything like it or puts any of it on an alien shall be cut off from his people.’”¹

¹ Exodus 30:25-33.

This divine aromatic mixture, called the *shemen ha'mishcha*, the anointing oil, was used to anoint all of the vessels in the Sanctuary (and later the Temple) in order to consecrate them and make them holy.

Then, this oil was also used to anoint the priests, the *Kohanim*, who would perform the holy service in the holy Temple. Whoever and whatever touched this oil became consecrated and holy. It was important to take great care that only the appropriate people had access to it and no person was allowed to imitate or duplicate its divine formula.

4. For All Generations

If you notice, the Torah says something additional: *This shall be oil of holy anointment to Me for all your generations*. Indeed, in later times, this sacred anointing oil was used to consecrate the kings of the Davidic line and the High Priests of Israel.

The king was called, *Melech ha'Moshiach*, “the anointed king,” and the priest was called the *Kohen Moshiach*. Indeed, the third chapter of Tractate Horiot of the Babylonian Talmud – which also states that this *shemen ha'mishcha* would exist for all eternity² – is called *Kohen Moshiach*.

Thus, the word *Moshiach* means “the anointed” and the *shemen ha'mishcha*, means “oil of anointing.”

But what does “anointing” have to do with the Messianic Era, with the Final Redemption, with this idea that at the End of Days we will have world peace, that the wolf will lie down with the lamb,³ that the Temple will be rebuilt, that all Jews will return to Israel, and that the one who will usher it all in will be Moshiach?

How is Moshiach, “the anointed one,” related to the anointing oil of the Temple?

² See Rashi, quoting Horiot 11b.

³ Isaiah 11:6.

5. An Impossible Recipe

The Midrash⁴ states that the *shemen ha'mishcha*, the anointing oil, with all its intricacies and specifications, was one of the four instructions from God that Moses had difficulty implementing. (The other three were forging the menorah of solid gold, identifying the new moon, and discerning the characteristics of the impure reptilian family.)

What exactly did Moses find so difficult about this anointing oil?

Kabbalistic and Chassidic texts⁵ describe the anointing with this oil as one of the most profound spiritual processes in the existence of reality.

The revolutionary transformation that happened in the sacred anointing process – turning mundane matter into holy spirit, transforming human beings into priests and kings – may be better understood through a beautifully visual psalm: Psalm 133.

6. Psalm 133

Psalm 133 is one of the shortest chapters in the Book of Psalms (*Tehilim*), being made up of only three verses. Some of you may know it as a classic Jewish camp-song, and one sung at many Shabbat tables and Jewish gatherings, *Hinei ma tov uma naim shevet achim gam yachad*. Here is what it says in English:

¹*A Song of Ascents by David.*

See how good and how pleasant it is

When brothers dwell together!

²Like the goodly oil upon the head of Aaron [the High Priest],

Flowing down his beard,

⁴ Exodus Rabba 15:28.

⁵ See Zohar Terumah, 158a; Ohr HaTorah Ki Tisa, vol. 6, p. 1944.

Flowing down to the borders of his garments,

³Like the dew of [Mount] Hermon,

Flowing down to the mountains of Zion.

For there, the Lord has commanded

The blessing of eternal life.

What is the connection between a popular song and sacred anointing oil?

This psalm (or camp song, if you will) is all about the goodness of brotherhood, which is compared to the goodly anointing oil flowing from the crown of the head down to the High Priest's garments. And this, in turn, is compared to dew flowing from Mount Hermon, the northernmost point of Israel – from its crown as it were – down its length to Mount Zion of Jerusalem, its heart and soul.

For there the Lord has commanded the blessing of eternal life. The blessing of life that lasts forever originates at a level above, at the crown of the body that is Israel, and it flows down into the heart and soul of the pulsing organism that is Jerusalem.

7. The Anointing Process

This is exactly what happened, physically, in the anointing process:

The goodly oil, the *shemen h'amishcha*, was poured⁶ upon the head of the priest, so that it flowed from above downward over his face and beard, and over his garments – which are a metaphor for his *midot*, his attributes and characteristics – until it reached his very heart and soul.

⁶ Horiot *ibid.* See Likkutei Sichot vol. 6, p. 238, for a lengthy discussion about the two methods of pouring and anointing the king and priest.

In other words: the sacred anointing ritual was the process of taking the highest blessing of the universe, coming from God Himself, and causing it to flow downward upon the face – via the garments, the attributes or the superficial levels of life⁷ – to ultimately reach the heart and soul.

This merging of the highest of the highs of existence (the crown, *keter*) and the lowest of the lows (attributes and garments, *midot*) is what causes brothers to dwell together: *Hinei ma tov uma naim shevet achim gam yachad*.

Anointing the world by implementing the highest of blessings into the matter of everyday life, more than anything, is the role of Moshiach, the Redeemer.⁸

It is all about connecting the above and the below, the northern peaks with the southern deserts. It is all about helping those who seem to be low and out of touch to connect with the heights that pulse within their souls.

Moses had difficulty formulating the *shemen ha'mishcha* until God showed him how by taking the highest crown of existence and bringing it down below into the lowest levels of existence in order to make everything holy.

This is exactly what is involved – taking material vessels, composed of empirical molecules, not spiritual ether, and making them divine ... taking human beings, of flesh and blood, and turning them into priests and kings.

This is also why this profound ability was not to be replicated or duplicated by anyone, for only God Himself has the ability to anoint vessels, priests and kings.

⁷ Note the connection between Meshicha with a chet, meaning 'anointing,' and Meshicha with a chof, meaning 'drawing,' as in drawing down blessings.

⁸ See Rambam, Laws of Kings, ch. 11-12.

8. Personal Lesson: Be Holy

That said, God has also commanded us in the Torah, “*You shall be holy, because I, the Lord Your God, am holy.*”⁹

While God, and God alone, has the power to anoint Temples, vessels, and people, we may – nay, we must – emulate God and anoint the elements of our lives, inspiring brothers to dwell together.

We can do this easily and simply:

Every seemingly mundane, lowly, physical act that we perform with our *midot* (external garments and attributes) should be infused with and anointed with the highest, purest oil at our disposal, that of Torah – specifically of the inner dimension of Torah, which is called *shemen*, oil.

Every vessel, temple and person in our lives – starting with ourselves – can be anointed with the pure aromatic oil of wisdom that comes from the Torah. (And today, much of that Torah wisdom is available in a multitude of languages, in many books, and across the World Wide Web.)

When we anoint our own personal lives, we will surely usher in the Final Redemption, with “the anointed one,” the Moshiach, ensuring that truly all brothers and sisters shall dwell together as one!

9. The Wolf and The Lamb (Joke)

A man visits a zoo and is taken to the wolf’s lair. He witnesses there the literal fulfillment of Isaiah prophecy – a wolf and a lamb are lying together!

Amazed, he calls over an attendant. “How long have you had a wolf and a lamb in a cage together?”

⁹ Leviticus 19:2. Also see Leviticus 20:26.

“Over a year already.”

“Absolutely Messianic,” the visitor is astounded. “How do you do it?”

“It’s easy. Every morning we put in a new lamb.”

10. Messianic Era (Conclusion)

Many people think of the Messianic Era as the Apocalypse of which we are petrified.

But remember the meaning of the Hebrew word, *Moshiach*, “the anointed one.” The coming of Moshiach does not mean the coming of an apocalypse. The Jewish view of the coming of Moshiach means the coming of an era when the highest of the high flows down and embraces even the lowest of the low. When, in the words of Maimonides, there will no longer be war and famine, no envy and strife; a united world whose primary preoccupation will be knowing the Divine; a world filled with divine knowledge as the waters cover the sea.

We live in a world where jihadists loudly proclaim that they will bring about – impose – the final redemption when, pinned down by the strictures of sharia law, the lamb will finally be forced to lie down with the wolf. They intend to make this happen even if they have to slaughter a million lambs in the process.

We Jews know that it cannot be so.

And we know that all good people stand together in solidarity against our mortal enemies. As Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made abundantly clear in his speech before Congress this week:

We’re an ancient people. In our nearly 4,000 years of history, many have tried repeatedly to destroy the Jewish people. Tomorrow night, on the Jewish holiday of Purim, we’ll read the Book of Esther. We’ll read of a powerful Persian viceroy named Haman, who plotted to destroy the Jewish people some 2,500 years ago. But a courageous Jewish woman, Queen Esther, exposed the plot and gave for the Jewish people the right to defend themselves against their enemies.

The plot was foiled. Our people were saved.

Today the Jewish people face another attempt by yet another Persian potentate to destroy us. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei spews the oldest hatred, the oldest hatred of anti-Semitism with the newest technology. He tweets that Israel must be annihilated...

You stand with Israel, because you know that the story of Israel is not only the story of the Jewish people but of the human spirit that refuses again and again to succumb to history's horrors.

Facing me right up there in the gallery, overlooking all of us in this august chamber is the image of Moses. Moses led our people from slavery to the gates of the Promised Land.

*And before the people of Israel entered the land of Israel, Moses gave us a message that has steeled our resolve for thousands of years. I leave you with his message today: *Chizku ve'imtzu, al tiru ve'al te'artzu m'pneihem, "Be strong and resolute, neither fear nor dread them."*¹⁰*

My friends, may Israel and America always stand together, strong and resolute. May we neither fear nor dread the challenges ahead. May we face the future with confidence, strength and hope.

May God bless the state of Israel and may God bless the United States of America.

We know that we will usher in the redemption by allowing our inner wolves to embrace our inner lambs, and then we can all sit around the campfire and sing:

Hinei ma tov uma naim shevet achim gam yachad, "See how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together!"

Shabbat Shalom!

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¹⁰ Deuteronomy 36:6.