



Carnegie Shul Chatter

March 16, 2022

Shabbat
Shalom

Light candles 7:12p

Shabbat Services 10:00am

Zoom in for Services

Shabbat services are held by Zoom, at 10am and last 60-90 minutes. A link is sent to all Shul members; if you don't receive it, contact Wendy Panizzi at panizziw@gmail.com.

Make the Most of What You've Got

I really like Rabbi Buchwald's article about caste systems, which begins on page 3.

It is true that some of us are born with a silver spoon in our mouths, others have great athletic ability, some have a talent to write, or to sing, or to paint, and others have genius IQs. And, as a result, some may have a head start of sorts in life. But it is just that – a head start, not a guaranteed place in the winner's circle of life.

One of the wisest things my dad always emphasized to me was, "Don't worry about what the other guy has or what the other guy is doing. You aren't the other guy. You are you. Just be true to yourself and always do the very best that you can do."

We have all seen many with the head start succeed, but we have also seen many of these same people fall,

— Continued on next page

and we also know some people with humble beginnings who accepted that as their fate and made nothing better of themselves, while others pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and became huge successes.

We are truly all born as equals in the eyes of God. It is up to us to use whatever talents God has given us and make a good life for ourselves. In the end, we will all be judged based upon what we did with that with which God blessed us.



Tzav in a Nutshell

Leviticus 6:1–8:36

From Chabad.org

G-d instructs Moses to command Aaron and his sons regarding their duties and rights as kohanim (“priests”) who offer the korbanot (animal and meal offerings) in the Sanctuary.

The fire on the altar must be kept burning at all times. In it are burned the wholly consumed ascending offering; veins of fat from the peace, sin and guilt offerings; and the “handful” separated from the meal offering.

The kohanim eat the meat of the sin and guilt offerings, and the remainder of the meal offering. The peace offering is eaten by the one who brought it, except for specified portions given to the kohen. The holy meat of the offerings must be eaten by ritually pure persons, in their designated holy place and within their specified time.

Aaron and his sons remain within the Sanctuary compound for seven days, during which Moses initiates them into the priesthood.



On the following page is a very interesting article by Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald who in 1987 founded the National Jewish Outreach Program.

What We Learn from the Jewish ‘Caste System’

Tzav 5782-2022

by Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week’s Torah portion, parashat Tzav, continues the Torah’s description of the sacrificial rite, and concludes with a description of the very dramatic and moving consecration ceremony of the מִיִּבְרָח —Cohanim, the priests, authorizing their service in the Mishkan—Tabernacle.

Virtually all religions, particularly Eastern religions, have powerful caste systems in which not all people are considered equal or treated equally. There are Brahmins and untouchables, human beings regarded as higher than others, and those considered lower and defiled. All ancient civilizations, of course, had their royalty and their slaves.

Judaism, on the other hand, prides itself as being a highly enlightened faith—an equitable, fair and revolutionarily moral system. When it comes to equality, the Torah repeats the mitzvah of loving the stranger 36 times—more often than any other mitzvah in the Torah! Yet, amazingly, there seems to be a caste system in Judaism as well. After all, we have the מִיִּבְרָח—Cohanim—priests, מִיִּיִּל—Leviim—Levites, and Israelites. In this week’s parasha, Tzav, we learn extensively of the special position and privileges of the מִיִּבְרָח —Cohanim—the priests, all of which seem to be discriminatory, and quite dissonant with Judaism’s views of universal equality before the Creator.

How is this seemingly discriminatory communal structure of Israel rationalized within Jewish law, Jewish theology, and Jewish philosophy?

There is a fundamental debate in Judaism about who is the “Ultimate Jew.” Maimonides, deals with this issue in his *Moreh Nevuchim*, the *Guide to The Perplexed* (Book 2, chap. 32 ff). Strongly influenced by Greek philosophy, Maimonides, in effect, employs the Platonic model of the “Philosopher King,” arguing that the “ultimate human being,” the person who can come closest to G-d, must be a philosopher—by which he means, a brilliantly endowed scholar, and King—the possessor of great natural leadership abilities. Translating these terms into Jewish nomenclature, the “Ultimate Jew” must be a great דִּמְלֵת מַלְלָה—Talmid Chacham, a great Jewish scholar, and a brilliantly talented גִּיְהַנֵּם—manhig, leader.

In practical human terms, the Maimonidian model for the philosopher king is, of course, Moses. As the Yigdal hymn affirms: דּוֹעַ הַשְּׁמַיִם לְאַרְשֵׁיב עֵקֶל אֵל, no person has ever arisen in Israel as great as Moses. Unfortunately, this model leaves the majority of mortals with little



hope of ever coming close to G-d. After all, who can aspire to be as great as Moses? Who is blessed with the prodigious natural endowments of Moses? Moses was singularly unique, and will remain unique. Confirming the uniqueness of Moses, is the epitaph that appears on Maimonides' tomb in Tiberius: "From Moses to Moses, no one rose like Moses."

At about the same time as Maimonides, another great Jewish philosopher and poet by the name of Rabbi Judah (Yehuda) HaLevi flourished. Rabbi Yehuda Halevi wrote a famed philosophy tract known as The Kuzari. The Kuzari was based on the historic conversion to Judaism of the king of the Kazar tribe in central Russia during the 8th century. In the philosophical discussion that takes place in the Kuzari (Book 1, statement 19), HaLevi raises the question of who is the "ultimate Jew." HaLevi suggests an entirely different model from that presented by Maimonides, pronouncing the "ultimate Jew" to be the person who works up to his or her potential. One's relationship with G-d does not depend on a person's natural endowments, but rather on what one does with those endowments.

It is told that the Chassidic Rabbi, Rabbi Meshulam Zusha of Hanipol once dreamt that he died and came back to earth. His Chassidim asked him, "Well, Zusha, what did the Al-mighty ask you?" The rabbi responded, "The Al-mighty and his tribunal did not ask me why I was not as great as Moshe, why was I not the "sweet singer" like King David, why I was not the great thinker like Rabbi Akiva." "They asked me," said Zusha, "Why weren't you Zusha?! Why didn't you live up to your own potential?!"

The Kotzker Rebbe was once asked, "Who's higher on the ladder, the person on top, or the one on bottom?" Recognizing that the question was a set up, he responded by stating that the answer depends upon which direction the people on the ladder are going. If the person on the bottom of the ladder is on his or her way up, and the person on top is on his or her way down, then, theoretically, the person on the bottom may be higher than the person on top! We see, once again, through this illustration, that what counts in Judaism is constant growth and working up to one's potential.

In life, we are all dealt a seemingly arbitrary "hand," and are forced to deal with the hand that we're dealt. Some people are born tall, others short, some blond, others brown-haired, some



blue-eyed, others dark-eyed. Some are born in the United States, others in Israel, or South Africa, or in the Himalayas. All of us have to deal with what “fate” has meted out to us. That’s exactly what the Jewish “caste system” of Cohen, Levi, and Israelite represents. The fact that there are Cohanim, Leviim and Israelites underscores that there is an arbitrariness to life, and that a good part of life consists of confronting and dealing with the arbitrariness of our natural endowments and the environmental vicissitudes. We simply have to operate with the hand that life has dealt us.

So how are we to deal with the arbitrariness? Each person is bidden to work up to his/her fullest potential, to always be in the “growth mode,” in all aspects of life. Who is the good Jew? Despite being an Orthodox rabbi, I openly declare that a good Jew is not necessarily Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, or Reconstructionist. A good Jew is rather a person who is always in the “growth mode” with respect to their Jewishness. Irrespective of from where a person starts, whether “privileged” Cohen, Levi, or Israelite, we each have responsibilities. Whether we possess a genius IQ, or are born mentally challenged, each of us is equal in G-d’s eyes. And working effectively with the hand that G-d has dealt us is the essential challenge of life.

Clearly, most important to bear in mind is that, notwithstanding our endowments, we must try to be as full, as complete, as good, as learned, as moral, and as accomplished as we can possibly be. Despite our limitations, if we strive to achieve our fullest potential, each of us can reach the status of being an “Ultimate Jew” in the eyes of the Al-mighty.

That is the message of the Jewish “caste system”—Cohen, Levi, and Israel. That is the Torah’s message, and G-d’s message as well.

May you be blessed.



Yahrtzeit

This week the Carnegie Shul acknowledges the yahrtzeits of:

Simon (Si) Perlman

Anna M. Levine

May their memories be for a blessing.



**Andrew Carnegie Free Library & Music Hall
300 Beechwood Avenue
Carnegie, PA 15106**

Join us for a visit from Marcel Walker and Wayne Wise, creators of the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh's comic book series *Chutz-Pow! Superheroes of the Holocaust*.

Chutz-Pow! seeks to place stories of courage, resilience, and sacrifice at the forefront of Holocaust awareness. Learn the stories of heroic resistance and share in conversation about the dangers of fascism and bigotry.

Masks are required for this free in-person event.