

**Parsha Tetzaveh
Fabrangen
February 27, 2021**

Led by Bracha Laster, Judybeth Greene, and Renana Brooks
[English Reading: Very beginning through verse 5](#)

I. The Parsha

(Bracha)1. In this parsha, as in many others, the people bring offerings to build our mishkan, our holy place. At the beginning of Parsha Tetzaveh, God gives the first instruction

L'ha-ah-lot Ner Tamid "to kindle the eternal flame"

Commentators point out, though, that the cantillation marks indicate that the punctuation is truly "to kindle the flame, eternally."

That is, this directive was FOR ALL TIME, according to Abravanel. Nechama Lebowitz expounds that this "Menorah-illuminated luminosity" ---applies to us and that there is a continuity between this directive from more than 2000 years ago and us! And, it will continue into the future. What is luminosity and why do we want it? Perhaps, it helps us see how we are part of whole system. And, we become the LIGHT.

Furthermore, God tells Moshe to instruct the people to bring pure oil for lighting. This was not a passive activity; the children of Israel had to be ACTIVE. Just as they were active...

we have decided to offer the community some space for everyone to actively participate today. We will have some small group discussion. God tells Moshe to instruct the people to bring pure oil for lighting. What was or is this pure oil?

This oil in the parsha is used for lighting the menorah, the Ner Tamid...a menorah that burns continually. This is the first strand/theme of our drash: We hope to facilitate a space for illumination of individual and communal ideas about issues that are evident in our community and society, and which we must continually illuminate, see more clearly, be made aware of, and after awareness, consider HOW to act to improve our community and/or society.

(Judybeth) 2. Hold up Rachel Braun's menorah embroidery. Individuals in our community provide illumination in a variety of ways. Here's a picture of one of the symbols from this parsha; Rachel Braun's unique, beautiful, and brilliant handiwork.

(Renana)--3. Here's another strand/theme: This parsha describes in detail the significant trappings of the priesthood: the vestments, the headpiece, etc. This is a fitting prompt for some of our discussion! This priesthood is the elevation of one group within a society; the creation of a hierarchy. The priests--kohanim and leviim--are the elite. They have responsibilities and rights, and they function as a dominant class among B'nai Yisrael.

II. Connections to Anti-Racism

So, let's just take these two themes 1. Luminosity 2. The impact of a hierarchy in a society. And, see where these two themes can move us a bit forward on our journey on the topic of **anti-racism**.

1. Luminosity: Lighting up in order to see--fits well with the concept of Anti-Racism presented by Ibram X. Kendi. He says that we need understanding what "racism" and "antiracism" are and how those concepts affect the policies that govern our everyday lives. Anti-racism is not just being "not racist."—A metaphor that I learned from Stephen Beckton is that we are all on a moving walkway (like at the airport) and we have to make intentional efforts to step OFF of that societal moving walkway of racism. We hope that our offering today may provide a place for some luminosity about getting OFF of the moving walkway.

Back to Kendi: "Racist research (the typical research that many of us have been doing) asks the question, 'What's wrong with people? What's wrong with those racial groups?'" For example, in my educational research, we often look at "struggling readers" or "underperforming students" or "low socio-economic populations." People in health care may study the "high rate of diabetes in African-Americans". Economists might study income disparities....BUT

Kendi explains. "Contrast that with antiracist research, which asks questions like, 'What's wrong with policies?' 'What's wrong with conditions?' 'What's wrong with systems and structures?'"—rather than what 's wrong with one group of people.

Going further, simply exposing racial inequities and policies with data and rigorous study is one thing. **Ending racism is another.** That goal, Kendi says, won't be achieved by pushing for race-neutrality or seeking to be a "colorblind" society. Rather, the only way to eliminate the negative effects of racist policy is to counter it with uncompromising antiracism that promotes true racial equity.

One question we pose to the community as individuals and as a community is "Are we anti-racists? If so, HOW are we anti-racists?"

2. What impact do hierarchies have on a society? Sometimes the hierarchies are informal or unspoken; sometimes—as in the case of our parsha—they are formal and explicit, where there is a dominant class and a lower class.

Fabrangen is interesting because 50 years ago we decided to not have distinctions between Cohanim, Leviim, and Yisrael. This is one manifestation of our descriptive as an equalitarian community. Are there other ways that we reject or accept hierarchies or classes of people?

Isabel Wilkinson's book *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* is an expansive description of entrenched hierarchies. She zeros in on how darker-skinned people in American society, Dalit in India, and Jews in Nazi Germany were

imbued with being an underclass; the lowest caste; people who were/are sub-human. Native Americans and African-Americans were dehumanized as groups. When compared to white people –they were believed not to feel pain or in contemporary times less pain. They were/are represented as not as academically smart, could be paid nothing or minimally for their labor, shouldn't be expected to be in positions of leadership or wealth, etc. The same is true for Dalit in India who are marked by their surnames as the lowest caste. Or, in the case of Jews, the Nazis: stripped them of their citizenship, livelihoods and property; segregated them in schools, hospitals, and neighborhoods; denied access to healthcare; tortured and killed indiscriminately. By the way, Wilkinson does an excellent job describing how the Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935 were modelled on the Jim Crow laws in the Southern United States, which stripped African-Americans of any rights and privileges they had gained immediately after the Civil War. In the U.S., Whites are surrounded by media and culture that portrays them/many of us as the norm, the standard by which all others are ranked; whites are portrayed as superior in beauty, intellect, etc. "It is the rare outliers who would go out of their way to experience the world from the perspective of those considered below them or even to think about them one way or the other."

Today, we hope to think about this. Our parsha has two appropriate themes: Luminosity and Hierarchy. In Breakout Rooms so more folks can get to talk, we will have three questions to ponder.

PROMPT QUESTIONS:

1. How can we illuminate the *moving walkway* of white privilege? What should we do to change systems or policies now?
2. How are we as individuals or as a community affected by hierarchies? How is the priesthood the same or different than caste/race in the United States today?
3. How welcoming has Fabrangen been towards Jews of Color, Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews in terms of assumptions, music, liturgy, etc.? What more can we do?