



Spiritual Genetics

Have you heard of the Lemba tribe in Zimbabwe? They have a tradition that they are one of the ten “lost tribes” of the Jewish people. According to their tradition, about 2,500 years ago they left Judea (the period prior to the second Temple). After a stay in Yemen, one group migrated to Ethiopia, and a second continued farther south to where the Lemba eventually settled.

They have several practices that resemble Biblical Judaism. Among other things, they are monotheists, they have a holy day (like Shabbat), they consider themselves a chosen people, they don't eat certain foods or combinations (milk and meat) prohibited in the Torah, they have a form of ritual slaughter, they practice circumcision, and put a Star of David on their tombstones. They even have a form of conversion.

Furthermore, the man who led them, Buba, was a kohen - and they have a priestly class. This becomes important later.

They also have “language markers” - words that don't belong in the African language they speak.

In 1998 geneticists in the U.S., Israel and England examined the “y” chromosome of Lemba men. Why? Because in 1997 scientists found a genetic marker of Jewish priesthood on the “y” chromosome. The “Kohen Gene” was quite distinct; other Jewish men didn't have it, but kohanim all over the world did. It was genetic proof of Jewish tradition, or at least a critical part of it.

And the descendants of Buba, the Lemba priests, shared that marker. This meant that their oral history had some basis, that at some point there was strong evidence of a connection to the Jewish people.

Why is this significant?

Well, for one thing, it gives greater weight to oral tradition. It's a scientific nod to Yehudah HaLevi who, in the Kuzari, explained that one way we know the Torah is true is because there has been an unchallenged chain of transmission.

It's significant for another reason. We declare that we are children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that our Jewishness is part of the very fabric of our being. What these genetic markers tell us is that we carry within us the information of our ancestors. We are a living history.

There's another interesting aspect to all this. Information gets encoded because of encounters with the environment. Science tells us that our genes “learn” from experience; the kohen gene gets passed down from father to son in an unbroken chain. But our actions also influence what gets passed on.

In simple terms, when parents perform mitzvot (commandments), consistently, this becomes part of the “family genetics.” It gets passed down from generation to generation, not just as an oral tradition, but as part of what that family does, and therefore, who they are.

In a sense, then, we encode our spiritual genes with mitzvot, and pass on that “spiritual genetic code” to our children, and they to their children, and so on.

And since spiritual genetics are also influenced by the environment, we can gain the “mitzva gene” (as converts do), by our actions. So not only are we a living history, we can acquire and pass on, as surely as we do blood type or eye color, a spiritual genetics, an inheritance of mitzvot and G-dliness.

(from <http://www.lchaimweekly.org/>)

Seeing is Believing

The first fund-raising campaign in Jewish history was held in the midbar (wilderness), soon after the Torah was given to the Jewish nation, as the beginning of the effort to build the Mishkan (Tabernacle). From the donated precious metals, stones and textiles would come all of the structures, fixtures and utensils of the Mishkan, as well as the priestly garb. The first set of construction specifics were for the Holy Ark that would hold the two tablets of the Decalogue. While all of the fixtures had structures to facilitate their transportation through the midbar, the staves of the Ark were unique. “The staves shall remain in the rings of the Ark, they may not be removed from it.” (Shemos/Exodus 25:15). Why?

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Ralbag (acronym of Rabbi Levi ben Gershom of Provence; 1288-1344; author of a rationalistic commentary which explains the text and collects the philosophical tenets and moral lessons contained within) explains that this mitzvah (Divine command) comes to teach the completeness of the Torah that was represented by the tablets within. That is, G-d commanded to leave the Ark whole, with the staves intact, to teach us that the Torah is complete. But how could the generation of that time, which had witnessed the miracles of the Ten Plagues, the Splitting of the Sea and the Revelation at Sinai, question that the Torah, which G-d Himself had just given them, was NOT perfect? Furthermore, if someone was lacking in this belief, how would seeing the staves in the Ark turn him around?

Rabbi Alter Henach Leibowitz (Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim in Kew Gardens Hills, New York) elucidates that the teaching function of the staves in the Ark was not to impart that which was not yet appreciated. Rather, they were there to instill and concretize that which the Children of Israel KNEW with a complete belief, but that some might not have FELT in the depths of their hearts. Therefore, by leaving the staves in their rings on the Ark, the Jewish people would always see the Ark as a complete unit, reinforcing the same truth of its contents.

There are many matters of faith and truth that we know absolutely, certain that they are part of our essence. But in times of crisis and challenge, when the fortitude of our trust in G-d is put to the test, how will we fare? The distance between the head and the heart can be a great one. Vigilance and visual cues will assure that the truths of Jewish faith contained in the Decalogue are etched onto the tablets of our souls, firmly embedded in the depths of our hearts.

(by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch from Project Genesis at www.torah.org)

Purim Katan ("Minor Purim")

In regular years, the 14th of Adar is Purim, the festival that celebrates the salvation of the Jewish people from Haman's evil decree in the year 3405 from creation (356 BCE). In a leap year – which has two Adars – Purim is celebrated in Adar II, and the 14th of Adar I is designated as Purim Kattan, the "Little Purim." There are no special observances, however, associated with Purim Kattan, other than the omission of Tachnun ("supplications") from the daily prayers and a prohibition against fasting or holding eulogies on this day. The Code of Jewish Law cites an opinion that one should increase in festivity and joy, but rules that there is no obligation to do so; "Nevertheless, a person should increase somewhat in festivity ... for 'One who is of good heart is festive always' " (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 697:1).

(from www.chabad.org)

We happily wish Mazel Tov to
Rabbi Shmuel Kaplan and Family
on the **Birth of a Grandson**,

born to **Rabbi Menachem and Mrs. Chani Feldman** of Greenwich, Connecticut.



We happily wish Mazel Tov to
Mr. Eliyahu and Mrs. Leana Schwartz and Family
on the **Birth of their Daughter, Chava Basya**.

DAVENING AND SHIURIM SCHEDULE

Friday, 2/16 — 7 Adar א

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.
Candles — 5:26 p.m.
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 5:25 p.m.

Shabbat, 2/17 — 8 Adar א

Shacharit — 9:00 a.m.
Sof Z'man Kriat Shema — 9:36 a.m.
Minchah — 5:15 p.m.
Shiur — after Minchah
Ma'ariv — 6:27 p.m.

Sunday, 2/18 — 9 Adar א

Shacharit — 8:00 a.m.
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 5:35 p.m.

Monday, 2/19 — 10 Adar א

Shacharit — 6:50 a.m.
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 5:35 p.m.

Tuesday, 2/20 — 11 Adar א

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 5:35 p.m.

Wednesday, 2/21 — 12 Adar א

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 5:35 p.m.

Thursday, 2/22 — 13 Adar א

Shacharit — 6:50 a.m.
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 5:35 p.m.

Friday — Purim Katan, 2/23 — 14 Adar א

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.
Candles — 5:33 p.m.
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 5:35 p.m.