

Parshat Tetzaveh
Knowledge of the Heart, Knowledge of the Hands
Rabbanit Dr. Liz Shayne - Class of 2021

When I was nine years old, my mother tried to teach me to knit. I say tried because, while she was a fine teacher, I was a terrible student. Truth be told, I only wanted to learn because my younger sister was learning and the idea of her being able to do something that I could not was, frankly, unthinkable. I gave up before I even finished my first scarf. When I was twenty-five, I sheepishly went back to my mother and asked her to teach me again. And I have not stopped knitting since. I had learned patience over the course of those intervening years. Moreover, I learned to appreciate the things that did not come easily to me, but that required skill and practice to master. It is one thing to know what knitted fabric feels like or even how a sweater is constructed. It is another thing to knit one.

In the opening verses of this week's parasha, God commands Moses to oversee the making of the priestly vestments and tells Moses to seek out those who are חֲכָמֵי-לֵב, who are filled with רוּחַ חָכְמָה. The literal translation of those two phrases would be "intelligent of heart" and "spirit of intelligence" respectively, but that is not what they mean. Those who are intelligent of heart are skilled artisans. To be filled with a רוּחַ חָכְמָה is to be imbued with the skill to make things. In this case, the intelligence of the heart is the knowing that allows one to create.

We see this language again and again throughout the parashiot describing the construction of the Mishkan and, every time it appears, I find myself both struck by it and taken with it. Taken with it for obvious reasons and struck by it because, out of all the parts of the body one could use to talk about craft, why choose the heart? Shouldn't it be חֲכָמֵי-יָד, intelligent of hand? After all, that seems a much more natural way to express the difference between *episteme* and *techne*, understanding the theoretical underpinnings of an object and having the skill to create it in practice. The mind knows how the fabric is created, but the hand knows the twist of the spindle and the precision that spins the fine and even yarn. Still, it is not in the hand where the Torah locates the skill of the skilled artisan, but in the heart.

The heart, in the Torah, is not the seat of emotions. The heart is the home of the will. A few weeks ago, we read how God hardened and strengthened Pharaoh's heart to prevent him from changing his mind. Strengthening the heart means strengthening the will. And in two weeks from now, we will read how all those who were generous of heart, נְדִיבֵי לֵב, gave to the Mishkan. Again, heart does not seem to refer to an emotional state, but a will to be generous. So when we revisit the language of חֲכָמֵי-לֵב, those who are intelligent of heart, we see that their intelligence lies in their ability to project their will into the world. Their wisdom is the capacity to create a whole from the sum of its parts. The encounter between the human being and the wool transforms the latter into a sweater. Or, in the case of our parasha, into the coat and apron of the High Priest.

There is will and skill in the practices that allow us to make things, but there is also, as the presence of the word חָכְמָה shows us, knowledge. Making things is a form of knowing about the world. And that knowledge is not simply the set of instructions that one follows, but the deep and embodied knowing that comes from doing. I often read knitting patterns over and over again, trying to understand the directions, but it is only when I cast on that I can truly

see the garment take shape before me. I knew what I had to do the whole time, but I only really *knew* it once I set my will and my hands into the making.

What does it mean to know through making and for our wisdom to come to us through the works of our hearts? It is clear, from these parashiot, that the Mishkan itself benefits from the skill and the will of the artisans who craft it, but I think there is also a deeper message that we can take from the Biblical language. It can be easy to fall into the idea that knowledge is a solely cerebral process. English, for example, distinguishes between art and craft; dismissing the latter and valorizing the former when both are ways of bringing beauty into the world. The artist, this misguided way of thinking says, creates and innovates, while the crafter merely follows a pattern. However, the men and women who created the Mishkan were masters of craft, not art: they followed God's instructions in order to make God's Mishkan real. And the language God uses to speak of them is the language of knowledge. חכמה.

If we look at the last four parashiot—including this one—together, a variation on the theme of knowing emerges. Yitro, the parasha of Matan Torah, is the parasha of experiential knowledge. Mishpatim, which follows on its heels, is the parasha of in-depth legal knowledge; what we usually think of as knowing when we say someone knows a lot. And, finally, Terumah and Tetzaveh are the parashiot of *techne*, the knowledge that comes from doing. All of these forms of knowledge are crucial to building a nation: revelation, scholarship, and craft unite to create the Jewish people and their relationship with God. I worry that we forget that that last one is a form of knowledge too. We dismiss the power that making can have. I learned so much from the hours that my mother spent teaching me how to knit and that patience, foresightedness, appreciation for skill and for determination stays with me in everything I do.

Over the course of 2020, many people have found solace in this intelligence of heart. One of the coping mechanisms I have seen people adopt has been turning to craft in order to find or make meaning. Whether it is the craft of sourdough baking, of sewing or other fiber arts, of painting, sculpting, meditation, or yoga, the turn towards *techne*, towards practice and learning through doing, has been an integral part of helping many of us get through an extraordinarily awful time. We have come to know the value of patience as the dough rises, the importance of each individual stitch to the grand design, the need for a practice to involve *practice*, and the power of doing the same thing over and over again to effect change. There is so much to know and so many ways of knowing. May we be given the gift of learning, and continuing to learn, from the works of our minds, our hearts and our hands.



Rabbanit Dr. Elizabeth Shayne came to Maharat after receiving her Ph.D from University of California, Santa Barbara, where she studied the past, present, and future of digital reading. Rabbanit Liz writes and teaches about everything from the hypertext history of the Talmud to the future of robots in halakha, while also innovating new ways to teach Torah online. She is a Wexner Graduate Fellow/Davidson Scholar, and interned at the Hebrew Institute of White Plains, Skokie Valley Agudath Jacob, and Sefaria. Rabbanit Liz plans to use her expertise to create more and better learning opportunities for all those who study and love Torah.