

Text Teaching prepared by Rabbi Hazzan Rachel Hersh
Heschel Vision Experience
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1. Zechariah 4: 1-6

וַיָּשָׁב הַמַּלְאָךְ הַדֹּבֵר בִּי וַיַּעֲרֵנִי כְּאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־יִעֹזֵר מִשְׁנֵתוֹ:

The angel who talked with me came back and woke me as a man is wakened from sleep.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי מַה אַתָּה רֹאֶה וַיֹּאמֶר [וַיֹּאמֶר] רָאִיתִי וְהִנֵּה מְנוֹרֹת זָהָב כְּלֵה וְגִלְגָּה עַל־רֹאשֶׁיהָ וְשִׁבְעָה נֶרְתִּיחַ עָלֶיהָ וְשִׁבְעָה וְשִׁבְעָה מוֹצְקוֹת לְנֵרוֹת אֲשֶׁר עַל־רֹאשֶׁיהָ:

He said to me, “What do you see?” And I answered, “I see a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl above it. The lamps on it are seven in number, and the lamps above it have seven pipes;

וּשְׁנַיִם זֵיתִים עָלֶיהָ אֶחָד מִיְמִין הַגִּלְגָּה וְאֶחָד עַל־שְׂמֹאלֶיהָ:

and by it are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and one on its left.”

וַאֲנִי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי־הַמַּלְאָךְ הַדֹּבֵר בִּי לֵאמֹר מַה־אֵלֶּה אֲדֹנָי:

I, in turn, asked the angel who talked with me, “What do those things mean, my lord?”

וַיַּעַן הַמַּלְאָךְ הַדֹּבֵר בִּי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי הֲלוֹא יָדַעְתָּ מַה־הֵמָּה אֵלֶּה וַאֲמַר לֹא אֲדֹנָי:

“Do you not know what those things mean?” asked the angel who talked with me; and I said, “No, my lord.”

וַיַּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי לֵאמֹר זֶה דְּבַר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי־זֵרֻבָבֶל לֵאמֹר לֹא בְחַיִּל וְלֹא בְכֹחַ בִּי אִם־בְּרוּחִי אֲמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:

Then he explained to me as follows: “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit—said the LORD of Hosts.

2. From Mordecai Kaplan’s diary, Thursday, December 24, 1942

The contribution which Judaism has made and should continue to make to democracy and the American way of life is best summarized in the motto enunciated by the prophet Zachariah [4:6]. “Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit saith the Lord of Hosts” and to add the supplement of Hillel’s famous summary of Judaism, “The rest is commentary, go and learn.”

The importance of Zachariah's motto is that it furnishes the key to that inner freedom without which democracy is merely a hollow form. "Not by might nor by power but by my spirit" sets forth the mental attitude which is a prerequisite to the building of a world on the foundations of peace. Before we can have democracy in action, we must will it. That calls for a sense of values which are certain to direct our will toward democracy and impel us to live by it and give our all in defense of it[, which] is that implied in the prophet's motto: Not by might nor by power &c. ...

If democracy is to function as the soul of the American way of life, and if that way of life is to become a means to self-fulfillment for every American, the sense of values which measure the highest good not by might or power but by justice and mercy must be incorporated in an American system of law and the process of education.

3. From Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai Kaplan by Mel Scult:

Kaplan's first congregation, The Jewish Center, was Orthodox. Seating was separate though equal and there was never any question of altering the synagogue ritual to include women. The major question of the day was women's right to vote. Kaplan advocated the emancipation of women. In his preaching, he went beyond mere support of the vote which he took for granted but did not argue for changing any rituals to include women. In the fall of 1918, he took the occasion of the Sidra (Torah portion) "Haye Sarah" to deal with the issue of women's rights. Preparing the way for the sermon, the center journal published the following question during that week: "Shall the Emancipation of women be merely a duplication of men?" On Shabbat morning Kaplan pulled no punches when he said that, "Judaism of the Galuth [Diaspora] has said nothing and done nothing to lay claim to any share in the Emancipation of women." The major religions, moreover, always lagged behind when it came to movements for social betterment. He asserted that, "the movement to emancipate women was nothing more than the logical extension of democracy."