



# KORACH

POWER TO THE LITTLE GUY

*Why Judaism Cherishes Ordinary People over Holy Saints*

# PARSHAH OVERVIEW

## *Korach*

Korah incites a mutiny, challenging Moses's leadership and the granting of the *kehunah* (priesthood) to Aaron. He is accompanied by Moses's inveterate foes, Dathan and Abiram. Joining them are 250 distinguished members of the community, who offer the sacrosanct *ketoret* (incense) to prove their worthiness for the priesthood. The earth opens up and swallows the mutineers, and a fire consumes the *ketoret* offerers.

A subsequent plague is stopped by Aaron's offering of *ketoret*. Aaron's staff miraculously blossoms and brings forth almonds to prove that his designation as High Priest is Divinely ordained.

G d commands that a *terumah* ("uplifting") offering be given to the *Kohanim* (priests) from each crop of grain, wine, and oil; as well as from all firstborn sheep and cattle, and other specified gifts.

# TEXT 1

Rashi, Numbers 16:1

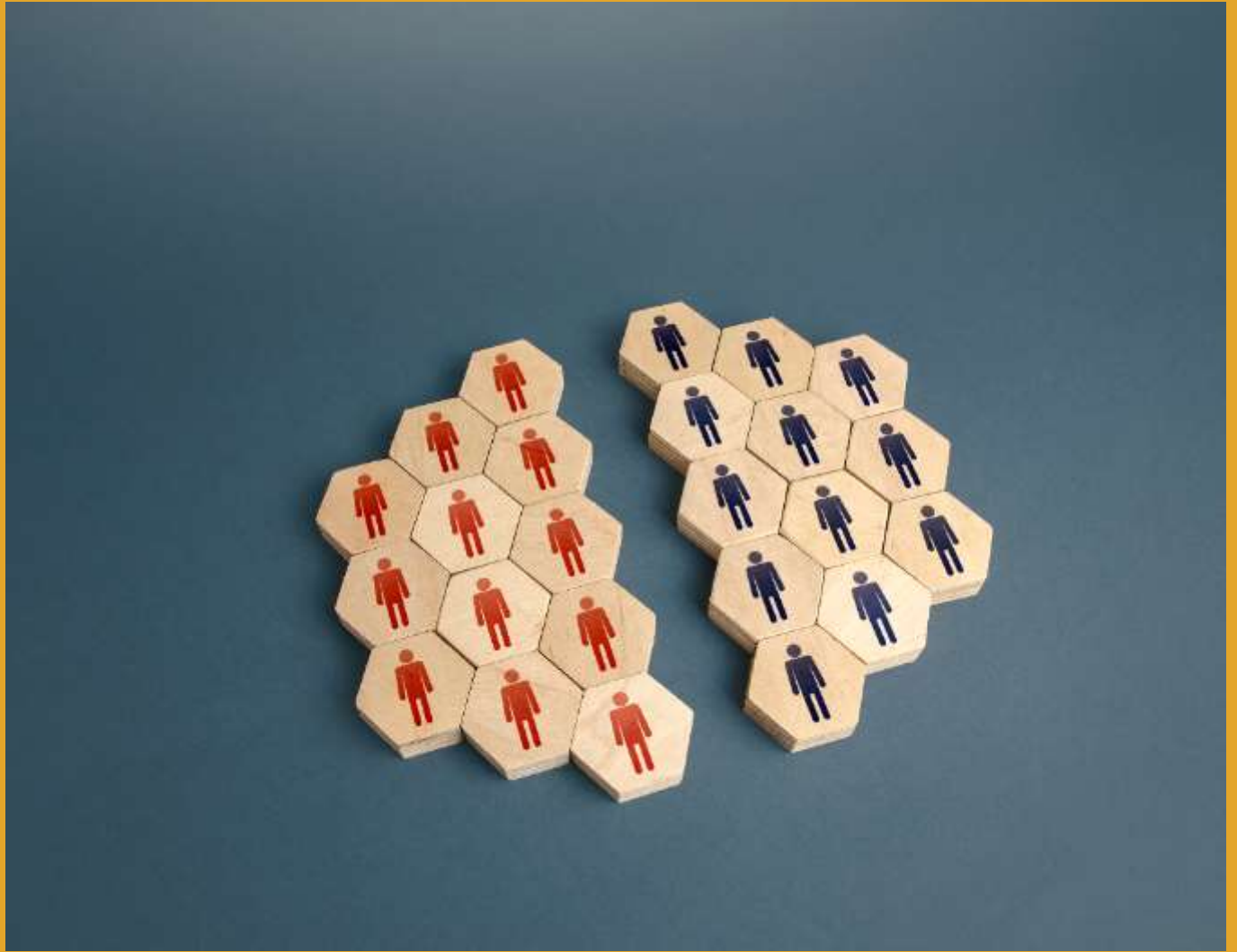
ויקח קרח: לקח את עצמו לצד אחד להיות נחלק  
מתוך העדה לעורר על הכהונה.

וזהו שתרגם אונקלוס "ואתפלג", נחלק משאר  
העדה להחזיק במחלוקת.

“And Korah took.” He took himself to one side to be separated from the congregation to challenge the priesthood.

*Unkelos* [the classic translator of the Torah into Aramaic] thus translated “he took” as “he split.” He split from the congregation to create divisiveness.

Korah's tactic was to split the congregation away from each other and sow chaos to achieve his goal.



Korah believed in  
two groups of Jews:

those who dedicate  
their lives to G-d and  
holiness, and the  
ordinary folk.

This way, each group  
would have their  
distinct way and  
would not merge.



# TEXT 2

Numbers 16:3

וַיִּקְהֻלוּ עַל מֹשֶׁה וְעַל אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב לָכֶם,  
כִּי כָל הָעֵדָה כָּלָם קְדוֹשִׁים וּבְתוֹכְכֶם ה', וּמִדּוּעַ  
תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל קֹהֵל ה'?

[Korah's group] gathered against Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You take too much for yourselves. The entire nation is holy, and G-d is among them, so why do you raise yourselves over G-d's people?"





Korah had a policy disagreement with Moses and Aaron.

He believed that the priests lived in a cloistered world, and although neither world was greater or less than the other, the worlds should not mix.

# TEXT 3

The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, *Likutei Sichot*  
18, pp. 219–220

וויבאלד אז א כהן איז אינגאנצן אפגעשיידט פון  
עניני העולם, ער איז פארנומען נאר מיט קדושה  
זאכן - ובלשון הכתוב "ויבדל אהרן להקדישו קודש  
קדשים הוא ובניו" (דברי הימים א כג, יג), ובפרט  
(אהרן) א כהן גדול אויף וועמען עס שטייט "ומן  
המקדש לא יצא" (ויקרא כא, יב).

איז "מדוע תתנשאו על קהל ה'" (במדבר טז, ג) —  
היינט ווי אזוי און פארוואס דארף זיין די השפעה  
פון דער התנשאות וקדושת אהרן אויף אידן (על  
קהל ה'), אז אויך זיי זאלן זיך אויפהויבן צו זיין  
מובדל פון עניני העולם, בשעת אז זייער עבודה איז  
צו פארנעמען זיך מיט דברים גשמיים און מאכן פון  
זיי כלים צו אלוקות?

The *Kohen* is completely insulated from worldly affairs—exclusively engaged with sacred matters, as the Torah says, “Aaron was separated, consecrated to be holy of holies, he and his sons” (I Chronicles 23:13). This is especially true of Aaron, about whom it is written, “He must not emerge from the Temple” (Leviticus 21:12).

If so, Korah claimed, “Why do you raise yourselves over G-d’s people” (Numbers 16:3)? How and why must Aaron’s lofty sanctity inspire everyone to be transcendent and to separate from worldly affairs? The people’s role is to engage with the world, and to fulfill G-d’s wish through this engagement.





Moses wanted a  
priesthood that  
inspired people  
to a greater level  
of holiness.

Korah thought  
that the meddling  
with priestly ideas  
would take the  
ordinary Jew  
away from their  
Divinely given  
task.





After putting down the rebellion, G-d instructed Moses to collect a staff from each tribe, and one from Aaron.

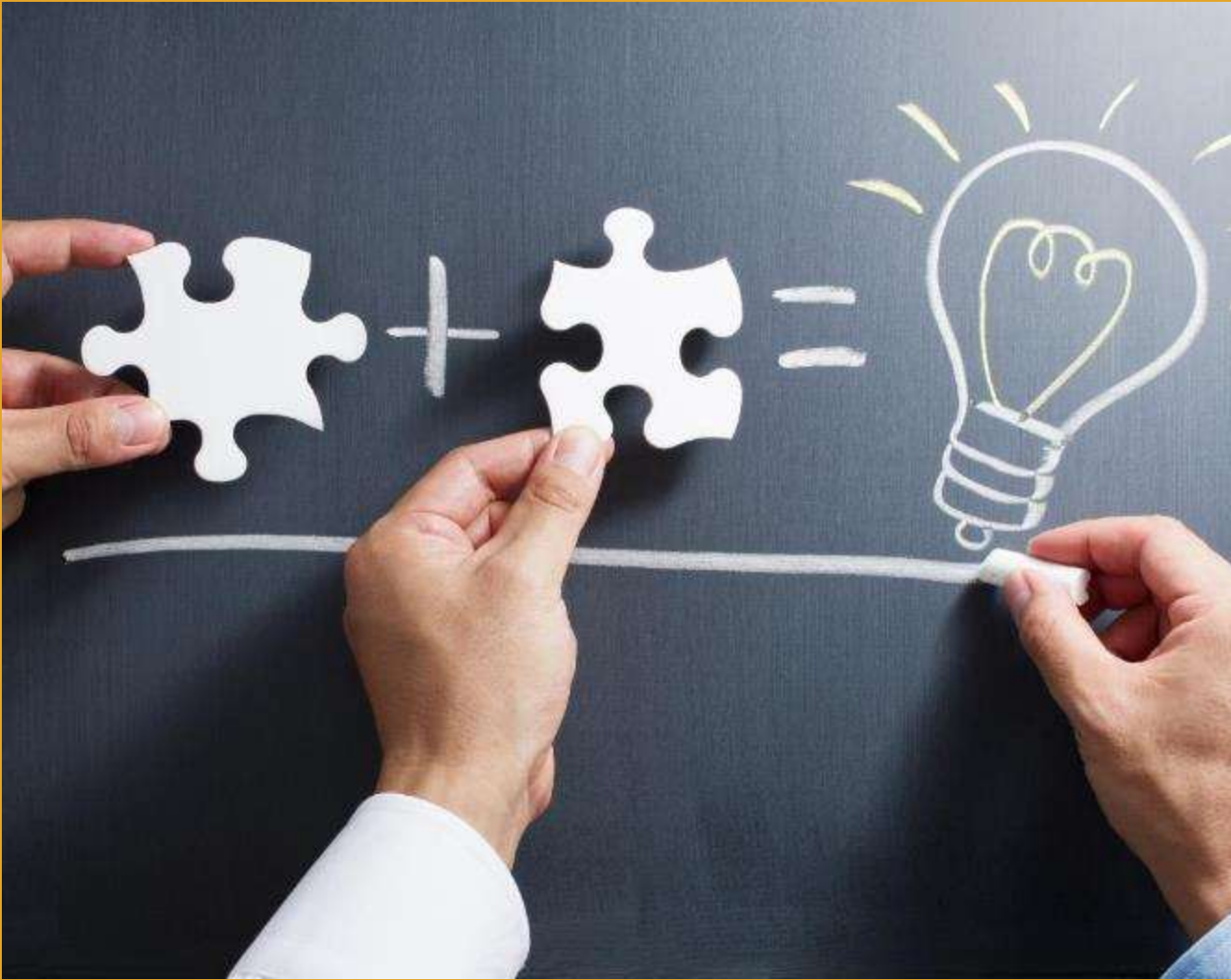
Aaron's staff sprouted almonds, proving to everyone that Aaron was Divinely chosen.

# TEXT 4

Numbers 18:19

כָּל תְּרוּמַת הַקֹּדֶשִׁים אֲשֶׁר יָרִימוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לַה',  
נָתַתִּי לָךְ וּלְבָנֶיךָ וּלְבָנוֹתֶיךָ.

All the sacred gifts that Jews set aside for  
G-d, I have given to you, your sons and  
your daughters.



The priestly offerings reinforced the perspective of combining holy and mundane.

When ordinary gifts from the Jews are brought to the priests, they are elevated to a holy status.

## QUESTION

Why does it make more sense to share this message through priestly gifts rather than sacrifices?



Moses  
understood and  
G-d confirmed  
that the role of a  
Jew is to bridge  
G-d and the  
world, not to  
separate them.





The mitzvah of *tzitzit* portrays this message literally with the tying of knots.

It symbolizes the idea that Jews must tie the mundane details of life to G-d.

# TEXT 5

Rabbi Abraham Saba,  
*Tzror Hamor*, Numbers  
16:1

סוד הציצית הוא קשור ואחוד בסבת ה' הקדוש.  
שהוא הקשר המקשר כל הדברים והחוליות בין  
הקשרים. להורות כי גבוה מעל גבוה שומר  
וגבוהים עליהם, ועליון יחיד על כולם הנותן  
קשר לכולם . . .

ולהורות על כל זה צוותה התורה "ונתנו על  
ציצית הכנף פתיל תכלת", להורות על היחיד  
עליון הנקרא חוט השני, שהוא ה' המחבר ותופר  
ומקשר בחוט אחד כל הדברים. והוא א-ל עליון  
קונה שמים וארץ ומחברם באחדים.

The secret of *tzitzit* is to tie and unite ourselves with G-d, the sacred First Cause of existence. G-d is represented by the top knot of the *tzitzit*—the one that binds the disparate pieces and wrappings that are located between the knots. The successive knots of the *tzitzit* demonstrate the many spheres of existence, each higher than the other. The top knot demonstrates that above all is the absolute unity of G-d, Who ties it all together. . . .

Thus, the Torah commands, "Affix a sky-blue thread upon the fringes on the corners" (Numbers 15:38). This teaches us that the Singular Supernal One, who is also described [in kabbalistic works] as the scarlet thread, attaches, sews, and ties everything together with a single thread. He, the Master of Heaven and earth, combines everything and makes them one.

→ CONTINUE

# TEXT 5

Rabbi Abraham Saba,  
*Tzror Hamor*, Numbers  
16:1

וזה הייחוד והקישור יש לו לכוון לכל איש  
שנקרא בשם יהודי ולובש טלית זה, שהוא  
מחובר וקשור נפלא עם ה' אחד. ובזה הוא חלק  
אדם מא-ל, וחלק אלוקה מעולמו

As we wrap ourselves in the fringed prayer shawl, we remember this unifying knot and visualize our wondrous connection and attachment to the One G-d. This way, the human becomes part of G-d and G-d has a presence in His world.

# TEXT 6

Midrash, *Bamidbar Rabah*  
18:3

קפץ קרח ואמר למֹשֶׁה: טְלִית שְׂפֵלָה תְּכַלֶּת, מֵהוּ  
שְׂתָהָא פְּטוּרָה מִן הַצִּיצִית?

אָמַר לוֹ: חַיִּיבָת בְּצִיצִית.

אָמַר לוֹ קֶרַח: טְלִית שְׂפֵלָה תְּכַלֶּת אֵין פּוֹטְרָת  
עֲצָמָה, אַרְבָּעָה חוּטִין פּוֹטְרוֹת אוֹתָהּ?

Korah arose and asked Moses, “Does a prayer shawl made entirely of sky-blue wool require sky-blue fringes on its corners?”

Moses replied, “The fringes are still required.”

Korah said, “If an entire sky-blue garment can’t exempt one from the obligation, how can four sky-blue fringes exempt us?”





Korah specifically questioned the *tzitzit* since he was trying to make a point.

Korah believed that G-d made the world for us to live in and enjoy it, not to tie ourselves up with G-d and segregate from the world.



Korah missed the  
central point of  
Judaism—to live  
in the world and  
do it for G-d.



# TEXT 7

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, *A Judaism Engaged with the World* (London, U.K.: Exco Dps Ltd., 2013), pp. 14–15

We are commanded to lead our lives so that we become living tutorials in the values Jews first taught the world: the sanctity of life, the dignity of the human person, the twin imperatives of justice and compassion, marriage as a covenant and the home as a sanctuary, community as collective responsibility, the importance of lifelong education, respect for the elderly, and many other ideals that Jews were the first to embrace and of which they are still the great exemplars.

When Dr. Ludwig Guttmann revolutionized the care of paraplegics and created the

Paralympics, that was a Kiddush Hashem. When Viktor Frankl in Auschwitz gave his fellow prisoners the will to live, creating a new psychotherapy based on “man’s search for meaning,” that was a Kiddush Hashem.

When Jewish economists develop ways of alleviating poverty throughout the developing world, that is a Kiddush Hashem. When Jewish businesses set new standards in respecting employees, that is a Kiddush Hashem. When Jews worked with Nelson Mandela to end apartheid or marched with Martin Luther King in the battle for civil

rights, that was a Kiddush Hashem.

The reason is that each of these is a way of showing what G-d wants from us in this world. He wants us to become His “partners in the work of Creation.” He wants us to fight the evil men do to one another. He wants us to use our freedom responsibly. He wants us to use our G-d-given powers to enhance the lives of others.



G-d gave us two groups to achieve this goal: the ordinary Jews and the *Kohanim*.

When we work as a team, the *Kohanim* empower us to live in a world with G-d.

# TEXT 8

The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, *Likutei Sichot*  
18, p. 223

אין הקרבת הקרבנות (ובכללות דער ענין פון  
קדשים, וואס א איד איז מקדיש זיינע נכסים  
לה') זאגט זיך ניט ארויס אז אלס דברים  
תחתונים גשמיים ווערען זיי א כלי צו אלוקות,  
ווארום די קרבנות גייען דאך ארויס פון חול, פון  
זייער שייכות צום אדם למטה, און ווערן אן ענין  
קדוש . . .

מה שאין כן בא מתנות כהונה, וואס א מענטש  
גיט אוועק פון זיין פארמעגען צום כהן . . . דוקא  
אין דעם איז ניכר ומודגש אז אויך במצבם פון  
ענינים דלמטה (אלס חולין) זיינען זיי שייך צו  
אלוקות.

Offering a sacrifice or consecrating any of  
our possessions to G-d fails to capture  
the concept of transforming mundane  
physical items into Divine instruments.  
They represent the idea of escaping all  
association with mundane worldliness and  
becoming sacred.

By contrast, giving our mundane  
possessions as priestly gifts to the *Kohen* .  
. . demonstrates the notion that mundane  
worldly possessions can become holy.





By G-d presenting the sacrifices, that would seem to imply that He wants everyone to be like the *Kohanim*.

Instead, the priestly gifts exemplify being worldly but anchored in G-dliness.

“In G-d we trust”  
on the bills shows  
that G-d is not  
hidden away in  
the synagogue,  
but rather He is  
“right on the  
money.”





# TEXT 9

“The Legislation Placing  
‘In G-d We Trust’ on  
National Currency,”  
[www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)

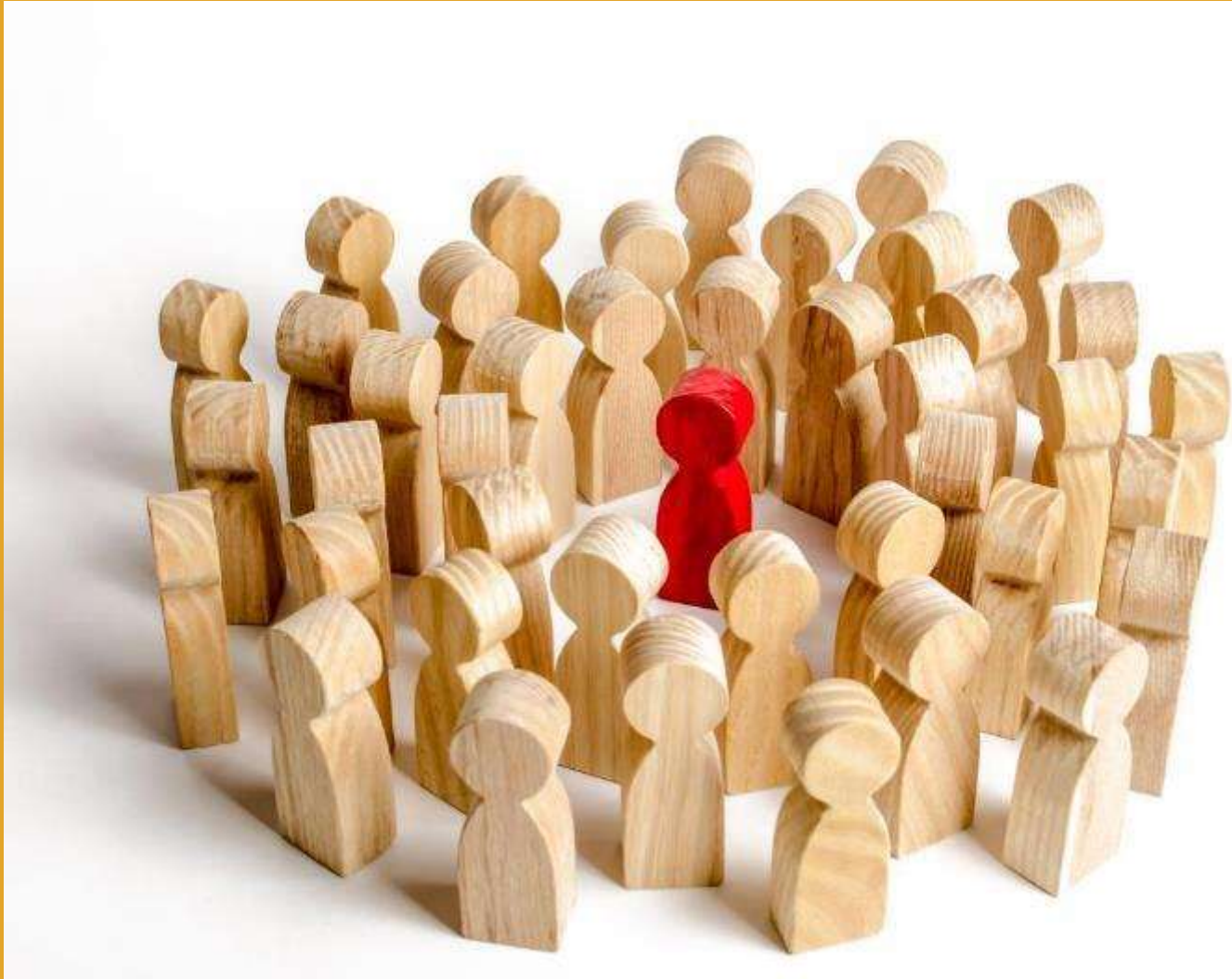
On this date [July 11, 1955], President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed into law H.R. 619, a bill that required that the inscription “In G-d We Trust” appear on all paper and coin currency.

Representative Charles E. Bennett of Florida introduced the resolution in the House. . . . Adding “In G-d We Trust” to currency, Bennett believed, would “serve as a constant reminder” that the nation’s political and economic fortunes were tied to its spiritual faith.

The inscription had appeared on most U.S. coins since the Civil War. . . . However, “In G-d

We Trust” had not appeared on paper currency and, from time to time, had not been inscribed on certain classes of coins.

Bennett’s measure sailed through the House, passing on an unrecorded voice vote. The Senate approved the measure less than three weeks later. The first dollar bills bearing the inscription entered circulation in 1957, shortly after “In God We Trust” also had been made the official national motto by an act of Congress.



In a sense, Jews  
play a priestly role  
on the world stage.

It is our role to  
show the world  
that the object of  
life is to tie holy to  
mundane.

# TEXT 10

The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson,  
*Likutei Sichot* 18, p. 228

אין דעם דוקא דריקט זיך אויס ווי אזוי אויך  
אזעלכע, וואס זיינען תחתונים אין זייער מציאות  
הנראית והנגלית זיינען שייך צו אלוקות. אז אין  
וועלכער מדריגה א איד געפינט זיך נאר, איז זיין  
אמת'ער און פנימיות'דיקער מציאות —  
אלוקות.

This truly highlights the fact that even those who seem low on the surface are deeply attached to G-d. No matter their station in life, the true and internal reality of every Jew is G-d.



There is really no such thing  
as an ordinary Jew—since  
we are all tied to the  
extraordinary.

# TEXT 11

The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, *Torat  
Menachem* 5730:1 (58), p.  
143

בעלי עסק שיש להם קשיים, יש להם כחות  
נעלים יותר מאשר יושבי אוהל שאין להם  
קשיים, כך, שאי אפשר לדעת כיצד היו  
מתנהגים אילו היה להם קשיים.

ובגלל זה סיבבו מלמעלה שישארו בישיבה או  
בכולל. ואילו בעלי עסק שיש להם קשיים —  
הרי זה גופא מוכיח שיש להם כחות על זה.

Jews who live in the world have more spiritual stamina than those who are cloistered in the halls of Torah study. The spiritual integrity of Torah students is never challenged by secularism because they are not exposed to it. We, therefore, don't know how they might fare if they were to be exposed to such challenges.

In fact, it is because they are not gifted with the same spiritual stamina that G-d guided them from Above to a cloistered life in the study hall. Not so the businessperson. The very fact that they face daily challenges indicates that they have the spiritual stamina to overcome these challenges.

Ordinary Jews  
have a greater  
capacity than the  
righteous to bring  
Heaven and earth  
together in all  
areas of life.





## KEY POINTS

1. Korah thought that holy Jews should live in their cloistered world of prayer and study while ordinary Jews live in the real world: that the two should have little contact.
2. Moses and Aaron taught that the role of the holy Jew is to go out into the world and connect the ordinary Jew with G-d: to empower them to be in the world but not of the world.
3. G-d agreed with Moses and demonstrated this through the laws of the priestly gifts. These gifts are made by the ordinary Jew to the priest. The part that is gifted becomes holy; the rest remains in the possession of the giver and remains mundane.
4. This blend of holy and mundane represents the Jewish principle that holiness and mundaneness are not meant to be separated. The mundane is meant to be tied to the holy and the holy is meant to have a presence in the mundane.

## KEY POINTS

5. Ordinary Jews are pivotal to bridging the holy and the mundane, for they live in the mundane world but are connected with G-d. Thus, G-d loves the ordinary Jew just as much, if not more, than He loves the holy Jew.

