

KAVANAH  
Parashat Tetzaveh  
5778

The Torah portion, Tetzaveh, is about the robes of the High Priest and preparation of the materials used in the Tabernacle. The parashah opens describing the oil used for the menorah, the seven-branched candelabrum in the Tabernacle. On the words, “bring for yourself pure oil of beaten olives,” the rabbis use the awkwardness of the Hebrew “for yourself” to say that God does not need the light of the menorah. The light is for our own sake. We need the light – we need it in our homes and we need it in our synagogues.

- I am reminded of the teaching of Menachem Mendl of Kotzk. The Kotzker asked the rhetorical question: “Where is God?” He answered his own question, “Wherever people bring God in.”

We bring light into the world – for our own sake and for the sake of the world around us.

I am inspired by the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School who went to Tallahassee and who went to Washington to plead for a ban on assault weapons. They learned quickly that politics is not easy. It takes persistent pressure to change entrenched power. Maybe they will persist. Maybe these students and this horror will be the spark that is needed. Maybe these teenagers and their families will learn that no one can afford to be silent.

- Regarding the lighting of the menorah, Rashi said that one has to light each branch until it burns on its own. We don't know if this tragedy will be the one that brings the change in gun safety.

Rashi's comment suggests that one must keep the flame burning until it burns on its own.

Their courage is already bringing some light.

It is our job, as religious people, to bring God and God's light into the world. I think that's part of what it means "to be religious." In a 1989 article, "Can We Be Good Without God," the author wrote:

- We are so used to thinking of spirituality as withdrawal from the world and human affairs that it is hard to think of it as political. Spirituality is personal and private, we assume, while politics is public. But such a dichotomy drastically diminishes spirituality construing it as a relationship to God without implications for one's relationship to the surrounding world. The God of [the Hebrew Bible] created the world and is deeply engaged in the affairs of the world. The notion that we can be related to God and not to the world – that we can practice a spirituality that is not political – is in conflict with the [Jewish] notion of God.

It takes our effort to light the lights. And when we are persistent, they just might burn on their own.