



century manuscript, produced in Spain—before the age of printed books—would only highlight for us how rare it was. So a siddur—a prayer-book—perhaps? In a period when most pious Jews had to rely on their memories, perhaps this well-off devout Jew wanted to display his piety through the expenditure of his resources on so important a work!

But then we discover that this is a Hebrew translation of the medical writings of Hippocrates, and we are reminded that medieval Jews, in Spain and elsewhere, did not live in ghettos, cut off from the world. The educations of educated Jews, like educated others, included the study of the wisdom of the ancients—works by Jews, to be sure, but also by Greeks. Besides, Hippocrates was the foundation of medieval medicine, and any person, Jew or not, would want to know how to maintain their health and sustain their life. So this was indeed a very important manuscript, truly dear to the person who commissioned it. It just wasn't the stereotypical Hebrew work we might expect.

Tetzavveh 5778  
Shabbat Zachor

תצוה תשע"ח  
שבת זכור



**The Jewelry of a Master Teacher**  
Rabbi Lilly Kaufman, Director, The Torah Fund  
Campaign of Women's League for Conservative  
Judaism

Without using alchemy, the 16th-century Italian commentator Seforno (1470–1550) turned gems into gold. Writing a few short words about the gemstones that adorned the clothing of the High Priest, described in Parashat Tetzavveh, Seforno shares a truly fine insight about achieving greatness as an educator.

We read in Exodus 28:2, “And you shall make sacred garments for Aaron your brother, for honor and for glory.” On the word *tiferet* (glory), Seforno asserts that the High Priest will be a *kohen-moreh narah*, an awesome priest-teacher. He explains, שהם תלמידי החקוקים על לבו וכתפיו, “for they are his students who are engraved on his heart and shoulders.”

This phrase refers to the names of the tribes of Israel, which were engraved on gemstones worn by the High Priest as part of his ritual garb: the High Priest wore *avnei-shoham*, which were probably lapis lazuli, in the form of an epaulet on each shoulder, each stone engraved with the names of six tribes of Israel, totaling twelve names. He also wore twelve different gems, arrayed in rows on the breastplate of judgment, set in gold. Each gem on the breastplate was individually engraved with the name of a tribe of Israel (Exod. 28:6–11, 15–21).

Why was the High Priest adorned with tribes' names on his shoulders and his chest? We can speculate that wearing the names of his people was meant to keep the supreme religious leader humble, remembering who he represents before God. But Seforno's comment directs us away from the topic of religious leadership, to the seemingly unrelated field of education.

Seforno borrows the phrase *priest-teacher* from II Chronicles 15:3, in which a troubled era of Israelite history is decried as being “bereft of a priest-teacher

and bereft of Torah.” He seizes on this brief biblical allusion to the priest functioning as a teacher to define what it takes to be a master educator.

For Seforno, as I understand him, a master teacher who carries her students’ names engraved on her shoulders takes responsibility for them, for what they learn. This is task-orientation. A master teacher who carries her students’ names engraved on her heart cares about her students. This is person-orientation. A master teacher practices both.

These two essential values in teaching, caring about the subject matter and caring about the student, can conflict. A teacher who is very focused on covering a substantial amount of course material by a set date might overlook how her student learns. As a result, the student might master the data superficially, never connecting imaginatively with material that requires imaginative engagement; or emotionally with material that demands emotional connection; or critically, with material that requires independent thought. Will this student ever love the subject enough to learn more on his own? This teacher’s focus on powering through the material may neglect whether it will become meaningful to her student.

A teacher who focuses too much on the person, on the other hand, may become overly concerned about the emotional comfort of her student, and might relax her demands that the student develop the discipline to learn complex material. This teacher risks not challenging her student enough, allowing the student to evade the hard work of mastering essential content or skills. This teacher’s focus on how the student feels can neglect what the student learns.

Extreme emphasis on either task-orientation or person-orientation is not desirable. The wise teacher works perennially in the creative tension between the two.

Fortunately, teachers can change: they can learn! A teacher can recognize her own teaching preference or bias, identifying whether she is naturally inclined toward task-oriented teaching or person-oriented teaching, and she can work to balance her instincts with what her students need. Such self-knowledge allows the “awesome” teacher to uphold educational standards *and* be sensitive to the ways different students’ minds and imaginations work. Steady expressions of interest in both—in the content and in the student—make for a stable and rich learning environment for the student.

Next week, on Purim, we will read, in Megillat Esther, a tragicomic fantasy of royal power, expressed through objects, such as limitless food and drink, lavish tapestries, and couches made of solid gold; and through the objectification of women; all designed to satisfy the whims of an impulsive, powerful fool of a king. The Persian fantasy of royal garb shares some physical similarities with the ritual garb of the High Priest, detailed in Tetzavveh. But in Exodus, the Bible adapts royal extravagance when fashioning the religious leader’s symbolic clothing, retaining some of the dazzle, but carving responsibility into the glitter—adding *kavod* (dignity) to the *tiferet* (glory). The rabbinic tradition deepens the Bible’s understanding of what it means to be genuinely awe-inspiring, with comments such as those of Seforno.

Seforno’s insight about the awesome teacher invites emulation. We cannot all be the High Priest, but we can be wonderful teachers. We can ask two questions of ourselves, when we teach in a formal setting, or in our homes with our own children and grandchildren, or as mentors in our workplace. We can ask: When I take this person on as my student, am I genuinely carrying his or her name on my heart? Am I successfully carrying his or her name on my shoulders?

If we can answer “yes” to these questions consistently, then we have directed our energy diligently to the service of the text *and* the student, and we have achieved deep integrity as teachers. Then we become *mamleket kohanim vegoy kadosh*, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. And that is pure gold.

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## Speaking of Text

**A WEEKLY EXPLORATION OF THE JEWISH BOOKSHELF**

### A Precious Hebrew Manuscript

**The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary**

Knowing almost nothing about this beautiful manuscript, what would you guess it is? Finely decorated with gold leaf, Hebrew, small for easy carrying (these qualities are all obvious from the photo)—all of these characteristics suggest that it is a dear personal item, one that a wealthy Jew commissioned because of the importance of what it records. Knowing that it is a fifteenth-