



# The Groom is Already Here

*What made a top actor drop everything and embrace his yiddishkeit?*

## You're a Jew!

Do you know Adam Schiff? I'm not talking about the senator from California but about the fictional Adam Schiff from NBC's Law & Order.

You might know him as Steven Hill, but in fact, his true name was Shlomo Krakowski. Although he didn't use his Jewish name publicly, he was actually an observant Jew. When that series was filmed, he observed Shabbat, ate kosher food, and so on.

However, that wasn't always the case. Steven Hill was born to a non-observant family in Seattle, Washington. He became an actor from a very young age; at 6 years old, he already played a lead role in a movie, and from then on made it his life's mission to become a Hollywood star.

In 1961, he starred as Sigmund Freud in "A Far Country," a show about one of Sigmund Freud's early patients. It was about a woman who lost the ability to walk after the death of her father and sister, despite the fact that the doctors could not identify any medical reason for her condition. Freud came to the conclusion that it was a result of her neurological, psychological condition, and if he would cure her of those issues, her physical malady would disappear.

When the show played on Broadway, the patient suddenly decided to

go off script. In one of her monologues, she yelled at 'Sigmund Freud,' "You are a Jew!"

It was a 'Freudian slip.'

From the very first moment, it shook Steven Hill to his core. During the intercession, he couldn't get his mind off of it. What does it mean to be a Jew? The question continued to haunt him until he finally began exploring his Jewish roots.

He came into contact with the previous Rebbe of Skver, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Twersky, who welcomed him and helped him begin his journey towards Jewish observance, and over time, he began observing Shabbat and keeping kosher, and becoming a fully observant Jew.

His new passion almost dealt a death knell to his career. Most Broadway shows take place on Shabbos, so he was now limited to movies and shows that could accommodate his difficult schedule. Nonetheless, he persevered, and made Yiddishkeit a priority in his life.

When people would ask him what led him to make such a drastic change, going from a lifetime career of acting to becoming an observant Jew, he said, "I came to the conclusion that I wasn't born to memorize lines." He realized that life had to be more meaningful than that.

In the course of his journey to Judaism, he had a private audience with the Rebbe. I don't know anything about their conversation, but on the evening he visited, something amazing happened.

There was another person visiting the Rebbe that night, right before Steven Hill. He wasn't famous; he was a person who had experienced a terrible personal tragedy, and was coming to the Rebbe for comfort. His son-in-law had died in a car accident, leaving his daughter with a young son. He came to the Rebbe hoping to receive his blessing for

his daughter's future.

When he arrived at 770, he noticed lots of excitement. When he asked what was going on, someone told him that the famous actor, Steven Hill, had come to see the Rebbe. He didn't make much of it.

When it was his turn, he entered the Rebbe's room and presented his note with his tale of woes. The Rebbe read his note and said, "The groom is already here."

This fellow was confused. He thought the Rebbe didn't understand his situation, so he began to heatedly explain that his daughter was in a terrible crisis, she didn't have a husband and she had a young child, and she needed a blessing for her future. The Rebbe tried to get a word in, but he was so overwhelmed that he kept on going and going. Finally, the Rebbe smiled and said again, "Don't worry, the groom is already here." He waved his hands in a motion that said, 'You have nothing to worry about.' Needless to say, this fellow left the Rebbe's room confused.

A few months later, someone suggested a match for his daughter — the actor, Steven Hill. They meant, married, and had a wonderful life together. The groom was already there... (Kfar Chabad issue 1994).

## **The Materials of the Tabernacle**

This week is Parshas Terumah. G-d tells the Jewish people to bring donations to Moses so that a home can be built for G-d in the desert. True, G-d is everywhere, but this was to be a place where His presence would be felt and experienced. It was a place where miracles would occur on a regular basis — where a regular person could come and experience the Divine on a regular day. The Torah lists all the necessary materials — gold, silver, copper, and so on.

How is the story relevant in 2023?

In our day, we do not have a Temple. We have “miniature temples” — in other words, synagogues, where we come together to engage with spirituality in a deeper way.

But the verse actually implies something deeper. When G-d commands the Jewish people to erect a tabernacle, He says, “Make for me a sanctuary, and I will dwell in them.” Our sages note that it doesn’t say, “I will dwell in it,” but rather, “in them,” in other words, G-d will dwell within the heart of every single Jew (See Likkutei Sichos vol. 1 pg. 165, Igros Kodesh vol. 33 pg. 273).

The point is that G-d does not want to dwell in a Ivory Tower separated from the day-to-day lives of the Jewish people. He wants to be in our hearts and minds at every moment.

How are we to accomplish that? The answer lies in the list of materials included in the parsha.

The metals were divided into three: gold, silver, and copper.

Gold (Zahav in Hebrew) has the same numerical value as Chabad. What is the connection between the two? (Don’t worry, this is not a fundraising appeal...) Chabad is an acronym for wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. It is a reference to the highest part of a person’s character, his intellect, which sets the tone for his entire life. Donating gold means bringing G-d into our minds.

Silver, *kesef* in Hebrew, resembles the word *kisufim*, yearning. This represents our hearts and our emotions. It’s not enough to think about G-d; we need to love Him as well. As we say in the shema, “and you should love your G-d...” Donating silver means being *passionate* about Yiddishkeit.

But that’s still not enough. We also need copper. Copper is a cheap metal, one that is commonly used in everyday life. This represents the

power of deed. Our actions need to be dedicated to G-d as well.

When we dedicate those three capacities to G-d, G-d dwells within us. (Toras Menachem v. 75 p. 236).

## **Find the Gold**

On a different occasion, the Rebbe once asked: why does the Torah first mention gold? The Torah wanted every Jew to contribute, so it should have begun with a material that everybody had. Copper is far more available, so why does it begin with gold? Why make people feel left out?

The answer is that every Jew is gold. Deep inside every single Jew, there is a rich fountain of spirituality. Deep inside, there is a place where when someone yells, "You are a Jew," it awakens endless potential, and sets the person on a path of connection G-d. (Toras Menachem 5752 v. 2 p. 287).

Lets get rich.