

Wisdom of the Heart

Rabbi Benji Levy
CEO of Mosaic United



In general, the head is perceived to be the seat of wisdom and intellect, while the heart is the source of emotion. And yet, in an intriguing piece of Torah, these polar opposites are woven together with the repetition of the phrase *chacham lev* or 'wise-heart' a total of seven times, when referencing the leaders and builders of the tabernacle. The question, therefore is, what is the meaning behind this unique phrase? (also asked by Natziv, *Emek Hadavar* 31:6).

Academic pursuits are generally considered intellectual. Subjects like mathematics, philosophy and science are typically explored in the theoretical cognitive realm. Even fields of study that can have practical application on a day-to-day basis often do not actually affect the way one lives or the character that one represents.

Judaism in its truest sense, however, requires a combination of cerebral, behavioural and spiritual rigour. It requires a commitment of heart, mind and practice. Whilst those endowed with great knowledge may be deemed knowledgeable, the way they conduct themselves will ultimately be the yardstick that defines whether or not they are a *talmid chacham* – a scholar of wisdom. The fact that this title requires the practical application of wisdom, not just the theoretical knowledge, differentiates it from almost all other academic or intellectual pursuits and offers insights into the deeper meaning of the term 'chacham'. To be a '*chacham lev*' therefore, is to be an academic of thought and action – someone with the ability to harmonise considerations, feelings and practice. It is not just about one's regular intelligence or IQ, but one's emotional intelligence or EQ.

The archetypical Jewish prayer, the Shema, states, '[the Torah] that I command you today, should be on your heart' (Deut. 6:6). The obvious question is why the Torah should be **on** one's heart, rather than **in** one's heart? If the Torah is of such great importance, one would assume it ought to be internalized, rather than situated outside of one's very being. This subtle difference may add depth to our understanding of the term *chacham lev*.

Every person in some shape or form is touched or moved at different moments in their life. It may be a definitive milestone with family or friends or a powerful encounter – everyone feels moved at least once. Judaism views these inspirational moments as gifts – opportunities that G-d, so to speak, places upon our heart. Once placed upon our heart – acceptance is up to us. The daily declaration that the Torah is placed on one's heart – rather than in one's heart – is a constant reminder of our responsibility to actively recognize and internalise these unique spiritual gifts rather than letting them pass us by.

If we return, therefore, to the verses recounting the building of the Sanctuary, we can now understand the meaning behind the repetition of the description of the 'wise-hearted' people. True wisdom is not merely intellectual talent, but an emotional appreciation, not the superficial exposure to moving moments, rather the ability to notice the sacred and invite it into the day-to-day. All of us on numerous occasions are faced with both knowledge based content and experiential emotional moments.

In order to earn the title of chacham lev – wise-hearted, it is upon us not to simply notice or learn, but to synthesize these unique experiences simultaneously into our heads, hearts and daily lives.

comments: benji@mosaicunited.org

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