



# COVENANT & CONVERSATION

## Family Edition

FINDING FAITH IN THE PARSHA WITH RABBI SACKS

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בס"ד

תצוה תש"ף  
Tetzaveh 5780

**Dressing to Impress**

### \*\* KEY IDEA OF THE WEEK \*\*

**Beauty can help us see the universe as God's work of art**



## PARSHAT TETZAVEH IN A NUTSHELL

In *Parshat Tetzaveh*, we learn more about the role of the Priests. Unusually, Moshe's name is not mentioned once. Instead, his brother Aaron, the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest), is our main focus.

We read about the jobs the Kohanim (the Priests) had to do in the *Mishkan*, the special clothes they had to wear, and the special ceremony (their consecration) for the Kohanim

when they began their service.

There are also some extra details about the *Mishkan* itself.

### QUESTION TO PONDER:

Why do you think the Torah goes in to so much detail about the *Mishkan*, and the *Kohanim*'s role there, when we don't have a *Mishkan* or a Temple today?



## THE CORE IDEA

Tetzaveh describes in detail the "sacred robes" which the Priests and the High Priest wore "for glory and for splendour" while they served in the Tabernacle. This seems to contradict some fundamental values of Judaism.

The Priestly clothes were made to be seen. They were intended to impress the eye. But Judaism is not normally a religion of the eye. Actually it is a religion of the ear. It emphasises hearing rather than seeing. Our key word is *Shema*, meaning: to hear, listen, understand and obey. The verb *sh-m-a* is an important theme of the book of Devarim, where it appears 92 times. Jewish spirituality is about listening more than looking. That is the reason why we cover our eyes when saying *Shema Yisrael*. We shut out the world of sight, and focus on the world of sound: of words, communication and meaning.

This is all because of the Torah's battle against idolatry. Others saw gods in the sun, the stars, the river, the sea, the rain, the storm, the animal kingdom and the earth. They made visual representations of these things. Judaism rejects this whole way of thinking.

God is not in nature, He is beyond it. He created it and He transcends it. Nature is God's work, but not itself God. God cannot be seen. He reveals Himself through *words*.

Clearly, the *Mishkan* (the Tabernacle), and later the *Mikdash* (the Temple), were exceptions to this. Their emphasis was on the visual, and a key example is the Priests' and High Priest's sacred clothing, the *bigdei kodesh*. Why?

The clue to why these were made to be visually beautiful clothes is in the statement that they were to be worn "for glory and for splendour". They created an atmosphere of awe and reverence, because they pointed to a beauty and grandeur beyond themselves, namely God Himself.

### QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. Why do we need a physical framework like a *Mishkan* or a Temple (or even synagogue) to worship God?
2. How can clothes create an atmosphere or emotions in the wearer and in those observing? Can you think of any examples?



## IT ONCE HAPPENED...

*I don't like packing! Even when it is for camp. I can't wait for camp, but I still cannot look forward to packing for it! As I sit here staring at all my clothes, deciding which will have the honour of accompanying me to camp, it occurs to me that some of my clothes are more meaningful to me than others.*

*For example, I am clearly taking my Arsenal shirt. I need everyone to know I am an Arsenal fan! Plus, I will definitely play football at camp, and I play better when I wear it. Of course I also have to take my Bnei Akiva movement shirt. I am proud to wear that too, especially at camp. Hmm... school uniform. Obviously not coming with. I am sometimes proud to wear that also, but definitely not at camp! I am also not taking my Shabbat suit, even though I like the way it makes me feel on Shabbat (I don't want it to get ruined at camp. And anyway, no one else will be wearing a suit on Shabbat.) Now what about T-shirts? I have so many! Some don't really say anything, but some really do. Take this one for example. It has a picture of my entire extended family surrounding my grandma on her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.*

*Too embarrassing to wear this in public... but it has to come with me. What can I do?! That's my whole family! Ah, here is my favourite T-shirts pile. We have my Avengers T-shirt, an IDF T-shirt I got on our last trip to Israel, and my Coldplay tour T-shirt. These will be good for the first week...*

*You know what I realise?! Even though I have never been into fashion or paid too much attention to what people wear, clothes can be really important. They affect how you feel when you wear them, and they can send a message to the world about who you are. Hey world, come look inside my suitcase if you want to know who I am!*

### QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. Why do you think the narrator chose these clothes for camp?
2. How many different kinds of "uniforms" do you have and how do they change the way you feel when you wear them?



## THINKING MORE DEEPLY

The Hebrew for "garment," *b-g-d*, also means "betrayal," as in the confession we say on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur: *Ashamnu bagadnu*, "We have been guilty, we have betrayed." Throughout the book of Bereishit, whenever a garment is a key element in the story, it involves some deception or betrayal.

There were the coverings of fig leaves Adam and Eve made for themselves after eating the forbidden fruit. Jacob wore Esau's clothes when he took his blessing by deceit. Tamar wore a disguise to deceive her father-in-law Judah. The brothers used Joseph's bloodstained cloak to deceive their father into thinking he had been killed by a wild animal. Potiphar's wife used the cloak Joseph had left behind as evidence for her false accusation to have him imprisoned. Joseph himself took advantage of his Viceroy's clothing to conceal his identity from his brothers when they came to Egypt to buy food. So it is exceptionally unusual that the Torah should now concern itself in a positive way with clothes, garments, vestments.

Clothes have to do with surface, not depth; with the outward, not the inward; with appearance rather than reality. All the more strange, therefore, that they should form a key element of the service of the Priests, given the fact that "People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Equally odd is the fact that for the first time we encounter the concept of a uniform, that is, a standardised form of dress worn

not because of the individual wearing the clothes but because of the office they hold, as *Kohen* or *Kohen Gadol*. In general, Judaism focuses on the person, not the office. Specifically, there was no such thing as a uniform for Prophets.

Tetzaveh contains some other new terms. This is the first time we encounter the phrase "for glory and for splendour," describing the effect and point of the garments. Until now *kavod*, "glory," has been spoken of in relation to God alone. Now human beings are to share some of the same glory.

Our parsha is also the first time the word *tiferet* appears. The word has the sense of splendour and magnificence, but it also means beauty. It introduces a dimension we have not encountered explicitly in the Torah before: the *aesthetic*. We have encountered moral beauty, for instance Rivka's kindness to Avraham's servant at the well. We have encountered physical beauty: Sarah, Rivka and Rachel are all described as beautiful. But the Sanctuary and its service bring us for the first time to the aesthetic beauty of craftsmanship and the visual.

This is a continuing theme in relation to the Mishkan and later the Temple. We find it already in the story of the binding of Yitzchak on Mount Moriah which would later become the site of the Temple: "Avraham named the place 'God will see.' That is why it is said today, 'On God's mountain, He will be seen'" (Bereishit 22:14). The emphasis on the visual is unmistakable. The Temple would be about seeing and being seen. But why is

it that specifically in relation to the Mishkan and Temple, the visual prevailed?

The answer is connected to the incident of the Golden Calf. What that sin showed is that the people could not fully relate to a God who gave them no permanent and visible sign of His Presence and who could only be communicated with by the greatest of Prophets. The Torah was given to ordinary human beings, not angels or unique individuals like Moshe. It is hard to believe in a God of everywhere-in-general-but-nowhere-in-particular. It is hard to sustain a relationship with God who is only evident in miracles and unique events but not in everyday life. It is hard to relate to God when He only manifests Himself as overwhelming power.

So the *Mishkan* became the visible sign of God's continual Presence in the midst of the people. Those who officiated there did so not because of their personal greatness, like Moshe, but because of birth and office, signalled by their clothing. The *Mishkan* represents acknowledgement of the fact that human spirituality is about emotions, not just intellect; the heart, not just the mind. Hence aesthetics and the visual as a way of inculcating feelings of awe.

The purpose of the emphasis on the visual elements of the *Mishkan*, and the grand vestments of those who ministered there, was to create an atmosphere of reverence because they pointed to a beauty and splendour beyond themselves, namely God Himself.

Rambam understood the emotive power of the visual. In his Eight Chapters, the prelude to his commentary on tractate Avot, he says, "The soul needs to rest and to do what relaxes the senses, such as looking at beautiful decorations and objects, so that weariness be removed from it." Art and architecture can lift depression and energise the senses.

Rambam's perspective on the visual allows him to explain an otherwise hard-to-understand law, namely that a Kohen with a physical blemish may not officiate in the Temple. This goes against the general principle that *Rachmana liba ba'i*, "God wants the heart," the inner spirit. The exclusion, says Rambam, has nothing to do with the nature of prayer or Divine service but rather with popular attitudes. "The multitude does not estimate man by his true form," he writes, and instead judges by appearances. This may be wrong but it was a fact that could not be ignored. The Sanctuary's entire purpose was to bring the experience of God down to earth in a physical structure with regular routines performed by ordinary human beings. Its purpose was to make people sense the invisible Divine Presence in visible phenomena. Visual beauty was key.

Thus there is a place for aesthetics and the visual in the life of the spirit. In modern times, Rav Kook in particular looked forward to a renewal of Jewish art in the reborn land of Israel. He himself, as I have written elsewhere, loved Rembrandt's paintings, and said that they represented the light of the first day of creation. He was also supportive, if guardedly so, of the Bezalel Academy of Art, one of the first signs of this renewal.

The great difference between ancient Israel and ancient Greece is that the Greeks believed in the holiness of beauty whereas Judaism spoke of *hadrat kodesh*, the beauty of holiness.

**I believe that beauty has power, and in Judaism it has always had a spiritual purpose: to make us aware of the universe as a work of art, testifying to the supreme Artist, God Himself.**

#### QUESTION TO PONDER:

How can we incorporate aesthetic beauty into our worship of God?



#### FROM THE THOUGHT OF RABBI SACKS

"Art in Hebrew – *omanut* – has a semantic connection with *emunah*, "faith" or "faithfulness." A true artist is faithful both to his materials and to the task, teaching us: "To see a world in a grain of sand, And a heaven in a wild flower, Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, And eternity in an hour." The name Betzalel means, "in the shadow of God." Art is the shadow cast by the radiance of God that suffuses all things: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil."

**God's Shadow, Covenant & Conversation, Vayakhel 5771**



#### AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. Why is Judaism wary of the values represented by clothing?
2. How can the Mishkan and the Priestly Garments lead to "glory" and "splendour" (*kavod* and *tiferet*)?
3. What is Judaism's approach to physical beauty?



## QUESTION TIME

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## EDUCATIONAL COMPANION TO THE QUESTIONS

### IN A NUTSHELL

1. There are two main approaches to this question. The first is that we believe that when Mashiach comes, the Temple will be rebuilt, and the Temple service will be reinstated. All the details given in the Torah here and in other places will one day become of practical use once again. The second approach is that all these details remind us that God created a home for humanity here on Earth, and we as a people spend a lot of time learning the details and putting care into making a home for His Presence, constructing first a Mishkan, then a Beit HaMikdash, and finally today all the fine synagogues that are painstakingly built by communities around the world. Everything in the Torah is there to teach us important lessons. This week's *Covenant & Conversation* is an example of an important lesson learned from the details of the Priestly garments.

### THE CORE IDEA

1. Humans are part physical and part spiritual, and we are living in a physical world. We struggle to relate and connect to an incorporeal God with no physical form. The physical aspects of the Mishkan, including the Priestly garments, help humans to connect to God through visual and physical aspects of worship. See *Thinking More Deeply*: "[Its] purpose was to bring the experience of God down to earth in a physical structure with regular routines performed by ordinary human beings. Its purpose was to make people sense the invisible Divine Presence in visible phenomena."
2. The way people dress can contribute to, or even create the atmosphere around them. Examples of this can include the formal dress code of a workplace, school uniform, or casualwear. We dress up for a wedding, and feel it is a special occasion. Then when we might see the bride in her dress and really feel the importance of the day. The way one dresses can also create emotions and state of mind in the wearer.

### IT ONCE HAPPENED...

1. The narrator of this piece spends lot of time thinking through which clothes to take to camp. In the end, the clothes chosen were ones that expressed identity, gave confidence, and felt special. The link between this story and the message of the *Covenant & Conversation* is that just as the Priestly garments were important for the state of mind of the Kohanim who wore them, and for those that watched the service, so too the clothes we choose to wear affect us and send a message, even if it is subconscious and subtle, to those around us.
2. Most children and teens have several uniforms in their lives, even if they aren't considered as such. As illustrated in the story, these might include school uniform, sports kit, youth movement shirt, and the norms of dress code on Shabbat. How many and which uniforms do you wear and how do they make you feel when you wear them?

### THINKING MORE DEEPLY

1. We do this by investing in the physical aspects of our worship, such as our synagogues, the objects we use to perform mitzvot, and the clothes we wear when we do these. However, with Rav Kook as our model, we can also find deep spirituality in physical beauty, whether in nature or man-made art. All aesthetic beauty is an expression of the Divine, and if seen in this way it can help us to connect to the Divine. See also *From the Thought of Rabbi Sacks*.

### AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. Judaism is concerned with inner truth. Clothes have to do with surface, not depth; with the outward, not the inward; with appearance rather than reality. The Hebrew for "garment," *b-g-d*, also means "betrayal," and this week's *Covenant & Conversation* lists several examples of clothing in biblical stories being used for deception and betrayal.
2. The purpose of the Tabernacle and all aspects of the Divine worship within it was to bring the experience of the sublime and incorporeal God down to earth in a physical structure. It was important that this structure and service was physically beautiful in order to inspire awe and wonder in those worshipping (the Kohanim) and those on whose behalf they were conducting the service (the Israelites). This is the "glory" and "splendour" – these emotions are the manner in which we can connect to God in His worship.
3. Physical beauty is an expression of God's sublime spiritual beauty. We can find this in nature and in man-made beauty. (The challenge is to ensure we don't disassociate physical beauty from spiritual beauty, and overemphasise the aesthetic.) We are encouraged to utilise it in our worship. One example is at Succot time, people take great care in decorating their succah and ensuring their etrog is beautiful. This is a prime example of *hiddur mitzvah*.