



“The Five Books of Moses:
Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives”

By Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

Session 20 Tetzaveh — Dressing to Serve

שמות כ"ח

א וְאֵתָהּ הַקָּרֵב אֵלֶיךָ אֶת-אֶהָרֹן אֲחִיךָ וְאֶת-בְּנָיו אִתּוֹ מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכַהֵנוּ-לִי אֶהָרֹן וְנָדָב וְנָאֲבִיהוּא אֲלֶעָזָר וְאִיתָמָר בְּנֵי אֶהָרֹן.
 ב וְעֲשִׂיתָ בְגָדֵי-קָדֵשׁ לְאֶהָרֹן אֲחִיךָ לְכַבוֹד וּלְתִפְאֳרָתוֹ. ג וְאֵתָהּ תִּדְבַר אֶל-כָּל-חֹקְמֵי-לֵב אֲשֶׁר מִלְּאֲתֵינוּ רוּחַ חֲכָמָה וַעֲשׂוּ אֶת-בְּגָדֵי אֶהָרֹן לְקַדְּשׁוֹ לְכַהֵנוּ-לִי. ד וְאֵלֶּה הַבְּגָדִים אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּ חֹשֶׁן וְאֶפֶוד וְמַעֲיֵל וְכֹתֵן תְּשַׁבֵּץ מִצְנַפֶּת וְאֶבְנֵט וַעֲשׂוּ בְגָדֵי-קָדֵשׁ לְאֶהָרֹן אֲחִיךָ וּלְבָנָיו לְכַהֵנוּ-לִי. ה וְהֵם יִקְחוּ אֶת-הַזָּהָב וְאֶת-הַתְּכֵלֶת וְאֶת-הָאֲרָגְמָן וְאֶת-תּוֹלַעַת הַשָּׁנִי וְאֶת-הַשֵּׁשׁ. {פ}

ו וַעֲשׂוּ אֶת-הָאֵפֶד זָהָב תְּכֵלֶת וְאֲרָגְמָן תּוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ מְשֻׁזָּר מַעֲשֵׂה חֹשֶׁב. ז שְׁתֵּי כֹתֶפֶת חֹרֵת יִהְיֶה-לוֹ אֶל-שְׁנֵי קְצוֹתָיו וְחֹשֶׁב אֶפְדָּתוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו כְּמַעֲשֵׂהוּ מִמֶּנּוּ יִהְיֶה זָהָב תְּכֵלֶת וְאֲרָגְמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ מְשֻׁזָּר. ט וְלִקְחֹתָ אֶת-שְׁתֵּי אֶבְנֵי-שֹׁהַם וּפְתַחְתָּ עֲלֵיהֶם שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. י שֵׁשֶׁה מְשֻׁמֹת הֵם עַל הָאֶבֶן הָאֶחָת וְאֶת-שְׁמוֹת הַשָּׁשֶׁה הַבּוֹתְרִים עַל-הָאֶבֶן הַשְּׁנִיתָ כְּתוּלָד תִּהְיֶה. יא מַעֲשֵׂה חֹרֵשׁ אֶבֶן פְּתוּחֵי חֹתֶם תִּפְתַּח אֶת-שְׁתֵּי הָאֶבְנִים עַל-שְׁמֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִסֹּבֵי'ת מִשְׁבְּצוֹת זָהָב תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם. יב וְשִׁמְתָּ אֶת-שְׁתֵּי הָאֶבְנִים עַל כֹּתֶפֶי'ת הָאֵפֶד אֶבְנֵי זָכָרֹן לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִשְׂאָ אֶהָרֹן אֶת-שְׁמוֹתֵם לְפָנָיו יִהְיֶה עַל-שְׁתֵּי כֹתְפוֹ לְזָכָרֹן. {ס}

יג וְעֲשִׂיתָ מִשְׁבְּצַת זָהָב. יד וְשְׁתֵּי שָׂרָשָׁרֹת זָהָב טְהוֹר מְגַבְּלוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם מַעֲשֵׂה עֵבֶר תִּנְתַּתָּה אֶת-שָׂרָשָׁרֹת הָעֵבֶר תִּתְּ עַל-הַמִּשְׁבְּצָת. {ס} טו וְעֲשִׂיתָ חֹשֶׁן מְשֻׁפֵּט מַעֲשֵׂה חֹשֶׁב כְּמַעֲשֵׂה אֵפֶד תַּעֲשֶׂנוּ זָהָב תְּכֵלֶת וְאֲרָגְמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ מְשֻׁזָּר תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ. טז רְבוּעַ יִהְיֶה כְּפוּל זָרֵת אֲרָכּוֹ וְזָרֵת רָחְבוֹ. יז וּמְלֵאֲתָ בּוֹ מְלֵאֲתָ אֶבֶן אַרְבָּעָה טוּרִים אֶבֶן טוּר אֶדָם פֶּטָדָה וּבְכֻרֶת הַטּוּר הָאֶחָד. יח וְהַטּוּר הַשְּׁנַיִם נֶאֱכָר סָפִיר וְנִזְהָל. יט וְהַטּוּר הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְשֵׁם שָׁבוֹ וְאַחֲלָמָה. כ וְהַטּוּר הַרְבִּיעִי תַרְשִׁישׁ וְשֵׁם הַנִּשְׁפָּה מִשְׁבְּצִים זָהָב יִהְיֶה בְּמִלּוּאֵי תָם. כא וְהָאֶבְנִים תִּהְיֶינָה עַל-שְׁמֹת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁתֵּים עָשָׂרָה עַל-שְׁמֹתֵם פְּתוּחֵי חוֹתֶם אִישׁ עַל-שְׁמוֹ תִּהְיֶינָה לְשְׁנֵי עֲשָׂר שֶׁבֶט. כב וְעֲשִׂיתָ עַל-הַחֹשֶׁן שָׂרָשָׁרֹת מַעֲשֵׂה עֵבֶר תִּתְּ זָהָב טְהוֹר. כג וְעֲשִׂיתָ עַל-הַחֹשֶׁן שְׁתֵּי טְבָעוֹת זָהָב וְנִתַּתָּ אֶת-שְׁתֵּי הַטְּבָעוֹת עַל-שְׁנֵי קְצוֹת הַחֹשֶׁן. כד וְנִתַּתָּ אֶת-שְׁתֵּי עֵבֶר תִּתְּ הַזָּהָב עַל-שְׁתֵּי הַטְּבָעוֹת אֶל-קְצוֹת הַחֹשֶׁן. כה וְאֵת שְׁתֵּי קְצוֹת שְׁתֵּי הָעֵבֶר תִּתְּ תַתֵּן עַל-שְׁתֵּי הַמִּשְׁבְּצוֹת וְנִתַּתָּה עַל-כֹּתֶפֶת הָאֵפֶד אֶל-מִוֶל פָּנָיו. כו וְעֲשִׂיתָ שְׁתֵּי טְבָעוֹת זָהָב וְשִׁמְתָּ אֹתָם עַל-שְׁנֵי קְצוֹת הַחֹשֶׁן עַל-שְׁפָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר אֶל-עֶבֶר הָאֵפֶד בֵּיתָה. כז וְעֲשִׂיתָ שְׁתֵּי טְבָעוֹת זָהָב וְנִתַּתָּה אֹתָם עַל-שְׁתֵּי כֹתֶפֶת הָאֵפֶד מִלְּמַטָּה מִמּוֹל פָּנָיו לַעֲמֹת מִחֲבֵרְתוֹ מִמַּעַל לְחֹשֶׁב הָאֵפֶד. כח וְיִרְכָּסוּ אֶת-הַחֹשֶׁן שְׁנֵי מְטָבְעֵי הָאֵפֶד בְּפִתִּיל תְּכֵלֶת לְהִיּוֹת עַל-חֹשֶׁב הָאֵפֶד וְלֹא-יִזַּח הַחֹשֶׁן מִעַל הָאֵפֶד. כט וְנִשְׂאָ אֶהָרֹן אֶת-שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּחֹשֶׁן הַמְשֻׁפֵּט עַל-לְבוֹ בָּבֹאוֹ אֶל-הַקָּדֵשׁ לְזָכָרֹן לְפָנָיו יִהְיֶה תְּמִיד. ל וְנִתַּתָּ אֶל-הַחֹשֶׁן הַמְשֻׁפֵּט אֶת-הָאֲוִרִים וְאֶת-הַתְּמִים וְהָיוּ עַל-לֵב אֶהָרֹן בָּבֹאוֹ לְפָנָיו יִהְיֶה וְנִשְׂאָ אֶהָרֹן אֶת-מִשְׁפֵּט בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל-לְבוֹ לְפָנָיו יִהְיֶה תְּמִיד. {ס} לא וְעֲשִׂיתָ אֶת-מַעֲיֵל הָאֵפֶד כְּלִיל תְּכֵלֶת. לב וְהָיָה פִּי-רֹאשׁוֹ בְּתוֹכוֹ שְׁפָה יִהְיֶה לְפָנָיו סָבִיב מַעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶג פְּכִי תַחְרָא יִהְיֶה-לוֹ לֹא יִקְרַע. לג וְעֲשִׂיתָ עַל-שׂוּלְיוֹ רִמְיֵי תְּכֵלֶת וְאֲרָגְמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי עַל-שׂוּלְיוֹ סָבִיב וּפְעָמָיִי זָהָב בְּתוֹכָם סָבִיב. לד פְּעָמָיִי זָהָב וְרִמּוֹן פְּעָמָיִי זָהָב וְרִמּוֹן עַל-שׂוּלְיוֹ הַמַּעֲיֵל סָבִיב. לה וְהָיָה עַל-אֶהָרֹן לְשֵׂרֵת וְנִשְׁמַע קוֹלוֹ בָּבֹאוֹ אֶל-הַקָּדֵשׁ לְפָנָיו יִהְיֶה וּבְצִאתוֹ וְלֹא יָמוּת. {ס} לו וְעֲשִׂיתָ צִיץ זָהָב טְהוֹר וּפְתַחְתָּ עָלָיו פְּתוּחֵי חֹתֶם קָדֵשׁ לַיהוָה. לז וְשִׁמְתָּ אֹתוֹ עַל-פְּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת וְהָיָה עַל-הַמִּצְנַפֶּת אֶל-מִוֶל פָּנָיו הַמִּצְנַפֶּת יִהְיֶה. לח וְהָיָה עַל-מִצַּח אֶהָרֹן וְנִשְׂאָ אֶהָרֹן אֶת-עֹרֹן הַקְּדָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר יִקְדִּישׁוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכָל-מִתְנַת קְדָשִׁיהֶם וְהָיָה עַל-מִצַּחוֹ תְּמִיד לְרִצּוֹן לָהֶם לְפָנָיו יִהְיֶה. לט וְשַׁבְּצַת הַכֹּתֵן שֵׁשׁ וְעֲשִׂיתָ מִצְנַפֶּת שֵׁשׁ וְאֶבְנֵט תַּעֲשֶׂה מַעֲשֵׂה רֹקֵם. מ וּלְבָנֵי אֶהָרֹן תַּעֲשֶׂה כְּתָנִי וְעֲשִׂיתָ לָהֶם אֶבְנֵטִים וּמְגַבְּעוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה לָהֶם לְכַבוֹד וּלְתִפְאֳרָתוֹ. מא וְהַלְבַּשְׁתָּ אֹתָם אֶת-אֶהָרֹן אֲחִיךָ וְאֶת-בְּנָיו אִתּוֹ וּמִשְׁחַתָּ אֹתָם וּמְלֵאֲתָ אֶת-יָדָם וְקִדְּשְׁתָּ אֹתָם וְכַהֵנוּ לִי. מב וְעֲשֵׂה לָהֶם מְכַנְסֵי-בָד לְכַסּוֹת בָּשָׂר עֲרוּהָ מִמִּתְנַיִם וְעַד-יְרֵכָיִם יִהְיוּ. מג וְהָיוּ עַל-אֶהָרֹן וְעַל-בְּנָיו בָּבֹאוֹ אֶל-הַקָּדֵשׁ אוֹ הַלְמוּעַד אוֹ בְּגִשְׁתָּם אֶל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְשֵׂרֵת בְּקָדֵשׁ וְלֹא-יִשְׂאוּ עוֹן וְנִתְּוָה חֲקַת עוֹלָם לוֹ וְלִזְרָעוֹ אֶחָדָּה.



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Exodus 28

¹ You shall bring forward your brother Aaron, with his sons, from among the Israelites, to serve Me as priests: Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron. ² Make sacral vestments for your brother Aaron, for dignity and adornment. ³ Next you shall instruct all who are skillful, whom I have endowed with the gift of skill, to make Aaron's vestments, for consecrating him to serve Me as priest. ⁴ These are the vestments they are to make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a fringed tunic, a headdress, and a sash. They shall make those sacral vestments for your brother Aaron and his sons, for priestly service to Me; ⁵ they, therefore, shall receive the gold, the blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and the fine linen.

⁶ They shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen, worked into designs. ⁷ It shall have two shoulder-pieces attached; they shall be attached at its two ends. ⁸ And the decorated band that is upon it shall be made like it, of one piece with it: of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen. ⁹ Then take two lazuli stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: ¹⁰ six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth. ¹¹ On the two stones you shall make seal engravings — the work of a lapidary — of the names of the sons of Israel. Having bordered them with frames of gold, ¹² attach the two stones to the shoulder-pieces of the ephod, as stones for remembrance of the Israelite people, whose names Aaron shall carry upon his two shoulder-pieces for remembrance before the Lord.

¹³ Then make frames of gold ¹⁴ and two chains of pure gold; braid these like corded work, and fasten the corded chains to the frames.

¹⁵ You shall make a breastpiece of decision, worked into a design; make it in the style of the ephod: make it of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen. ¹⁶ It shall be square and doubled, a span in length and a span in width. ¹⁷ Set in it mounted stones, in four rows of stones. The first row shall be a row of carnelian, chrysolite, and emerald; ¹⁸ the second row: a turquoise, a sapphire, and an amethyst; ¹⁹ the third row: a jacinth, an agate, and a crystal; ²⁰ and the fourth row: a beryl, a lapis lazuli, and a jasper. They shall be framed with gold in their mountings. ²¹ The stones shall correspond [in number] to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, corresponding to their names. They shall be engraved like seals, each with its name, for the twelve tribes.

²² On the breastpiece make braided chains of corded work in pure gold. ²³ Make two rings of gold on the breastpiece, and fasten the two rings at the two ends of the breastpiece, ²⁴ attaching the two golden cords to the two rings at the ends of the breastpiece. ²⁵ Then fasten the two ends of the cords to the two frames, which you shall attach to the shoulder-pieces of the ephod, at the front. ²⁶ Make two rings of gold and attach them to the two ends of the breastpiece, at its inner edge, which faces the ephod. ²⁷ And make two other rings of gold and fasten them on the front of the ephod, low on the two shoulder-pieces, close to its seam above the decorated band. ²⁸ The breastpiece shall be held in place by a cord of blue from its rings to the rings of the ephod, so that the breastpiece rests on the decorated band and does not come loose from the ephod. ²⁹ Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel on the breastpiece of decision over his heart, when he enters the sanctuary, for remembrance before the Lord at all times. ³⁰ Inside the breastpiece of decision you shall place the Urim and Thummim, so that they are over Aaron's heart when he comes before the Lord. Thus Aaron shall carry the instrument of decision for the Israelites over his



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heart before the Lord at all times.

³¹ You shall make the robe of the ephod of pure blue. ³² The opening for the head shall be in the middle of it; the opening shall have a binding of woven work round about — it shall be like the opening of a coat of mail — so that it does not tear. ³³ On its hem make pomegranates of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, all around the hem, with bells of gold between them all around: ³⁴ a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, all around the hem of the robe. ³⁵ Aaron shall wear it while officiating, so that the sound of it is heard when he comes into the sanctuary before the Lord and when he goes out — that he may not die.

³⁶ You shall make a frontlet of pure gold and engrave on it the seal inscription: "Holy to the Lord." ³⁷ Suspend it on a cord of blue, so that it may remain on the headdress; it shall remain on the front of the headdress. ³⁸ It shall be on Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may take away any sin arising from the holy things that the Israelites consecrate, from any of their sacred donations; it shall be on his forehead at all times, to win acceptance for them before the Lord. ³⁹ You shall make the fringed tunic of fine linen. You shall make the head-dress of fine linen. You shall make the sash of embroidered work.

⁴⁰ And for Aaron's sons also you shall make tunics, and make sashes for them, and make turbans for them, for dignity and adornment. ⁴¹ Put these on your brother Aaron and on his sons as well; anoint them, and ordain them and consecrate them to serve Me as priests.

⁴² You shall also make for them linen breeches to cover their nakedness; they shall extend from the hips to the thighs. ⁴³ They shall be worn by Aaron and his sons when they enter the Tent of Meeting or when they approach the altar to officiate in the sanctuary, so that they do not incur punishment and die. It shall be a law for all time for him and for his offspring to come.

Context

Parashat Tetzaveh continues the description of the preparation of the sacred vessels for the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle). The focus is on the high priest, *kohen gadol*, and the future inauguration of the priests, precisely prescribing their many special garments, and the detailed ceremony of sacrifices involved in their ordination. The parasha concludes with the details of the altar for the burning of the incense, a twice daily offering before the Ark from where the divine will speak.

Explorations

At the outset, the Torah suggests reasons for expending such tremendous effort on the priestly garments; the description of the clothing for Aaron (the *kohen gadol*) begins:

And you should make sacred clothes for Aaron your brother, for honor and for glory. And you should speak to all those who are wise of heart who are filled with the spirit of wisdom, and they should make Aaron's clothes to sanctify him so he can serve me.
(Exodus 28:2-3)



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Several commentators discuss the ambiguous words, “[for honor and for glory](#).” What or who is honored and glorified by the special clothing? According to [Ibn Ezra](#) (12th century Spain), Aaron’s clothing glorifies him since no one else is dressed like him. His unique clothing reflects the power and glory of his status as kohen gadol and indicates to others to treat him with respect appropriate to his role. The priests’ clothes inspire honor for their service. Clothing thus communicates the status and sacred function of the wearer.

[Sforno](#) (16th century Italy) writes that Aaron’s clothing, because he wears it for sacred service, brings honor to God. As one who performs sacred service, Aaron must wear clothes appropriate to his tasks. Clothing thus not only reflects on the wearer, but also broadcasts messages about her/his activities.

Ramban elaborates about the clothing in detail, explaining the regal associations of each garment from the biblical period onward, and in surrounding cultures.

Aharon ought to be honored and glorified by wearing garments of honor and glory for these garments resemble garments of royalty, “as a bridegroom with priestly glory” (Isaiah 61.10). These are the garments that monarchs would have worn at the time of the Torah as we find, “he made him a *striped*-ornate tunic (Ber. 37.3), embroidered in the pattern of stripes, which is like the tunic of the kohen gadol. The tunic signifies leadership just as Yosef was presented by his father with a *tunic*. He dressed him as a child of ancient sovereigns, and so it was the way to wear a striped tunic as it also says, “She was wearing a striped tunic, for unmarried princesses were customarily dressed in such garments in those times” (Shmuel II 13.18). From this it is clear that daughters of sovereigns used to wear *striped*-ornate tunics. . . . Aharon was to be clothed as a sovereign of ancient times... The miter is still worn by royalty and nobility to this day... The breastplate and ephod are royal attire. . . . and the headband is a type of crown. The gold, sky-blue, purple and crimson materials used to make these garments are expensive and rare.
(paraphrase of Ramban on Shmot 28.2)

Ramban emphasizes the sovereignty of the kohen gadol—the clothing declares power and position. He refers to a prophetic passage in Isaiah about the redemption,

I greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being exalts in my God; for S/He has clothed me with the garments of redemption, S/He has wrapped me in the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom with priestly glory, and as a bride bedecked with her ornaments (Is. 61.10, my rendering).

In his interpretation, and in the biblical sources Ramban cites, the priestly garments are modeled on the ornate clothing of sovereigns and their children, both male and female. On the face of it, this idea fits with the passage from Isaiah celebrating both a bride and a groom adorned with redemption. Unfortunately, both characters Ramban cites who wear the ornate garment are humiliated in them—Yosef is stripped of his tunic by his brothers and sold into



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slavery (Ber. 37.18-28); Tamar is raped by her brother Amnon; after the violation, she tears her tunic, screaming (Shmuel II 13.1-19). Evidently, garments are a sign of royalty, and also potentially a reflection of its undoing. In a famous confrontation between prophet and sovereign, Shmuel informs Shaul that he has lost his position. The sovereign pleads,

²⁵ Please, forgive my offense and come back with me, and I will bow low to the Lord." ²⁶ But Shmuel said to Saul, "I will not go back with you; for you have rejected the Lord's command, and the Lord has rejected you as sovereign over Israel."

²⁷ As Shmuel turned to leave, Saul seized the corner of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸ And Shmuel said to him, "The Lord has this day torn the sovereignty over Israel away from you and has given it to another who is worthier than you. (Shmuel I, 15)

King Shaul tears the prophet's garment, signifying the tearing of his own sovereignty, of his mandate to rule.

These texts and interpretations demonstrate the complexity of the symbolism and meaning of sovereign and sacred clothing. Garments come to represent personal identity, role, and intention. Looking more closely at the specific articles of the kohen gadol, it is possible to read them not only as traditional outward symbols projecting honor and glory, but also as inward prompts toward sacred service itself. The Talmud comments about the close identification between the priests and their clothes. "When they are wearing their (special) garments, their priesthood is upon them; if they are not wearing their (special) garments, their priesthood is not upon them" (Zevachim 17b). For the purpose of exploring potential meanings of the clothing, we can refer to the kohen gadol as woman or man, irrespective of our reading of history and whether or not there has ever been a woman kohen gadol.



The kohen gadol wears four special garments, clothes corresponding to different body parts and actions. On each shoulder of the **ephod**-vest (1) the kohen gadol bears a stone engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Similarly, the **choshen mishpat**-breastplate (2) is lined with stones representing all of the tribes of Israel laid over her/his heart (28:21), as well as the mysterious *urim* and *tumim*—that help settle the judgement of the people. In this way the garments remind of the responsibility to stand for the people. Rather than increasing the power and privilege of the high priest as a ruler or sovereign, the ephod and breastplate impress humility and awe. Rather than a crown of power, s/he wears the golden **tzitz**-headband (3) inscribed with the words, “sanctified to God,” on his/her forehead (28:36)—a diminishment of personal worthiness, and reminder that the honor and glory derives from the divine. The kohen gadol is meant to occupy her/his mind and heart with entering into service. The **robe** (4) worn over the tunic is rimmed with pomegranates and bells—

chiming together with every step. Each discreet movement rings a call to awareness and intention.



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In addition to the meanings of sovereignty and service, these garments can also be seen in a larger symbolic frame. [Josephus](#) who lived in the tumultuous first century of the Common Era, explains the symbolism of the garments in parallel to the Creation,

Now the vestment of the kohen gadol being made of linen, signified the earth; the blue denoted the sky, being like lightning in its pomegranates, and in the noise of the bells resembling thunder. And for the ephod, it showed that God had made the universe of four elements; and as for the gold interwoven, I suppose it related to the splendor by which all things are enlightened. He also appointed the breastplate to be placed in the middle of the ephod, to resemble the earth, for that has the very middle place of the world. And the girdle which encompassed the kohen gadol round, signified the ocean, for that goes round about and includes the universe. Each of the sardonyxes declares to us the sun and the moon; those, I mean, that were in the nature of buttons on the kohen gadol's shoulders. And for the twelve stones, whether we understand by them the months, or whether we understand the like number of the signs of that circle which the Greeks call the Zodiac, we shall not be mistaken in their meaning. And for the mitre, which was of a blue color, it seems to me to mean heaven; for how otherwise could the name of God be inscribed upon it? That it was also illustrated with a crown, and that of gold also, is because of that splendor with which God is pleased. (*Antiquities*, Book iii, 7, 7.)

Josephus' reading echoes the spirit of many commentaries from the ancient period through the middle ages that seek the cosmic significance of the Mishkan and all that attaches to it. We will explore these further as we proceed through the Torah.

Concerning the relevance of the priestly garments to Jewish life after the Temple, the Shulkhan Arukh states that a person should wear special clothes for prayer "similar to the way the priests wore priestly garments." (*Orach Chayim* 98:4)

Questions for Discussion

- How do our contemporary clothes and/or uniforms confer or diminish peoples' status?—consider class, ethnicity, religious, profane etc. aspects. In what ways do you interact with people differently according to the messages communicated by their clothing?
- How do you dress differently for different activities and for different people?—to project outwardly, or to affect your inner intentions?
- How is clothing gendered? Relate to the culture-bound norms that determine the shape, colors, styles of “men's” and “women's” clothing, and the relative extent of coverage of women's and men's bodies. Consider the kinds of postures, active and/or passive purposes for which gendered clothing is designed and suited. Shoes are an excellent case for analysis. Do men's, women's, and unisex clothing communicate different power and status? What roles do current fashions project, particularly gender roles? Would you have a woman priest dress differently? Why or why not?—relate to the two images of kohen gadol.



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- In what ways can you use clothing to make you more mindful of the potential for sacredness in your daily activities? Experiment with selecting clothes, accessories, and, perhaps, ritual clothing that focus your attention on performing sacred service in your daily life. When you adorn yourself with clothing and accessories, attend to the role of different parts of your body, physical and symbolic, in fulfilling sacred functions.
- One detail that the Torah does not mention about the clothes of the kohen gadol is who washes and maintains them, and considering the living conditions in the dry desert, how. In the rituals of sacrifice, they are constantly stained with blood. Discuss who performed this work, the symbolic significance of it, and their status in the sacred service.

Study Links

[Here](#) is an image of Israeli school students who studied parshat Tetzaveh, wearing their version of the priestly garments.

[This site](#) sets out to explain the priestly garments in comparison with sacred clothing traditions in a variety of cultures, East and West.

[This article](#) critiques the trend toward prostituted women-style fashion.

[Here](#) is an online company that markets gender-free children's clothing and a [blog](#) on the topic.

Summary of Issues

Sacred clothing has the potential to convey outward messages of power and glory, inward messages that focus intentions on humility and integrity, and to symbolically attribute cosmic significance to human lives. It can also signify the unraveling of those roles.

Methods & Observations

Biblical details about clothing are immediately relevant to daily life and every human context—everyone wears clothes. By studying these details in the Torah, we open the possibility to pay attention to our own clothing practices, and how there is potential in such a mundane act to aim toward sacred experience. We gain access to layers of meaning that might affect our behavior and choices about our identities, how we project ourselves and our roles, and how we read one other.

Contact

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