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Prophet and Priest

The portion of Tetsaveh, as commentators have noted, has one unusual feature: it is the only portion from the beginning of Shemot to the end of Devarim that does not contain the name of Moses. Several interpretations have been offered:

The Vilna Gaon suggests that it is related to the fact that in most years it is read during the week in which the seventh of Adar falls: the day of Moses' death. During this week we sense the loss of the greatest leader in Jewish history - and his absence from Tetsaveh expresses that loss.

The Baal HaTurim relates it to Moses' plea, in next week's sedra, for God to forgive Israel. "If not," says Moses, "blot me out of the book you have written" (32: 32). There is a principle that "The curse of a sage comes true, even if it was conditional" (Makkot 11a). Thus for one week his name was "blotted out" from the Torah.

The Paneach Raza relates it to another principle: "There is no anger that does not leave an impression" When Moses, for the last

time, declined God's invitation to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt, saying "Please send someone else", God "became angry with Moses" (Ex. 4: 13-14) and told him that his brother Aaron would accompany him. For that reason Moses forfeited the role he might otherwise have had, of becoming the first of Israel's priests, a role that went instead to Aaron. That is why he is missing from the portion of Tetsaveh which is dedicated to the role of the Cohen.

All three explanations focus on an absence. However, perhaps the simplest explanation is that Tetsaveh is dedicated to a presence, one that had a decisive influence on Judaism and Jewish history.

Judaism is unusual in that it recognises not one form of religious leadership but two: the navi and Cohen, the prophet and the priest. The figure of the prophet has always captured the imagination. He (or she) is a person of drama, "speaking truth to power", unafraid to challenge kings and courts or society as a whole in the name of high, even utopian ideals. No other type of religious personality has had the impact as the prophets of Israel, of whom the greatest was Moses. The priests, by contrast, were for the most part quieter figures, a-political, who served in the sanctuary rather than in the spotlight of political debate. Yet they, no less than the prophets, sustained Israel as a holy nation. Indeed, though Israel were summoned to become "a kingdom of priests" they were never called on to be a people of prophets (Moses said, "Would that all God's people were prophets", but this was a wish, not a reality).

Let us therefore consider some of the differences between a prophet and a priest:

- The role of priest was dynastic. It passed from father to son. The role of prophet was not dynastic. Moses' own sons did not succeed him; Joshua, his disciple did.

- The task of the priest was related to his office. It was not inherently personal or charismatic. The prophets, by contrast, each imparted their own personality. "No two prophets had the same style" (This, incidentally, is why there were prophetesses but no priestesses: this corresponds to the difference between formal office and personal authority. See R. Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, Responsa Binyan Av, I:65).
- The priests wore a special uniform; the prophets did not.
- There are rules of kavod (honour) due to a Cohen. There are no corresponding rules for the honour due to a prophet. A prophet is honoured by being listened to, not by formal protocols of respect.
- The priests were removed from the people. They served in the Temple. They were not allowed to become defiled. There were restrictions on whom they might marry. The prophet, by contrast, was usually part of the people. He might be a shepherd like Moses or Amos, or a farmer like Elisha. Until the word or vision came, there was nothing special in his work or social class.
- The priest offered up sacrifices in silence. The prophet served God through the word.
- They lived in two different modes of time. The priest functioned in cyclical time - the day (or week or month) that is like yesterday or tomorrow. The prophet lived in covenantal (sometimes inaccurately called linear) time - the today that is radically unlike yesterday or tomorrow. The service of the priest never changed; that of the prophet was constantly changing. Another way of putting it is to say that the priest worked to sanctify nature, the prophet to respond to history.
- Thus the priest represents the principle of structure in Jewish life, while the prophet represents spontaneity.

The key words in the vocabulary of the Cohen are *kodesh* and *chol*, *tahor* and *tamei*, sacred, secular, pure and impure. The key words in the vocabulary of the prophets are *tzedek* and *mishpat*, *chessed* and *rachamim*, righteousness and justice, kindness and compassion.

The key verbs of priesthood are *lehorot* and *lehavdil*, to instruct and distinguish. The key activity of the prophet is to proclaim "the word of the Lord" The distinction between priestly and prophetic consciousness (*torat cohanim* and *torat nevi'im*) is fundamental to Judaism, and is reflected in the differences between law and narrative, *halakhah* and *aggadah*, creation and redemption. The priest speaks the word of God for all time, the prophet, the word of God for this time. Without the prophet, Judaism would not be a religion of history and destiny. But without the priest, the children of Israel would not have become the people of eternity. This is beautifully summed up in the opening verses of Tetzaveh:

Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives, to keep the lamp constantly burning in the tent of meeting, outside the curtain that is in front of the Testimony, Aaron and his sons shall keep the lamps burning before the Lord from evening to morning. This is to be a lasting ordinance among the Israelites for the generations to come.

Moses the prophet dominates four of the five books that bear his name. But in Tetzaveh for once it is Aaron, the first of the priests, who holds centre-stage, undiminished by the rival presence of his brother. For whereas Moses lit the fire in the souls of the Jewish people, Aaron tended the flame and turned it into "an eternal light".



No Embarrassment

In Parashat Terumah, which was read last week, the instructions to build the Mishkan were given to Moshe, and through him, to the entire nation. But the Mishkan would have to be staffed and maintained. Who would serve in the holy tasks that the Mishkan was intended to fulfill? Who would do the actual work, the hands-on service of God? Who would serve as the intermediary between God and the people? In Parashat Tetzaveh, Aharon and his sons are chosen for this august role.

The Torah describes, in great detail, the special uniforms they will wear when they perform their holy tasks, but this issue is far from straightforward. Clothing is complicated; it has a dual purpose. While it may identify the wearer's role or position, it can hide and obscure.

The Hebrew words for clothing used in this section hint at this complexity.

You shall bring forward your brother Aharon, with his sons, from among the Israelites, to serve Me as kohanim (priests): Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, Elazar and Itamar, the sons of Aharon. Make holy clothing (bigdei kodesh) for your brother Aharon, for dignity and adornment. (Shmot 28:1,2)

The word used for clothing is *begged* (the plural, *bigdei*, is used in the verse above). The root of this word is the same as the Hebrew

word for betrayal, infidelity, disloyalty, or treason. These are not the words we would wish to associate with Divine service.

A few verses later the Torah lists the various vestments, among them the *me'il*, an outer garment. Once again, the Hebrew word for this article of clothing shares its root with a highly problematic concept: *Me'ilah* means embezzlement, misappropriation, or sacrilege. If anything, *me'ilah* is the antithesis of the Divine service the kohanim are to perform.

To understand the complexity of clothing and to clarify its role in the Mishkan, a place of purity and forgiveness, we must go as far back as the very first garment – and even further.

God creates a mate for Adam and presents her in the Garden of Eden. When Adam first meets his wife, the Torah tells us,

The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame (lo yitboshashu). (Bereishit 2:25)

While the text attests to their nudity, in a certain sense, they were not naked; nakedness implies a sense of embarrassment, even humiliation. It would therefore be more correct to describe them as merely unclothed.

Later, after Adam and Eve eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, they become acutely aware of their nakedness, and desperately try to cover themselves:

Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loin cloths. (Bereishit 3:7)

Covering strategic parts of their anatomy with fig leaves is not quite the same as wearing clothing. We may easily imagine that Adam

and Eve felt more vulnerable, more naked, after covering themselves with fig leaves after the sin, than they had felt when they were completely unclothed, prior to the sin.

They had committed a crime, and punishment soon followed: After brief but thorough questioning by God, and after attempting to deny their culpability, they are found guilty, and exiled from the Garden. Before they are evicted, though, though, they are the beneficiaries of an unanticipated gesture of compassion and kindness:

And the Almighty God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them (vayalbishem). (Bereishit 3:21)

The word with which the clothing fashioned for the disgraced couple is described, "vayalbishem," echoes the word that had been used to describe their innocent, unembarrassed nakedness before the sin, "yitboshashu" - both of which draw on inter-related root forms (*b-(o)-sh* and *l-bh-sh*). The subliminal message of *vayalbishem* draws upon their earlier innocence, when they were unclothed but not ashamed (*lo hitboshashu*). Now, in His mercy, God clothes them, in effect covering their shame, and allows them to look away from their sin. By replacing the flimsy fig leaves with sturdy leather garments, God clothes them in forgiveness and restores their dignity. The verse combines two Divine Names - the Almighty, God of Judgement, and the Name of God as Judge.

The transition from being naked to being clothed is not merely having better, more appropriate attire. The clothing is an expression of God's willingness to forgive. At the same moment He hands down their sentence, He wraps them in loving kindness. Like a parent who must punish a wayward child, God cares for them, despite what they

have done and despite what He is forced to do as a result. God kicks them out of the Garden of Eden, but He makes sure they have clothing to protect them from the elements.

This new clothing helps temper their feelings of rejection and abandonment. It is a tangible reminder that God cares, even after their sin. The necessity for this clothing was created by their bad behavior; the clothing, in a very real sense, symbolizes their treason, their disloyalty, their betrayal of the trust God had placed in them, their embezzlement and misappropriation of the treasures of the Garden, and their sacrilegious disregard for the one commandment God had given them. On the other hand, the clothing, made with loving care by a forgiving God, covers their embarrassment and eases their shame.

This is the key to the clothing of the kohanim, and to the Mishkan itself: By enabling and empowering us to build the Mishkan, God provided a place where we, so full of hubris and tainted by sin, may approach and appeal to God - who is, at one and the same time, the God of Judgement and the God of Mercy. The clothing of the Kohanim remind us that God still cares. Despite our transgressions, He covers our nakedness and removes our shame.

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<http://arikahn.blogspot.co.il/2018/02/audio-and-essays-parashat-titzaveh.html>



The Power of Tumim

It must have been very convenient for the *Kohein Gadol* to have the power of the *Urim* and *Tumim* at his disposal. Whenever he needed to know something important, all he had to do was put on the *Choshen Mishpat*, the Breastplate of Judgment into which were set precious jewels representing all the Jewish tribes, and ask a question. Lights would flash, and an answer would appear. This is what I thought when I was a young child. The reality was not quite so simple.

The Ramban explains that the Divine message was received through a combination of the *Urim* and *Tumim* powers. The message used the letters of the names of the tribes engraved on the stones of the *Choshen Mishpat*. When the *Kohein Gadol* asked his question, a number of letters would light up. This was the power of *Urim*. But those letters still needed to be arranged and deciphered. A set of holy Names also appeared. These provided the *Kohein Gadol* with a special ability to decipher the message, called the power of *Tumim*, akin to *ruach hakodesh*, Divine inspiration.

Sometimes, the *Kohein Gadol* erred in his interpretation. For instance, we are told (*I Samuel* 1:13) that Eli Hakohein made a serious error regarding Chanah, the prophet Shmuel's mother. The Gaon of Vilna explains that the letters *shin*, *kaf*, *resh* and *heh* lit up. They spelled out the word *kesheirah*, worthy woman. But Eli thought they spelled out the word *shikorah*, drunken woman, and he treated her as such. At that precise moment, Eli did not have the power of *Tumim*.

The Beis Av explains the modern-day form of the *Urim* and *Tumim*. There are many people who are great in Torah. When they are presented with a question, they look into the Torah, and many words, verses and passages light up for them. They see the lights, and they feel confident they can interpret their message. But this is only the power of the

Urim, the lights. Only a few people in each generation also have the power of *Tumim*, which gives them the ability to interpret the lights correctly. They are the ones that have true *daas Torah*. They can discover the Divine message by looking into the Torah.

A profound example of the *Urim* without the *Tumim* can be found in the story of the prophet Shmuel and King Shaul (*I Samuel* 15). Shmuel told Shaul in the Name of Hashem to destroy Amalek, to wipe them out, man, woman, child and all the animals, from camels to donkeys. But Shaul disobeyed. He allowed Agag, the Amalekite king, to live, and he did not kill the animals that could be used for sacrifices to Hashem. For these failures, he would lose his throne.

The next day, Shmuel came, and Shaul went out to greet him. What would we expect him to say to Shmuel? "I'm sorry. I made a terrible mistake. I know I should have followed your instructions, but I was overcome by misplaced mercy." That is what one might have expected, but incredibly he said, "I have fulfilled the word of Hashem."

What was Shaul thinking? Did he expect to fool Shmuel? How could he claim to have fulfilled the word of Hashem?

Clearly, Shaul believed he had indeed fulfilled Hashem's will. He was great in Torah, and somehow, he arrived at a different interpretation of the instructions he received from Shmuel. This is the classic example of having the power of *Urim* but not the power of *Tumim*. And so, he could in all honesty tell Shmuel he had fulfilled the word of Hashem, at least according to his understanding. And yet, he was completely wrong.

At the end of *Sefer Shoftim*, we read about one of the most sordid affairs in Jewish history, the story of "*pilegesh b'Givah*," the concubine of Givah. Without getting into the details, suffice it to say that one thing led to another, and

soon all the tribes were filled with righteous anger and mobilized against the lonesome tribe of Binyamin. There was a war, and the tribe of Binyamin was just about wiped out. Afterwards, they realized they had gone too far and tried to make amends to revive the stricken tribe.

How could such a thing happen? How could the well-meaning tribes of the Jewish people make such a mistake that an entire tribe was nearly eradicated forever?

The answer lies in the last verse of *Sefer Shoftim*, "In those days, there was no king in Israel, and everyone did as he pleased." Here is the problem. People can have the best intentions, the most righteous motivations, they can see the lights in the Torah and read in those lights support for their own opinions, but all that is no more than the *Urim*. If they do not have to answer to a higher authority, if they are not compelled to seek the guidance of sages who also have the power of *Tumim*, they can make tragic errors. If there is no king in Israel, if there is no bona fide leader who possesses the power of *Tumim*, if each individual can do as he pleases, then even the best and the brightest can easily go astray.



Symbolic Clothes

Greetings from the holy city of Jerusalem!

In this week's portion, we find a detailed description of the eight garments worn by the

High Priest: the breastplate, apron, robe, cloak, hat, sash, *tzitz* (a golden plate worn on the forehead), and pants (Exodus 28:4, 28:36, 28:42). The parsha continues by describing the animal offerings of the Tabernacle.

The Talmud (Arachin 16a) questions the logic behind this juxtaposition. What is the connection between the priestly garments and the animal offerings?

According to the Talmud, both bring about atonement. The Talmud elaborates on this idea by listing the symbolism of each garment:

- The **cloak**, reminiscent of Yosef's cloak, atones for the crime of murder.
- The **pants**, designated to cover nakedness, atone for the crime of immorality.
- The **hat**, symbolizing haughtiness, atones for pride.
- The **sash**, covering the trunk of the body, atones for illicit thoughts of the heart.
- The **breastplate** ("*choshen mishpat*") atones for judgments ("*mishpat*") that are false or corrupt.
- The **apron** atones for idolatry.
- The **robe**, with its pleasant-sounding bells at the hem, atones for the negative sound of evil speech ("*lashon hara*").
- The **tzitz** atones for brazenness.

The commentator Kli Yakar explains that these eight types of incorrect behavior can be subdivided into two categories. Idolatry, immorality, murder, and *lashon hara* are severe crimes in and of themselves, while the remaining behaviors - judicial corruption, pride, immoral thoughts, and brazenness - are generally undesirable traits that cause other sins to be committed.

Yet all this categorization still does not help us resolve the fundamental question: how can the garments of the High Priest atone for the

Jewish people?

OCEAN WAVES

In order to understand this issue, we must clarify the mechanism at work. When the Torah promises us benefits for fulfilling mitzvot, it is not describing an automatic process of reward. Wearing the priestly garments with no awareness of their power would cause no effect at all. The Torah teaches us the potential for good that is contained within every mitzvah - but actualizing that potential takes hard work. We must change ourselves for the better, and only then will the circumstances around us change.

We see one example of this in the description of the High Priest's robe, which atones for the sin of *loshon hara*. The Torah states (Exodus 28:31) that the robe must be made entirely of *techeilet* (turquoise), a color that the Talmud (Menachot 43b) likens to the sea. We can extrapolate from this description that the sea can teach us how to curb our tongues from improper speech. The enormous waves of the ocean come speeding in with great force - yet ultimately they crash at the shore and dissolve. This reminds us of the verse in the Book of Job (38:10-11), "I have put a bar and doors on it; come to this point (*"ad po"*) and go no further." The word *po* ("this point") is spelled identically to the word *peh*, which means "mouth." Thus, the Kli Yakar suggests that the turquoise color of the priest's robe reminds us of ocean waves, which in turn teach us not to overstep boundaries in our speech.

We see this also in the Torah's instruction to reinforce the opening of the robe (Exodus 28:32). The words used in this instruction (*"Safah yihiyeh l'fiv saviv"*) can be translated literally as, "There should be lips to your mouth" - meaning that we should use the "bar and doors" we have been given (teeth and lips) to prevent our tongue from bursting out and speaking negative or unnecessary words.

Furthermore, the hem of the priestly robe is adorned with small bells (Exodus 28:34) that jingle as the High Priest moves about and performs his service. The bells can be compared to a mouth, with the clapper symbolizing a tongue, serving as an additional caution to watch what we say.

Finally, at the end of the description of the robe, the Torah states, "And he [the High Priest] will not die" (Exodus 28:35). Why would the Torah specifically mention this detail in reference to the robe? We can understand this verse based on the midrashic statement that *loshon hara* kills three people: the speaker, the listener, and the party being spoken about (Devarim Rabba). If we internalize the lesson of the robe, and withhold ourselves from improper speech, we can save all three parties from death.

The example of the robe shows that the lessons of the garments must be brought into reality and used to improve ourselves in order to achieve atonement. Judaism is not just a game, where a given thought or action will magically bring about the desired effect. We must strive to truly internalize the messages of the mitzvot and make them manifest through focused, positive action. Only in this way can we reap the benefits of their potential.

May we be blessed to cultivate this outlook on mitzvot, so that we can develop a complete picture of Torah, combining our knowledge of the details and technicalities with an understanding of the deep opportunity for self-improvement contained within every action.