

TIMELESS TORAH

PARSHAT TETZAVEH - Clothed in Strength & Dignity

The Splendour of Clothes

The principal focus of Parshat Tetzaveh is the priestly garments, both of the Kohen Gadol and the ordinary Kohanim. According to the Ramban, these garments were modelled after royal attire; the Kohanim had the role of spiritual leaders for the Jewish nation, and, like all leaders, they required the respect and consent of the people. Wearing these ornate garments was meant to help the rest of the Jewish people view them with the dignity required by their position. This is why a central theme of the priestly garments is that they should be *l'kavod u'letif'eret* — for honour and for splendour (Shemot 28:2)

The meaning behind these words, however, goes far deeper than this. The Malbim (d.1879) demonstrates from many verses in Tanach that the word 'honour' is a reference to the soul. As such, the idea that the Kohanim should wear clothes for *kavod* — honour — means that their souls would be 'clothed' by a Divine gift, in a spiritually uplifting sense. *Tif'eret*, on the other hand, is something that can only be attained through exercising one's free will. The Kohanim were not due honour because of the garments that they wore; true splendour — *tif'eret* — is a level of nobility that is gained through human effort alone. Thus, the message conveyed by these garments is that spiritual status may be conferred on a person, but the highest level of spiritual achievement is only possible through deep self-work and motivation to grow spiritually.

Taking this idea further, Rabbi Moshe Shapira explains that a deeper nuance of the word *tif'eret* is 'harmony', because beauty and splendour is truly appreciated only when all the various components of the piece work together in synchrony. On a mystical level, the service of the Kohanim in the Mishkan and the Bet HaMikdash was to make this lowly world beautiful by connecting it with the spiritual realm. The Mishkan was the loftiest place in this world, and the Kohanim were called upon to enter it and create harmony between this world and the spiritual world above. On the one hand, their garments hid their souls, their 'honour', but on the other hand, when used in the right way, they could ultimately influence a person to shine a light not only on their own mission, but on that of the whole of the Jewish people.

An Eternal Flame

Somewhat incongruously, the introduction to the parshah has nothing to do with its main theme of the priestly garments but rather discusses the lighting of the Menorah. Bearing in mind that the Menorah, and indeed, any part of the Mishkan, had not yet been built, this introduction must be giving us an insight into the function of the Kohanim as spiritual leaders of the Jewish people. We will attempt to explore this insight, based on some ideas of the Kli Yakar, by bringing up a few other related points.

The Baal HaTurim (d.1340) comments on a well-known anomaly in Parshat Tetzaveh: this is the only parshah in the Torah from the birth of Moshe in which his name is not mentioned.



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On the other hand, perhaps significantly, the word 'you' is heavily emphasised in the introductory verses to the Parsha. Although, in Lashon HaKodesh, this pronominal is normally prefixed to the verb in a single letter *tav*, there are three instances in the beginning of the parshah where the word '*atah* — you' is written separately: 'And you will command,' referring to the Kohanim lighting the Menorah; 'You draw close,' instructing Moshe to initiate his brother, Aharon, to the service and lastly, 'And you speak' to those who volunteered to build the Mishkan. Clearly, although Moshe is not mentioned by name, this word *atah* is a reference to him, but why is it given so much emphasis?

The Kli Yakar teaches us that the specific light spoken about in this parshah is the *ner tamid*, the flame on the Menorah that was never extinguished and from which all the other lights of the Menorah were kindled. Our Sages explain that this miracle of the *ner tamid* was symbolic of the Torah and a reflection of the presence of the Luchot that were kept in the Aron. The difference between the Menorah and the Aron, however, was that the Aron was kept behind a curtain while the Menorah was visible to the people. Thus, these verses are not so much an instruction to light the Menorah as a message to Moshe that, although he would not be around to lead the Jewish people forever, he must carry the light from the Aron forward towards the people. The role of a leader is to help people make their own light shine as brightly as possible, and in this sense, Moshe was being told to, '*tetza-veh*—command' the future generations how to continue their heritage without him.

The late Israeli diplomat and presidential advisor, Yehuda Avner (d.2015), in his book *The Prime Ministers*, tells a beautiful anecdote that echoes this idea. On one of his visits to New York, he visited the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and he asked the Rebbe how he was able to have the most incredible influence on so many people. The Rebbe told him that he looks at a person as candle, a wick and a flame, where the candle represents the body and the flame is symbolic of his soul. 'All I try to do', the Rebbe said, 'is to see how the flame on top can burn brightly'. As Avner left, he asked if his own candle has been lit, but the Rebbe answered him in the negative. He said, 'I have given you the match, but only you can light your own candle'.

This is the depth behind this interpretation of the Kli Yakar. Moshe was the first and most influential leader of the Jewish people, but he would not be around forever. As he began the work on the clothes that would be worn by the Kohanim throughout the generations, he was reminded to inspire these future leaders, and the rest of the nation, to ignite their own passion for Torah and spirituality in their lives.

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