

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Tetzaveh
February 12, 2022*** 11 Adar, 5782

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We **welcome all** to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

[Tetzaveh in a Nutshell](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1320/jewish/Tetzaveh-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1320/jewish/Tetzaveh-in-a-Nutshell.htm

G-d tells Moses to receive from the children of Israel pure olive oil to feed the “everlasting flame” of the menorah, which Aaron is to kindle each day, “from evening till morning.”

The priestly garments, to be worn by the kohanim (priests) while serving in the Sanctuary, are described. All kohanim wore: 1) the ketonet—a full-length linen tunic; 2) michnasayim—linen breeches; 3) mitznefet or migba’at—a linen turban; 4) avnet—a long sash wound above the waist.

In addition, the kohen gadol (high priest) wore: 5) the efod—an apron-like garment made of blue-, purple- and red-dyed wool, linen and gold thread; 6) the choshen—a breastplate containing twelve precious stones inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel; 7) the me’il—a cloak of blue wool, with gold bells and decorative pomegranates on its hem; 8) the tzitz—a golden plate worn on the forehead, bearing the inscription “Holy to G-d.”

Tetzaveh also includes G-d’s detailed instructions for the seven-day initiation of Aaron and his four sons—Nadav, Avihu, Elazar and Itamar—into the priesthood, and for the making of the golden altar, on which the ketoret (incense) was burned.

[Haftarah in a Nutshell: Ezekiel 43:10-27](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/819846/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/819846/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

In this week’s *haftarah*, the prophet Ezekiel describes a vision of the altar that will be built for the third Holy Temple and its dedication ceremony—paralleling this week’s Torah portion which discusses the dedication of the Tabernacle’s altar. Shortly after the destruction of the first Temple, Ezekiel experienced a vision of the third Holy Temple that will be built by the Messiah. G-d tells Ezekiel to recount to the Jewish people this vision, and this hopefully will bring them to be ashamed of the deeds they did that caused the destruction of the Temple. “And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, let them know the form of the House and its scheme, its exits and its entrances, and all its forms, and all its laws and all its teachings...”

Ezekiel then goes on to describe in detail the third Temple’s altar, and also describes its seven-day inauguration ceremony and the offerings which will be

brought on each day of that special week.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Ethic of Holiness from The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/tetzaveh/the-ethic-of-holiness/>

With parshat Tetzaveh, something new enters Judaism: Torat Kohanim, the world and mindset of the Priest. Rapidly it becomes a central dimension of Judaism. It dominates the next book of the Torah, Vayikra. Until now, though, priests in the Torah have had a marginal presence.

This week's parsha marks the first time we encounter the idea of a hereditary elite within the Jewish people – Aaron and his male descendants – and their role to minister in the Sanctuary. For the first time we find the Torah speaking about robes of office: those of the priests and the High Priest worn while officiating in the sacred place. For the first time too we encounter the phrase, used about the robes: lekavod ule-tiferet, “for glory and beauty” (Ex. 28:2). Until this point, kavod in the sense of glory or honour has been attributed only to God. As for tiferet, this is the first time it appears in the Torah. It opens up a whole dimension of Judaism – namely, the aesthetic.

All these phenomena are related to the Mishkan, the Sanctuary, the subject of the preceding chapters. They emerge from the project of making a “home” for the infinite God within finite space. The question I want to ask here, though, is: do they have anything to do with morality? With the kind of lives the Israelites were called upon to live and their relationships to one another? If so, what is their connection to morality? And why does the priesthood appear specifically at this point in the story? It is common to divide the religious life in Judaism into two dimensions. One the one side, the priesthood and the Sanctuary, and on the other, the prophets and the people. The priests focused on the relationship between the people and God, mitzvot bein adam leMakom. Prophets focused on the relationship between the people and one another, mitzvot bein adam lechavero. The priests supervised ritual and the prophets spoke about ethics. One group was concerned with holiness, the other with virtue. You don't need to be holy to be good. You need to be good to be holy, but that is an entrance requirement, not what being holy is about. Pharaoh's daughter, who rescued Moses when he was a baby, was good but not holy. These are two separate ideas.

In this essay I want to challenge that conception. The priesthood and the Sanctuary made a moral difference, not just a spiritual one. Understanding how they did so is important not only to our understanding of history but also to how we lead our lives

today. We can see this by looking at some important recent experimental work in the field of moral psychology.

Our starting point is American psychologist Jonathan Haidt and his book, *The Righteous Mind*.^[1] Haidt posits that in contemporary secular societies our range of moral sensibilities has become very narrow. He calls such societies WEIRD – Western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic. They tend to see more traditional cultures as rigid, hidebound, and repressive. People from those traditional cultures tend to see Westerners as strange in abandoning much of the richness of the moral life.

To take a non-moral example: A century ago in most British and American (non-Jewish) families, dining was a formal, social occasion. The family ate together and would not begin until everyone was at the table. They would begin with grace, thanking God for the food they were about to eat. There was an order in which people were served or served themselves. Conversation around the table was governed by conventions. There were things you might discuss, and others deemed unsuitable. Today that has changed completely. Many British homes do not contain a dining table. A recent survey showed that half of all meals in Britain are eaten alone. The members of the family come in at different times, take a meal from the freezer, heat it in the microwave, and eat it watching a television or computer screen. That is not dining but serial grazing.

Haidt became interested in the fact that his American students reduced morality to two principles, one relating to harm, the other to fairness. On harm they thought like John Stuart Mill, who said that “the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.”^[2] For Mill this was a political principle but it has become a moral one: if it doesn’t harm others, we are morally entitled to do what we want.

The other principle is fairness. We don’t all have the same idea of what is fair and what is not, but we all care about basic rules of justice: what is right for some should be right for all, do as you would be done to, don’t bend the rules to your advantage and so on. Often the first moral sentence a young child utters is, “That’s not fair.” John Rawls formulated the best-known modern statement of fairness: “Each person has an equal right to the most extensive liberties compatible with similar liberties for others.”^[3]

Those are the ways WEIRD people think. If it’s fair and does no harm, it is morally permissible. However – and this is Haidt’s fundamental point – there are at least three other dimensions to the moral life as understood in non-WEIRD cultures throughout the world.

One is loyalty and its opposite, betrayal. Loyalty means that I am prepared to make

for the sake of my family, my team, my co-religionists and my fellow citizens, the groups that help make me the person I am. I take their interests seriously, not only considering my own self-interest.

Another dimension is respect for authority and its opposite, subversion. Without this no institution is possible, perhaps no culture either. The Talmud illustrates this with a famous story about a would-be proselyte who came to Hillel and said, "Convert me to Judaism on condition that I accept only the Written Torah, not the Oral Torah." Hillel began to teach him Hebrew. On the first day he taught him aleph-bet-gimmel. The next day he taught him gimmel-bet-aleph. The man protested, "Yesterday you taught me the opposite." Hillel replied, "You see, you have to rely on me even to learn the aleph-bet. Rely on me also about the Oral Torah" (Shabbat 31a). Schools, armies, courts, professional associations, even sports, depend on respect for authority.

The third arises from the need to ring-fence certain values we regard as non-negotiable. They are not mine to do with as I wish. These are the things we call sacred, sacrosanct, not to be treated lightly or defiled.

Why are loyalty, respect, and the sacred not considered key strands of ethics in the typical view held by liberal elites in the West? The most fundamental answer is that WEIRD societies define themselves as groups of autonomous individuals seeking to pursue their own interests with minimal interference from others. Each of us is a self-determining individual with our own wants, needs and desires. Society should let us pursue those desires as far as possible without interfering in our or other people's lives. To this end, we have developed principles of rights, liberty, and justice that allow us coexist peacefully. If an act is unfair or causes someone to suffer, we are prepared to condemn it morally, but not otherwise.

Loyalty, respect, and sanctity do not naturally thrive in secular societies based on market economics and liberal democratic politics. The market erodes loyalty. It invites us not to stay with the product we have used until now but to switch to one that is better, cheaper, faster, newer. Loyalty is the first victim of market capitalism's "creative destruction."

Respect for figures of authority – politicians, bankers, journalists, heads of corporations – has been falling for many decades. We are living through a loss of trust and the death of deference. Even the patient Hillel might have found it hard to deal with someone brought up on the 1979 Pink Floyd creed: "We don't need no education, we don't need no thought control."

As for the sacred, that too has been lost. Marriage is no longer seen as a holy commitment, a covenant. At best it is viewed as a contract. Life itself is in danger of

losing its sanctity with the spread of abortion on demand at the beginning and “assisted dying” at the end.

What makes loyalty, respect, and sanctity key moral values is that they create a moral community as opposed to a group of autonomous individuals. Loyalty bonds the individual to the group. Respect creates structures of authority that allow people to function effectively as teams. Sanctity binds people together in a shared moral universe. The sacred is where we enter the realm of that-which-is-greater-than-the-self. The very act of gathering as a congregation can lift us into a sense of transcendence in which we merge our identity with that of the group.

Once we understand this distinction, we can see how the moral universe of the Israelites changed over time. Abraham was chosen by God “so that he will instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just” (tzedakah umishpat; Gen. 18:19). What Abraham’s servant looked for when choosing a wife for Isaac was kindness, chessed. These are the key prophetic virtues. As Jeremiah said in God’s name:

“Let not the wise boast of their wisdom, or the strong of their strength, or the rich of their wealth but let one who boasts, boast about this: that they have the understanding to know Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness (chessed mishpat utzedakah) on earth, for in these I delight.”

Jer. 9:22-23

Kindness is the equivalent of care, which is the opposite of harm. Justice and righteousness are specific forms of fairness. In other words, the prophetic virtues are close to those that prevail today in the liberal democracies of the West. That is a measure of the impact of the Hebrew Bible on the West, but that is another story for another time. The point is that kindness and fairness are about relationships between individuals. Until Sinai, the Israelites were just individuals, albeit part of the same extended family that had undergone Exodus and exile together.

After the Revelation at Mount Sinai, the Israelites were a covenanted people. They had a sovereign: God. They had a written constitution: the Torah. They had agreed to become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). Yet the incident of the Golden Calf showed that they had not yet understood what it is to be a nation. They behaved like a mob. “Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughing-stock to their enemies” (Ex. 32:25) That was the crisis to which the Sanctuary and the priesthood were the answer. They turned Jews into a nation.

The service of the Sanctuary performed by the Kohanim in their robes worn le-kavod, “for honour,” established the principle of respect. The Mishkan itself embodied the principle of the sacred. Set in the middle of the camp, the Sanctuary

and its service turned the Israelites into a circle at whose centre was God. And even though, after the destruction of the Second Temple, there was no more Sanctuary or functioning priesthood, Jews found substitutes that performed the same function. What Torat Kohanim brought into Judaism was the choreography of holiness and respect that helped Jews walk and dance together as a nation.

Two further research findings are relevant here. Richard Sosis analysed a series of voluntary communities set up by various groups in the course of the nineteenth century, some religious, some secular. He discovered that the religious communes had an average lifespan of more than four times longer than their secular counterparts. There is something about the religious dimension that turns out to be important, even essential, in sustaining community.[4]

We now also know on the basis of considerable neuro-scientific evidence that we make our choices on the basis of emotion rather than reason. People whose emotional centres (specifically the ventromedial prefrontal cortex) have been damaged can analyse alternatives in great detail, but they can't make good decisions. One interesting experiment revealed that academic books on ethics were more often stolen or never returned to libraries than books on other branches of philosophy.[5] Expertise in moral reasoning, in other words, does not necessarily make us more moral. Reason is often something we use to rationalise choices made on the basis of emotion.

That explains the presence of the aesthetic dimension of the service of the Sanctuary. It had beauty, gravitas, and majesty. In the time of the Temple it also had music. There were choirs of Levites singing psalms. Beauty speaks to emotion and emotion speaks to the soul, lifting us in ways reason cannot do to heights of love and awe, taking us above the narrow confines of the self into the circle at whose centre is God.

The Sanctuary and priesthood introduced into Jewish life the ethic of kedushah, holiness, which strengthened the values of loyalty, respect and the sacred by creating an environment of reverence, the humility felt by the people once they had these symbols of the Divine Presence in their midst. As Maimonides wrote in a famous passage in *The Guide for the Perplexed* (III:51),

We do not act when in the presence of a king as we do when we are merely in the company of friends or family.

In the Sanctuary, people sensed they were in the presence of the King. Reverence gives power to ritual, ceremony, social conventions, and civilities. It helps transform autonomous individuals into a collectively responsible group. You cannot sustain a national identity or even a marriage without loyalty. You cannot socialise successive generations without respect for figures of authority. You cannot

defend the non-negotiable value of human dignity without a sense of the sacred. That is why the prophetic ethic of justice and compassion had to be supplemented with the priestly ethic of holiness. [1] Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*, New York: Pantheon Books, 2012. [2] *On Liberty and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 13. [3] *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005, p. 60. [4] "Religion and Intragroup Cooperation: Preliminary Results of a Comparative Analysis of Utopian Communities," *Cross Cultural Research* 34, no. 1 (2003), pp. 11–39. [5] Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, p. 89.

The Pulse of Prayer: Parashat Tetzaveh by Rabbi Aviva Richman

<https://www.hadar.org/torah-collection/aviva-richmans-divrei-torah>

Terumah and Tetzaveh offer a visual landscape of the mishkan, its structure, its furnishings and the dress of those who served in it. We also get a sense of the soundscape, or lack thereof. In one scholarly description, this was a "sanctuary of silence."¹ The Torah doesn't indicate that any words were recited in the mishkan, in prayer or in song.² In fact, if we picture the mishkan based on this week's parashah, the only sound was from the jingling bells on the bottom of the robe worn by the Kohen Gadol. As we will see, the resonant sound of these bells evokes the steady rhythm of the high priest in worship, but also carries painful overtones of what is most haunting and unresolved as we try to approach the Divine.

In an otherwise fairly mundane and detailed description of materials and design, we are suddenly shaken with the message that this clothing design is high stakes:

Exodus 28:35-36

... a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, all around the hem of the robe. Aharon shall wear it while officiating, so that the sound of it is heard when he comes into the sanctuary before God and when he goes out—that he may not die.

Close your eyes and imagine being inside the mishkan. There is no sound except the bells that jingle everytime the Kohen Gadol takes a step, as he moves towards and away from an encounter with God. Like the word for bell (פֶּעַמּוֹן), the word פֶּעַם also means footsteps in Tanakh.³ The sound of the mikdash is the steady rhythm of footsteps doing their work to serve God.

The sound of these footsteps in the mishkan carries a message for our own prayer and relationship when we turn to an intertext in Psalms.⁴ We make a plea that our footsteps be firmly anchored and that we not misstep:

Psalms 119:133

Make my footsteps firm through Your promise; do not let iniquity dominate me. The Kohen Gadol walking through the kodesh, doing his service, is a visual representation of exactly this prayer. Imagining the sound of the bell-laden

footsteps in the mishkan, we can envision our own footsteps as steady and true, undeterred in our path. This is the nature of “prayer” in the mishkan: it is pre-verbal. Instead of articulating words, we act out presence, putting one foot in front of the other each day, perhaps a kind of “praying with my feet.”⁵

In modern Hebrew a similar word, פעימות, refers to the beats of a heart. A poem of Yehudah Amichai weaves together themes of footsteps, heartbeat, and an anchoring space. Amichai writes not about the mishkan but about his mother’s house. Rather than the footsteps of the Kohen Gadol, he speaks of his mother’s footsteps:

Yehudah Amichai, from **My Mother’s House**

...Your footsteps on the stairs are always inside me

Not approaching and not going away, like a heartbeat...

Amichai’s heartbeat is intertwined with the sound of his mother’s footsteps on the stairs. The sound of her footsteps is constantly reverberating in his memory. Unlike the bells on the Kohen Gadol, these footsteps don’t clearly delineate whether she is “coming” or “going”. Instead, the memory of footsteps becomes a kind of constant rhythm indicative of presence, like a heartbeat. It is as though the sound-memory of these footsteps keeps him alive. The sound of the bells in the mishkan, in light of this poem, conjures the comforting sound of footsteps of people who anchor us, and maybe set the rhythm of our own footsteps.

Yet, there is a different, haunting reading of the sound of the bells in the mishkan. It is not just a pleasant musical accompaniment to the Avodah. As we see in the verse, their sound does nothing less than prevent Aharon from dying as he approaches God. This is a rude awakening to the terror of the mishkan and the risk involved in trying to be in close relationship with God. Whenever we take the risk of entering into close relationship, we expose ourselves.

The sound of the bells (קול) reverberates with the sound of one of the earliest human failures. The Torah Temimah links the sound of the bells to manslaughter: Torah Temimah Shemot 28:35

...“It will be on Aaron to serve and its sound will be heard when he enters the kodesh.” Let this sound come and atone for the sound of one who kills another [by accident].

The sound (קול) of the bells reminds us of a different sound that has been resounding loudly since the beginning of humanity and never found resolution: when Kayin killed Hevel.⁶ “The sound (קול) of your brother’s blood is screaming to Me from the earth” (Genesis 4:8). This commentary focuses on resolution; the service of the mishkan brings atonement for that unresolved sin.⁷ Yet, by making this intertextual leap, it actually dredges up a part of our story we might have wanted to forget. The sound of these bells in the sanctuary of silence makes us

aware of the loud screaming of all that feels unresolved in our world. There are no words of prayer to hide behind. This is the only prayer in the house of God: the silence that echoes loudly and uncomfortably with what we might rather ignore in our persisting human failures. When we try to approach God with honesty and integrity, that is the sound we will inevitably hear.

As we go about paving a path for our own footsteps to bring us closer toward God and our deepest hopes for the world, these two aspects of the sound of bells in the mishkan can guide our way. We need the comfort of steadiness and assuredness, perhaps from internalizing the “footsteps” of others who inspire us, creating our own constant heartbeat as a source of energy in our lives and work. And, we need to be ready to be shaken by the haunting sound of lingering faults and failures—that of ourselves or others—that clash with the vision we want to achieve. If we are ready to listen to both of these sounds, perhaps our own footsteps will bring us all a bit closer to what is truly sacred.

Shabbat Shalom.

¹ This is the title of Bible scholar Israel Knohl's book (*The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* [Eisenbrauns, 2007]), which builds off of Yehezkel Kaufmann's essential work in *The Religion of Israel* (Chicago, 1960).

² This is in contrast to later biblical books where we see indication of instruments and text of prayers. E.g. 1 Chronicles 16 attributes to King David the introduction of levitical music in the Temple service by the descendants of Asaf (also see chapter 25), and also includes the prayer they said when the ark arrived at the City of David. Many psalms are also thought to have been composed to be played and sung in the Temple service, e.g. Psalm 30 with the superscription: “*Mizmor*: a song for the dedication of the altar.”

³ E.g. Judges 5:28: בְּעֵד הַחִלּוֹן נִשְׁקָפָה וַתִּיבֹב אִם סִיטְרָא בְּעֵד הָאֲשֻׁבּ מִדֹּעַ בְּשֵׁשׁ רֶכְבּוֹ לְבֹא מִדֹּעַ. אַחֲרוֹ פְּעָמֵי מְרֻבּוֹתָיו. תִּרְמָסְנָה רֶגְלֵי רֶגְלֵי עֲנִי פְּעָמֵי דְלִים.

⁴ See also Psalm 17:5: תִּמְךָ אֲשֶׁרִי בְּמַעְגְלוֹתַיךָ בַּל־נִמְוָטוּ פְּעָמֵי.

⁵ These are the words of Frederik Douglas, echoed by R. Abraham Joshua Heschel after his march with Dr. Martin Luther King at Selma.

⁶ In some midrashic readings, this was indeed an accidental murder, in part because the punishment Kayin received was exile (Genesis 4:11-12), also the punishment for the manslayer in Numbers 35. This connection is not explicit in the Torah Temimah, but the verse referring to קול in the Kayin and Hevel story seems to be in the background.

⁷ R. Barukh Ha-Levi Epstein, author of the Torah Temimah, referenced in the passage above a *sugya* in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Yoma 7:3). The Yerushalmi itself seems to tie atonement for *lashon hara* to the bells, while tying the atonement for manslaughter to the death of the Kohen Gadol (based on Numbers 35:25).

ר' סימון בשם ר' יונתן דבית גוברין: שני דברים לא היתה בהן כפרה וקבעה להן התורה כפרה ואלו הן - האומר לשון הרע וההורג נפש בשגגה, האומר לשון הרע לא היתה לו כפרה וקבעה לו התורה כפרה זוגי המעיל (שמות כח לה) "והיה על אהרן לשרת ונשמע קולו" יבא קול ויכפר על קול. ההורג נפש לא היתה לו כפרה וקבעה לו התורה כפרה - מיתת כהן גדול.

[Yearning for Our Ner Tamid: Parshat Tetzaveh by Rabbi Kerry Chaplin](https://truah.org/resources/parshat-tetzaveh-kerry-chaplin-moraltorah/)
<https://truah.org/resources/parshat-tetzaveh-kerry-chaplin-moraltorah/>

I'm going to tell you something you already know: you matter too. During a pandemic and a resurgence of overt white supremacy, it's easy to forget or to despair or to think that mattering is just for other people. We advocates for justice get so burnt out, especially at this time when we're so sorely needed.

I imagine you've been a part of them too: these text chains or Zoom calls or social media posts in which fellow spiritually driven activists are "hanging in there" or "ready for a sabbatical" or however someone wants to say they are so deeply tired. We get into this work because we care. And we care so much about the people that look to us for help, about the broken world that cries out for repair, about the things we must do to survive and thrive as Jews, that we burn out, break down, break out, and fatigue of even our greatest gift: compassion.

How do we stay in it? How do we continue to care compassionately about this world and the people who rely on us? Even now?

Our burnout is a yearning for a bright light.

In Parshat Tetzaveh, we are commanded to light the *ner tamid* — an eternal light that began in the *ohel moed*, the tent of meeting that traveled with the Israelites throughout the wilderness, and now shines in brick-and-mortar synagogues all over the world. A light that itself represents Divine sustaining power. Which is to say: You are not meant to sustain yourself by yourself. You are not meant to fight the good fight of justice by yourself.

One of the greatest lies we tell ourselves is that we are alone in the world. And we dedicated advocates for justice are, I think, especially guilty of that lie. The *ner tamid* is not lit by one person or only the most gifted among us. It's not lit only by the priests or by Moses. All of the Israelites are commanded to beat the olives, prepare the clearest oil, and contribute to the eternal Divine light. That light is created by all of us, for all of us — yes, even you.

One might think this parshah about Aaron's garments and ordination should begin with Aaron. But it doesn't. It begins with the Divine light. So we too must begin there, and when the light becomes dim or we stray so far that we strain to see it, we must trust the people around us to beat their olives and bring their oil. We must trust that the light will burn without us, that it is bigger than you or me — because it is all of us.

Receiving the Divine light, which we ourselves have helped to bring forth into the world through acts of justice and righteousness and caring, is how we stay in this work of caring so damn much. It's how those of us who are Jewish spiritual leaders continue to don the "priestly garments" of spiritual leadership in an unjust world. And it's how all of us do what we do for the long haul. The light is yours to receive — because it's ours. (*Rabbi Kerry Chaplin is a Spiritual Counselor specializing in*

addiction recovery, queerness, and parenthood. She can be found on Twitter @kerrychaplin and on Instagram @rabbi.kerry.chaplin)

Nothing But Radish Oil by Ilana Kurshan

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/14T2h3NdgCzRciqJ0odJ3PYFQap2MmFZy/view>

This week's parashah opens with God's instructions to Moshe concerning the oil used for lighting the Menorah in the Mishkan: "You shall instruct the Israelites to bring you clear oil of beaten olives for lighting, for kindling lamps regularly" (27:20). The rabbis of the Mishnah (Menachot 8:4) explain that it was necessary to kindle the Menorah in the Tabernacle using oil of the highest quality, taken from the olives that grew at the very tops of the trees, which were crushed and put into baskets so that the oil might collect in a vessel below. Why was it necessary to use such high-grade oil? The Talmudic rabbis, in explaining this mitzvah, enter into a discussion about wealth, poverty, and the way we honor God, shedding light on their value system as well as our own.

The rabbis consider the nature of this oil in tractate Menachot (86b), which is about grain offerings in the Temple. Nearly all grain offerings were made of a mixture of fine flour, frankincense, and oil, and the Talmud asks whether the oil used in the Menachot offerings, too, had to be the same highest-quality oil required for kindling the Menorah. They respond that no, the Menachot offerings did not need to be made from such high-quality oil. Their response is based on a close reading of the first verse in our parashah, where the "oil of beaten olives" is specifically "for lighting," and not for any other purpose. Thus the rabbis conclude that such oil is required for Menorah, but is optional when it comes to the grain offerings.

Why require oil of the highest quality for the Menorah but not for the Menachot? Rabbi Elazar explains that the reason is because such oil is very expensive, and "the Torah is sparing of the money of the Jewish people." Rashi clarifies that the Menorah did not require very much oil, and was kindled only once a day, unlike the grain offerings, which were brought frequently. Furthermore, grain offerings were often brought as a poor man's alternative to the more expensive animal sacrifices; to require high-quality oil would defeat the purpose of this more affordable option.

It is for this reason, too, that the rabbis permit lighting Shabbat candles using all sorts of oils; not everyone can afford high-quality olive oil. When the wealthy Rabbi Tarfon ruled that only olive oil was acceptable (M. Shabbat 2:2), he was met with significant backlash. The midrash explains that Rabbi Yohanan ben Nuri stood up to Rabbi Tarfon, insisting: "What will the people of Babylon do, who have nothing but sesame oil? What will the people of Media do, who have nothing but nut oil? What will the people of Alexandria do, who have nothing but radish oil?" (Tanchuma Behaalotcha 1). Rabbi Tarfon's insistence on olive oil would impose significant financial hardship for communities where such oil was not readily available.

The notion that "the Torah is sparing of the money of the Jewish people" comes up

at several points throughout the Talmud and midrash, where it is often pitted against the contrasting principle that there should be “no poverty in a place of wealth.” On the one hand, the Torah does not wish to place an undue financial burden on us; on the other hand, one’s actions should not be motivated by a concern for financial cost in a sacred structure like the Mishkan or the Temple.

The Talmud (Menachot 89a) cites both principles in a discussion of how the priests figured out how much oil was necessary to keep the Menorah burning all night long. According to one opinion, the priests initially used far more oil than was necessary to burn throughout the night, and then they decreased the quantity by a small amount each night until the oil lasted only until dawn. But according to a second opinion, they initially used a small amount of oil, and then they gradually increased that quantity until the Menorah remained lit all night. Those who hold by the first opinion maintain that there should be “no poverty in a place of wealth,” and thus it’s better to waste some extra oil rather than stingily trying to use every last drop. Those who hold by the second opinion argue that “the Torah is sparing of the money of the Jewish people,” and thus the priests tried to minimize the expense of their experimentation.

The Torah Temimah (Rabbi Baruch Epstein, 1902), in his commentary on our parashah, attempts to reconcile these two principles. He explains that when it came to communal contributions like the oil for the Menorah, the goal was to give lavishly and generously, using the highest quality oil as befits a place of wealth like the Mishkan. But when it came to private contributions like the grain offerings brought by individuals, the Torah did not want to tax anyone financially, and thus lower quality oil was perfectly acceptable.

In our own day, too, we aspire for our public religious institutions to be as beautiful as possible, and those who can contribute towards an adorned synagogue ark or a magnificent ark cover are encouraged to do so. But when it comes to the religious objects in our private homes, we need not feel obligated to spend in excess, especially when doing so might embarrass those of lesser means. Not everyone has the fanciest Shabbat candlesticks, but if the light of our communal institutions burns clearly and brightly, it will illuminate all of our homes and hearts. *(Ilana Kurshan is the author of If All the Seas Were Ink, published in 2017 by St. Martin’s Press. She has translated books of Jewish interest by Ruth Calderon, Benjamin Lau, and Micah Goodman, as well as novels, short stories, and children’s picture books. Her book Why Is This Night Different From Other Nights was published by Schocken in 2005. She is a regular contributor to Lilith Magazine, where she is the Book Reviews Editor, and her writing has appeared in The Forward, The World Jewish Digest, Hadassah, Nashim, Zeek, Kveller, and Tablet. Kurshan is a graduate of Harvard University (BA, summa cum laude, History of Science) and Cambridge University (M.Phil, English literature). She lives in Jerusalem with her husband and five children).*

Mortality and the Generations: Ezekiel 43: 10-27 by Bex Stern Rosenblatt

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/14T2h3NdgCzRciqJ0odJ3PYFQap2MmFZy/view>

While there has never been another prophet like Moses, Ezekiel is rather similar to him. Both of them serve God and Israel outside of the land of Israel. In this week's parasha and haftarah, both Moses and Ezekiel provide detailed descriptions of how to sanctify a dwelling place for God. Moses is describing the mishkan, the tabernacle, which will accompany the Israelites on their way to the land of Israel. Ezekiel is describing beit hamikdash, the Temple to be rebuilt when the people return from exile. The First Temple has been destroyed and he describes the Temple which will replace it. Even more so, just as God traveled with the Israelites out of Egypt, God has traveled with us into exile. Earlier in the Book of Ezekiel, we read God explain that because the people have been scattered through the nations, God will be for us a mikdash me'at, a little temple or a temple for a little while. Ezekiel and Moses also never get to Israel. Moses leads the people there but does not enter. Ezekiel, having been exiled, never returns. Indeed, the way God addresses Ezekiel throughout the entire book emphasizes this fragility. God calls him ben adam. This translates literally as "son of man." Many modern translations say "mortal." The Targum Jonathan, an early Aramaic translation of Nevi'im, translates it as "son of Adam." As Abarbanel notes, all of the prophets were sons of men, all of the prophets were mortal. Yet it is only Ezekiel who is constantly referred to using this title. The term does appear in the Book of Isaiah. There we read, as translated by Robert Alter:

"I, I am He Who comforts you. What troubles you that you should fear man who dies and the son of man who is no more than grass, and you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretches out the heavens and founds the earth."

The rendering of the term as mortal makes sense in this context. Human transience is contrasted with the might and eternity of God. So, what is it about Ezekiel that he should be constantly reminded of his own mortality? Why, even as he is relaying messages of hope and renewal for Israel, is he made aware that he will not see the Temple rebuilt?

Perhaps it is only through an acceptance of his mortality that Ezekiel is able to deliver such a message. In order to imagine a better future, a time of near perfection, it is necessary for Ezekiel to remove his ego from the equation. Rather than focusing on his own experience as located in a particular time and space, Ezekiel is free to be conduit for the totality of the Jewish people, which is not mortal, which does not have an end date. (Bex is the Mid-Atlantic Faculty-in-Residence for The Conservative Yeshiva. Bex holds a B.A. in History and German from Williams College and an M.A. in Hebrew Bible from Bar Ilan University. She is the recipient of numerous academic awards, including a Fulbright Grant to Austria. Her writing has appeared in Mosaic Magazine.)

Parshat Tetzaveh: All That Is Gold Does Not Glitter by Shimshon Stuart Siegel

<https://www.growtorah.org/shemot/2022/02/09-parshat-tetzaveh-all-that-is-gold-does-not-glitter>

All that is gold, truly does not glitter.[1] Parshat Tetzaveh continues the instructions for the building of the Mishkan, which began in last week's parsha. The Mishkan is the center of the Jewish people's camp, the locus of the Divine Presence on earth, and the precursor of the Beit Hamikdash in Yerushalayim. Appropriately, the instructions feature a long list of rare metals, fine skins and fabrics, precious gems and gold. A lot of gold.

In Terumah and Tetzaveh, gold is mentioned nearly 50 times, far more than any other material.[2] Gold covers most of the Mishkan and its furniture, including the Aron Hakodesh, which is topped with two solid gold keruvim. The Cohen Gadol, who leads the service of the Mishkan, is draped in gold: gold chains, gold bells, gold rings, gold settings for precious stones; there is even gold woven into the fabric of his garments.[3] The tzitz, a solid gold headplate, crowns the ensemble. Such a finely adorned sanctuary and spiritual leader would not be out of place in our own time. Our society has a passion for gold and jewelry. We mark significant life transitions with jewelry. We regard finery as a symbol of sophistication, love, and inherent worth.

However, behind every gold ring in today's modern world, lies an array of damaging effects to the earth. According to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID), hard-rock mining, which includes the mining of gold, causes both environmental and human health hazards. The extent of these hazards are more far reaching than one might imagine.

Chemical contamination is an unavoidable consequence of artisanal mining. Mercury and cyanide are common and cheap chemicals used to extract gold from the earth and to help separate gold from other minerals in the soil. Excess mercury is often heated up to remove from the gold and evaporates into the air. From the air, it is then deposited into croplands and water sources, causing both environmental destruction and human health risks.[4] Cyanide use is effective and cheap, but accidents have happened, affecting wildlife and river systems in the vicinity of the mine.[5] In 2000, a mine reservoir in Romania broke its dam, causing a toxic waste spill that polluted a tributary of the Danube River. The spill contaminated drinking water for 2.5 million people, killed approximately 200 tons of fish, and killed many animals in the surrounding ecosystem. That accident, the second that year, was described as the worst environmental disaster since the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear reactor accident in the Ukraine.[6]

Exposure to mercury by the indigenous populations who practice artisanal mining of gold is a major issue for communities in the Amazon Basin, Africa, Indonesia, Philippines, Laos, and China. Estimates say there may be over 10 million people involved in artisanal gold mining, including up to 500,000 women and children directly mining gold and being exposed to mercury. There is little or no provision of health services to miners or their families. In 2010, 400 children died in a village in

Zamfara State, Nigeria, and at least 3,000 were poisoned by lead contamination from a nearby artisanal mining site.[7] The Government of Nigeria, along with Medicine Sans Frontiers, provided health education, and environmental remediation is in progress, but several families have been left unremediated. Other populations near artisanal mining have never been tested for exposure and likely remain at risk. This is just one area of convergence of environmental responsibility and human rights.

Loss of biodiversity is an unintended, but serious side effect of gold mining. Land clearing for mine construction and expansion causes deforestation, which leads to loss of biodiversity and has ecological impacts no matter the scale. When plants are removed from soil, roots and stems can no longer soak up excess water and keep soil in place. This can result in erosion and landslides. Landslides block rivers and streams and can cause harm to the people working in the mines. [8]

Injustice, pollution, poison, and waste - this is the legacy of today's gold. And yet the Torah prescribes the clothing of the Cohanim as being "l'kavod ul'tifaret," "for honor and splendor." [9] The exquisite golden appointments of the Cohen Gadol and the Mishkan concentrated the power of gold on a singular aim, creating a space for Hashem's presence in the midst of humanity. It would be impossible for this sacred craftsmanship to be done with dirty gold. In fact, the Mishkan was made entirely of reused and recycled materials. As we see in Terumah and Ki Tissa, B'nei Yisra'el donate the materials for the Mishkan as part of a process of spiritually rectifying and elevating the wealth taken from Mitzrayim. [10]

The Cohen Gadol's pure gold headplate bore the engraved slogan "Holy to the L-rd." Gold that originates in injustice and destruction and is used to satisfy individual desires does not reflect this holy potential. Such adornments serve our vanity but do not promote our awareness of the Divine or the unity of our world. The time has come to follow the Torah's example by ensuring that our gold is obtained and used with a pure conscience.

As the truth about gold mining becomes too apparent to ignore, jewelry producers and retailers are taking steps to align themselves with ethical gold mining and acquisition. Tiffany and other major jewelry retailers have signed on to an ethical gold campaign, "No Dirty Gold." [11] The campaign suggests purchasing gold only from retailers who pledge to use ethical, environmentally safe gold.

Of course, even ethical mining leaves a mark on the earth. Recycling and reusing old precious metals and gems is the most environmentally friendly way to attain new, personalized jewelry. There is a growing grassroots movement of boutique jewelry artists who only use recycled materials. Many of us have collections of old jewelry from parents and grandparents that often sit in jewelry boxes or safe-deposit boxes. Recycling and reusing these beloved heirlooms creates precious new pieces that honor the memory of the past while promoting a viable and ethical future.

The ultimate challenge is the cultivation of a holy, honorable, and harmonious relationship with gold. Let us reevaluate our perceived need for gold and ask ourselves if the jewelry we buy truly reflects our values. As we adorn our gold, are we aware of the destruction it is causing the earth, as well as the villagers and animals living near the gold mines? As we celebrate our happiest occasions with traditional gifts of gold jewelry, are we linking our joy to Hashem's full earth? As conscious Jews, we must start viewing our use of gold through the pure glimmer of the Cohen's golden headplate, and be sure that we are adorning ourselves not just in splendor, but with honor and holiness.



Shabbat Shalom

