

## PARASHAH #65 – 24 JANUARY 2026

Torah: Exodus 27:20–28:43

Haftarah: Hosea 14:4–9

Apostolics: Hebrews 4:14–16

This parasha is part of a longer section of Exodus where we learn about the construction of the mishkan and the establishing of the personal and other details to make it function.

### ISRAEL, THE LIGHT TO THE NATIONS

The first thing mentioned in our parasha is instructions about the menorah. The text says that the fuel for the lamps was derived from olives. “The “clear oil of pressed olives” (27:20) was extracted from un-ripened olives that were beaten and pounded in a mortar rather than crushed in a mill. The pulpy mass was then placed in a basket; and the oil, without any mixture of other parts of the olive, dripped through the basket, giving a clear, pure oil that burned with little or no smoke.”<sup>1</sup> That is why the text uses the word “beaten” (כתית) instead of grinding by a mill. Next, we are told that the menorah was to be placed “in the tent of meeting, outside the veil which is before the testimony (27:21). Thus, it seems that there is a connection between the menorah and the presence of God in the Mishkan. Indeed, “these lamps, serviced by Aaron and his sons, symbolized the presence of God.”<sup>2</sup>

There is some difference of opinion about how long the limbs of the menorah were to be kept lit. “Josephus (Antiq. III, 199 [viii.3]) contends that three lamps were kept burning ‘throughout the day’.”<sup>3</sup> However, 27:21 says the lamps were to be kept burning “from evening till morning.” Other verses show that all the lamps were lit every evening (30:8) and extinguished in the morning (1 Samuel 3:3). But 27:20 says that the light was to be a *ner tamid* (נר תמיד). This seems to stress that the light was to be continually on.

In later Judaism the *ner tamid* was understood to mean “eternal light” and to refer to the perpetually lit lamp usually suspended from the ceiling above the Torah Ark in the synagogue. This lamp serves as a symbolic reminder of the original menorah... The *ner tamid* also symbolizes the Divine Presence, the Shekhinah that accompanies the community of Israel through its dispersal.<sup>4</sup>

It seems that Exodus 27:20–21 is placed in the text to teach us that if we fully understand the significance of the menorah, we will more clearly see how the Eternal One intended Israel to be a light to the whole world, illuminating it with the grace and splendour of God.

Our parasha teaches us that there was something else that was designed to show the glory and splendour of God: the attire of the priests, including the High Priest. That is what we shall focus on for the rest of our time. The parasha inadvertently provides us with an outline for our discussion. This is found in 28:2. Three words are used to describe the nature of the priests' clothes: sanctity, glory, and splendour (author's translation). If we analyse this portion along these lines, then perhaps we will more easily see how Israel could function as a menorah to the world. Accordingly, our study will utilize this outline:

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1. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *Exodus (Expositor's Bible Commentary)*. Comments on Exodus 27:20.

2. John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament (IVP-OT Commentary)*, 108.

3. Kaiser, *Exodus (Expositor's Bible Commentary)*. Comments on Exodus 27:20, citing *Josephus Antiq.* III, 199 [viii.3].

4. Nahum M Sarna, *JPS: Exodus*, 176.

- I. Clothes of Sanctity
- II. Clothes of Glory
- III. Clothes of Splendour

## SANCTITY, GLORY, & SPLENDOUR

Before discussing the clothes it is important to note **28:3** as it describes the people who are to make these precious and special clothes. We present our translation of this verse as follows: "You are to speak to all the men who are wise in mind that I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, and they are to make the garment of Aaron to consecrate him to Me as a priest." The Hebrew is quite picturesque. For example, the words we translate "men who are wise in mind" are rendered simply "skilled men" in the NIV. The Hebrew is an idiomatic expression that literally reads as we have rendered it, "all the men who are wise in mind". The phrase "wise in mind" contains the word usually translated "heart" (*lev*): *chakhme lev*, (חכמי לב). "In Bible psychology, the heart is the seat of the intellect not of feeling."<sup>5</sup>

### I. CLOTHES OF SANCTITY 28:2

The Hebrew phrase translated "vestments (or clothes) of sanctity", *begedei kodesh* (בגדי-קודש), contains the common word usually translated "holy", *kodesh* (קודש). When we discussed this word previously, we saw it used in connection with people. For example, Exodus 19:6 says that Israel is to be a "holy" nation. Here, however, in **28:2** the word is used in connection with an *object*, not a person. This may shed some light on its meaning.

Since an object cannot have intrinsic moral qualities like a person, then the word "holy" must mean something else besides its common usage — a religiously moral state. Ultimately, it may include that kind of a description, but its base meaning seems to involve a setting apart. Specifically, it is a setting apart from all else in order to serve God.

The clothes that the priests wore were, therefore, not to be used for anything other than the purposes of God. Many other objects connected with the Mishkan, or sacrifices were also declared to be "holy" by God. The sanctifying of objects as described in Torah paved the way for us to understand how an object such as our body can be declared "holy". It does not mean that there is some kind of a mystical goodness attached to it. It simply means that God does not want it used for anything other than His own purposes. By way of application, we can say that just as the clothes for the priests were objects set apart for God, so also our bodies serve as "holy vestments" for the Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:12–20).

Unlike the clothes of the priests, which were worn only when they were using them for their office, the body is worn all the time. This emphasizes the fact that those who trust Yeshua are believer-priests all the time; on call continually for the Holy One!

### II. CLOTHES OF GLORY

Not only are we told that the priest's clothes are holy garments, but we are also informed that they are clothes for "glory". The Hebrew word translated "glory" is *kavod* (כבוד). This word is closely connected with the word "heavy". When the word is used in connection with God, it hints at the fact that the Lord is full and heavy with a characteristic that would cause all His creation to praise Him.

For whose glory were the garments to be? Were they to be for the priests' glory or for God's glory? Perhaps one is connected to the other. If people looked upon the priests' garments and beheld their glory, they were most likely to glorify God for His wisdom in creating such clothes.

It is crucial to understand the symbolism of the clothes in order to appreciate how they can bring glory to God. When we do so, we need to apply the same hermeneutic principles as we did when we studied the Mishkan. The Apostolic Scriptures comment more on the duties and the function of the priests, especially those of the High Priest, than they do of the Mishkan itself. However, very few

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5. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 339.

comments are actually made concerning the clothes they wore. We are left to other means to try to determine what the vestments symbolize.

Many books and articles have been written attempting to explain the symbolism of the clothes, especially those of the High Priest. One such book is called *Garments for Glory and For Beauty*.<sup>6</sup> This little book contains many gems worth reading. Like other writings of a similar nature, however, it does not distinguish between the *intended* meaning and the *illustrative* purpose of the text. When Scripture specifically tells us that a certain object means something, it is obvious that we are to look no further, but when the Scripture is silent, we must be careful. The most we can say is that "such and such *might* provide a good illustration or picture of so and so."

In short, we want to make a plea for grace and carefulness when we attach a meaning to something about which the Word seems silent. It is in this spirit that we will now proceed to suggest comments concerning the priests and their garments. Whatever is said and believed about the symbolism of the sacred clothing, we must never lose track of the fact that the priest pictured the dignity and beauty connected with serving God. For Exodus **28:4** says that these garments are "that they may serve *Me* as priests" (Italics ours).

### A. The Ephod 28:6

The first piece of the priest's clothing that we encounter is found in **28:6**. It is called an "ephod". The word ephod is a strange to us. We do not have any piece of clothing to compare with it. The modern Israeli soldier wears as part of his equipment which is referred to in modern Hebrew as an ephod. It is a load-bearing vest used by the IDF since the 1970s, pictured below. However, this is nothing like the biblical ephod, it just uses the same name.



The word ephod is a direct transliteration of the Hebrew word *ephod* (אֶפֹּד). Not only is the word itself strange, but "The etymology of this word is uncertain."<sup>7</sup> Our passage merely describes it for us. It does not explain to us any of its symbolism, nor, until relatively recent times, were we able to determine any information from other similar Ancient Near Eastern clothes. However, with the discovery of the Ugaritic tablets in modern Ras Shamra, close to the Syrian coast in the late 1920's, we now have a more definitive picture of some of the meaning of the ephod. According to Nahum M. Sarna, there is a cognate form of the word "ephod" found in Ugaritic, a Canaanite language,

where it refers to some kind of expensive robe. . . It may quite possibly have been an item of apparel that was once widespread among the upper classes in the Near East and that eventually became outmoded. The innate conservatism of religious institutions made for its retention in ecclesiastical circles alone, where it developed into a vestment.<sup>8</sup>

As we can see from this quote, people other than God's priests wore an ephod. For example, Gideon made a golden ephod that caused Israel to go after other gods (Judges 8:27). In addition, an ephod occupied a permanent place in the Philistine sanctuary behind which Goliath kept his sword (1Samuel 21:9).

6. Lawrence V. Tiller, *Garments for Glory and For Beauty* (Cheltenham, Glos. England: Greenhurst Press, 1981).

7. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, 193.

8. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus*, 178.

The fabric of the ephod was of the same nature as those of the curtains and veil of the Mishkan, "indicating the intimate connection between the high priest and the Sanctuary." Moreover, its importance lies in the fact that it contains all five colours of the Mishkan as well as being the first article of clothing mentioned in the text.<sup>9</sup>

The main function of the ephod seems to be that it held the *avne zikron* (אבני זכרון) or "stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel" (28:9). These were two stones placed on the shoulder pieces of the ephod which had the names of the twelve tribes written on them, six each side. The Torah says that their purpose was so that "Aaron is to bear the names on his shoulders as a memorial before the Lord" (28:12). J. H. Hertz explains that the purpose of these stones "was to remind the children of Israel of their unity of descent and unity of service to the God of Israel."<sup>10</sup> Rashi suggests that the stones were there, "so that the names of the twelve tribes shall be visible before God and He will remember their righteousness."<sup>11</sup>

Lawrence Tiller, however, has a different view. He contends that the shoulder stones speak of strength. He says, "What better place for us to be carried than on the shoulders of the Great High Priest? When a shepherd rescues a lamb, he carries it on his shoulder; so, the infinite strength of Messiah is capable of bearing us until we reach Heaven's fold."<sup>12</sup>

## **B. The Breastplate 28:15**

We come next to the breastplate (*choshen*, חושן), in 28:15. This is associated with a word which could also mean "excellent" or "beautiful".<sup>13</sup> This also is a very unusual item, but as strange as the breastplate sounds, its peculiarity may not be as pronounced as that of the ephod. Similar breastplates may have been worn in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures. For example, Alan Cole notes what may be a "striking parallel from bronze-age Babylon. This is a rectangular gold plate, set with jewels, hanging from a gold chain: it apparently was a breast adornment for a local king."<sup>14</sup> By doubling it over, it became a square with a pouch. Thus, it served as a pouch for the urim and tummim.

The purpose of the breastplate was functional. It contributed to some of the duties of the High Priest. The High Priest was considered to be a mediator between God and the people. On the one hand, he was to bring some of the sanctity, glory, and splendour of the Eternal One to the people. On the other hand, he was to represent sinful man to the Lord. Here is how the breastplate helped him to do this.

The breastplate was a pouch about nine inches square and covered the heart, which brings us to the heart of the matter! There were two main features. First, placed in the front of the breastplate were 12 stones with the names of the sons of Israel written on them, all set skilfully in gold. The second feature of the breastplate was a pouch containing the *urim* and *tummim*. If we examine each of these features, we will learn more clearly how the High Priest functioned as the mediator between God and man.

### **1. The Beautiful Stones 28:17–20**

Looking at the stones first, we see a feature deeply engraved with symbolism — literally! These were all precious and beautiful stones with the names of each of the sons of Israel engraved on them. They were arranged in four rows of three stones each. According to Rashi, "The order of the tribes' names on the stones was like the order in which they were born."<sup>15</sup>

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9. J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 340.

10. Ibid.

11. *Rashi: Shemot*, ArtScroll Edition, 155.

12. Tiller, *Garments*, 36.

13. BDB, 365.

14. R. Alan Cole, *Exodus (TOTC)*, 200.

15. Rashi, *ArtScroll: Exodus*, 388.

The symbolism of the stones on the breastplate is partially explained for us in **28:29**, which says that Aaron “shall bear or carry the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place, for a perpetual memorial before the Lord.” Thus, it seems that the purpose of these stones is similar to those on the shoulders; only these are over Aaron's heart. Hertz, offers this insightful comment, "The stones on his heart are Aaron's silent prayer to God on behalf of his entire people."<sup>16</sup>

The *Book of Hebrews* specifically equates the functions of the High Priest with what Yeshua did/does for us. He is called the Mediator (Hebrews 8:6), and He is ever before the Lord in the Mishkan in the heavenly places, ministering on our behalf. In that light, Tiller suggests that the stones may symbolize that Messiah "continually bears our names as He ministers in the presence of God for us."<sup>17</sup> In addition, since Aaron's stones were precious and beautiful, it may teach us that the Lord considers us precious and beautiful as the new creations He made us to be. That speaks about our real identity as one whose old man has died and who now has new life from above!

## **2. The Urim and Tummim 28:30**

The second main feature of the breastplate is that it contained a pouch in which to place the urim and the tummim (**28:30**). This illustrates another function of the High Priest. Just as the stones picture the High Priest representing us before the Lord, the urim and tummim reveal a picture of how the High Priest represents God to us.

The urim and tummim were two stones placed into the pouch of the breastplate. As the Torah says, this garment is called the "breastplate of judgment". The urim and the tummim gave it that function. These were two "oracular stones by means of which God's judgment might be made known."<sup>18</sup> The meaning of these words, urim and tummim (אורים and תומים) is "light" and "perfections" respectively. They were used like a “lot” to determine what "light" from the Lord could be shed on a pending decision or what His will (a "perfection") was for a particular matter. In other words, they brought a little of God's judgment and wisdom down to needy man.

1 Samuel 14:41 gives, perhaps, the clearest example of how these stones were used to determine divine guidance. The LXX renders this passage in a most revealing way. It says, “Why have you not responded to Your servant today? If this inquiry was due to my son Jonathan or to me, O Lord God of Israel, show urim; and if You say it was due to Your people Israel, show tummim.”

We must confess that every time we read about the urim and tummim we think of something very mysterious. Rightly so! They remain one of the most obscure objects connected with the High Priesthood.<sup>19</sup> Near the end of the First Temple period, when he thought that Judah was going to be "conquered, King Josiah hid the urim and tummim, the Ark with the Tablets, and the Anointing Oil. They were never found during the Second Temple period."<sup>20</sup> Their location remains a mystery today despite what Indiana Jones may think! Nonetheless, not so many years ago, the former Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of Israel thought they might still be under the ground beneath the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. He ordered a dig there only to be frustrated by some of the Arab Muslim leadership who, upon hearing about the dig, made such a storm of protest, that the authorities were forced to halt the dig.

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16. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 342.

17. Tiller, *Garments*, 34.

18. Cole, *Exodus (TC)*, 201.

19. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 342.

20. *ArtScroll Chumash*, 471.

We have one point of Hebrew that we should consider. Each of these names has a definite article (ה) used before both of them, making it: *the* urim and *the* tummim, and also with *the* ephod. This means that when Moshe gave these instructions, he was referring to something specific about which the Israelites were aware. They may already have been in use at the time. However, interestingly enough, “There is no mention of them ever being used in an idolatrous context. They are in the exclusive possession of the priest and are always administered on behalf of the leader of the people in matters of national import.”<sup>21</sup>

### C. The Robe 28:31

The next piece of clothing, mentioned, beginning in **28:31**, is the robe. It was called "the robe of the ephod", not because they were one piece, but because "the ephod, which was worn over it, kept it snug by means of its belt."<sup>22</sup> The robe contained two key features. The first element was the colour, which we will soon discuss, and the second was the bells and pomegranates on its hem. Let us focus on these unusual items for now.

#### 1. Bells 28:34–35

The purpose for the bells is clearly indicated for us in the text. It says, “Aaron must wear it [the robe] when he ministers. The sound of the bells will be heard when he enters the Holy Place before the Lord and when he comes out, so that he will not die” (**28:35**). The text says that the bells attached to the robe helped the people know that the High Priest was ministering. The intent seems to be the whole people gave themselves up to prayer and repentance, whilst the High Priest stepped into the Holy of Holies to officiate in their name.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, by tracing his movements in the Holy of Holies, "they would know that his offering had been accepted, and that he had not been struck dead."<sup>24</sup>

The Talmud offers another explanation. In a summary of some of the symbolic interpretations of the priests' garments, B. Zebahim 88b says,

as sacrifices make atonement, so do the priestly vestments make atonement." "The coat atoned for bloodshed; the breeches, for lewdness; the mitre, for arrogance, the girdle, for impure meditations of the heart; the breast piece, for neglect of civil laws; the ephod, for idolatry; the headpiece, for brazenness; and the robe, for slander because it says, 'let an article of sound come and atone for an offence of sound'."

#### 2. Pomegranates 28:33

Exodus **28:33–34** also indicates that little crafted pomegranates were placed between the bells. Some think that their purpose was to help the bells to make their noise. Others see symbolism by their presence. For example, Cole sees fruitfulness in them.

Others see the Torah. How so? Jewish tradition has it that each pomegranate contains exactly 613 seeds. However, we have never counted them. Yet we know of others who have, and the fact is simply not true! The rabbis say that this feature reminds us of the Torah because they say there are 613 commandments or *mitzvot* in the Torah. If this is true, then the pomegranates would picture for us the fact that High Priest carried on his clothing a constant reminder of the Torah. All of this is fascinating; however, we do not agree! There are neither 613 seeds in each pomegranate nor are there 613 commandments.

May we have the liberty to present the opinion of a rather unknown but expert commentator of Torah, D'vorah? She has an interesting viewpoint about the pomegranates. In America, where we were living before moving to Israel, we had never seen a pomegranate. Then one year, many years ago, when she read about the tradition of bringing a not-so-familiar fruit to the table for Rosh Hashanah,

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21. Sarna, *JPS: Exodus*, 182.

22. *ArtScroll Chumash*, 471.

23. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 343.

24. Cole, *Exodus (TC)*, 202.

she noticed at the grocery store a strange fruit, wondering what it was. She thought, "This ought to be good for Rosh Hashanah!" So, that Rosh Hashanah we had a pomegranate for the first time.

When we opened the pomegranate, she was at once amazed at what she saw. There were scores of tiny white seeds inside. (Remember, Jewish tradition says there are 613 of them!) Moreover, she was struck by the fact that each pure white seed was individually covered in translucent red, compacted closely together, and completely surrounded by red.

To her this was a perfect Torah picture, and so completely appropriate to be on the High Priest's garments. Here is what she saw: The pure white seeds perfectly pictured *us* in Messiah. Each seed was covered by the red, which pictured the blood of the Lamb. Thus, she saw a beautiful picture of the new creation in Messiah. Just as the seeds were pure and white, so are all who are believers in Yeshua. We are made anew and are constituted righteous (Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21). As new creations we are now holy and blameless in the Messiah. When God caused us to believe in Messiah, God changed us completely, from sinners to saints! The white seeds picture this, (the white representing purity).

It is not merely that God sees us as pure, nor is it merely as though the Lord clothed us with purity (though He did so, as will be indicated later by the tunic). It is more! One of the basic truths of the Good News of Yeshua is that, in reality, the new creation *is* pure, righteous, and holy. We are truly changed people! It is true that we have a flesh in which active sin dwells. However, Colossians 2:11–12 tells us that our flesh is circumcised, or severed from us, the new us. We truly are new creations! Thus, according to D'vorah, the seeds might picture the new us. We not only have the living Torah, Yeshua the Messiah, living in our lives, but also, one of the characteristics of the new creation is that Torah is written on our minds! (Jeremiah 31:33, our translation)<sup>25</sup>

Finally, D'vorah also noticed that all of the white seeds were totally engulfed in red. This, to her, was a beautiful picture of the fact that it is only through being in Messiah and covered by His blood that we have become new creations. Another commentator and friend, Jan Styles, suggests that all the individual seeds picture the relationships within the believing community protected by the blood of Messiah.<sup>26</sup>



#### D. The Headpiece 28:36

Moving on in the parasha, we come next to the "headpiece" or "plate" (28:36). Exodus 28:37–39 describes this headpiece by the word, *mitsnefet* (מצנפת). This is a Hebrew word that means "a winding".<sup>27</sup> Hence, it would most likely have been some kind of a turban which was made by winding cloth. Many translations call it a "mitre". This rendering is misleading because many of us think of a tall, pointed hat, such as what the Pope wears, when we hear the word "mitre". From the description in Hebrew, it seems that this was not the case with the High Priest. Instead, he wore beautifully wound

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25. Jeremiah uses the Hebrew word *lev* (לב). Most translations render *lev* as "heart". However, according to ancient Semitic language expert, Dr. Eldon Clem, professor at the Jerusalem University College, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that whenever *lev* is used in the Hebrew of the *Tanakh* (as well as in other ancient Semitic languages) unless it refers to the organ of the heart, it should be translated as "mind". See also *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner entry for *ck*. However, Koehler and Baumgartner do not seem as dogmatic as Clem.

26. This was gleaned from a personal conversation in January 2008 at her home in the UK.

27. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon* ("BDB"), 857.

turban on his head with the gold head plate on his forehead. Like the other pieces so far, there also seems to be two important features to this one.

### 1. “Holy to יהוה”

The first feature of the head covering is the gold frontlet engraved with the words, "Holy to the Lord". When Aaron entered the Most Holy Place to minister on Israel's behalf, he carried with him that inscription as a reminder of both his and Israel's position. Tiller takes it further and suggests that “When Aaron stood before the Lord, fully arrayed in all his magnificent apparel, God looked at this Gold Plate flashing forth Holiness to His Name and accepted the people.”<sup>28</sup>

The second point is rather obscure. It says in **28:38** of the head piece, “It will be on Aaron’s forehead, and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate... It will be on Aaron’s forehead continually so that they will be acceptable to the Lord.” What does this mean? Some hold that it functioned as a means of atonement.<sup>29</sup> Others say, “Should there be any imperfection in the sacrifice, or any error in the manner of offering, the High Priest assumes the responsibility.”<sup>30</sup> It is hard to decide exactly its full meaning. Perhaps Rashi and Hertz are the closest.

It seems that when the Eternal One instructed that “Holy to the Lord (יהוה)” be inscribed on this headpiece, He may also have been indicating that God’s holiness must always be on Aaron’s mind.

### 2. P’til Telechet

It is interesting how this frontlet was attached to the turban. We read in **28:37** that a blue cord was attached to it to tie it to the turban. It seems to say that this blue cord ran across the front of the gold piece. The Hebrew words translated “blue cord”, are *p’til tekhelet* (פחיל תכלת). These are the same words that describe the cord of blue that was to be tied within the fringes mentioned in Numbers 15. We will comment more on this blue later.

### 3. Royalty

It is also important to note that a *mitsnefet* was a turban which was also a sign of royalty.<sup>31</sup> On the one hand, since the High Priest represented God to the people, his head covering reminded them that their God is the King of kings. On the other hand, since he also represented the people to God, the High Priest’s head covering reminded the people of who *they* were in God — a royal people, God’s kingdom of priests. Royalty is also one of the meanings of the colour blue in the cord that tied the frontlet onto the turban.

### 4. Coverings for All

Exodus **28:40** teaches that all the priests, as well as the High Priest, were to wear head coverings. The text tells us that there were actually two different kinds of head coverings, one for the regular priests and a different one for the High Priest. We have been looking at the head covering for the High Priest. That word was *mitsnefet*, but in **28:40** we read that the regular priests’ coverings were called *migba’ot* (מגבעות). This term is associated with a Hebrew term that is usually translated as a "hill".<sup>32</sup> In other words, the regular priests' head covering looked literally like a hill on their head! Hence, we suggest that it might have been a beautiful skull cap.<sup>33</sup> However, Josephus offers another description. He says that this head covering was a “non-conical (that is, flattish) cap that only partially covered the head. It consisted of a band of woven linen wound round and round and repeatedly stitched with a muslin veil enveloping it from the top down to the forehead in order to hide the unsightly stitches.”<sup>34</sup>

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28. Tiller, *Garments*, 47 and Cole, *Exodus (TC)*, 202.

29. *ArtScroll Chumash*, 473.

30. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 343. And Rashi.

31. Hertz, *Ibid*.

32. BDB, 148–149.

33. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 344.

34. Sarna, *JPS: Exodus*, 185.

The significance of the head coverings themselves seems clear: "The covering of the head speaks of submission."<sup>35</sup> It, therefore, would also symbolize our humility before God. It shows that there is One who is higher than us, who is our Head, the Messiah!

The fact that all the priests wore some kind of a head covering is one of the reasons that religious Jewish men today wear a covering. We do not know how ancient the practice was but the Talmud teaches, "Cover your head, so that the reverence of Heaven be upon you."<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, our sages taught, "It is custom not to walk under the heavens bareheaded."<sup>37</sup> Finally, because of this Talmudic hint, Jewish thinker, Rabbi Hayim Donin comments, "Though never legislated by the Sages, the custom of not going about bareheaded at any time — at home, in the synagogue, and outdoors — extends back several thousand years in time. In many ways, it has today become a mark of Jewish piety."<sup>38</sup>

### **E. The Tunic (*khetonet*, כְּתוֹנֶת) 28:4, 39**

This was the main garment worn closest to the body by both men and women. During times of grief, it was this garment that was usually rent. This was also the same word used for Joseph's so-called "coat" of many colours.

Not much is said about this piece except one important statement: "You shall make a linen tunic..." The fabric, linen, would have been white. The tunic is the piece worn closest to the body. From this information, we can conclude that one of the possible pictures it paints for us is one of purity. Representing man before God, the High Priest, wearing the white tunic, reminds us that no one may approach the Lord with impurities — sin. Taking this one step further, we can also say that the High Priest pictures Yeshua, our Great High Priest who really was pure and sinless. Galatians 3:27 says that we are clothed in Messiah. Thus, Yeshua is our pure white linen Tunic! In Exodus 28:39, we also read about the sash, but we present no comments on this item.

### **F. Don't Forget the Breeches!**

The final piece of clothing, mentioned in **28:42**, is the "breeches". The Hebrew word translated "breeches" is *mikhnaṣei bad* (מִכְנָסֵי-בֶד). This is associated with the word, *mikhnaṣ* (מִכְנָס). In Modern Hebrew this is the common word for "trousers", but most commentators feel that these were really the priests' underwear! In fact, BDB renders this word, "drawers", in that they "cover up" or "hide".<sup>39</sup>

The reason for these trousers, which extended "from the waist to the thighs" (**28:42**) was for modesty. As we have noted, one meaning of the Hebrew word was "to cover up". They were to cover up any potential nakedness when the priests wore these garments. In addition to the normal standards of modesty the Lord had in mind, Cole suggests "this is probably a reaction against ritual nakedness in other religions."<sup>40</sup>

## **III. CLOTHES OF SPLENDOUR**

We will conclude this week's commentary with some remarks about the phrase at the beginning of the parasha which says that the priests' garments were not only to be garments of sanctity, and garments of glory, but they were also to be garments of "splendour". Another translation instead of "splendour" is "beauty". Hence, these vestments added to the beauty and awe of the sanctuary.<sup>41</sup>

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35. Tiller, *Garments*, 44.

36. B. Shabbat 156b.

37. *Orach Hayim* 2:6.

38. Hayim Halevy Donin, *To Be a Jew*, 180.

39. BDB, 488.

40. Cole, *Exodus (TC)*, 202.

41. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 339.

The beauty of the priests' clothes was displayed in several ways. One example where a person could see the beauty was in the remarkable embroidery, stitch work, weaving, and detailed handwork (**Exodus 28**). Along with the skilful handwork, was the dyeing and combination of magnificent colours: gold, blue, purple, scarlet, and white. These five colours are first mentioned in **28:5** and are repeated several times throughout this section. Moreover, it is important to note that they are the same colours used to make the Mishkan. Thus, they connected the priest to the Mishkan; he was a crucial and intimate part of it. Of course there is much symbolism in these colours, but commentators are not always agreed on their meaning. Let us see what we can tell:

**Gold** (*zahav*, זהב) — Gold is the purest of all metals and is often used in connection with royalty. Thus, it shows that the High Priest was to picture the priesthood as royal, and God as the Pure One.

**Blue** (*tekhelet*, תכלת) — Some consider blue to represent heaven and the Eternal One in the heavens. In the words of one Jewish thinker: “Tekhelet...signifies the mysterious. It resembles the sky and sea which intimate distance and inapproachability, things that are beyond one’s reach and out of one’s control. It expresses infinity, boundlessness and vastness...In the depth of the blue colour one can gain a momentary glimpse of eternity.”<sup>42</sup>

Blue can also represent royalty. In fact, scientifically gold when analysed contains the colour blue. As we have already noted, tekhelet is also the same colour as the *tzitzit* (“fringes” according to Numbers 15:38), which the Eternal One tells us to wear on the four corners of our garments. There is no indication that the High Priest had *tzitzit* sown into his clothes, but he did have a long robe of blue (*tekhelet*). Thus, when people saw him, he must have looked like one walking *tzitzit*!

Numbers 15:37–39 tells us that one purpose of the *tzitzit* is to remind us to follow the Torah. Therefore, the High Priest was a walking reminder to follow the Covenant, to live according to the Ketubah, to follow the Torah.

**Scarlet** (*tola'at*, תולעת) — Scarlet is a colour which is used to remind us of our human nature. The usual Hebrew word for red is the same word for man, *Adom* (אדום). While the Hebrew word in this parasha is not *adom*, the colour, however, is similar. It is close to red. By wearing the color, the high priest was representing sinful man before the Holy One.

The Hebrew term for this colour is also associated with the word for “worm,” The word “worm” is *tol'ah*, תולעה. Hence, apparently this colour seems to be a similar colour as a worm.

**Purple** (*argamon*, ארגמן) — This colour is a combination between the two: blue and red. Its symbolism is difficult to determine. Perhaps, as Tiller suggests, it “prevents a glaring contrast” between the blue and scarlet.<sup>43</sup> It was also the colour of royalty in that only the rich in ancient times could afford to have their clothes dyed with purple. “Throughout the ancient world, royal blue and Tyrian purple (*tekhelet* and *argaman*) adorned the robes of kings, princes, and priests.”<sup>44</sup>

**White** (*lavan*, לבן) — It is practically universally agreed that white represents purity.

## THE BRIDEGROOM!

We cannot seem to leave this topic! The last remark we want to make in the parasha concerns the Hebrew word translated “splendour” *tifaret* (תפארת). It is true that it means beauty, but it also means more. The same word, but in a different form, is also used in Isaiah 61:3, 10 to refer to a bridegroom! Specifically, it refers to the beautiful headgear a bridegroom used to wear.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the Psalm-writer says, “May your priests be clothed in righteousness.” “It is clear, then, that the phrase in [our parasha] ‘for glory and for beauty’ does not mean ‘for the glory and the beauty of the priest.’ It means,

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42. Baruch Sterman, *The Meaning of Tekhelet*, 15–16.

43. Tiller, *Garments.*, 26.

44. Sterman, *The Meaning of Tekhelet.*, 1.

45. BDB, 802.

‘for the glory of God and the beauty of His presence.’ The task of the kohen — and the message of his clothes — was to be a signal of transcendence, to point in himself to something beyond himself, to be a living symbol of the Divine Presence in the midst of the nation.”<sup>46</sup>

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46. Jonathan Sacks, *Exodus: The Book of Redemption (Covenant and Conversation)*, 247.