



The US

Volume 27

No. 20

תצוה

TETZAVEH

PARASHAT ZACHOR

דף השבוע



Daf Hashavua

28 February 2015 • 9 Adar 5775

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starting at 5.02am and ending at 6.27pm

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### Journeys with the Prophets: Part 30

## The Book of Judges (Shofetim) Chapter 16

by Rabbi Dr Moshe Freedman, Northwood United Synagogue

**Summary:** Shimshon (Samson) travelled to Gaza, where he consorted with an inkeeper after which he tore out the city gates. He met a woman called Delilah, who was employed by the Philistine leaders to discover the source of his strength. After three failed attempts, Delilah eventually coaxed the truth out of Shimshon; due to his Nazirite oath, his hair had never been cut. She lulled him to sleep so the Philistine men could shave his head. When he awoke, they overpowered him and removed his eyes, before throwing him into prison.

**A Deeper Look:** This chapter marks the downfall of Shimshon, as he indulged his passions. The Talmud (Sotah 9b) explains that since he sinned in Gaza, he was punished there too, measure for measure. He sinned with his eyes by lusting after women and surrendered to temptation, so his eyes were removed by the Philistines.

Rashi (d. 1105) explains that the verse in the Shema "and you shall not wander after your hearts and after your eyes" (Bemidbar 15:39)

highlights the process of human temptation - 'the eye sees, the heart desires and the body commits the transgression'.



In the end, the Philistines wanted to humiliate Shimshon. They praised their idols for delivering him to them and Shimshon cried out to G-d to restore his strength one last time to avenge G-d and punish the Philistines for this desecration of G-d's

Name. G-d answered his prayer, allowing him one last burst of strength, which broke the supporting pillars and brought down the building, killing everyone inside.

While suicide is forbidden in Jewish law and actions such as Shimshon's in such an instance are forbidden and discouraged, his actions were contingent on G-d's miraculous intervention. Given the desecration of G-d's name caused by the Philistines, Shimshon risked his life to sanctify G-d's Name. This also demonstrated his desire to undo the damage he had caused by giving in to temptation. He may have completed his mission, but it had now cost him his life.

# The Magnificent Clothing and the Invisible Man

by Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence  
Finchley United Synagogue

The sidrah describes the robes worn by Aharon the High Priest and his children, the Kohanim. Contrasted with the level of detail that follows, there seems to be a significant omission in the opening verse:

*"You shall command the Children of Israel..."*  
(Shemot 27:20)

We are left to infer that Moshe is the undefined "you". Dramatically, Moshe's actual name does not appear in the entire sidrah. This is the only such omission in the entirety of the Books of Shemot, Vayikra and Bemidbar. Moreover, it was Aharon and his offspring (not Moshe) who merited the splendid garments of Priesthood. Something about the function of Aharon and the Kohanim mandated the magnificent clothing. In contrast, something about the leadership of Moshe demanded no special garb.

*"...A breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a tunic, a turban and a sash... gold turquoise, purple and scarlet wool and linen..."* (ibid 28:4). There is an adage that 'the clothes make the man'. This finds its Biblical origins in these garments, about which the Talmud (Zevachim 17b) observes: 'when their clothes are upon them, their priesthood is upon them'. When the Kohanim were not dressed in their robes, they were ineligible to officiate. Of Moshe we cannot say that 'the clothes make the man'. Perhaps quite the reverse.

What explains the disparity between the costumes? What mandated ornamentation or Aharon in the Tabernacle while Moshe required no badge of office?

The partnership between the two brothers goes back to the Burning Bush. When G-d was impressing upon Moshe that he should go

before Pharaoh and demand the release of the Israelites, Moshe feared that Aharon, who was older, would be jealous. Moshe was almost defiant in his refusal. G-d responded, reassuring him that Aharon would not bear a grudge. On the contrary: "He is coming to see you with joy in his heart" (ibid 4:14).

There had been a succession of jealous or competing brothers – Cain and Hevel (Abel), Yishmael and Yitzchak, Esav and Ya'akov, Yosef and his older siblings. Fraternal feelings had been far from warm. In contrast, Aharon came to Moshe "with joy in his heart".

Moshe's role in G-d's grand scheme was to be utterly faithful to the word of G-d. He had to be painstakingly precise. Accuracy trumped aesthetic communication – his difficulty of speech was not considered a barrier. The word of Moshe's Law was unembellished. Its beauty was inherent, not external. Moshe was the ultimate impartial expert witness, offering straight truth.

Aharon's role was to dazzle and inspire. The Kohanim represented the glory of G-d to the people. Aharon represented the aspirations and prayers of the people to G-d. As High Priest, he stepped into the Holy of Holies and pleaded on their behalf. He would stand before the people and call out to them, using G-d's name to repent. Aharon was there to move and to motivate.

The partnership of Aharon and Moshe gave the people the twin models of leadership they required, establishing a paradigm for the rest of Jewish history.



# Jewish Leadership – For Whom the Bell Tolls

by Rabbi Gavin Broder, London Region University Chaplain

Parashat Tetzaveh describes the garments worn by the High Priest whilst serving in the Temple. The Torah defines these clothes in minute detail; how they were to be fashioned and worn. One of these garments was the *me'il* – the robe – which was made of sky-blue wool and was ornately decorated:

*"On the bottom of the robe, place pomegranates made of sky-blue, dark red, and crimson wool, all along its lower border. In between these pomegranates all around, there shall be gold bells"* (Shemot 28:33).

The Torah offers a reason and a warning for attaching bells to the *me'il*:



*"The sound of the bells shall be heard when he [the High Priest] enters the sanctuary before G-d, and when he goes out, so that he not die"* (ibid 28:35).

We can understand that it was important for the people to hear the bells of the robe ringing in order to know that the High Priest was about to do the sacred service. Yet what significance could there be in hearing the bells when he left? Was it merely a time-check, to show that he was complying with his work requirements?

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shemoni*) relates that two Sages (of the Mishnah era), Rabbi Chananya and Rabbi Shimon, were learning at Rabbi Akiva's Torah academy, far from their home. During the 13 years that they learned there, Rabbi Shimon kept in touch with his family, whilst Rabbi Chananya did not. Even when

Rabbi Chananya was informed that his daughter was of marriageable age, he did not return home! Rabbi Akiva, aware of the circumstances, instructed Rabbi Chananya to go home. However, when Rabbi Chananya arrived, he did not know where his former home was, as the layout of the village had changed. He went to the place where the girls of the village drew water and overheard someone calling his daughter. He followed her home and, arriving unannounced, tragically caused his wife to pass away from shock.

There is a parallel passage in the Talmud (Ketuvot 62b) which relates that Rabbi Chama bar Bisa learned for 12 years in a yeshiva. Knowing the result of what transpired when Rabbi Chananya had returned home unannounced, he informed his household prior to his return.

There is no doubt that all the Rabbis were steeped in learning. However, the difference between Rabbi Chananya and Rabbi Shimon was that Rabbi Chananya was so focused on his Torah learning that he distanced himself from any worldly activity so that it would not interfere with his concentration. This became so pronounced that it did not occur to him that he should forewarn his wife that he was coming home. Rabbi Shimon, on the other hand, as spiritual and great as he was, remained in closer touch with his society.

This is why there was a necessity for bells on the High Priest's robe. When he entered to do the service, it was a reminder to him that he was about to stand before the Almighty. Yet he also had to relate to the nation. In order to avoid him becoming so lofty that he would forget their needs, the bells rang when he returned.

# **“If You Remain Silent at This Time**

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by Rabbi Baruch Davis, Chigwell & Hainault United Synagogue, Chairman of the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue and Editor-in-Chief of Daf Hashavua

Adapted from a lecture given by Rabbi Dr Aharon Lichtenstein, Rosh Yeshivat Har Etzion

The Esther depicted in the closing chapters of Megillat Esther was entirely different from the Esther of the opening chapters.

We first meet Esther as one of many candidates to replace Queen Vashti. She was beautiful, unsophisticated and devoid of initiative and independence. She did whatever Mordechai asked her to, and when she lived in the royal palace, she did only “what she was told by Hegai, the king’s officer, appointed over the women.” (2:15)

Later on in the story, Esther took on Achashverosh and Haman at their own game; she displayed cunning: “Let him come today... let him come tomorrow” (5:4,5:8). She led Haman into a trap, simultaneously arousing the anger and desire of Achashverosh. What brought about the change?

The answer lies in chapter 4. After the royal decree to exterminate all the Jews was issued, Esther, who lived in the royal palace, did nothing. She thought to herself: “The decree has been issued – what can I do? I’m a young and simple girl; I can’t move mountains.”

What eventually moved her to act? The entire nation of Israel faced mortal danger; this she was able to bear. Then she heard that Mordechai, her beloved uncle, was wearing sackcloth. Instead of trying to have the decree cancelled, instead of expressing solidarity with her people, she sent Mordechai clothing!

When Mordechai refused to accept the clothes, Esther sent messengers to Mordechai a second time, “to learn what this was and why this was” (4:5). Mordechai sent back a very clear message: a copy of the royal decree. His message was:

“Do something! Use your position as wife in the royal palace!”

All around, the swords were being sharpened, the ammunition was being gathered, but Esther told Mordechai that she could not approach the king – it was against palace regulations.

Such was Esther’s response, even after “the queen was greatly distressed” (4:4), even after Mordechai had sent her a copy of the king’s decree. At this point, Mordechai warned her (4:13): “do not imagine that you will escape in the king’s palace from [among] all the Jews.”

If you considered your own soul to be at stake, would you be able to say, “For a whole month I have not been called to the king”? Is this how someone talks when she believes that her nation is in danger? Is this the response of someone who cares?

It was at that point that Esther faced her moment of truth. She rose to her full height and became – not just in title, but in essence – Queen Esther.

In this fateful showdown between Mordechai and Esther, she chose between apathy and empathy, selfishness and selflessness.

The Megilla is a story of Esther’s development on two levels: one in terms of strength of character, initiative and courage, and the other in terms of moral awareness, of reassessing priorities. The two processes go hand in hand: when Esther found the will to achieve an important end, she found the ability to do so as well.

Esther’s potential character traits, which had been concealed, eventually proved capable of overturning worlds, cancelling decrees and changing the fate of an entire nation.

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United Synagogue Daf Hashavua

Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue, together with US Living & Learning

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