

שמות כ"ז:כ'

(כ) וְאֵתֶּה תַּצְנֶה | אֶת־בְּגֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִקְחוּ אֵלָיֶה עֹמֵן וְיִתְּנֶה
כְּתִיב לְמַאֲוֵר לְהַעֲלֹת נֵר תָּמִיד:

Exodus 27:20

(20) *You shall further instruct the Israelites to bring you clear oil of beaten olives for lighting, for kindling lamps regularly.* Olive oil was, and remains, one of the essential commodities of the Mediterranean world. Olives went through several pressings; the oil produced from the first pressing was the purest, had the least sedimentation and gave off the cleanest light without producing smoke. In the confined space of the enclosed tabernacle, an odorless, smokeless fuel would be critical. The Mishnah deals with the subject of what kinds of oils are appropriate for lighting Shabbat lamps. The majority of the rabbis rule that as long as the oil doesn't give off a foul odor or a lot of smoke, it is acceptable. R. Tarfon however, insists that Shabbat lamps be lit only with olive oil. A purest, he felt that the light of the Shabbat lamps be related to the light of the Temple. We follow the majority opinion here.

שמות כ"ח:ב'

(ב) וַעֲשִׂיתָ בְּגָדֵי־קֹדֶשׁ לְאַהֲרֹן אֶחָיֶה לְכָבוֹד וּלְתִפְאֳרָתָ:

Exodus 28:2

(2) *Make sacral vestments for your brother Aaron, for glory and beauty.* What follows in much of this parasha is a set of instructions for the clothing of the High Priest and the clothing of the regular priests. The purpose of the clothing was to bring glory and beauty, *glory and beauty*. The Torah sees value in the enhancement of the religious experience with beautiful objects and beautiful clothing. This has inspired Jewish ritual art found in synagogues and homes throughout the world. It's interesting that the phrase *לְכָבוֹד וּלְתִפְאֳרָתָ* also appears in the blessing following the Haftarah where it refers to Shabbat. The phrase is also the textual frame for the torch lighting ceremony of Israel Independence Day, during which the honorees state that they are lighting the torches *לְתִפְאֳרָתָ מְדִינַת יִשְׂרָאֵל* "in honor of..." and *לְכָבוֹד*, "for the glory of" the State of Israel.

שמות כ"ח:ד'

(ד) וְאֵלֶּה הַבְּגָדִים אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂוּ הָשָׁן וְאֶפֶד וּמְעִיל וְכִתְנֵת תְּשַׁבֵּץ
מִצְנַפֶּת וְאַבְגָּט

Exodus 28:4

(4) *These are the vestments they are to make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a fringed tunic, a headdress, and a sash...* Four of these are unique to the High Priest. The *ephod* contains two onyx stones upon which all the names of the tribes are inscribed; in wearing this, he becomes a symbol of the entire people. The *hoshen* contained the *urim ve-tumim*, the array of twelve precious stones also representing each tribe which functioned, by sequences of mysterious "flashings" (or some other means), as an oracular device to ascertain judgement, and also represents the entire people. There are very few references to its actual use. The main feature of the *me'il* was its bells which signaled the coming and going of the High Priest, and lastly, the *mitznefet* found on the High Priest's head, contained an engraved piece of gold that said, *Holy to the Lord*. The High Priest's dress expresses the narrative of the relationship between God and Israel.

שמות כ"ח:כ"ח

(כח) וַיִּרְכְּסוּ אֶת־הַחֹשֶׁן מִטְּבַעֲתָיו אֶל־טְבַעֲתֵי הָאֶפֶד בְּפִתְיֵל
תְּכֵלֶת

Exodus 28:28

(28) *The breastpiece shall be held in place by a cord of blue...* The "cord of blue," most likely a tassel, appears twice in the High Priest's dress. Here it holds the *ephod* and the other place is in the crown-like *mitznefet*. (See below). What would be the significance of the *p'til tekhelet* when it appears in the commandment to wear *tzitzit*? Wearing *tzitzit* gives the entire people symbolic access to the specialness of the High Priest; the ritual tassel is a tangible demonstration of Israel as *mamlekheth kohanim ve-goy kadosh* – a Kingdom of Priests and a holy nation.

(לו) וַעֲשִׂיתָ צִיצִית זָהָב וּפְתִיחָתָ עָלָיו פְּתִיחָתָ חֹתֶם קֹדֶשׁ לָהּ:

(לז) וְשָׂמַתָּ אֹתוֹ עַל־פְּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת וְהָיָה עַל־הַמִּצְנַפֶּת אֶל־מִוֶּל
פְּנֵי־הַמִּצְנַפֶּת יְהִיָּה:

Exodus 28:36-37

(36) *You shall make a frontlet of pure gold and engrave on it the seal inscription: "Holy to the LORD."* (37) *Suspend it on a cord of blue, so that it may remain on the headdress; it shall remain on the front of the headdress.* Here's the narrative: the High Priest is God's representative to Israel and Israel's representative to God.

Some thoughts on two verses in Esther

אסתר ד'י"ד

(יד) כִּי אִם־הִתְחַרַּשׁ תְּחַרְשִׁי בְּעַת הַזֹּאת רְנַח וְהִצְלָה יַעֲמֹוד לַיהוּדִים מִמָּקוֹם אֲחֵר וְאֵת וּבֵית־אֲבִיהֶּ תֵּאבְדוּ וְגַם יוֹדֵעַ אִם־לַעֲזֹת כְּזֹאת הַגְּעֵת לַמְּלָכוֹת:

Esther 4:14

(14) On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father's house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis." Having learned of Haman's plot to destroy the Jews, Mordecai messages Esther that she has an important role to play in the unfolding situation. She had just told him that if she appears unsummoned before the king, she risks being executed. Mordecai replies with the words above leaving the decision whether to act hers, and hers alone. This is **the** critical moment in the story. Everyone faces critical moments of decision in life with possible consequences that affect the lives of others. Sometimes a critical decision justifies why you are, where you are.

אסתר ו'א

(א) בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא נִדְרָה שְׁגַת הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר לְהִבִּיא אֶת־סֵפֶר הַזְּכָרֹנוֹת דְּבַרֵי הַיָּמִים וַיְהִי וַנִּקְרָאִים לְפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ:

Esther 6:1

(1) That night, sleep deserted the king, and he ordered the book of records, the annals, to be brought; and it was read to the king. Let's examine the events before, during, and after that night. Esther, after a three day fast, successfully appeared unsummoned before the king. The king asked her what she wanted. She replied by inviting the king and Haman to a feast – that day! The king immediately summons Haman, and they all dine together. The king asks her again what she wants, and she replies by inviting them both to another feast the next day. Haman, in an elated state, departs. It must be late afternoon. On exiting the palace, he encounters Mordecai who deflates him. Haman summons Zeresh and all his acolytes to cheer him up; this gathering goes into the evening. They advise him that if he wants to come to Esther's feast in a good mood, he should set up an impaling post for Mordecai, and, that morning, inform the king of Mordecai's insolence, who will then agree to have Mordecai executed. Haman likes the idea and sets out stealthily from his house to make the impaling post. When? That very night! Now the impaling

post is a very large structure – 50 cubits tall, (~75 feet) taller than the average telephone pole (~ 40 feet)! Not a small task. Procurement of such a pole, digging a hole, installing and stabilizing it, would take several hours. We are now well into the middle of the night. This is when the king cannot fall asleep. He summons his attendants to read from his chronicles. How long do they read? Long enough to get to Mordecai's report of the assassination plot. The king asks his attendants if Mordecai was ever rewarded. They reply, no. It's then that the king hears Haman in the outer courtyard. What time is this? It must be daybreak, the earliest moment for Haman to speak to the king and eagerly accelerate the execution of Mordecai. But, to his surprise, the king solicits his advice instead. How to reward someone? Thinking that he is referring to him, Haman says that such a person should be clothed in the king's clothes and paraded through the streets. The king immediately sends Haman out to do that for... Mordecai! What time is it? After dawn! What time is the parade? Later in the morning! What time does Haman arrive home? How long does it take to parade through the streets of Shushan? A couple of hours. Haman returns Mordecai to the palace and goes home around noon. He is disheveled and exhausted from his all-nighter, and miserable because he has just paraded his nemesis on royal horseback through the streets of Shushan in royal attire, an honor he wanted for himself! And now, in this sullen physical and psychological state, his dear wife, Zeresh and all his buddies, deal him the ultimate blow by telling him that because Mordecai is a Jew, Haman is destined to lose. It can't get worse for him, except it does! Precisely at that moment, he is picked up by the king's attendants and driven to the palace for Esther's feast. The final scene is set: Esther is rested and clear-headed with a full feast prepared; the king is refreshed and contented, having repaid a debt and rewarded Mordecai; Haman arrives at the feast in a loathsome state: smelly, disgusting, sweaty, dirty, disheveled, exhausted and humiliated. It's not an accident that after being confronted by Esther, he falls on her bed! In the wings is Harvona, the gossipy palace eunuch, who having learned of Haman's midnight impaling-post-building, informs the king, who then orders that Haman himself be impaled on it! That's what happened that night! Shabbat Shalom!