

Parshat Tetzaveh
Dress to Impress
Nomi Kaltmann

"What you wear is how you present yourself to the world, especially today, when human contacts are so quick. Fashion is instant language." —**Miuccia Prada**

As a child, any excuse for a dress up was an opportunity for celebration and excitement. With yearly costumes for Purim and dress up for school plays, fancy events or costume parties, nailing the dress code was always important.

I'm not someone who enjoys shopping, but like most people, I try to take the extra effort required to look nice for special occasions. While this may ensure I look like I belong and am part of the event that I am attending, science suggests that for both men and women dress can have an even deeper meaning.

A study from Northwestern University examined a concept called "enclothed cognition." This concept looked at how a person's psychology changed or was influenced by the clothing they were wearing.

Conducting some simple experiments, researchers provided white lab coats for participants to wear. Some participants were told they were wearing a painter's smock while others were told it was a doctor's lab coat.

All participants were instructed to undertake unassuming tasks. The incredible thing researchers uncovered was that participants who were told they were wearing a doctor's coat completed tasks much more carefully and precisely than those who were told they were wearing an artist's coat. The results of the experiments demonstrated that participants being told they were doctors influenced the way they performed tasks. The subjects channeled societal expectations of the profession for which they were dressed. Their behavior reflected the way that they were influenced by their attire.

In fact, clothing not only affects the way we behave, but also our moods. For example, women will often have a "power suit" which they will wear when they want to feel authoritative and ascribe to society's view of what power looks like. The active wear trend which sees people wear active wear out in public has been shown in studies to subtly influence the decisions of wearers to make more healthy choices. In fact, it has been shown that a person is more likely to do exercise just by virtue of wearing clothing that are usually worn while exercising.

Likewise, uniforms can be used to show belonging but can also influence the way we behave when we see uniforms. Nothing slows down traffic more than the sight of visible traffic police, but you are also more likely to take a doctor or lawyer seriously if they are wearing the kind of garb that you expect them to be wearing.

Conversely, many workplaces have casual day on Fridays to convey a creative and friendly vibe that invites employees to relax as they wind down for the weekend.

Social status can also be determined by clothing. Designer goods are priced expensively so that they not only attract a sense of status but also exclusivity for the general public.

This week's Parsha, Tezaveh, communicates many of these important concepts through the intricate description it provides of the holy priestly apparel to be worn by the Kohanim while in God's service. The clothing not only helped to provide status to the priests, but also helped them to feel and absorb the holiness of their tasks in the Temple.



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The clothing for the priests is carefully described in the Parsha, from the coloured dyes and fabrics to their elaborate weaving designs. The descriptions of these garments invoke images of regality, status and beauty. Masechet Zevachim in the Talmud Bavli (17B) notes that the: *While the priests are clothed in the priestly garments, they are clothed in the priesthood; but when they are not wearing the garments, the priesthood is not upon them.*"

These garments elevated the priests who wore them and they also conveyed an important message for people who came into contact with the priests. The minute the priests put on these clothes they had to consider the fact that they were responsible for performance of holy work in the Temple and were answerable to the people of Israel for their behavior and conduct. Just as a doctor wearing a white coat invokes an image of being able to help patients and provides reassurance to patients when sick, the priest's garb was meant to convey a message to the people that they were there to serve God on behalf of the people.

However, one is not required to wear fancy or beautiful clothes in order to serve God.

The reason that the priests wore expensive, beautiful and colorful clothing was not to demonstrate that these were prerequisites in order to be close to God. Rather, the distinctiveness of the clothing made the priests extra careful when in the service of God.

When these garments were placed upon them they showed that they had dedicated themselves to a life of service to God. They were responsible for representing the name of God before the public.

This Parsha encapsulates the essence of the importance of the way we dress. Our clothing needs to be functional, but we should consciously dress the message we seek to convey. The clothes we wear characterize the way people relate to us and how they perceive our message.

Like it or not, there are many important things dressing can convey, and thus it is important to ensure that the messages we want to send are reflected in the way we dress. Just as the priests were able to convey important messages to the people of Israel through their careful presentation and dress in the Temple, we should take heed and consider the same message in our daily lives.



Nomi Kaltmann is from Melbourne, Australia. Nomi comes to Maharat after earning her Bachelor of Laws and Bachelor of Liberal Arts in Politics and Jewish Civilizations from Monash University. She also holds a Masters degree in Legal Practice from the Australian National University.

Previously Nomi has worked for the Shadow Attorney General of Australia and as an advisor to the former Minister for Small Business in the Victorian Legislative Assembly. Nomi also coordinated and accompanied a Parliamentary delegation to Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Specialising in charities and not-for-profit law, Nomi has worked for the Australian Charities Commission.

Nomi was one of the founding members of the Women's Orthodox Tefillah Group in Victoria. She has previously studied at Midreshet HaRova and completed a Masters research unit that looked at the current state of Australian family law and issues relating to Agunot and Gett.

Nomi is married to Daniel Guttman and they have two beautiful children.

