

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Tetzaveh

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in gratitude to the Beit Midrash for your inspiring classes

A Lesson From the National Gallery

Idan Rakovsky

A couple of months ago I visited the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. From the finest collections of Indigenous Art, to the masterworks from numerous other artistic traditions, I was exhilarated by every exhibition I entered. However, when I stepped into the Contemporary Art exhibition on the second floor, I was surprised. Not to sound harsh, but the art items that were hung up on the walls were something that my little nephew could easily come back with from kindergarten... I wondered to myself, how are rich and detailed paintings such as *The Death of General Wolfe* hung under the same roof with a huge, tricolour, simple circle?

The concept of aesthetics has changed in our postmodern generation. As with other things in our lives, the concept of beauty has undergone what the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) called «Deconstruction of the Object» - the disintegration of reality into a *signifier* and a *signified*. The *signifier* is the objective product we are facing, where the *signified* is the subjective message, meaning, and statement that the *signifier* is trying to convey. In that case, *art* and *beauty* are only objective *signifiers* of different subjective meanings. Apparently, everything can be beautiful, everything can be art.

In our parshah, G-d commands Moshe to recruit the first Jewish artist described in the Torah, Betzalel ben Uri, to create the outfit of the kohen as well as the appearance of the Mishkan. In

Judaism, the whole concept of aesthetics is in constant tension:

- Throughout history, Jews have refrained from preoccupation with beauty in the name of religion and holiness. Beauty has been viewed as external, shallow and sometimes even secular and mundane. And the truth is, this approach has foundations in the Tanach. For instance, G-d rebukes Shemuel for judging Eliav by his royal appearance and not by his inner character (Shemuel I 16:6-7); see also Proverbs 31:30: "Charm is false and beauty is empty." We also know that this perception of beauty may have developed further as a response to the ancient Greek philosophy linking perfectionism and aesthetics. (For Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner's class on this topic, click [here](#).)
- And yet, we do find in our sources a certain favour for the concept of beauty, especially in the world of mitzvot. Perhaps the best-known concept is *hiddur*: the requirement to use a beautiful etrog, shofar, etc., as the Talmud (Shabbat 133b) understands from the verse "This is my G-d, *v'anvehu*." (Shemot 15:2)

Perplexed by the tension between embracing aesthetics and throwing it into the secular furnace, how should we understand the Torah's preoccupation with the appearance of the high priest?

I would suggest that, surprisingly, the postmodern conception of aesthetics could open a window into sanctifying the concept of beauty, using a path drawn by the Hasidic thinker Rabbi

Mordechai Yosef Leiner (1800-1854). In his book *Mei Shiloach* on Parshat Tetzaveh, he explains that the priestly garments do not stand on their own as an aesthetic object, but rather their beauty stems from the fact that they express the inner character of the high priest, and so he writes: „In these garments the blessed G-d shows Israel which soul He chooses, for the preciousness of the soul of Aharon haCohen is recognized and understood from the garments.“ (tr. Betsalel Edwards)

I think that we can understand Rabbi Leiner's point by borrowing Derrida's deconstruction, applying it to clothes. The garment (the *signifier*) points not to itself as a beautiful object, but to the soul of the priest who wears it (the *signified*). The object, in this case, receives its beauty from the very subject who wears it. This deconstruction of aesthetics allows us to load holiness into the beauty. When every item of clothing expresses an intellectual element, it is loaded with holiness by its very connection to the soul of the priest. Just as Rabbi Leiner explains the *choshen* (breastplate) of the kohen gadol: "The Choshen hinted that there was no hatred for any soul of Israel in his heart, for the tribes of Israel were engraved on his heart." (tr. Edwards)

This is a lesson from the National Gallery.

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Summary

Our chapter opens with the ascension of Hosheia ben Elah to the throne of the northern Israelite kingdom. We are told that although he did do things that G-d considered evil, he was not as bad as the kings who preceded him. (17:1-3)

Hosheia initially accepted his kingdom's position as vassal to the Assyrians, but he eventually rebelled and sought protection from So, the king of Egypt. In response, the Assyrians laid siege to Shomron for three years and ultimately defeated it. The remaining Israelites were exiled and scattered throughout the Assyrian empire. This marked the end of the Israelite kingdom. (4-6)

The text explains why this happened:

- The Jews abandoned their relationship with G-d and served idols. (7, 9-11, 16-17)
- The Jews abandoned G-d's Torah, along with the kind of lifestyle and culture that the Torah was intended to create. They chose instead to mimic the cultural practices of the nations living around them, despite G-d's explicit command not to do this. (8, 15)
- When G-d sent prophets to tell the Jews to stop behaving this way and

return to the path of the Torah, the Jews ignored them. (12-13)

- Extra emphasis is placed on the sins of Yeravam, the first Israelite king, who led his subjects to destruction when he barred travel to Jerusalem and set up centres of worship with golden calves. (21-22, see Metzudat David)

The practices of the Israelites eventually spread to the Kingdom of Judah as well. In the end, G-d resolved to send His entire people into exile. (19-20) This description of Judah foreshadows the coming chapters of the book.

The Assyrians transplanted populations from other conquered nations into the cities of the Israelite kingdom. When these people first arrived, G-d sent lions to attack and kill them. (24-25) They determined that this was happening because they weren't serving the Deity of their new land, and so the Assyrians sent an Israelite priest to teach the newcomers how to serve G-d - while maintaining other idolatrous practices. (27)

Insight

Rashi (commenting on 17:2), quoting

the Sages, explains that Hosheia was "not [as bad] as the Israelite kings who came before him", because he removed the guards who had prevented Israelite Jews from visiting the Temple in Jerusalem.

Rashi notes that this step was taken under duress, because the Assyrians had already destroyed the two major centres of worship in Israelite territory. But this positive act on Hosheia's part only highlighted the tragic reality of the Israelite kingdom in the years leading up to its destruction. Even though the Jews could now go to Jerusalem, they mostly didn't. The separation from the Temple, originally instituted by Yeravam as a political measure, had spiritual and cultural consequences. It eroded the Israelites' connection with G-d almost completely. By Hosheia's time, his people's commitments to idolatry and foreign cultural practices had become systemic parts of Israelite society, and, apparently, the only corrective was to wipe the cultural slate clean. In the words of the prophet, the Jews had "strayed after vanities and had become vanity" themselves. (15)

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It Happened in Israel: Speaking Truth to Power**Rabbi Chaim Metzger**

Controversial sermons have been given for thousands of years. Sometimes, a rabbi teaches something even though the audience does not want to hear it. A midrash records such a sermon (Bereshit Rabbah 80):

Yosi from Meonah (a neighborhood in Tiberias) gave a homiletical interpretation of Hosheia 5:1, which states, "Hear this, kohanim! Pay attention, House of Israel! Royal house, give your ear! [For right conduct is your responsibility.]" Yosi explained that one day, G-d will turn to the kohanim and blame them for not studying Torah, when the people support them with their tithes and gifts. The kohanim will respond that it was the House of Israel's fault, for they did not support the kohanim with those tithes and gifts that they are commanded to give. Then G-d will turn to the Israelites and ask them why didn't they give the kohanim their due. The people will claim that they were too poor to give to the kohanim, because of the heavy taxes laid on them by the house of the Nasi, the political leader of the Jewish people.

Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi II, a political leader of the Jewish community and grandson of the compiler of the Mishnah, heard this, and he became incensed. Reish Lakish said to Rabbi Yehudah to appease him, "Our master, we need to thank the nations of the world for bringing entertainment into their theaters and circuses and performing before them, so they don't speak to each other and get into useless fights." Reish Lakish continued to contrast this with Yosi of Meonah, "who said a word of Torah and you became angry at him?" Rabbi Yehudah replied, "Do you think he knows Torah?" Reish Lakish answered, "Yes." Rabbi Yehudah asked, "Has he been taught and learned something?" Again, Reish Lakish

answered, "Yes." Finally, Rabbi Yehudah asked, "If we ask him something would he be able to answer? Reish Lakish responded, "Yes." Rabbi Yehudah said, "Then have him come here, and we will see him."

Reish Lakish asked Yosi from Meonah, "What is meant by Yechezkel 16:44, which says, 'All speakers of parables will make a parable about you, saying: Like mother, like daughter?'" Yosi replied, "Like the daughter so too is the mother, the generation is like its leader, the altar is like the kohanim." Reish Lakish said to him, "You still haven't apologized for the first comment, and you insult him again?" To which Yosi continued, "No ox is punished [by a court for violent acts] without its young also kicking. No woman is promiscuous without her daughter also becoming promiscuous."

Presumably, Rabbi Yehudah haNasi II was not any more satisfied with Yosi of Meonah's conclusion than he was with Yosi of Meonah's earlier words, but Yosi of Meonah persisted. The practice of "speaking truth to power," telling people that which they do not want to hear, has long been a rabbinic mandate. It is interesting to note that Rashi to Bereishit 30:16 quotes a further part of Yosi's words in this midrash, indicating that he agrees with Yosi's approach.

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Biography
Rabbi Moshe Isserles
Rabbi Josh Gutenberg

Rabbi Moshe Isserles (Rama) was born in Krakow, Poland in 1530. His father was a wealthy man who supported the local synagogue in Krakow. At a young age, he went to Lublin to study in the yeshiva of Rabbi Shalom Shachna, whose daughter he later married. In 1550, Rabbi Isserles returned to Krakow and started his own yeshiva, which he was able to support himself due to his family's wealth.

In 1553, Rama was appointed rabbi of Krakow, and he headed the local beit din. He was also appointed to the Council of the Four Lands, a body in charge of the Jewish communities in Poland and the surrounding areas. His reputation spread and he answered questions that were sent to him from all over Europe.

Rama is best known for his works relating to Jewish law. His major works include *Torat Chatat*, a book dealing with the laws of kashrut; *Darkhei Moshe*, an encyclopedic survey of Jewish law; and *HaMappah*, glosses to *Shulchan Aruch*. The latter two works correspond to works written by Rabbi Yosef Karo; *Darkhei Moshe* is an addendum to *Beit Yosef* and *HaMappah* is an addendum to *Shulchan Aruch*. Rama's main goal in these works is to emphasize the opinions and traditions of the Franco-German and Polish communities. Interestingly, he began writing *Darkhei Moshe* independently of Rabbi Karo's writing of *Beit Yosef*. However, once the latter book was published he changed the format of his work to summarize the opinions quoted in *Beit Yosef* and then add the opinions and customs not quoted by *Beit Yosef*.

Rama's contribution to Jewish law was significant. Even today, his glosses to *Shulchan Aruch* are the basis of Jewish law followed by the Ashkenazic communities.

Rama died at a young age in Krakow in 1572. His greatness can be summed up by the inscription on his tombstone "From Moshe (Rambam) until Moshe (Rabbi Moshe Isserles) there was no one like Moshe."

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Torah and Translation
The Symbolism of the Menorah
Rabbi Moshe Isserles, Torat ha'Olah I 19:15
Translated by Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

ואמרו (מנחות כט.) "אבן היה לפני המנורה, ובו שלשה מעלות שעליו כהן עומד ומטיב הנרות ומניח עליו כלי שמנה כו." האבן הוא מורה על כלל העולם שעמד על אבן שתייה, כדאמרינן ביומא (נד:), ולכן היו בו שלשה מעלות והם שלשה חלקי העולם שעומדים בזכות התורה, וכמו שנאמר (ירמיהו לג: כה) "אם לא בריתי יומם ולילה חקות שמים וארץ לא שמתיו."

ולכן היה האבן מונח לפני המנורה, הרומז על התורה כמבואר. ולפי שהמנורה הטהורה היה מורה על כל חלקי התורה ופרטיה וכלליה, לכן נאמר "כן עשה משה את המנורה," ואמרו גם כן במדרש (ספרי) "מלמד שבחו של אהרן שלא שינה," כי דבר גדול הוא המקיים כל התורה כולה ועושה אותה כמצוה.

ואמרו רבותינו זכרונם לברכה (שבת כא.) כי מבואר בגדים של כהנים היו עושים פתילות למנורה, והוא מבואר הגנות, אם לא שבא להורות לנו ענין נאות, וזה כי בגדי כהנים היו מורים על ענייני המצות ומעלות המדות כמו שיתבאר לעתיד, וכבר אמרו רבותינו זכרונם לברכה במנחות (סב.) "שירי מצוה מעכבין הפורענות." ולזה היו בלואי בגדיהם המרמז על שירי מצוה, מאירים ומזהירים במנורה, להורות כי אף שירי מצוה שבתורה, ממלאים הבית אורה והם מצילים מן הפורענות, והוא דמות החושך אשר הוא בבית בהעדר האור, וזה בסוד המנורה בעזרת ד' יתעלה נותן התורה, והוא יתן לי ולכל ישראל עוז ותעצומות לזכות לאורה של ביאת הגואל, אשר לקויו ומיחליו שמורה.

And [the Rabbis] said (Menachot 29a), "There was a stone before the menorah and it had three steps, upon which the kohen would stand and prepare the lamps and he would place on it a vessel of its oil." The stone teaches about the whole world, that it stands on the "foundation stone" (*even shetiyah*), as it says in Yoma 54b. Therefore, it had three steps, which represent the three parts of the world that stand in the merit of the Torah, as it is says, "[Thus said G-d:] Without My covenant of day and night, I would not have placed the laws of heaven and earth." (Jeremiah 33:25)

And thus, the stone was placed before the menorah, which alludes to the Torah, as has been explained. And since the pure menorah instructed about all parts of the Torah, its details and generalities, therefore it is said, "So Moshe made the menorah." (based on Bamidbar 8:4) And they also said in a midrash (Sifri) that this teaches the praise of Aharon, that he did not change. For it is a great thing that sustains the whole Torah, and he did it as commanded.

And our rabbis of blessed memory said that from the worn-out clothes of the kohanim they would make the wicks of the menorah. (Shabbat 21a) And this would seem to be clear denigration, if it did not come to instruct us something beautiful. Namely, the clothes of the kohanim teach about the mitzvot and the positive levels of character traits, as will be explained in the future. The sages of blessed memory already said that "[being careful with] the remnant [i.e., non-essential] of a mitzvah prevents calamity." (Menachot 62a) Therefore, the worn-out clothes allude to the remnants of the mitzvah, which illuminate and shine in the menorah, to teach that even the remnants of the mitzvot in the Torah fill the [Temple] with light and save from calamity. This is the image of darkness which is in the [Temple] in the absence of light. This is the secret of the menorah, with the help of the Exalted G-d, the Giver of the Torah, and [may] He give me and all of Israel courage and might to merit the light of the coming of the Redeemer, for whom those who trust and hope are preserved.

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Monday-Thursday

10:00 AM - Noon: Adult Seder Boker with Rabbi Moshe Yeres on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/sederboker> (men)
Monday/Wednesday: Talmud Succah, Orot haTeshuvah of Rav Kook
Tuesday/Thursday: Parshah, Tanach: Sefer Melachim

Shabbat February 11-12

After 8:00 AM shacharit R' Yehuda Mann, Halachah from the Parshah, Clanton Park

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT: Gruda Beis Medrash (men)

After minchah Idan Rakovsky, Parshah, Shaarei Tefillah

Motzaei Shabbat 7:30 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Parent-Child Learning on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/parent-child>

Sunday February 13

9:00 AM R' Zev Spitz & R' Yehuda Mann, Semichat Chaver Program, Clanton Park (men)

9:15 AM Idan Rakovsky, The Thought of Rav Shagar (university)

Nusbaum Family Medical Ethics and Halacha Program

9:30 AM to 11:00 AM Gender Dysphoria in Judaism

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/mtethics>

Register at <https://torontotorah.com/cme> Free of charge, CME accredited, Laypeople welcome

10 AM R' Aaron Greenberg, Talmud Eruvin, Yeshivat Or Chaim or ZOOM: <http://bit.ly/jliczoom> 613613 (univ)

Monday February 14

A New Parshah Podcast: Parshat Ki Tisa, with Rabbi Jared Anstandig and Rabbi Yehuda Mann
Apple <http://tiny.cc/apodcast>, Google <http://tiny.cc/gpodcast>, Spotify <http://tiny.cc/spodcast>

8:45 AM Idan Rakovsky, Likutei Moharan of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

2:00 PM I. Rakovsky, On Parents and Children in the Book of Genesis 1 of 5, ZOOM <http://tiny.cc/idanrak> NEW!

7:30 PM Prielle and Idan Rakovsky, Song of the Week, ZOOM <http://tiny.cc/weeklysng>

8:30 PM R' Moshe Yeres, Talmud Shabbat (Chap. 15), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/talmud>

Tuesday February 15 Purim Katan

9:00 AM Idan Rakovsky, Likutei Moharan of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, King Solomon's Arc (Melachim I 3), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 11), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

Wednesday February 16 Shushan Purim Katan

6:15 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Talmud: Avodah Zarah, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/idolsarebad>

10:00 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Jews and Food #2 of 5: Blessed Foods?, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Introduction to Jewish Philosophy Week 3 of 5, Shaarei Tefillah

8:15 PM R' Chaim Metzger, Substance Use/Abuse: Tobacco, BAYT & ZOOM <http://tiny.cc/chaimmetzger>

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah Chabura, Clanton Park

Thursday February 17

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 24), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Beitzah, at BAYT (Gruda BM), email ymanntorontotorah.com for ZOOM options (men)

8:00 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Gemara Bava Batra, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/torontowbm> (university women)

8:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Parshah w/Torah in Motion on ZOOM, Register at <https://bit.ly/3LgWjBP>

Friday February 18

8:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Parshah, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Bava Batra Perek 2 *advanced*
In-person at Yeshivat Or Chaim, on Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/frishiur>