



Shabbat Table Talk Page

Overview

- **Parashah: Tetzaveh (תְּצַוֶּה, “you shall command”)**
- **Chapters: Exodus 27:20-30:10**



בְּרִיךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסוֹךְ בְּדַבְּרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

Synopsis

Last week’s Torah portion explained that God had asked for a “donation” (terumah) from the people for the sake of creating a portable, tent-like sanctuary called the Tabernacle. God then showed Moses the pattern according to which the Tabernacle and its furnishings were to be made. First the Ark of the Covenant (and its cover called the kapporet) would occupy an inner chamber called the Holy of Holies. Within an adjoining chamber (called the Holy place) a Table would hold twelve loaves of matzah and a seven-branched Menorah would illuminate the tent. God gave precise dimensions of the tent with the added instruction to separate the Holy of Holies by a veil called the parochet. The entire tent was to have a wooden frame covered by colored fabric and the hide of rams and goats. Outside the tent an outer court was defined that would include a copper sacrificial altar and water basin. The outer court was to be enclosed by a fence made with fine linen on silver poles with hooks of silver and sockets of brass.

This week’s Torah portion continues the description of the Tabernacle, though the focus shifts to those who will serve within it, namely the priests of Israel. First Moses was instructed to tell the Israelites to bring pure olive oil for the lamps of the Menorah, which the priests were to kindle every evening in the Holy Place. Next God commanded Moses to ordain Aaron and his sons as priests and described the priestly garments they would wear while serving in the Tabernacle.

All priests were to wear four garments – linen breeches, tunics, sashes, and turbans, but in addition to these the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) was to wear a blue robe decorated with pomegranates and golden bells. Over this robe, an ephod – an apron woven of gold, blue, purple, and crimson – was to be worn, and upon the ephod was attached a breastplate inlaid with precious stones inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. Finally, the High Priest would wear a golden plate engraved with the words “Holy to the LORD” upon the front of his turban.

The priests were to be ordained in a special seven-day ceremony that involved washing, dressing, and anointing them with oil and blood, followed by the offering of sacrifices. The priests were further instructed to present burnt offerings twice a day upon the copper altar. The portion ends with a description of the Golden Altar upon which incense was offered twice a day by the priests when the Menorah lamps were serviced. In addition, the blood of atonement was to be placed on its corners once a year, during the Yom Kippur ritual.



Basic Questions

1. What type of oil (*shemen*) was used to light the menorah in the Tabernacle? ¹
2. Who were the kohanim? ²
3. What are the three “classes” of Jews? ³
4. Why were “holy garments” to be made for the kohanim? ⁴
5. What special clothes did the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) wear? ⁵
6. What was in the kohanim’s clothing which ordinarily may not be worn? ⁶
7. How were the priests consecrated for their service (avodah)? ⁷
8. What is the name of the daily sacrifice and what was required? ⁸
9. How often was incense to be burned upon the altar in the Holy Place? ⁹
10. Later in the Torah, two of Aaron’s sons were killed by God for taking “strange fire” into the Sanctuary. Which sons were *not* killed? ¹⁰
11. What was attached to the hem of the robe of High Priest, and what was its purpose? ¹¹
12. What was engraved on the golden plate (tzitz) attached to the High Priest’s turban ? ¹²
13. The breastplate (choshen) is called the breastplate of what? ¹³
14. What was done with the blood of the “ram of ordination”? ¹⁴



¹ Clear, pure olive oil (*shemen zayit zakh*), which came from the first drop that was squeezed from the olive (the rest was used for other things).

² Aaron and his descendants (Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar).

³ Kohanim (priests), Leviim (levites), and Yisraelim (Israelites). Only the Kohanim are physical descendants of Aaron assigned the priestly duties of offering korbanot (sacrifices). The other descendants of Levi were assigned roles to assist in the maintenance of the Mishkan, such as carrying various vessels, assembling it when the LORD moved the camp, and so on. The Kohanim, then, are a *subset* of the tribe of Levi. Thus, while every Levite is an Israelite (a descendant of Israel), not every Levite (descendant of Levi) is a Kohen (descendant of Aaron).

⁴ “For glory and for beauty” (Exod. 28:2).

⁵ The *efod*, an apron-like garment (tied in the front); the *choshen*, a breastplate that contained twelve precious stones inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel; a *robe* of blue wool, with golden bells and decorative pomegranates on its hem; and the *tzitz* - a golden headband bearing the inscription “Holy to the LORD.”

⁶ Shaatnez (שׂעִטְנֵי), a fabric made of wool mixed with linen. Shaatnez is prohibited in Lev. 19:19 and Deut. 22:11. The kutonet (a tunic or inner shirt) of the priests contained shaatnez.

⁷ They washed, dressed in the holy garments, and were anointed with oil on their foreheads.

⁸ Korban tamid (קֹרְבַן תָּמִיד), which was the sacrifice of a yearling lamb every morning and afternoon upon the altar. In addition, a bread and wine offering were required (Ex. 29:38-42). Lamb – bread – wine were required daily.

⁹ Twice each day, in the morning and evening (during the time the Menorah was tended).

¹⁰ Eleazar and Ithamar.

¹¹ Golden bells to make a sound when he goes in and out of the Holy place before the LORD that he not die. The bells were also a warning to the people that the high priest was performing his duties.

¹² “Holy to the LORD” (קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה). It was called *tzitz* because a cord of techelet (blue) held it in place.

¹³ Judgment (choshen ha-mishpat). The priest would represent the judgment of the people over his heart.

¹⁴ The blood was placed on the right earlobe, right thumb, and big toe of the right foot of the priests.



Discussion Topics

1. The commandment to keep the lamp of the menorah burning at all times is called *ner tamid* (נֵר תָּמִיד), an “eternal lamp.” In many synagogues today a ritual light called the ner tamid is set above the aron (the ark where the scrolls are stored) to symbolize the Presence of God. Discuss the idea that “every Jew must light the ner tamid in his/her own heart.”
2. In most synagogues it is customary to “dress” the Torah scroll in a manner similar to that of garments of the High Priest of the Tabernacle. A Torah crown, a pomegranate robe, a breastplate, a yad (pointer), etc., are common “Torah ornaments.” In what ways do you think that the Torah has replaced the idea of the priest in Jewish thinking?
3. The High Priest’s breastplate contained a pouch holding two special gemstones called the urim v’tummin (Urim and Thummin) usually translated as “lights and perfections.” According to the Targum Jonathan, when a matter was brought to the High Priest for settlement, he would sometimes hold the urim before the menorah and the Shekhinah would irradiate various letters inscribed on the choshen to reveal the will of God. Do you think this is a form of divinely sanctioned divination? Why or why not?
4. According to Chassidism, the Tabernacle is a metaphor for attaining personal, inner sanctity. The detailed building instructions point to the soul building project; the ner tamid points to the need for the soul’s illumination, the garments of the High Priest point to particular areas where we need to exercise sanctity (e.g., the turban represents the call for right thinking, etc.). Shifting the metaphor, the Ark represents the brain; the cherubim represents God’s “still, small voice,” the menorah represents the eyes, the Table represents the mouth; the altar of incense represents the nose, the laver represents the hands, and the altar represents the stomach. Discuss the merit of this analogy.
5. Olives were intended to be “beaten for the light.” The Jewish people are compared to an Olive Tree because they yield their “oil” (virtue) only when crushed. Discuss how affliction can be a means of yielding a testimony for the light in your life...
6. God spent a lot of time discussing the garments of the priests. The garments were intended for “glory and for beauty” (לְכָבוֹד וְלְתִפְאֵרֶת) and – to the wise in heart – for sanctity (Exod. 28:2-3). How important is appearance in your life?
7. The role of the priest was to bring people close to God. The word “korban” (sacrifice) means being brought near (*karov*). Aaron wore the breastplate of judgment over his heart (Exod. 28:30) as a token of the weight of people’s suffering. His role was to represent the heart of the people before God. How do you understand Yeshua as your priest before the Father?
8. The light of the Menorah – just as the Ark of the Covenant itself – was *hidden* from view. No Gentile would ever see it, nor would most Jews who were not Levites. Discuss how the Divine Light transcends the physical realm, and how things done in “secret” may be “seen” as effects in the external world...



9. Why was Aaron chosen to be the High Priest of Israel and not Moses? Was it because Moses forfeited the right during the encounter with God at the Burning Bush (Exod. 4:14-16)? But how do we make sense of the statement in Psalm 99:6, “Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called upon his name. They called to the LORD, and he answered them.” Moreover, how did Moses understand the laws of sacrifice *before* the revelation at Sinai? In what ways did Moses function as Israel’s first High Priest, and how does that prefigure Yeshua?
10. The Ark of the Covenant is likened to *Kisei Ha-Kavod*, the “Throne of Glory.” The Ark itself was composed of three separate (and overlapping) boxes: a wooden box covered by a gold box with another gold box inside. The outermost box also had a border (or “diadem”) called a *zer* (זֶר) that would hold the cover (kapporet) in place (Exod. 25:11). Moreover, the tent of the Tabernacle was composed of three parts: the Holy of Holies and two divisions within the Holy Place. Despite the various articles of the Tabernacle, it is called “one” (echad). Discuss how the pattern of the Tabernacle reveals the nature of God.
11. According to Malbim, the Menorah is said to reveal the light of the Torah. These are sometimes called the “49 Gates to Torah.” The 7 branches represent the seven words of Gen. 1:1; the 11 fruits represent the 11 words of Exod. 1:1; the 9 flowers represent the 9 words of Lev. 1:1; the 22 cups represent the 22 words of Deut. 1:1. What about the Book of Numbers? The 17 words of Num 1:1 refer to the 17 tefachim (handsbreadths) of the Menorah’s height. Discuss the symbolism of the menorah, especially in light of Yeshua’s words, “I am the Light of the World.”
12. The “Korban tamid” (קָרְבַּן תָּמִיד) was the sacrifice of a lamb every morning and afternoon upon the copper altar at the Tabernacle. Along with it, a bread and wine offering were required, thereby prefiguring the Lamb of God and his sacrifice for us (Exod. 29:38-42). When the priest was consecrated for service, the blood of the “ram of ordination” was placed on his right earlobe, right thumb, and big toe of the right foot (Exod. 29:19-20). Likewise we are called to present our bodies as a “living sacrifice” (i.e., *korban chai*: קָרְבַּן חַי) in our own service to the LORD (Rom. 12:1-2). In what ways do you make a daily sacrifice to the LORD in your life?



For Next Week

- Read parashat **Ki Tisa** (i.e., Exodus 30:11-34:35)
- Read the Haftarah (1 Kings 18:1-39)
- Read the New Testament (2 Cor. 3:1-18)

