



Parshat Tetzaveh-Zachor- 7 March 2025 Shabbat times start 5:35 finishes 6:43

## Rabbi Sacks

Beethoven rose each morning at dawn and made himself coffee. He was fastidious about this: each cup had to be made with exactly sixty beans, which he counted out each time. He would then sit at his desk and compose until 2:00 or 3:00 PM. Subsequently he would go for a long walk, taking with him a pencil and some sheets of music paper to record any ideas that came to him on the way. Each night after supper he would have a beer, smoke a pipe, and go to bed early, 10:00 PM at the latest.

Anthony Trollope, who as his day job worked for the post office, paid a groom to wake him every day at 5:00 AM. By 5:30 he would be at his desk, and he then proceeded to write for exactly 3 hours, working against the clock to produce 250 words each quarter-hour. This way he wrote 47 novels, many of them 3 volumes in length, as well as 16 other books. If he finished a novel before the day's 3 hours were over, he would immediately take a fresh piece of paper and begin the next.

Immanuel Kant, the most brilliant philosopher of modern times, was famous for his routine. As Heinrich Heine put it, "Getting up, drinking coffee, writing, giving lectures, eating, taking a walk, everything had its set time, and the neighbors knew precisely that the time was 3:30 PM when Kant stepped outside his door with his gray coat and the Spanish stick in his hand." These details, together with more than 150 other examples drawn from the great philosophers, artists, composers and writers, come from a book by Mason Currey entitled *Daily Rituals: How Great Minds Make Time, Find Inspiration, and Get to Work* (New York: Knopf, 2013). The book's point is simple. Most creative people have daily rituals. These form the soil in which the seeds of their invention grow.

In some cases they deliberately took on jobs they did not need to do, simply to establish structure and routine in their lives. A typical example was the poet Wallace Stevens, who took a position as an insurance lawyer at the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, where he worked until his death. He said that having a job was one of the best things that could happen to him because "it introduces discipline and regularity into one's life." Note the paradox. These were all innovators, pioneers, groundbreakers, trailblazers, who formulated new ideas, originated new forms of expression, did things no one had done before in quite that way. They broke the mold. They changed the landscape. They ventured into the unknown.

Yet their daily lives were the opposite: ritualized and routine.

## Inspiration and Perspiration

One could even call them boring. Why so? Because—the saying is famous, though we don't know who first said it—genius is one per cent inspiration, ninety-nine per cent perspiration. The paradigm-shifting scientific discovery, the pathbreaking research, the wildly successful new product, the brilliant novel, the award-winning film, are almost always the result of many years of long hours and attention to detail. Being creative involves hard work. The ancient Hebrew word for hard work is *avodah*. It is also the word that means "serving G-d." What applies in the arts, sciences, business and industry applies equally to the life of the spirit. Achieving any form of spiritual growth requires sustained effort and daily rituals.

Hence the remarkable aggadic passage in which various sages put forward their idea of *klal gadol ba-Torah*, "the great principle of the Torah." Ben Azzai says it is the verse "This is the book of the chronicles of man: On the day that G-d created man, He made him in the likeness of G-d."<sup>1</sup> Ben Zoma says that there is a more embracing principle: "Listen, Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is one." Ben Nannas says there is a yet more embracing principle: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Ben Pazzi says we find a more embracing principle still. He quotes a verse from this week's Parshah: "One sheep shall be offered in the morning, and a second in the afternoon"<sup>2</sup>—or, as we might say nowadays, *Shacharit*, *Minchah* and *Maariv*. In a word: "routine." The passage concludes: The law follows Ben Pazzi.

The meaning of Ben Pazzi's statement is clear: all the high ideals in the world—the human person as G-d's image, belief in G-d's unity, and the love of neighbor—count for little until they are turned into habits of action that become habits of the heart. We can all recall moments of insight when we had a great idea, a transformative thought, the glimpse of a project that could change our lives. A day, a week or a year later, the thought has been forgotten or become a distant memory, at best a might-have-been.

The people who change the world, whether in small or epic ways, are those who turn peak experiences into daily routines, who know that the details matter, and who have developed the discipline of hard work, sustained over time.

Judaism's greatness is that it takes high ideals and exalted visions—image of G-d, faith in G-d, love of neighbor—and turns them into patterns of behavior. *Halachah* (Jewish law) involves a set of routines that—like those of the great creative minds—reconfigures the brain, giving discipline to our lives and changing the way we feel, think and act. Much of Judaism must seem to outsiders, and sometimes to insiders also,

boring, prosaic, mundane, repetitive, routine, obsessed with details and bereft for the most part of drama or inspiration. Yet that is precisely what writing the novel, composing the symphony, directing the film, perfecting the killer app, or building billion-dollar business is, most of the time. It is a matter of hard work, focused attention and daily rituals. That is where all sustainable greatness comes from.

We have developed in the West a strange view of religious experience: that it's what overwhelms you when something happens completely outside the run of normal experience. You climb a mountain and look down. You are miraculously saved from danger. You find yourself part of a vast and cheering crowd. It's how the German Lutheran theologian Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) defined "the holy": as a mystery (*mysterium*) both terrifying (*tremendum*) and fascinating (*fascinans*). You are awed by the presence of something vast. We have all had such experiences.

But that is all they are: experiences. They linger in the memory, but they are not part of everyday life. They are not woven into the texture of our character. They do not affect what we do or achieve or become. Judaism is about changing us so that we become creative artists whose greatest creation is our own life. And that needs daily rituals: *Shacharit*, *Minchah*, *Maariv*, the food we eat, the way we behave at work or in the home, the choreography of holiness which is the special contribution of the priestly dimension of Judaism, set out in this week's Parshah and throughout the book of *Vayikra*.

These rituals have an effect. We now know through PET and fMRI scans that repeated spiritual exercise reconfigures the brain. It gives us inner resilience. It makes us more grateful. It gives us a sense of basic trust in the Source of our being. It shapes our identity, the way we act and talk and think. Ritual is to spiritual greatness what practice is to a tennis player, daily writing disciplines are to a novelist, and reading company accounts are to Warren Buffett. They are the precondition of high achievement. Serving G-d is *avodah*, which means hard work.

If you seek sudden inspiration, then work at it every day for a year or a lifetime. That is how it comes. As every famous golfer is said to have said when asked for the secret of his success: "I was just lucky. But the funny thing is that the harder I practice, the luckier I become." The more you seek spiritual heights, the more you need the ritual and routine of *halachah*, the Jewish "way" to G-d.

In each one of us glows a spark of Moses. He is our teacher, a teacher from within.

Moses is a shepherd of faith, nourishing each of us with our own inherent knowledge, guiding it to pour down into our conscious mind. Showing us the way out of our slavery to mortar and bricks.

How do you awaken Moses?

By awakening yourself.

How do you awaken yourself?

That only you can do.

Yet even that will be with the guidance of a teacher, of someone in whom Moses is awake.

Only the awakened can guide others to be awake.

## Joke

Rabbi Markowitz concluded the services one Shabbat morning by saying, "Next Shabbos, my sermon will be about lying. In preparation, I would like you all to read the 42nd chapter of the book of Exodus."

On the following Shabbat, Rabbi Markowitz rose to begin, and said, "Now, then, all of you who have done as I requested and read the 42nd chapter of the book of Exodus, please raise your hands."

Nearly every hand in the congregation went up.

"You are the people I want to talk to," said Rabbi Markowitz. "There is no 42nd chapter of the book of Exodus."

## Story time

Moshe the fisherman peered into the water. "What has happened to the fish? I was counting on fish for our Purim feast." Moshe cast his nets again and pulled them in—nothing at all. Dusk was falling and Moshe began to pull in his nets for the final time when he saw something silver shimmering in his net. Why, it was as fine a fish as he could have hoped for. Just then, a thought caught him. According to his contract, half of every catch belonged to the landlord. So by right, this fish was the landlord's. Moshe was caught in a quandary. He couldn't give up this fish, for he desperately wanted it to honor the festival, but to withhold it from the poretz (landlord) was equally impossible. Finally he came to a decision. This fish he would keep; tomorrow's catch would go entirely to the poretz. Moshe set off for home in a happy mood, the silvery fish tucked under his arm. But, he was not alone. Piotr, the gardener, was standing behind the hedges. "This Moshe, who the poretz thinks is so trustworthy, is making off with the poretz's fish. These Jews always think they can outsmart everyone, but now, I'll have the last laugh." Piotr was trimming the hedges in front of the manor house when the poretz came out for his afternoon stroll. He pretended to be murmuring to himself, but made sure the poretz overheard: "Imagine, Moshe keeping that huge fish for himself, and giving nothing to the poretz." "What's that you say?" said the poretz. "Moshe didn't bring me any fish today, but I thought he just didn't catch anything." "Well, I saw him carrying home a nice one just about an hour or so ago," said Piotr, hiding his glee. "If that's so, I'll soon know about it," said the angry poretz, dispatching a servant to bring Moshe to him immediately. "What happened to my fish, Moshe? Is this how you repay my trust?" "Please, sire, I can explain," stammered the frightened fisherman. "Today is our festival of Purim and I had to have a fish for our meal. I never intended to steal from you for I am planning tomorrow to bring you my entire catch and keep nothing for myself."

"I don't care about your holidays! It's my fish!" The poretz was furious. "Please let me explain. Every month has a celestial sign and this month's sign is the fish. It reminds us that just as fish never close their eyes, G-d never closes His eyes—He always watches His people to protect them from harm. Long ago on Purim He saved us from the wicked Haman. Please forgive me this once and let me keep the fish. I will make it up to you." The poretz allowed himself to be persuaded. "You may keep the fish, but if it ever happens again, I'll hang you," he said, pointing to a huge oak. Some days later was a meeting of all the landowners of the district. Each had some complaint: one had lost a fortune gambling and was now in debt; another was having trouble paying for the redecoration of his mansion; a third couldn't meet the payment on his gilded carriage. One of them spoke out: "Who is to blame for all our troubles? The Jews, of course. They are the managers of our estates, inns, finances. They're ruining us!" Another landowner piped up, "My Jews are just like that! They are so lazy, they never work!" Then the poretz spoke up, "My Moshe even kept all the fish for himself because it was some holiday or other for him!" "Let's get rid of those parasites for once and for all! I'll draft a proclamation expelling them from our territories, and you all sign," said one of the leading nobles. There was general agreement all around, as the Russian gentry anticipated the end of all their woes. Suddenly all gazes were drawn to the doorway. There, unexpectedly, stood the royal prince himself, resplendent in his sapphire blue robes. "Sire," began a duke, "won't you sign our document about the Jews?" The prince read the document. "Surely you jest," he said. "For these so-called 'offences' you want to banish the Jews?"

You must be mad. On whom do you propose to rely, on the Poles who hate you, or on your servants who rob you blind? My friends, you will be doing yourself a great disservice, for you will never find servants more loyal and capable than the Jews." A buzz passed through the hall. "With your permission," the prince said, and tore the paper into pieces. Then he left the room without another word, leaving the embarrassed nobles to stare at one another in wonder. The poretz returned home full of confusion. How could the prince have appeared and then vanished so fast? It could only have come from Above. When he arrived home he sent for Moshe. "I saw your G-d today. He came to protect you at our meeting." "What are you saying, Sire?" The poretz told him about the decree and the strange appearance of the prince. "Oh, no, Sire," replied Moshe, "You cannot see G-d. Perhaps Mordechai came to save us, just as he did on Purim so long ago," he added hesitantly. "Well, whatever it was, it seems you have had some good fortune from your festival...and your Purim fish!"

## Parsha Summary

The name of the Parshah, "Tetzaveh," means "Command" and it is found in [Exodus 27:20](#).

G-d tells Moses to receive from the children of Israel pure olive oil to feed the "everlasting flame" of the menorah, which Aaron is to kindle each day, "from evening till morning."

The priestly garments, to be worn by the kohanim (priests) while serving in the Sanctuary, are described. All kohanim wore: 1) the ketonet—a full-length linen tunic; 2) michnasayim—linen breeches; 3) mitznefet or migba'at—a linen turban; 4) avnet—a long sash wound about the waist.

In addition, the kohen gadol (high priest) wore: 5) the efod—an apron-like garment made of blue-, purple- and red-dyed wool, linen and gold thread; 6) the choshen—a breastplate containing twelve precious stones inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel; 7) the me'il—a cloak of blue wool, with gold bells and decorative pomegranates on its hem; 8) the tzitz—a golden plate worn on the forehead, bearing the inscription "Holy to G-d."

Tetzaveh also includes G-d's detailed instructions for the seven-day initiation of Aaron and his four sons—Nadav, Avihu, Elazar and Itamar—into the priesthood, and for the making of the golden altar, on which the ketoret (incense) was burned.