



## Tetzaveh 2024

### Attitude Redux

4 minute read | Straightforward

God gave various commands during the Jewish People's time in the desert.

We expect God to give commands; it comes with the territory, that's what God does, and it makes sense. They'd just left Egypt and stood at Sinai; there was a new religion with new procedures and protocols to implement. And after all, there's no way to know what God wants unless God says so!

What God says, we expect the audience to do, which the Torah dutifully records – וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן.

But what we might not expect is that the Torah reports with meticulous regularity, every time, not just that people obey, but that people carry out their task as per God's command – וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה'. The Torah uses this phrase tens, if not hundreds, of times!

If you think about it, it's almost entirely redundant, apart from the repetitiveness. It's not obvious what doing something per God's command adds because, in nearly every example, there is no other conceivable way to do it.

When God says to light the Menora, there is only one way to light a Menora. When God says to take a census of how many people there are, the only way to fulfill the command is to count people. When God says to bring a Korban Pesach, or how to do the Yom Kippur service, or any of the Mishkan-related workflows, or to go to war with Midian, or to execute somebody, there isn't any other way to do any of those things! And yet each time, the Torah doesn't say people followed their instructions; it says that the people followed their instructions faithfully as per God's command – וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה'.

When people follow instructions, why does the Torah add that they followed the instructions per God's command?

Perhaps the Torah isn't telling us that they did it; it's telling us how they did it.

R' Shlomo Farhi explains that even when there truly is only one way to do something, there is still a right and wrong way. When the Torah adds that people followed instructions faithfully – וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' – it's not saying that they did just like they were told; it means that people follow instructions just like when they were told, capturing the snapshot of sentiment or feeling of a particular moment.



When you do anything, even if there's no other way, you can still do it with energy, focus, and joy, or not – a right way and a wrong way, even when there's only one way.

Our sages were sensitive to this subtle but universal nuance.

Rashi quotes the Sifri that Ahron lit the Menora every day, precisely the way Moshe told him for the rest of his life, and never changed or deviated in any way – כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' – the Sifri suggests that our everyday approach to Torah should similarly be with freshness and excitement – וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר – אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם עַל־לְבָבְךָ.

R' Simcha Bunim of Peshischa notes that as much as the comment is about Ahron not changing how he performed his duties, it's equally a comment about how his duties didn't change him. Some people let privilege and honor get to their heads – but not Ahron.

The Sfas Emes notes that lighting the Menora wasn't a prestigious ceremony in that any Kohen could kindle the lights. Still, Ahron took it seriously enough that he insisted on doing it himself every day for the rest of his life – he did it like the moment he received the command.

The Izhbitzer notes that the highest praise for Ahron is that he retained that initial desire, that things never got stale or boring for him. He kept challenging himself to find something new and exciting, so he lit the Menora his last time with the same enthusiasm as the first.

The Shem miShmuel notes that the word for training, which means practice repetitions, is cognate to the word for inauguration, the first time you do something – חִינוּךְ / חֲנוּכָה. This suggests that training is not simply a repeat of past performance but the repetition of newness, with each repetition inviting an opportunity to introduce a fresh aspect or dimension.

Attitude and mentality are everything; the mental and emotional components heavily influence the substance of any interaction. Prayer and sacrifice require proper intent to have any substance; there is a vast difference between giving someone a hand because you care and giving someone a hand out of pity.

A Torah scroll is quite clearly a religious article, yet it has no inherent sanctity from perfect script or spelling. A Torah scroll is kosher and sacred exclusively when written with the express intent of imbuing the words and scroll with sanctity, which is to say that its utility and value as a holy object are solely determined by the mentality of the scribe.

The Mishkan had plenty of unique artifacts like the Menora, but it had some pretty ordinary implements that everyone owns; a shirt, a hat, a cup, and a spoon. What designated these as sacred and distinct is the intention with which they were crafted.



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This is a universal truth in all walks of life, from Judaism to art to cooking. A great cook will say their secret ingredient is love; a great artist or sage will say their secret technique is heart and soul.

In the words of Martin Luther King Jr., if a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michelangelo painted, Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'

Mastery is typically dull. Finishing your fiftieth marathon is less notable than your first.

It's normal.

The more we experience something, our enthusiasm, and attention typically wane. Predictability and comfort put an end to fresh euphoria; when we know what to expect, our excitement wears off, and boredom sets in. That's why we need to keep things fresh if we're focused on a long-term project or goal; cruise control is a killer.

It's often seen with young athletes or scholars who lose their way – they think they've made it and stop putting in the work that would take them to the elite tier. The seasoned pros always comment on how essential it is for youngsters to maintain their concentration and focus on staying on track, being fully present in each moment, and devoting their full and undivided attention, so things don't get boring.

In all walks of life, the highest form of mastery is valuing each repetition and finding its novelty and excitement.

It's not redundant for the Torah to say each time that people did the right thing in the right way for the right reason. It is ubiquitous because it reflects a truism of life, a constant reminder that is universally true.

The way you do things matters.

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## [The Clothes Make the Man](#)

5 minute read | Straightforward

From all over the world, Jews would come to the Mishkan and Beis HaMikdash for spiritual healing and engagement with the divine transcendence. Offering services far beyond the regular public programming and sacrifices, the Kohanim, the priests on duty, would attend to people's personal



spiritual needs, helping them bring sacrificial offerings to find atonement or thanksgiving, whatever their circumstances.

The Torah describes a plain and simple uniform that all on-duty Kohanim would wear: linen shorts with a matching long-robed shirt, a belt, and a turban.

The uniform was modest and minimal, but like all dress codes, uniforms pose a challenge. How we dress is a form of self-expression; doesn't imposing a uniform dress code stifle individuality and human freedom?

Clothing is a basic form of self-expression, and self-expression is vital to emotional growth and well-being. We use freedom of expression, including clothing choice, to cultivate the ability to make choices about how we express ourselves, an integral part of learning a broader responsibility for our choices and healthy personal development. If you've ever seen a child put up a big fight about getting dressed, you've seen just how important it is, emotionally speaking, to be able to control your outward appearance as part of being in control of your identity. There should be no question that you can tell something about a person by how they dress. While imprecise, it's directionally accurate.

Yet, be that as it may, the nature of a public-facing service job is that you must somewhat check yourself at the door. There's plenty of time for self-expression, but it might not be the right moment to express yourself fully when a client or patient requires your advice and compassion.

Humans have certain behaviors hardcoded into our biological makeup – we make snap judgments from very thin slices of information, including conclusions from how someone dresses. These are powerful drives, and we'd be lying to ourselves if we thought we could suppress subconscious instincts; they are subconscious. So while there are plenty of highly successful or learned people who avoid formal wear on principle and achieve incredible heights wearing gym clothes and flip flops, the fact remains that when you're trying to impress, regardless of your merits, everyone knows you're better off in a suit than pajamas.

How someone dresses is, of course, not a reliable or proper way to judge a person at all, but the fact remains that appearances matter. Sitting in the emergency room with a troubling health concern, you might get thrown off a little if the doctor walks in with ripped jeans and spiky chains over a tank top. In scrubs or a clown costume, he's still the same doctor; the scrubs also help you.

When you're at the hospital, and you see someone in scrubs in the hallway, you instantly know an incredible amount of relevant and valuable information about that person – they work at the hospital, they know their way around the building, they know a lot about health and the human body, they can direct you where you're trying to go. But most importantly, you know they're there to help you; the hospital dress code utilizes nonverbal communication to foster a sense of comfort and gravity that allows patients and their families to feel comfortable and at ease, all before a single word needs to be said.



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And it's no different for spiritual health and well-being.

The Torah mandates a simple dress code for on-duty Kohanim, consisting of a plain and simple uniform, spirit scrubs if you like, out of concern for the weary and troubled souls who came from far and near.

Dress codes are effective. Dress codes work. While it's not an absolute and immutable law, it is a pretty good rule of thumb, a heuristic that primes us to act a certain way. And to be sure, what we're discussing is the textbook definition of superficial – but that's human nature and psychology; we have a strong bias and inclination towards the superficial. The way you present yourself matters.

Dress codes level the playing field by peeling away distractions and removing barriers to people getting what they need. Uniforms aren't intimidating the way fancy clothes are; uniforms aren't off-putting the way old, raggedy clothes are. Everyone on duty appears equal, at least in an outward sense. Uniforms also create a psychological bond, building a group identity that motivates individuals to do more; you see this in the military, police, school, and work. It can help engender feelings of support: you see others working with you and recognize that they aren't just doing it as individuals for personal reasons. When you are servicing the public, it is not about you because you are expressly not representing yourself. Tellingly, the uniforms were procured with public funds and owned by the Beis HaMikdash endowment.

There is nothing inherent about dress codes or uniforms that makes you better at what you do for wearing those clothes, but the fact you're wearing them signals, at least to some people, that you're willing to put them first. And even if you don't think that's true, it is still a reason somebody else might think it is true, and that's reason enough.

Like other uniforms, the Kohanim's uniform conveys information and fosters comfort and security, setting the tone for meaningful and high-signal interactions with spiritual seekers. But like a doctor in scrubs, the dress code is only skin deep.

It's important to stress that appearance isn't everything – far from it. No two doctors or people are the same, even though they may wear the same uniform. They each have different personalities and sensitivities, and assuming a basic threshold of competency; they distinguish themselves with their bedside manner – what they're like to interact with. Our Amida also has a uniform structure, morning, noon, and night, Sunday through Friday, yet no two prayers are alike – the feeling we invest in each word is different each time. R' Shlomo Farhi highlights that even as similar as the Kohanim's uniform was, each set of clothing still had to be tapered to the contours of the wearer's body, with no loose fabric. No two people are alike, and even two conversations with the same person aren't interchangeable; uniformity doesn't mean homogeneity, and common form is not common substance.

Shakespeare wrote that the clothes make the man, but if that's a little wide of the mark, it's probably correct to say that the clothes set the tone. In your own house, yard, or office, do whatever and be



whoever you like. Who's to say otherwise? But in other-facing, client-facing, or public-facing positions, you should be mindful of how you look to people who don't know to give you the benefit of the doubt. Plenty of major companies have relaxed dress codes for non-client-facing positions, but you can be sure that the client-facing positions are suited and booted!

The value articulated by a dress code or uniform policy is that while they may not help everyone, they provide substantial benefits to portions of the population disadvantaged in specific contexts.

So perhaps dress codes don't compromise individuality or self-expression; maybe they curb the outermost and superficial part of ourselves, and that's the part we can afford to sacrifice for other people's comfort in public service.

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## Sacred Space

6 minute read | Intermediate

If you ask people what the defining traits of religion are, holiness will be on most people's lists.

Holiness is a shorthand code word everyone recognizes, and we sagely and solemnly nod our heads. Yes, yes, holiness, of course!

But what is holiness?

We sometimes think of holiness as something we do on our own. Withdrawing from the world, from the joys and vices of life, fasting, going into the woods, or perhaps profound meditations on lofty metaphysics, retreating deep into the recesses of the mind.

There may be substance to some or even all of those things, but that's not how the Torah talks about holiness.

The Torah talks about withdrawing in part and designating times and spaces; the Hebrew word for holiness means to designate or separate – קדושה.

But a critical element is missing from the word's everyday use. Most appearances of holiness throughout the Torah describe it as a function of plurality, something we do with others together.

When the Torah asks us to be holy, Rashi notes that the instruction is given to everyone together – דָּבָר – אֶל-כָּל-עַדְת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאִמְרַת אֱלֹהִים קְדָשִׁים תְּהִי.



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charitable, fair, and honest in dealing with others. As the Chasam Sofer notes, the Torah's conception of holiness is one of connection and interdependence, not disconnection and asceticism.

When the time comes to build the Mishkan, everyone must come together for God to be found in their work:

וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשִׁכְנֹתַי בְּתוֹכָם – And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. (25:8)

Standing at the hallowed Mount Sinai, on the cusp of receiving the Torah, God tells the gathered people their overarching mission:

וְאַתֶּם תְּהִיוּ־לִי מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ – You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation... (19:6)

Beyond the Torah explicitly speaking about holiness as a function of togetherness – וְעָשׂוּ / תְּהִיוּ – our Sages emphasize the central importance of the Jewish People coming together at Har Sinai – וַיִּתְּרוּ־שָׁם – יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגְדַּת הַהָר / כִּאִישׁ אֶחָד בְּלִב אֶחָד.

Almost all sacred gatherings require a group, from prayers and sacrifices to reading the Torah and weddings – כֹּל דְּבַר שֶׁבִקְדוּשָׁה לֹא יֵהָא פָחוֹת מֵעֲשָׂרָה –

So why is holiness so tightly linked to togetherness?

In the Torah's formative story of the emergency of humanity, it describes the first man's existential aloneness as bad – לֹא־טוֹב הָיְתָה הָאָדָם לְבָדוֹ – Being alone and doing things alone is terrible; being together and doing things together is good.

Our prophets and sages talk about the soul as the thing that animates our consciousness, the part of you that makes you uniquely you, and they speak of soul fragments directly connected to God – חֵלֶק – אֱלוֹק מִמַּעַל.

But when we come together, we become whole, which is why holiness is linked with connection – כֹּסֵם – יִשְׂרָאֵל.

R' Jonathan Sacks suggests that if the Creation story is about the space God makes for us, the Mishkan narrative is about the space we make for God. Noting that the Torah spends a lot more time discussing the Mishkan than Creation, R' Sacks teaches that the Torah is far more interested in what we do for God than what God does for us.

Far more esoterically, Chassidus speaks of tzimtzum, the space or vacuum God separates from God's fullness so that existence can have an independent existence and reality. But maybe when we build a Mishkan, a separate return space, we form our own inverse or parallel tzimtzum, which we can only do in our enhanced state of togetherness.



In the external world, it starts with individuals, human to human. The Torah has its fair share of lofty arcane things, but a full half of the Ten Commandments are grounded in interpersonal regulations – בין אדם לחברו. It's not enough to love humanity in the abstract; you have to love people in particular – your annoying neighbor and the guy who never stops talking.

Among the most misunderstood laws are the mitzvos about sanctifying and profaning God's name – וְלֹא תִחַלְלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם קִדְשִׁי וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. But in the context of holiness as something we do together, they make perfect sense – בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. If holiness is related to togetherness, our public actions either draw people in or alienate them.

The Chemdas Dovid explains that while an individual is like a string, a group is more like a rope, far stronger than the individual components alone, which is to say that togetherness generates something greater than the sum of its parts.

While the Mishkan project had an open call for donations of all kinds of things that were wonderful and welcome, the core donation to the Mishkan project was a simple half-shekel and was required of everyone – הָעֹשֶׂיךָ לְאֶ־נִרְבֵּה וְהִדֵּל לֹא יִמְעִיט מִמִּחְצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל לְתַת אֶת־תְּרוּמַת ה' לְכַפֵּר עַל־נַפְשֵׁיכֶם –

While the Torah predates the notion of corporations or public companies, it seems thematically similar. Every person was invested in the Mishkan, or perhaps better; everyone was a contributor and owner of that holiness, which could be precisely what made it holy in the first place.

There is undoubtedly an aspect of generosity that we need to welcome and celebrate – כל המרבה הרי זה – משובה. But it can often feel like we miss the everyman who can't quite swing a high roller donation.

The unit of the mandatory universal contribution to the Mishkan was a half shekel, not a whole shekel, and most or all of the measurements in the Mishkan ended in half cubits, reflecting the same core theme that your contribution can only ever take you halfway. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos teaches that it is not for us to complete the work, but neither are we free to desist, with the obvious conclusion that we count on others by necessity – לא עליך המלאכה לגמור, ולא אתה בן חורין ליבטל ממנה –

We ought to remember the Mishkan project that indicates smaller nominal contributions are just as valuable as everyone else's. Everyone gives the whole of what they should, rich or poor. You give a fraction, and not only does it count, but it's enough, and that's all we need. More than how much you give, it matters that you participate.

This isn't cutesy moralizing – the half-shekel contributions were melted down to form the sockets that connected the base of each wall segment. The part everyone gave together formed no less than the foundation of the entire Mishkan.

We're better off through what we do together, for, and with others. The Gemara says that collecting the half shekel from everyone elevated and uplifted them – כִּי תִשָּׂא אֶת־רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְפָקְדֵיהֶם, וְנִתְּנוּ אִישׁ כֶּפֶר –





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בְּפֶשֶׁן. Avos d'Rabi Nosson notes how valuable human contribution is; God is everywhere, but we can manifest the divine presence a little more palpably by coming together to make something for God. The Midrash goes so far as to suggest that God is most pleased by what we do down here, as exhibited by God leaving Heaven behind to be a little closer to us – דירה בתחתונים.

It is almost natural that the thing we build when everyone comes together is the holiest thing there is. As R' Shamshon Raphael Hirsch notes, it follows that it is the physical and spiritual center of our lives, which the entire camp is built around, the site we aim our prayers, and the place we come closest to the divine.

Moreover, it follows why our sages attribute the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash to animosity and hatred; disputes and internal strife led to division, and without togetherness, it only followed that sanctity would disappear as well. The Ohr Pnei Moshe notes that the inverse is true as well; for Moshe to inaugurate the Mishkan, he must bring all the people together – וַיִּקְהַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת-כָּל-עַדְת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

The Torah commands the commission of each utensil in the Mishkan in the second person singular, but not the Aron, which it commands in the plural – ועשית / ועשו. The Alshich notes that the Torah is not like monarchy or priesthood, which fall to specific individuals; the call to Torah is open-ended and universally accessible – it beckons to all of us, to you.

R' Menachem Mendel of Vorki notes that if holiness is something that everyone has to do, it has to be according to the capabilities and circumstances of every individual. There can be no one-size-fits-all; as the Kotzker famously put it, God doesn't need more angels.

The Chafetz Chaim teaches that the Torah is everyone's to take up, even if our stakes look different; a bit more this, a bit less that. You might be a scholar, maybe you offer financial support, or perhaps you help tidy up your shul a little. Everybody counts, and everybody's contribution is counted.

We are not designed to be alone; we cannot exist alone. We need each other, and it's not weakness; it's our greatest strength. Where you find togetherness, you'll find wholeness and holiness; and we must yearn for it perpetually – בְּרַכְנוּ אֶבְיָנוּ בְּלֵנוּ בְּאֶחָד בְּאוֹר פְּנֵיהָ.

But don't just yearn for it; work for it too. Find somebody to mentor, find an interesting local community project or charity to support, or get involved with, in whatever way, big or small.

Your participation doesn't just make a difference; it makes it better.

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*I present TorahRedux l'ilui nishmas my late grandfather, HaGaon HaRav Yehuda Leib Gertner ben HaRav HaChassid Menachem Mendel.*



## TorahRedux

*I hope you enjoyed this week's thoughts. If you have questions or comments, or just want to say hello, it's a point of pride for me to hear from you, and I'll always respond.*

*If you liked this week's edition of TorahRedux, why not share it with friends and family who would appreciate it?*

Neli

**PS** - *TorahRedux is my pride and joy, the product of thousands of hours of learning, research, writing, editing, and formatting. My business, Hendon Advisors, allows me to dedicate time to TorahRedux, and I welcome your assistance in furthering my goal to keep publishing high-quality Parsha content that makes a difference. I source and broker the purchase and sale of healthcare businesses; I kindly ask for your blessings and prayers. If you are a buyer of healthcare businesses or can make introductions to healthcare operators who might buy or sell, just reply to this email to get in touch.*

**Redux:** *adjective* – resurgence; refers to being brought back, restored, or revived; something familiar presented in a new way. Not to see what no one else has seen, but to say what nobody has yet said about something which everybody sees.