

Shabbat 20 February 2016 – Tetzaveh

“Do not look at the outside of the bottle but at what it contains”.

These words come from the Mishneh in Ethics of the Fathers. It is referring to bottles of wine. Sometimes you can look at the outside and it might be an old bottle, however, the wine inside is new; and sometimes you can purchase a new bottle but the wine inside is old. Older wine is more mature and valued, younger wine is less valued. The appearance of the bottle is not always a way of knowing what is on the inside, whether or not you have purchased a superior quality of wine

The message of the Mishneh is profound. Don't always look at the outside, because that might not be a true reflection of what is going on the inside.

In English we have a similar dictum – don't judge a book by its cover. I expect you can apply this idea to so many aspects in life. Go into a supermarket to purchase your groceries. What makes you buy the product, is it the packaging or what the product contains?

Is it really good for you? Is it healthy? Have you been taken in by the nifty advertising, marketing and packaging techniques? And we all do it. We are taken in by brand name products with the promise that somehow or other that particular brand is better, even though it might not be.

Likewise when we look and judge people are we looking at the outer layer, his/her look, what they are wearing, their demeanour, their hairstyle, their make up, the way they come across, or do we look deeper?

The Mishneh is saying look at the inside, don't look at the outer packaging, but look to see what does a person really stand for.

All the above that I have just said seems to fly in the face of the Sedra this week.

The Torah in Tetzaveh and again it is repeated in Pekudei, all in all a total of 80 verses, preoccupies itself with the special clothes worn by the Cohanim and the Cohen Gadol.

Indeed the Torah says that if the Cohen is lacking any of these garments then his service is invalid.

How is it that the Torah is preoccupied with the outer appearance, rather than the inner essential aspect of who the Cohen Gadol really was and his connection to Hashem?

Rabbi Yosef Dov Ber Soloveitchik Z'L compares the Cohanim to the Neviim. Whereas the Torah goes into great detail about their appearance, nowhere in the Torah are we instructed that the Navi had to be dressed in a certain fashion.

The only case I can think of is when Hashem appeared to Moshe at The Burning Bush and said to him, "remove your shoes from your feet because the place under which you are standing is holy ground".

But that is the exception. There is no dress code for the prophet, the navi. But for the Cohen it's really strict.

The distinction is in the roles of the Navi and the Cohen.

The Navi is bringing the message from Hashem and that message in each situation was different depending on the circumstance. Israel had sinned by bowing down to idols, by turning their backs on Hashem. The Navi like Jeremiah or Isaiah gives the message to Israel to repent, to turn back to Hashem, if not, Hashem would destroy the Temple. In each situation the message could be very different, so the clothes he wore reflected that chidush in the message.

However, the Cohanim have a different role. Their mission was to do the daily service which represented the tradition, doing the same service, every day, every week, every season and every year. The service therefore was reflected through the clothes of the Cohanim.

Imagine you were a Cohen living in the times of the first or second Temple. The clothes, the service that you did was very much the same as what your great, great grandfather was doing. The clothes therefore of the Cohanim were a reflection of that permanence, tradition, consistency in service to Hashem.

The message to orthodoxy today. Be like the Navi, look forward, try out new ideas.

But then again with the Cohen, looking back at tradition reflected by their clothes.

Shabbat shalom