

## A LESSON IN COMMUNITY

A commentary on *Parashat Tetzaveh*

By Emma Dorman

*Parashat Tetzaveh* follows on from the previous *Parasha* where the Jewish people were instructed on the building of the Tabernacle. In *Parashat Tetzaveh* we move focus from the physical building to those who worked within it. Here we learn about the special ceremony for inaugurating the priests, Aaron and his sons, and the garments worn by the High Priest.

Among these garments are *the ephod* – an apron worn backwards which had gem-studded straps, the *me'il* – a blue robe hemmed with gold bells and pomegranates and the *tzitz* which was a golden headband engraved with the words “Holy to G-d”. These clothes, specific to the High Priest, were in addition to the regular outfit of the priests of tunic, turban, sash and trousers.

The High Priest also wore the *choshen mishpat* – the breastplate of judgement. The breastplate comprised four rows each containing three precious stones. This totals twelve gemstones, upon each gemstone was engraved the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. We are told that each gemstone had its own unique colour which corresponded to the colours of the

tribes’ flag as well as the attributes of each tribe. For example, the tribe of Simeon was symbolized by a topaz.

The representation of each tribe in their own individual way on the garments of the high priest, who can be viewed as a conduit to G-d, is important. There is

a lesson here on community but also the importance of diversity. All the tribes were represented on the breastplate, none were left out, unifying the entirety of the Jewish people and representing them as a community in the Tabernacle where G-d resided.

This explains the importance of community but how does it explain diversity which some would deem the opposite of unity? The names of the tribes could have all been engraved on one large stone or on multiple of the same stone, but they were not. Each tribe was asked to provide a stone which represented them as a tribe. In this way the individual traits of each tribe, what they contributed to the Jewish people as a whole, was represented. Here is our lesson in diversity. It is only when we accept what makes us different and come together in spite of our differences that we become a community.

This is not just a lesson for then but also for now. At Jami we are privileged to work with those with lived experience of mental health problems who use our support services alongside the educational and awareness work we do in the community. People turn to Jami as somewhere to receive support particularly when they feel that their situation

is misunderstood. It can be difficult to understand those who have a different experience to us or have travelled on a different path of personal development but it is important to remember

that we are all part of one community. Everyone has something unique to contribute. Just as the gemstones on the breastplate of the High Priest united us as a people it is also a reminder of the richness of a community symbolized by diversity.

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HIGH PRIEST IN ROBES AND BREASTPLATE.  
—Lev. viii, 8.