

# Tetzaveh

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

This week's reading goes in detail into the special clothes the priests and the High Priests wore, which actually form the basis of Christian clerical ceremonial dress to this day. In practice, the priesthood did not quite work out in Jewish history the way it was intended to. Moshe appointed his brother, Aharon, to be the High Priest responsible for performing the Tabernacle rituals, who in turn appointed his sons. The other families of priests were all related. Aharon was also responsible for heading the judiciary and for being the keeper of the tradition.

But the priesthood was always a dangerous role. Aharon's two sons were burned to death. By Samuel's time the priesthood was being abused; throughout the reigns of the kings of Judah, some were noble and acted for the good of Judaism, but others were political. The prophets became the main standard bearers of Jewish life. When Ezra arrived in Israel after the return from Babylon he found a discredited priesthood that had largely married out.

We have managed with priests only being symbolic for two thousand years. What values can we learn from them? We all need examples to look up to. After all, the Jewish people were expected to live a really spiritual life to show it was possible to follow God and yet still play an important role in everyday life. The priests were supposed to be similar examples within Judaism.

There are lots of situations in the Torah where high standards are set, even though it seems almost inevitable that people will fail. But understanding failure does not mean we shouldn't aim high. The priesthood is a reminder that humans are different, have different roles, and yet still are subject to one moral code, even if there are different ritual functions according to sex or birth.