



Dressing with Dignity – A Story for *Tetzaveh*

By Alan J. Levin

Benjy ran down the stairs ready for school. He grabbed his lunch and took a piece of toast from the table. His dad was about to say "Have a great day Benjy" when he took a second glance and stopped. "Benjy, what are you wearing to go to school?"

"Dad," replied Benjy, "I look fine. I'm wearing what I like to wear."

His dad reviewed the figure of Benjy standing in front of him. He was clean and had gel in his hair making his hair stand up. However, Benjy was wearing a torn baggy T-shirt with a cartoon character making a rather rude face on it. Dad wasn't quite sure what was keeping his baggy jeans up since they did not seem to be anywhere near Benjy's waist. The edges were frayed and there were holes in the knees. Benjy's unlaced tennis shoes and socks also had holes in them.

"You are not going to school and Hebrew school looking like that."

"Why not, Dad? All the kids do," Benjy replied.

Benji knew his father would reply "I don't care what all the other kids do" so he tried another tactic. "My Hebrew school teacher wears jeans and so does my science teacher. Who cares what I wear if I am a good kid and am clean?"

Benjy's father understood how Benjy felt, but knew that he was missing the point. So his father tried a different tactic. "Benjy," he asked, "Do you know what Judaism tells us about dress codes?" He continued, "First, think about it, we have different kinds of clothing for ball games, play, school, or synagogue services, right? Look at what it says here in the Torah portion *Tetzaveh*." Benjy's father began to read all the details of what was to be the dress of Aaron and his sons. There was a description of the tunics and head-dress. It told about the materials and the sashes. He showed Benjy where it said that all of this was to provide "dignity and adornment" when they enter the tent of meeting and when they approach the alter.

"So," Benjy's dad continued, "All of those details and rules about clothing are about showing respect and dignity. While we don't dress like that anymore, I would like you to show respect and dignity when you enter public school or religious school. You can be comfortable and feel good with an *appropriate* t-shirt and jeans. Remember, when you enter the sanctuary at religious school this afternoon it is not camp and it is not the playground."

"Let's go one step further, the Rabbis have written that the disciples of the wise should not even have a grease spot on their clothing. Stay clean in honor of your teachers, our tradition says. The Rabbis thought that in your own town a good name



matters, but away from home, your attire matters. They even taught that it is unbecoming to go out in patched sandals."

"So you see, Benjy, while clothing does not make the man, or the boy, in your case, you should still show respect for yourself, your teachers and your studies. One way that you can do that is by the way you dress. So, please go upstairs and change your clothes."

Benjy learned a few important things that morning. He learned that how you dress can be a sign of respect. He learned that the writings of the Torah and the Rabbis still applied to his life today even though they were written a very, very long time ago. He also learned that he needed a new pair of socks!