

5780:

The playwright Anton Chekhov wrote that a loaded gun should not show up in the first act of a play unless it will be fired in the second act. What he meant was that a stage prop is shown to an audience only if it has a purpose in the drama that we are seeing.

Similarly, when the Torah speaks about the implements of the mishkan – the shape of the building, its furniture and the dress of the kohanim who served in it - it does so in anticipation of a working system whose 'props' must be well described if they are to function properly. I mean no insult when I compare the mishkan, its ark and lampstand and its priest's garb as set, props and costumes. It is precisely the dramatic value of these things that made the goings-on in the mishkan a sacred drama. Without them, the sacrifices would still have had sanctity, but no drama would accrue to them. Soon enough the work of the priesthood would resemble a run of the mill slaughterhouse. In order to distinguish sacred rites from the everyday, God gives Moses and Betzalel, his 'production designer,' a distinctive look for the mishkan.

By anticipating the use of these objects and clothing, we are more attuned to the sanctity to which they will be put to use. God isn't merely 'dressing up' sacrifices to make them more palatable. God is showing us the splendor of objects that most Jews, not being kohanim, would never see in person. Getting a peek inside the mishkan through these descriptions in the Torah, we get a glimpse of another world, a place where heightened emotions attend dramatic events. If that's not theater, I don't know what is.

Shabbat Shalom.