

Rabbi David Wolpe's

Off The Pulpit

March 20, 2014

"Is *That* What You're Wearing?"

One of the greatest pleasures of Shabbat is disapproving of what other people wear. So please, permit me the pleasure.

The Talmud comments that honoring the Sabbath mandates that one's dress not be the same as on weekdays. In the Torah Rebecca helped Jacob impersonate his brother not only by putting hair on Jacob's arms, but by dressing him in Esau's clothes. Rabbi Naphtali of Rushpitz's explanation is that Rebecca understood that dressing like Esau would allow Jacob to feel more like Esau, because what we wear effects who we are.

So if you dress in torn or dirty jeans, or very short skirts, you may find it harder (and make it harder for others) to feel the dignity due God's presence. On the other hand, dressing in

outrageously expensive finery seems at least equally irreverent. In this as in many things, the custom of the community should prevail; joining a congregation means understanding and respecting their standards so long as they do not outrage your moral sense.

And please, no gum. If you were called to appear before a President or Monarch would you have a mouthful of gum? Surely then, when standing before the Sovereign of the universe...