

THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF BEAUTY

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In many instances the Bible ascribes some measure of physical beauty to a personality in a narrative. It will be seen that the purpose is not merely to round out depiction of a character or description of appearance, but also to introduce a factor that will move the narrative along to its next stage.

It is stated that Rachel is *shapely and beautiful* [*וַיְפַת תֹּאָר וַיְפַת מִرְאָה*] (*yefat to'ar v'yafat-mareh*) (*Gen. 29:17*) and then follows the statement of Jacob's great love for her. Rachel's son Joseph is described as *well-built and handsome*. The Bible uses the same four adjectives, inflected for gender, to describe him: *yefe to'ar v'yefe mareh* (*Gen. 39:6*), and this is a prelude to the desire of Potiphar's wife and her attempt to seduce him. When he rebuffed her, she cried "rape" and saw him off to prison. This in turn led to Joseph being called upon to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh of good [again *yefot mareh*] cows and ears of grain, and of poor ones, and being appointed governor over Egypt (*Gen. 41:1-14*).

Below are some of the references to beauty and physical endowment that may recall to the reader how the pleasing appearance of the personality led to subsequent events.

1. Sarai: Abram tells her '. . . what a beautiful woman you are' and the Egyptians find her to be *very beautiful* (*Gen. 12:12, 14*).
2. Rebekah: *because she is beautiful* (*Gen. 26:7*).
3. Saul: *An excellent young man, no one among the Israelites was handsomer than he – he was a head taller than any of the people* (*I Sam. 9:2*).
4. David: *He was ruddy, bright-eyed and handsome* (*I Sam. 16:12,18*).
5. Bath-sheba: *The woman was very beautiful* (*II Sam. 11:2*).
6. Tamar: *Absalom . . . had a beautiful sister* (*II Sam. 13:1*).
7. Absalom: *No one in Israel was so admired for his beauty as Absalom, from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him* (*II Sam. 14:25*).

Isaiah observed the adornments with which a lady of fashion of the day strove for beauty:

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... the anklets [with bells], the fillets [for the hair], and the crescents . . . the eardrops, the bracelets and the veils; the turbans, the armlets and the sashes . . . the talismans and the amulets . . . the signet rings and the nose rings . . . the festive robes, the mantles and the shawls . . . the purses, the lace gowns and the linen vests . . . the kerchiefs and the capes . . . perfume . . . a diadem of beaten work . . . (Isa. 3:18-24).

BEAUTY AND INTELLIGENCE

Proverbs 31:1-31 points out that beauty is *hevel* [vanity]. For a Woman of Valor, wisdom and good deeds are prerequisites. Beauty is not required to qualify. Otherwise, the search for a Woman of valor might have been reduced to a contest like the search for a replacement for Queen Vashti.

Abigail, wife of Nabal, is described as a woman of good sense [*לְכָלָה תַּבְדֵּל sechel*] as well as good looks [*yefat to'ar*]. Her clever speech mollified David and averted his anger from her household. She was, indeed, as effective as Judah had been when he addressed the Egyptian governor who was in fact his brother Joseph. When she soon became a widow by natural causes, David married her – perhaps impressed by her intelligence and skill with words as well as her beauty (I Sam. 25:2-42).

Esther was *shapely and beautiful* [*yefat to'ar v'tovat mireh*] (Est. 2:7) but her charms alone might not have saved the Persian Jews had she not been intelligent enough to influence her royal husband.

IT IS IN THE GENES

Physical traits may be genetic, and beauty inherited. Natural intelligence may also be in part genetic, but wisdom must be acquired. Eve learned to her dismay that you cannot acquire wisdom by eating the fruit of a special tree. The pursuit of wisdom is an eternal quest in which we have the help of the Wisdom Books of the Bible.

Rachel's great beauty was inherited by her older son Joseph. The genes may also have been carried by her younger son Benjamin, the ancestor of Esther. It may even be that because Benjamin was the smallest of the tribes, the traits for beauty were strong in the gene pool.

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Another example of a family line runs from the handsome David to Absalom, to Absalom's sister Tamar, and to Absalom's daughter who was also named Tamar and noted for her great beauty.

ONLY SKIN DEEP

The weight to be given to beauty on the biblical scale of values is shown in I Samuel 16:7:

'Pay no attention to his appearance or his stature . . . man sees only what is visible, but th Lord sees into the heart.'

עשה תורה קבוע
THE TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR
DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
CHAIM ABRAMOWITZ

2002

October	Psalms 11-38
November	Psalms 39-65
December	Psalms 66 - 100
January	Psalms 101 - 125
February	Psalms 126 - 150