

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Tetzaveh
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פרשת תצוה
י"ג באדר תשע"ז

Torah Reading: *Shmot* (Exodus) 27:20-30:10
Maftir: Parashat Zachor: Devarim (Deuteronomy) 25:17-19

In this *parasha*, Hashem describes to Moshe the clothing and the process of anointing the *cohanim* (priests).

Almost an entire Torah portion is dedicated to how people – in this case Aharon and his descendants – should dress. At first glance, it seems like too trivial and materialistic an issue for the Torah to address. However, when we stop to consider the issue of clothing, we realize that what we wear speaks volumes about who we are. We identify the physician, the postal worker, and the soldier by their uniforms. We change our own mode of dress depending on the circumstances; we would not choose to wear a pair of jeans and a t-shirt to a black tie affair, for example.

Clothing defines and demonstrates status. Only a monarch wears the royal crown. Only a judge wears the judicial robe.

Clothing is the first thing given by God directly to human beings and the first thing that the human beings realized they were without after they ate of the Tree of Knowledge. Adam and Chava covered themselves with fig leaves, and God made for them coats of leather and dressed them.

However, we Jews pride ourselves on being a spiritual people. Why, then, the need for such detail and such expense when it comes to the *cohen's* clothes? The Torah offers an explicit explanation: "You shall make holy garments for Aharon your brother for honor and for beauty." (27:20)

God is a realist. Perhaps in some theoretical world, it should not make a difference what people wear. But God does not deal in a theoretical world; God deals with a real world. And in a real world, people look upon others and react to them, in part, according to the way they dress.

Any number of studies have been done on the differences in the way people are treated in stores based on how they are dressed. That is human nature, and rather than denying human nature, God uses it to the best advantage.

The *cohanim* are God's servants. They must dress the part so that others view them as holy, important, beautifully dressed, and deserving of being those who directly serve God in the Sanctuary.

Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of the Fathers, tells us "*Al tistakel b'kankan ela b'mah she'yesh bo* – do not look at the container, but at what is inside it." (4:20) This adjures us not to ignore the fact that there is a container but to take into account that the container is holding within it a much more precious payload – the human soul. Nonetheless, the presentation of the ephemeral body containing the human soul makes a difference in the way people regard the soul itself. We need to view our leaders as people worthy of honor and respect. How they dress (provided it is consistent with how they act) only enhances that sense of honor and respect.

As a matter of fact, this is one time of year that demonstrates how people change as their clothing changes. As we don our Purim outfits, we "become" the characters whom we are portraying, and we often feel differently inside of ourselves wearing the garb of a persona apart from ourselves.

The offices of the *Cohen Gadol* (High Priest) and the regular *cohanim* required well-made clothes, constructed from fine materials, in order to demonstrate the "honor and beauty" of those directly serving God; to make those people recognizable to the masses; to demonstrate their status in the community; to create a proper aura within the *Beit HaMikdash* (Temple); and to have them feel internally the importance of their tasks. Just as Hashem dictated what the first humans should wear; so the Torah here dictates what the *cohanim* should wear in the service of Hashem.

Shabbat Shalom and Happy Purim!

For Discussion:

- What is your favorite thing to wear? Why?
- Should we judge people by the way they are dressed? Why or why not?
- How do you think you will feel wearing your Purim costume? Will you relate to the character that you have chosen to dress as? Why or why not and how?