

# Parshat Tezaveh

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## The Priests' Clothes

The Bigdei Kehuna (clothes of the priests) are something of a mystery. The Torah regards these items of clothing as encapsulating "honour and splendour."<sup>1</sup> Are they simply an impressive uniform, an outfit fit for royalty, or do they hide spiritual secrets, motifs of a higher nature, activating the God-Israel relationship at its essence? And if they do represent higher things, how might a simple (even intricate) piece of clothing assume a role of such weighty proportions?

### Chavruta:

Study Perek 28 that details the clothes of the Kohanim.

1. First, make a list of the clothes described.
  - Which pieces of clothing are for the Kohen Gadol, and which for the Kohen Hedyot?
  - How does the Torah divide between the two categories of clothing?
2. See the "header" passuk that opens the section dealing with the Bigdei Kehuna – 28:2.
  - Does the "header" match the content of the perek? – relate to both the NUMBER of begadim mentioned, and the ORDER of the begadim.
  - How might we explain the disparity?
3. Each piece of clothing has a "purpose" clause: - see passuk 12, 29-30, 35, 38.
  - Examine these phrases. - What impression do they give us as to the function of the garments of the Kohein Gadol?
  - Examine the description of the clothes for the regular priests (40-43). Do they have a "purpose" clause? Is their function the same as that of the Kohein Gadol?
4. See the opening sections of our Parsha (27:20, 28:1, and even 28:3.)
  - From a literary perspective, how do they differ from ALL the other paragraphs (parshiot) both BEFORE and AFTER them, within the detailing of the Mishkan? (Clue: Check the opening words)
  - What does this tell us about THESE particular instructions as opposed to the parshiot that surround it? What is the difference?
5. The contrast of Tzit and Choshen, contained in this shiur, may be found in an article by Rav Soloveitchik in "Divrei Hagut VeHaaracha." See also, Rav Chaim Sabato's book, "Ahavat Torah." They are both well worth reading.

### Shiur

The relationship between a person and his clothes is a complex dynamic. On the one hand, clothing can reflect the true essence of an individual. One's attire may present a person according to one's mood, one's personality. In this way, clothing can sometimes display an inner truth.

But there are times in which the clothing is at dissonance with the person who wears it. At times, the clothes obscure and hide our persona, presenting instead a new image, a projection of the way we want to be seen, different from the way we really are. This is true of many uniforms that present an image that aims to represent a product, a loyalty, a profession, but to eclipse the person who wears those clothes. It is for this reason that certain dictators dress in military attire. They wish to present an image of strength and force. The Hebrew word "begged" has the same letters BG"D as the word for betrayal or deception..

Obviously, it can work in the reverse direction as well. Sometimes, the clothes do "make the man," in the sense that our clothes genuinely affect us, transform our behaviour and our mood. A business suit might give a person a genuine air of professionalism; a conductor's baton transforms an ordinary man into a maestro.

Is Aaron chosen as Kohen, and hence, naturally, he requires the appropriate clothing (as would appear from 28:1-4)? Is the clothing simply the uniform that Aharon must wear if he is to be Kohen Gadol or is it the priestly attire itself that, at some level, transforms Aaron into a Kohen Gadol (as would be implied by 29:5-9)?

How does it work with the Bigdei Kehuna? How do they function?

TWO VIEWS: OUTSIDE AND INSIDE.

I would like to offer two views that are in many respects, diametrically opposed to one another. Ponder the truths and virtues of each approach, and their weaknesses:

"Man is affected and transformed by means of his actions, and follows his thoughts and intentions. The agents of atonement must occupy his entire thinking with the Divine service. Hence, it is fitting that he wear special clothes, that any moment in which he will glance at his body, he will be immediately reminded and reawakened to before Whom he serves. This in the same manner as Tefillin; everyone is instructed to wear the Tefillin ...as a reminder of pure thoughts. And even though the Kohen wears Tefillin, because of the gravity of his

task he needs this additional reminder." (Sefer HaChinuch – Mosad Harav Kook - Mitzva 99)

For the Sefer Hachinuch, the Priestly Clothes are to stimulate the wearer to greater awareness, constant focus and cognisance of the immense task in which he is engaged. The clothes act as an ongoing reminder of the Kohen's task. However, everything is expressed here in general terms. The Chinuch fails to outline whether a particular garment might stimulate a particular spiritual disposition. Rather we might simply understand that the simple dignity of the Kohen's clothing, and the regal splendour of the High Priests garb remind the Kohen that he stands at all times, in service of God.

(The Chinuch's reference to Tefillin is in place here. Tefillin is placed as - see Shemot 13:9 - as "a sign on your arm and a memorial between your eyes." Many have commented that the Tefillin are close to ones heart and to ones thoughts (brain.) But the Bigdei Kehuna also mention – see ahead – the Choshen which is placed on the heart – 28:29 and head –28:38. This might provide a direct parallel!)

In contrast to this approach, the Malbim claims that there are SPECIFIC properties that should be associated with EACH of the garments:

"From an outside perspective, the garments that God instructed are clothing in the regular sense of the word, with detailed instructions for the craftsmen as to their creation.

But in truth, at a deeper level, these clothes teach us about the "inner garments" with which the Kohanim of God must clothe their souls, regarding ideas, character traits, fine disposition, which are the clothing of the soul. The (inner, spiritual) vestments were not put together by the craftsmen. God instructed Moshe to make these holy garments i.e. to teach (the Kohanim) the perfection of their inner self and their temperament in a manner that would bestow an aura of splendour and beauty to their inner spiritual personality." (Malbim on 28:2)

The Malbim is not interested in the expensive dyes, the elaborate weave, or the jewelled stones. This is all a façade. The real truth lies beneath the exterior; deeper. The Bigdei Kehuna do not create a general aura of awareness in the priest. Rather, every detail counts. Every thread, every weave is a lesson, a teaching, an expression of truth. These garments are almost a code, a spiritual agenda to be followed, a personal-spiritual roadmap, as opposed to impressively crafted regalia.

## PURPOSE CLAUSES

The Torah describes the specific garments and adds a purpose clause – an aim or objective or function – alongside the instructions for the particular garment at hand. Here are a few examples. Some would appear to be more mundane:

"And you shall make them linen breeches to cover the flesh of their nakedness." (28:42)

The purpose of the trousers of the Kohanim is a functional one. However, there are certain garments that have higher aspirations:

## The Ephod

12 And you shall put the two stones upon the shoulder-pieces of the ephod, to be stones of **memorial for the children of Israel**; and **AARON SHALL BEAR** their names before HaShem upon his two shoulders for a **memorial**.

## The Choshen Mishpat

29 And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goes in unto the holy place, **for a memorial before HaShem continually**. 30 And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; **and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goes in before HaShem**; and **AARON SHALL BEAR** the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before HaShem continually.

## The Tzitz

36 And you shall make a plate (Tzitz) of pure gold, and engrave upon it, like the engravings of a signet: HOLY TO HaShem...38 **And it shall be upon Aaron's forehead**, and AARON SHALL BEAR the iniquity committed in the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow, even in all their holy gifts; **and it shall be continually upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before HaShem**.

Now what is indicated here as to the function of these clothes? Let us note a few things. In these central garments, Aaron carries or "bears" something. Each time, the garment bears a new thing:

- Efad – the names of Israel
- Choshen – Israel's Judgement
- Tzitz – Israel's iniquity

The garment, acts as a "zikaron," a reminder before God. Somehow this seems to translate as a sense of drawing Israel to God's attention, so to speak. This "zikaron" or remembering in other places in Tanach – See Bereshit 8:1; 30:22, Shemot 2:24, Bamidbar 10:9 - indicates a sense of mercy or forgiveness before God. If this is true, then these clothes actually serve as a stimulus to God, to induce God's virtues of forgiveness and mercy, to evoke the awareness of Am Yisrael before God!

But why do these particular items of clothing stimulate this sort of remembrance, this response from God? Maybe this is linked to the fact that each of these vestments has a inscription, writing, engraved upon it:

- On the Choshen-Ephod<sup>2</sup>, it is the **names of the twelve Tribes of Israel**. (The Choshen and Ephod are really one linked garment.)
- On the Tzitz, the phrase "**Holy to God**" is engraved.

So the details DO matter. The names of Israel, the words induce a response from God.

To summarise, we have presented two approaches. The Chinuch who sees the Bigdei Kehuna as royal clothes, even spiritual clothes that will induce special thoughts in the mind of Aharon. However the Malbim feels that the clothes actually serve a function in relation to God. They affect God Himself! They themselves act as a sort of Avodat Hamikdash – Temple service.

## **TZITZ AND CHOSHEN**

Interestingly it is only with the Choshen and the Tzitz that writing and engraving is made in the priestly clothes, and hence these garments in particular have attracted attention. The distinction between these two garments has aroused the attention of Darshanim throughout the ages.

"The Titz is placed upon Aaron's forehead, corresponding to the centre of intelligence and wisdom.

The Choshen was on Aaron's heart, the centre of love and affection for Israel. All the names of the Tribes were engraved upon it, and the Torah calls it the Choshen Mishpat – the breastplate of Justice/Judgement – the judging of Bnei Yisrael was entrusted to the Choshen.

The Tzitz ruled questions of ritual law, the impure and the pure, obligations and prohibitions ... the Choshen would rule on very different questions: Shall we go to war or not? Do I protest against a government that has fallen short of the values of Israel or not?"

(Rav Soloveitchik – The bearers of the Tzitz and the Choshen. In Divrei Hagut VeHaaracha pg 191-2)

Here Rav Soloveitchik dwells upon the contrast between these two very different garments. They represent contrasting religious functions.

The Tzitz, pure gold, is dedicated to God. It is on the seat of the intellect, representing a theoretical approach to religion. The tzitz represents purity. But if we can view the Titz in its relationship to Torah, Rav Soloveitchik sees the Tzitz as the study of pure Torah in an almost theoretical manner. Detached from the realities of everyday living, hidden from the turbulence of the pressures of life, family, statehood, conflict, Torah remains pristine.

The Choshen is a contrast to all this. A weave of different colours, the Choshen contains twelve semi-precious stones, each with its unique texture and colour, its contours and grain. It represents variety, difference. And that is reflected in the engraving too. Each stone is engraved with a name of one of the Tribes of Israel. It is this garment that represents the Mishpat – the judgement – of the people. It is this garment that holds the collective identity of the people.

Two opposites: Theoretical Torah and applied Torah; The purity of a single intellect and the tensions and variety of twelve tribes; the brain versus the heart. All these tensions lie in the dichotomy between the Tzitz and Choshen.

The Ephod was placed upon the seat of emotion, not the seat of intellect. The Ephod represented the trials and tribulations of the nations of Judaism. It is, perhaps not a coincidence then, that Rashi (see verse 30) tells us the indeed the Choshen also contained an engraved plate with the name of God – the Shem HaMephurash. However this Divine name was hidden, the Urim VeTumim enveloped within the folds of the Choshen.

God's pure essence need to be viewed through the filter of the Ephod, of the heart, of the nation in all its multiplicity. Not only this but God's name must be filtered through twelve very different channels, through twelve tribes each with their special character, their temperament, their needs, their shortcomings.

The message of Judaism, the relationship with God has to be perceived, at times through the Tzitz: theory, purity, unadulterated by practical concerns, the ivory tower, the yeshiva, removed from life. But there is also the relationship with God that takes place in the marketplace, in the battlefield, in the stormy heart, and the tensions between rival tribes, brothers who have different interests and ideologies. The Torah, God, must be able to be applied not only on theory, but also in practice. Hence it is the King who summons the Ephod in order to communicate with the Almighty. The King who has the weight of government on his mind may consult with God through the Choshen, not through the Tzitz.

And so, Rav Soloveitchik views the Garments of the Keohein Gadol is deeply reflective of the inner ideas and truths of Judaism. Maybe we have reinforced the Malbim who suggests a depth of spiritual significance within every detail of the regalia.

However, let us not also ignore the Sefer Hachinuch. The Chinuch reminds us that we have a daily corollary to this: the Tefillin. They too are placed on the mind and on the heart. And in a "general" sense they simply remind us of Hashem, while at a "deeper", detailed level, we can appreciate the

minutiae and the depth that the details of the Mitzva offer. Maybe we always have a daily reminder of the truths of our faith!

Shabbat Shalom.

### **For further Study**

See 28:35, the description of the Me'il. This has some manner of "purpose" clause, but the passuk's meaning is difficult to decipher.

- Why does Aharon's "voice – kol" need to be heard/sounded, as he enters the "kodesh"? And how does this connect with the phrase "v'lo yamut?" Use the mepharshim.
- Maybe before that, note a linguistic parallel with Vayikra 16:2,13 maybe supporting the tradition that the Kohen Gadol could die in the Kodesh Kodashim on Yom Kippur. Is this the only possible explanation?

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<sup>1</sup> Shemot 28:2,40.

<sup>2</sup> The Ephod and Choshen Mishpat are, in the mind of many commentators, interconnected. After all, they both have the names of Israel inscribed upon them, the Ephod physically supports the Choshen, and in addition, they appear together sometimes in the order Choshen-Ephod and sometimes the reverse. There would seem to be an interconnection between them, despite the fact that they might each have a distinct identity.