



Yeshivat Ma'alot

Parashat Tetzaveh

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ישיבת מעלות

פרשת תצוה

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Freedom and Framework- The Inner Meaning of Clothing

This week's parasha, Parashat Tetzaveh, speaks in great detail about the clothing of the Kohen Gadol. The Torah says as follows¹: "And you shall make holy clothes for your brother Aharon, for glory and for splendor. And you shall speak to all the wise- hearted people with whom I have filled the spirit of knowledge, and they shall make Aharon's clothes to be holy and to serve before Me. And these are the clothes which you shall make: Choshen (breastplate), Efod (vest), Me'il (robe), Ktonet (tunic), Mitznefet (turban), and Avnet (sash)." Many of the commentators raise an apparent question. The Torah later on states that the Kohen Gadol has eight garments. If so, why did the Torah exclude the remaining two garments, the tzitz (golden head-plate) and the michnasa'im (pants)? Special note must be taken that the tzitz and the michnasa'im are worn at the two opposite ends of the Kohen Gadol- the tzitz on his head, and the michnasa'im from his waste down.

Clothing is the means by which a person outwardly portrays himself. All clothes have two functions. The first is to cover up one's body in such a way that he can present himself modestly to others. The second function is to reveal to others part of one's personality and essence. For example, when a soldier wears his uniform, he is revealing to others that he is part of the army and that his duty is to protect and to serve.

These two opposite aspects of clothing, to cover and to reveal, also exist in the bigdei kehuna, the priestly garments. On the one hand, they come to cover up the Kohen Gadol, yet they simultaneously expose his true essence to the world. The fact that the tzitz and the michnasa'im are not mentioned in the beginning of the parasha comes to show that they only have one purpose. The tzitz does not cover anything. Rather, its sole purpose is to display the message that is etched into it, "Kodesh L'Hashem", sanctified to Hashem, which is a testimony to the world about the holiness of the Kohen Gadol. The michnasa'im do not show outwardly expose anything (they were covered by the Ktonet and the Me'il). Their function is to cover the Kohen Gadol. Through the garments that are *not* mentioned at the beginning of the parasha, we learn what the true essence of clothes really is.

¹ Shemot 28, 2-4

The Ar"i Z"l uses the analogy of garments to explain how Hashem is found in this world. He writes² that in this world it is impossible to contemplate or internalize Hashem's infinite light; therefore Hashem displays Himself in this world as if He is wearing garments. For example, no one can stare directly at the sun, rather one must have some sort of visor between himself and the sun's rays. If Hashem's light was to shine in this world in its untouched form, the world would not know how to embrace it and there would be utter chaos. Rather it is necessary for Hashem's light to be compacted and to be displayed only through "garments". Only in this way is it possible for Hashem's light to radiate in this world.

What is true on the greater scale of the world is also true on the scale of the individual. There are people in the world who have great ideals and ideas that they want to spread. The only way that such people can take their lofty ideals and turn them into a way of life is by condensing them into a framework. These ideals need to fit into a reality of time, place, and the laws of nature. Many of these people feel that living within a framework means giving up on the essence of their ideals. They claim that one should aspire to live a lifestyle free of framework, not having to be responsible to specific norms and ways of life.

When looking at reality from a deeper perspective, it is clear that leading a life free of framework only brings chaos. Such a lifestyle does not make it possible for true spirituality to exist in this world. By "clothing" lofty ideals within frameworks that can be understood by everyday people, the world moves closer towards completion.

The bigdei kehuna teach that the kehuna was expressed in the world through specific outwardly garments and by precise and detailed service. So too, the most spiritually elevated ideals need a clear cut framework in order to be successfully understood in this world. By having such a framework, these great ideals are able to bring blessing to the world.

² Sha'ar Ma'amarei Rashb"i p. 107