

PARSHAS TETZAVEH

תשפ"ד

This parsha discusses the bigdei kehunoh and Aharon HaKohen. In Parshas Terumah we have the keilim of the Mishkon and the materials of the Mishkon itself.

The bigdei kehunoh are described as being made לטוב ולתפארת to be worn while doing the avodoh of the Mishkon. There is a concept being conveyed here that is relevant to all of us: when one is engaged in avodas Hashem, it is improper to be wearing torn clothes or shabby or dirty clothes. The halacha is that bigdei kehunoh that do not fit properly or are soiled are invalid to wear during the avodoh. When Klal Yisroel see the kohanim serving in the Mishkon with the bigdei kehunoh, it was supposed to impress upon them that when you represent Hashem, you need to command respect and carry yourself with dignity.

It goes on various levels. Aharon, who was the kohen godol, had an even higher standard to look respectable and dignified. It was not only in his elevated gold-laced clothing but his overall appearance had to be one step above a kohen hedyot. His hair had to be cut once a week instead of once a month. This was not for the personal glorification of the kohen godol. It was because he represented Hashem to a greater extent than the kohen hedyot. He had greater responsibility.

There are varying levels of people who represent Hashem to the world – to a greater or lesser degree. There is a very important halacha brought by the Rambam in Hilchos De'os. Just as a person who learns Torah is distinguished by his knowledge from the masses, he is also distinguished by his middos from the masses. There is an expectation that learning Torah lishmoh will change the personality of the person who is learning and he will become elevated – as the braisoh in Ovos says. This elevation of a talmid chochom has to be reflected in all his actions, his appearance, and his dealings with people. They have to be on an extremely high standard. It has to be readily apparent to everyone who sees him that the Torah has made him an elevated human being.

It is funny that while the Israeli army is fighting an enemy that doesn't feel bound or limited by any of the international rules designed to keep war humane and civilized, Israel is constantly criticized the minute there is the slightest deviation from those rules that Hamas is always flaunting. But the truth is that all Jews represent Hashem to the world whether we like it or not – no matter what level we are on – and we are going to be judged by a higher standard than the rest of the world. That is the reality.

Similarly, within Klal Yisroel, a ben Torah who is learning Torah has to project an image of respect and dignity to the rest of Klal Yisroel. They should look at him and say this is someone whom the Torah has made an impact on and has elevated. People should want to learn Torah and be associated with talmidei chachomim because of the behavior they see.

The Rambam gives all sorts of specific examples of daily behavior – eating, drinking, etc. He should not get drunk. It is a chillul Hashem for yeshiva bochurim to get drunk. Besides for being an issur gomur. It makes him a sinner, he becomes low, and he makes the Torah look disgraceful and it makes you forget your learning. The Rambam is exceedingly clear on this. He doesn't have a heter for making a chillul Hashem on Purim.

A talmid chochom has to be incredibly honest, and has to speak softly and gently – not scream and yell like an animal. He cannot deceive

people.

Emes is a middoh. We live in a world where sheker is so common and accepted in our frum society that truly honest people are not easy to come by. Learning Torah demands one live with absolute honesty.

The Rambam adds that a talmid chochom's clothing needs to be distinguished and dignified. In the yeshivos in Europe, there was an extreme emphasis on bochurim looking presentable and dignified in order to elevate the status of Torah in the eyes of the public. But somehow this concept has become distorted. There is no excuse to look disheveled and sloppy and say this is a "yeshivish look".

The Rambam says talmidei chachomim should not wear fragrances.

The message is that when you represent Hashem to the world, you need to act in a way that commands respect. We learn this from the kohanim and the kohen godol. When a ben Torah disrespects himself by his appearance or behavior, he makes a chillul Hashem.

When a person approaches the time in his life to take limud Torah seriously, he needs to be aware that the Torah is supposed to change him.

Aharon HaKohen was the leader who represented Hashem to Klal Yisroel. Often, this position goes to people's heads. People become consumed by kovod. In order to combat this tendency, the kohen godol wore the names of the shevotim engraved on the precious stones placed upon his heart. This meant his honor brought with it awesome responsibility to worry about and constantly have the needs of Klal Yisroel on his mind.

The Jewish king has the same situation. He is the leader of the Jewish people and there are many halachos about this. All Jews have to give extreme honor to the king, and interestingly, the king cannot waive his right to receive honor. Why not? The Maharam Mi'Rutenberg gives a beautiful explanation for this halacha. Hashem bestows a part of His kingship to human kings. The human king represents Hashem's kingship in the world. The Rambam writes, to the extent the Torah gives the Jewish king kovod, to that same extent, the king must humble himself. It is a paradox. He must realize the honor that he is getting isn't his own, but it is Hashem's honor given to His human representatives. So the king has no right to waive this honor.

The Torah says explicitly that a king is not allowed to feel superior to any other Jew. He has to give respect to the smallest, most insignificant Jew. He is in the service of Klal Yisroel – just like Moshe Rabbeinu, who had the din of a melech, and he was the humblest of human beings.

A king can't have too many wives because the Torah is concerned about the state of his heart. He has to maintain a sensitivity and a caring feeling for every individual Jew. He has to constantly learn Torah to remind himself that he is a servant of the people and he has to worry for them and not let all the honor he is getting go to his head.

So while it is true that the Jews are obligated to give extreme honor to a king and a kohen godol, in return, they have to have to keep the needs and problems of Klal Yisroel weighing down on their minds always. This honor comes with grave responsibilities. This is why Aharon has the names of the shevotim on his heart.

There is another idea represented in the clothing of the kohen godol. There were bells sewn into the hem of the me'il, which made noise to announce the approaching of the kohen godol when he walked in

the Azoroh. The people had to know he was there doing the avodoh. There was one time a year where Aharon HaKohen didn't wear these bells: when he wore the bigdei lovon and took off the bigdei zohov when he went into the Kodesh haKodoshim. No-one is allowed to see him or even hear him during the most intense avodas haMikdosh of the year. He is the holiest person, going into the holiest place, at the holiest time of the year, to effect the kapporoh for all of Klal Yisroel. Why is he alone?

The same was true by the akeidoh. Avrohom and Yitzchok were accompanied by Eliezer and Yishmoel up to a certain point. Then they were left behind and Avrohom and Yitzchok went up to the mountain alone. No-one was able to see the akeidoh.

The same is true of Yaakov. The high point of Yaakov Ovinu's life, when he was triumphant over the Sar of Eisov, happened in the total darkness of night when no-one was watching.

There are times where you make fateful, life-altering decisions or

actions, and usually they happen between you and Hashem alone. No-one else is there, no-one is watching, no-one will read about it or know about it afterward.

Today there is an obsession with media. Everything we say and do has to be made public in order to give it significance. But there were no reporters or journalists at the foot of Har HaMoriah rushing at Avrohom and Yitzchok to ask how they felt at that moment when the knife was right at Yitzchok's neck. No reporter is asking the kohen godol what his emotions were when he went into the Kodesh haKodoshim. Those moments are between them and Hashem.

In life generally, a person's sincerity is tested when there is no audience and it's just him and Hashem.

There will be nisyonos that everyone will go through in life, and you will be pushed to the extreme. The decisions you make at those private times when no-one else is watching, really determine the path of growth you will take and ultimately who you become.