

INNER IS THE NEW OUTER

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Strip Aharon of his vestments and dress Elazar his son in them. Aharon shall be gathered in and die there.^[2]

As Moshe stripped each garment from Aharon, teach Chazal,^[3] he dressed Elazar with it. They observed that this took a miracle to accomplish, because the first garments that Moshe removed from Aharon were the outermost ones. If he immediately clad Elazar with them, then the next layer he took from Aharon had to find their way past the outer garments that had been already placed upon Elazar! This is contrary to the laws of Nature – which Hashem is loath to suprend without a compelling reason. What was the point of this *ness*?

Let's go back to the place where we first encounter the special *bigdei kehunah*. "You shall make vestments of sanctity for Aharon your brother, **לכבוד ולתפארת** / for honor and splendor."^[4] I believe that the two words are anything but synonymous. *Kavod* refers to the reaction one receives from others for something of value that he has done; *tifferes* connotes the elevation that one receives directly from the activity, and that may lead to enhanced honor in its wake. (Think of the mishnah in Avos:^[5] [The proper path a person should chose is the one that] "brings *tifferes* to the one who does it, and *tifferes* to him from other people.")

We can illustrate the difference. We honor a *talmid chacham* by rising in his presence. This honor doesn't change its recipient. It is offered only occasionally, when the situation calls for it. Through it, we acknowledge whatever Torah he has already mastered. It does nothing to increase his wisdom. Different is some honorable garb that always accompanies some person. When he sees himself constantly adorned by a mark of distinction, he reminds himself of the challenges and expectations of his rank. Through this added vigilance, he helps propel himself to even greater accomplishment.

Both of these types of honorable garb were given to Aharon. He donned most of the *bigdei kehunah* only when performing the actual *avodah*. Any spiritual boost from them would have paled in comparison to what he received from his actual performance of the *avodah*. These *begadim*, then, served to recognize the special rank to which he was appointed and had already achieved, but were not instrumental in further *aliyah*.

One of the vestments, however, remained upon him always. Because the Torah specifies that the

tzitz was to remain on his forehead *tamid* / always,^[6] it was appropriate for the *kohen gadol* to wear it at all times, even when not performing the *avodah*.^[7] By riveting his attention upon his holy tasks, the *tzitz* helped the *kohen* attain singular concentration and focus.

These two types of *begadim*, then, illustrate the difference between *kavod* and *tifferes*. Most of them honored who he was or what he was doing; the *tzitz* helped the *kohen* become even greater.

We can consider an altogether different kind of garment of honor. The gemara^[8] asks, "Why are the *talmidei chachamim* in Bavel distinctive?" and answers, "Because they are not *bnei Torah*." The *talmidei chachamim* of Bavel certainly were *bnei Torah*! The gemara means that their fellow citizens were not. Because so few were, the *talmidei chachamim* were forced to adopt distinctive garments, to increase their stature in the eyes of those who otherwise would undervalue their achievement. The accoutrements of the office of *talmid chacham* helped him artificially achieve the stature that he should naturally have had in the eyes of the rest of the people.

This third kind of honor associated with special garments most certainly did not apply to Aharon, who was so loved and respected that special dress could not conceivably add to his appreciation by others. The *kehunah*, however, were not given to Aharon alone. His role was meant to continue into the future. It was to be "an eternal law,"^[9] and would service people in much weaker generations.

Thus, Chazal say, "When their *begadim* are upon them, their *kehunah* is upon them."^[10] They mean that there would be times in the future when a key function of the special *begadim* would be to artificially create a sense of awe and respect for the *kohen*.

This had profound impact upon Moshe. He understood Hashem's instruction about the future all too well. HKBH was working to ensure that Aharon's mission would impact future generations through his descendents. Hashem had already created a function for the *bigdei kehunah* that would be important only in the distant future. Moshe realized that Hashem had made no such provision for his own children. His descendents, apparently, were not to play key roles in the transmission of Torah, which was the most important part of his life's work.

Chazal point to this realization when they say that Hashem's command to Moshe to "draw Aharon near"^[11] "disconcerted" him.^[12] Moshe was not displeased with the honor accorded his brother. Rather, he understood from the provision for the future effectiveness of the *bigdei kehunah* that there was no parallel treatment planned for his own descendents.

Hashem's response to Moshe – "Torah was mine, and I gave it to you!" – must be understood in the same vein. His role as receiver of the Torah and its teacher was so unique that the notion of it continuing through his descendents was irrelevant. The Torah would always be Moshe's Torah. His death would not change his role and contribution. Having brought it down from Sinai and implanted it in the Jewish nation, it was secure for the future.

The Torah hints elsewhere that the *bigdei kehunah* were designed to further elevate the *kohen*, not just honor his role. "The *kohen*...who has been inaugurated to don the vestments shall not leave his head unshorn and shall not tear his garments."^[13] In other words, the special garments are meant to protect and preserve his purity. He should respond to their call. He should see to it that when the time comes for him to return them, he shall not have sullied them. His head shall not have become an unkempt place, preoccupied with nonsense or worse. The garments – representing Man's character traits – shall not show tears in their fabric. His personality should not show the irregularities of character flaws.

We are now ready to understand the midrash with which we began. Aharon not only lived the message of the *begadim*, he went one-up on it. Not only were the garments he removed when he died free of any stains and imperfections, he improved and elevated them during his lifetime. He returned them with more holiness than he first received them.

Every sequence of mitzvah events is governed by the rule of *maalin ba-kodesh* – we move from the less holy to the more holy. The garments that the *kohen* put on first were not as holy as the outer ones that he put on after. But this relationship reversed itself in the case of Aharon. By the time he died, he had invested the *begadim* with *kedushah* that they had lacked previously. The purity with which he performed the *avodah* assured this. *Kedushah* flowed from him to the garments, not the reverse route. This meant that the *begadim* closer to his body were elevated even more than those further removed from him. Thus, when his outer garments were removed and immediately transferred to Elazar, they assumed the role of inner garments, and were donned first. Aharon's inner garments – now holier than the others! – were treated as if they were the usually-holier outer garments, donned later, following the rule of *maalin ba-kodesh*. Inner had become the new outer.

It did take a miracle to have Elazar dressed with the outer garments before donning the inner ones. But it was a justified miracle, meant to demonstrate to the nation the ability of Man to create holiness and elevate what he touches.

1. Based on HaMedrash V'HaMaaseh, Chukas, by R. Yechezkel Libshitz zt"l.
2. Bamidbar 20:26.
3. Sifra, Tzav #170.
4. Shemos 28:2.
5. Avos 2:1.
6. Shemos 28:38.
7. Tosafos Yoma 69A s.v. *bigdei*, according to one of his approaches.
8. Shabbos 145B.
9. Shemos 28:43.
10. Sanhedrin 83B.

11. Shemos 28:3
12. Shemos Rabbah 37:4
13. Vaykira 21:10