

# ENCLOTHED IN MYSTERY

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

It is interesting that the **eighth** parsha of Shemos should be a parsha that begins talking about the production of the shemen zais-olive oil-used in the menorah. After all, Chanukah, a holiday of **eight** days is celebrated by lighting our menorahs filled with shemen zais! Furthermore, the Kohen Gadol wore **eight** different types of clothing, and it was through the kohanim that the miracle of Chanukah occurred. And if you count from the beginning of the Torah, then Tetzaveh is the **twentieth** parsha, and the Talmud teaches that a menorah can't be placed higher than 20 amos (1 amah = 1.5 feet). Not just that, but the **thirty-six** parsha in the Torah is Parashas BeHa'alosecha, which begins with the mitzvah to light the menorah as well, and which the Ramban says is a direct allusion to Chanukah. We light a total of **thirty-six** candles over the course of **eight** days! Enough with numbers for now ...

This parsha is concerned primarily with the clothing of the Kohanim, and their induction into the service of G-d. In Parashas Yisro, we already discussed an aspect of the essence of what it means to be a kohen of the Jewish people, and its wider application to the entire nation of Yisroel, who is called, "A Nation of Priests." I want to further explore the role of the Kohen within the mission of the entire Jewish nation, and why the clothing he wears makes such a difference.

Modern psychology has yet to acknowledge what to every believing Jew is a fundamental of daily life: humans have souls. This cannot be proved empirically, because the soul is beyond the grasp of the microscope and computer analysis. It is not physical, and therefore, it cannot be tracked or traced. Belief in the soul is a matter of faith, and the only logical answer to the mystery of life. It is the invisible source (battery pack, if you will) of life that leaves as secretly as it comes.

However, the soul itself is no mystery to the Jewish mystic, or Kabbalist, who understands not just its implicit existence, but even its make-up and how it functions. In the classic philosophical work by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto ("Ramchal"), The Way of G-d, five parts of the soul are identified (see page 181). They are, Nefesh, Ruach, Neshama, Chia, and Yechida. However, for all intents and purposes, the last two are so spiritual that we just about ignore them for now, and deal only with the first three, which in short are referred to by their acrostic, NeRuN.

The idea is, the holier and more spiritual the level of soul, the more essential it is (i.e., the closer to G-d it is, and therefore more internal). If you imagine your soul to be a like an onion, which consists of layer upon layer of onion, then, your Neshama would be more toward the inside, and the Nefesh would be the most external part. In fact, the Neshama is called the neshama of the neshama, or, the

soul of the soul. In a sense, the nefesh is the "clothing" for the more inner levels of soul.

This hierarchy of three souls is a paradigm for all sets of three in Judaism. However, the one that concerns us now is the set of three referred to as, Kohen, Levi, and Yisroel. By comparison, the Kohen represents the Neshama, Levi, the level of soul called Ruach, and Yisroel, the Nefesh.

Even within the Jewish camp set-up in the desert, the outer "layer" was for the majority of the Jewish population referred to as Yisroel, within which was Machane Levia, or the Levitical Camp, which surrounded the Mishkan, or Tabernacle, within which only the Kohanim operated. But, like the souls themselves, this comparison only serves to make each level even more interdependent, and to better define the roles of each within a unified and synergetic system.

According to the rabbis, the Neshama is considered the "breath of G-d," which is sent to us via the level called Ruach, into our bodies in order to create the reality of Nefesh. It is analogous to a glassblower who blows down a tube to fill the molten glass at the end with air to become a container. The Neshama is the "breath" of G-d, the Ruach is the "tube" through which the air is funneled, and the molten glass is our body in which the Nefesh will reside. This is what it said in Bereishis: "And G-d breathed a living soul into the man, and he became a living spirit."

If we understand the role of the Neshama, then we can also understand the role of the Kohen, is compared to the Neshama.

The role of the Neshama is to act as a spiritual "interface" between G-d and man. It is the beginning of the "pipe" through which G-d's blessing passes on the way down to its ultimate recipient: the Nefesh, which resides in the body. So too do the kohanim act as such a transitional point between G-d and the rest of the Jewish nation (evident also from their mitzvah to bless the entire nation), to make possible the flow of G-d's blessing down to the "body" of the nation referred to as Yisroel. This is why the demands on the Kohanim were so great, and why they are treated in a special manner.

This is also why the clothing of the Kohen Gadol was imbued with such meaning, as the Talmud points out (Zevachim 88b). Each piece of clothing played a role in atoning for the Jewish people, as follows:

Kesonos (Inner Garments): against murder

Michnasayim (Pants): against illicit relationships

Miznefes (Turban): against haughtiness

Avneit (Belt): against illicit thoughts

Choshen (Breastplate): against incorrect judgments in law

Eiphod (Shoulder Pieces): against idol worship

Me'il (Robe): against loshon hora (true, but derogatory speech about others spoken in public)

Ketores (Incense): against loshon hora (true, but derogatory speech about others spoken in private)

So, though it is true that this parsha seems to be quite technical, and that it deals with laws that

seem relevant only to a small portion of the Jewish nation, and even for them these laws cannot be observed today, at least we can appreciate the important role the kohanim played on behalf of the welfare of the entire Jewish nation. It can help us to develop an appreciation of what we lack when we live without the Temple, and are unable to properly perform the Temple service.

But G-d has a way of compensating for what we can't do in the physical world. As the Talmud points out (Brochos 6a): one who is set upon doing the mitzvah and is held back from completing it due to circumstances beyond his control, is looked upon as one who actually did the act! In fact, this is what the Chanukah menorah and olive oil are supposed to remind us of each year.

The kohanim of that era had led the battle against the Greek-Syrian army, and after being successful against the odds, they ran straight back to the Temple to rekindle the menorah that was supposed to burn continuously. However, they could only find one pure vial of oil fitting to be used in the Temple menorah, which they promptly lit. They then set about the task of producing more pure oil, which took eight days to do. The rest is history, and the message was monumental: You do everything you can to fulfill My will in the physical world, and I will take care of seeing that it gets down in the spiritual world.

So, we may not have the Temple, the clothing of the kohanim, and the chance to actually perform the Temple service, but that should not stop us from longing for it, and trying to compensate for the lack of it. In this merit, perhaps we will become the generation to merit to see the return of the third and final Temple, and the blessings it will bring.

Have a great Shabbos  
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