

DIVINE DISTINCTION

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

The expression, "clothing makes the man," suggests superficiality in the way we view each other and ourselves. It implies that we attach greater significance to the illusion of appearance than the substance of character and soul.

On the one hand, our social reality dictates that appearance is of significance. First impressions aside, a clean and well-groomed individual is more pleasant and impressive to be around than someone slovenly and unkempt. On the other hand, everyone knows not to judge a book by its cover.

Yet, this week's Parsha and the Torah in general place a significant value on the otherwise superficiality of clothing and appearance. Among the noted acts of G-d's Chesed (kindness) is the clothing He fashioned for Adam and Chava (Eve) after expelling them from Gan Eden (Paradise). The sensitive and dignified characters of Shem and Yefes (sons of Noach) were revealed when they covered up their Father in the aftermath of Cham's shameful act. Yoseph was designated as apart and gifted among the sons of Yakov by virtue of his multicolored coat. Yoseph designated Binyamin as apart and different when he presented him with five changes of royal garments. Finally, in this week's Parsha the Torah presents the detailed description of the priestly vestments worn by the Kohain Gadol (High Priest) and the lesser Kohanim. Why does the Torah place such importance on the external? If anything, given the illusionary and transient qualities of external appearances we might have expected the Torah to diminish the significance of clothing rather than extend it.

In previous issues of the Rabbi's Notebook we have discussed the importance of clothing as a correction for Adam and Chava having eaten from the Tree of The Knowledge Of Good and Evil. So long as they listened to the word of G-d the human creature was apart and distinct from all other creatures by virtue of his internal sanctity, devotion, and willful subjugation to G-d. There was no reason for clothing. Humans were distinct because G-d had given them the ability to willfully serve Him. As soon as humans gave in to their natural and animalistic desires for "that which was good for eating and a delight to the eye" they reduced themselves to the level of animals by doing what they wished to do rather than that which G-d had commanded. Therefore, they became no different than any other of G-d's creatures. Therefore, G-d imposed on the humans an external means of distinguishing themselves from the rest of creation. Clothing became the external manifestation of what had otherwise been the internal dignity of true royalty.

This Shabbos I would like to focus on the separation value of clothes as it relates to the Kohain

Gadol, Kohanim, and Moshe Rabbeinu.

The clothing described in this week's Parsha set Aharon and his sons apart from the rest of the Jewish people. Not only were the clothing symbolic of devotion, repentance, and absolute subjugation to the word of G-d, it also served to identify them as being Temple functionaries. For whom was that distinction necessary? What would have been missing from the priestly service in the Temple and the service to the people if the Kohanim had dressed like everyone else except where utility demanded innovation? (aprons etc.)

The reason for the external differences was because "clothing makes the man," - for the sake of the man and the sake of the people. Imagine what it would be like if police officers dressed as undercover agents. Would they be more or less effective in maintaining the safety norms of our society? Granted, they might catch more criminals in the act because the criminals would not know that they were under surveillance; however, at the same time we would lose the deterrent value of seeing that distinctive blue outfit or police vehicle. I personally think that without the identifying symbols of law enforcement our safety would be negatively compromised. That is but one example of why the priestly garments were important for the sake of the people.

Equally important is the impact of the 'uniform' on the man himself. A police officer dressed in distinctive blues knows that the public is looking and the public has expectations. It acts as a deterrent and a motivation. It deters the negative and it motivates the positive; likewise, the priestly garments truly made the man. Draped in the vestments of service, the Kohain knew that he was chosen from among the rest. Dressed in the majesty of bejeweled embroidery and the finest materials, the Kohain Gadol knew that he had been chosen to serve the chosen by having been chosen as the very best. It was as much for his sake as it was for theirs.

Moshe was the exception. The distinction of Moshe was not as much in his appearance as it was in the manner of his being. He will be described as the most humble and trusted of G-d's house. He will descend from Mount Sinai carrying the Stone Tablets he had fashioned, the forgiveness he had fought for, and with a discernable radiance unique to him and him alone. Moshe dressed simply. His garments did not assign him any greater distinction than simple protection and modesty; nevertheless, all who saw him knew that he was not like them, that he was different.

From the very beginning, G-d elevated the importance of clothing so that they draped humanity in divine dignity. The Jewish people, His chosen nation, would be clothed in even greater significance and distinction. The manner of their dress would proclaim their chosenness. Tefilin (phylacteries), Tzitzis (fringes), not wearing Shatnez (mixture of wool and linen), are the more obvious trappings of that distinctiveness. Certainly, modesty and Tzniut (modesty in dress) are the most important constants of divine dignity that apply equally to men and women.

In the aftermath of the Golden Calf G-d withdrew from within the people. He commanded the construction of a sanctuary wherein which divine dignity would be reflected in priestly behavior. The

nation would stand outside the structure of the Mishkan and observe the on goings of devotion and holiness. In a limited capacity they would be invited into G-d's sanctuary. Beyond that they would observe the Kohanim and learn from their chosenness.

The other nations would also be observers, but at an even greater distance. Using the model of the Mishkan, the Kohain Gadol functioned alone within the inner sanctity of the Holy of Holies. The rest of the world was consigned to the bleachers. The Kohanim functioned as a chosen group within the structure of the Kodesh ? Holy with the rest of th

Our job is to embrace the clothing that makes the man. Our job is to embrace the differences that set us apart and dress us in vestments of royalty. Our job is to learn the lesson of separation and distinction. Our job is to wear the uniform that radiates sanctity. Our job is to gaze upon the veiled radiance of Moshe and know that the clothing we wear is only as significant as the people we are.

This week, in addition to the regular Parsha, we read Parshas Zachor. Parshas Zachor is the 2nd of the four special Shabbosim preceding Pesach when additional portions are read from the Torah. The first special Shabbos was Parshas Shekalim. This week we read Zachor, and in a few weeks we will read Parah and Chodesh. There are set rules which determine when each of these additional Parshios is to be read. Parshas Zachor is always read on the Shabbos before Purim.

On Parshas Zachor, we read the additional Parsha found in Divarim, 25:17. As a nation, we were commanded to destroy the nation of Amalek. This nation came into existence at the same time as we did. Eisav's son Elifaz had a son Amalek. Eisav and Elifaz's legacy to Amalek was an undying hatred against the children of Yakov.

At the time of the exodus from Egypt, Amalek traveled hundreds of miles to ambush the newly freed nation in the hope of destroying them. We, as a nation, did not pose any threat to their sovereignty. They lived to the east of Canaan and were not among the Seven Nations occupying Eretz Yisroel. Nevertheless, their irrational hatred against Hashem and us compelled them to attack a harmless and seemingly defenseless nation. In the aftermath of their attack we were commanded to always remember the evil that is Amalek. It is the reading of this Parsha that is the fulfillment of this Biblical commandment. This mitzvah, according to most authorities, is not restricted by time and must be fulfilled by men and woman.

The Rabbi's selected the Shabbos before Purim for the fulfillment of this Mitzvah because Haman was a direct descendent of Amalek, and Mordecai was a direct descendent of King Saul. The entire story of Purim is directly linked to this Mitzvah and the missed opportunity of King Saul that we read about in the Haftorah.

Haftorah Zachor - Shmuel I - 15:2

This week's Haftorah takes place 2,873 years ago. In the year 2883 - 878 b.c.e. King Shaul was sent

by G-d to destroy the nation of Amalek. Agag was their king, and it was a singular moment in history when every member of Amalek was in one place at the same time. Shaul, as per Shmuel Hanavi's instructions, was successful in destroying Amalek. However, as the Haftorah clearly states, Shaul had mercy and allowed the king, Agag, to remain alive, as well as the captured cattle. The commentaries state that in the interim, Agag was able to impregnate a maidservant, from which the nation of Amalek would survive. Hashem told Shmuel that Shaul's neglect of His command to totally destroy Amalek must result in Shaul losing the right to be king. Despite Shmuel's prayers for mercy, Hashem didn't relent, and Shmuel went to tell Shaul of G-d's punishment.

The connection to Purim is well documented. Haman is called, "the Agagi". He was a direct descendent of Agag. In ascertaining Hashem's mercy and justice, we are forced to acknowledge our limited understanding. The notion of killing men woman and children is thankfully foreign and abhorrent to us. Nevertheless, Shaul was commanded to eradicate the entire nation.

The Haftorah identifies Shaul's sin in not fulfilling G-d's commandment as misplaced mercy. Had he known that, 521 years later, his merciful act would result in the potential extermination of the entire Jewish people, Shaul would not have had mercy on Agag and the cattle. It is the responsibility of a king to think beyond the immediate and do what has to be done to guarantee the future of his nation. Being that no single human can ever guarantee the future, he has no choice but to listen to Hashem's commandments and do as he is told. That insures the future.

The message of Purim is the story of our Haftorah. Hashem works His miracles through the noSubjectRabbi's Notebook-Parsha.ems rmal passage of time. Actions done today set in motion ripples in time that radiate far into the future.

May today's celebration of Purim set in motion the redemption of tomorrow!

Rabbi's Purim Notes

1. The Purim period begins with the Four Parshios: Shekalim, Zachor, Parah & Chodesh. This Shabbos is Zachor. All men and women should hear Zachor read from the Torah.
2. Taanis Esther usually begins the morning of the day before Purim and ends after the Megilah reading. This year the Fast of Esther was Thursday March 4. Exemptions to fasting must be discussed with one of the Rabbis.
3. On Purim, Al Hanisim is added to the Amidah and Benching.

The Four Mitzvos of Purim

1. Reading of the Megilah: Men, women, and children who can listen and not disturb, must hear the Megilah being read twice: once on the night of Purim (3/6) and once during Purim day (3/7).
2. Mishloach Manos: Each adult should deliver at least one Mishloach Manos. It should consist of two different foods requiring no further preparation for eating and must be delivered on Purim

day.

3. Matonos L'Evyonim: Money or food must be given on Purim to at least two recipients. Tzedaka can be given to the Rabbis in advance of Purim for delivery on Purim.
4. Seudas Purim: A festive meal must be eaten during the day of Purim (before sunset). Even if it continues into the night Al Hanisim should be recited in Benching.

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