

## **Parshat Tetzaveh (תשפ"א): Be a Mentch First**

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וַעֲשֵׂה לָהֶם מְכַנְסֵי־כַד לְכַסּוֹת בְּשָׂר עַרְוָהּ מִמִּתְנַנִּים וְעַד־יִרְכָּבִים יִהְיוּ: וְהָיוּ עַל־אֶהָרָן וְעַל־בָּנָיו בְּבָאֵם | אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד  
אוּ בְגָשְׁתָּם אֶל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְשֵׁרֵת בְּקֹדֶשׁ וְלֹא־יִשָּׂאוּ עוֹן וּמָתוּ חֲקַת עוֹלָם לֹא וּלְזָרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו (תצוה כח: מב-מג).

And make for them breeches made from linen to cover the flesh of their nakedness ... when they go into the *Ohel Moed* to do service (Shemot 28:42-43).

These are the posukim about the *Bigdei Kehuna* -- the clothing that the Kohen and the Kohen Gadol have to wear. Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch stresses that the clothing that the Kohanim wear is not simply to be external adornments worn to merely affect the eyes of the onlookers; instead, it also has a message and a meaning for the wearer himself. The *Bigdei Kahuna* are divided into two groups of four -- there are four garments worn by the regular Kohen, and four additional garments that are worn by the Kohen Gadol. The *michnasaiim*, the breeches, are in a group of their own. The Netziv writes *מכנסים המה פחותים ממעלת שארי ב"כ* that these breeches are the least *kadosh* of all of the clothing that the Kohen and the Kohen Gadol wear. Furthermore, the *michnasaiim* must be worn by the Kohen before he enters into the Ohel Moed sanctuary, whereas the rest of the *bigadiim* are only donned once the Kohen enters the Ohel Moed. These *bigadiim* achieve a sense of *kedusha* while the Kohen wears them in the Beit Hamikdash.

Rav Hirsch writes that the Kohanim wear these breeches not because they are Kohanim; rather, they wear them out of general human decency. However, the other garments of the Kohen are worn to retain the Kohanim's special *kedusha* and Priestly-meaning. The importance of what the Kohen wears before he walks into the Beit Hamikdash can be traced back to Adam and Chava eating from the Eitz Ha'daat, and then realizing that they were unclothed; covering one's loins is the first realization and distinction that we are different from animals who run around naked.

In the Beit Hamikdash there are two levels of *kedusha* -- that of the Kohen, a nominal level for one who works in the Beit Hamikdash's Ohel Moed. In his work, the Kohen has a sense of *kedusha*, and it is to this *kedusha* the Kohen Gadol adds four more garments, or eight total garments, in order to reach an even greater level of *kedusha*: he is a Kohen Gadol. It is important to understand that the very first garment, the *michnasaiim*, which need to be worn well before the Kohen Gadol dons any garment of *kedusha* that will be used in the *avodah* of the Ohel Moed, are a statement! The *michnasaiim* teach us that before you go on to achieve any level of *kedusha*, you must first be a mentch.

An expression is used: לעולם יהא אדם - always be a mentch, that is the first and most important thing. One of the Talmidim at the yeshiva shared with me a givaldik vort that he heard in his family: Talmud Torah overcomes every *middah ra'ah*. Talmud Torah is there to help you overcome all of the evil traits, except for one trait: the middah of *geiva*. In order for a person to achieve a level of *kedusha*, he must not only want to achieve *kedusha*, but must also want to build upon it in a similar way to the Kohen Gadol who takes the regular Kohen's great level of *kedusha*, and elevates it to be a Kohen Gadol. This is the first step toward not being like an animal; one must be a mentch. *Halevai* that us individuals should want to achieve and function with a sense of *kedusha* in our everyday lives and daily encounters! This is especially true for those of us that find ourselves in leadership positions, whether it be religiously, politically, socially, economically. Whatever it might be -- *michnasaiim*. First be a mentch, לעולם יהא אדם. With that attitude it will be a bracha for yourself, for your community, and for Klal Yisrael. Amen!