

## Parenting from the Parsha- Parshat Tetzave/Purim- - Outer Appearances and Inner Beauty

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The juxtaposition of Parshat Tetzave to the Chag of Purim has long fascinated me. More specifically, I find puzzling the conflicting messages that seem to emerge from each one of these sources.

A global theme that emerges from the Torah readings at this time of the year is the significance of outer appearances. In the parshiot of Teruma and Tetzave, the Torah describes the elegance and beauty of the Mishkan and garments of the Kohen Gadol in painstaking detail, as it outlines the plans for their creation. The text then devotes another two full parshiot, Vayakhel and Pikudei, to the creation of these entities. In Parshat Tetzave, specifically, the Torah outlines the tremendous outlay of time and money to be spent on the creation of sophisticated and elegant clothing for the Kohen Gadol - as the Kohen needed to wear clothing that were "לכבוד ולתפארת", "for glory and splendor"- properly representative of his important stature. The Rambam adds that these 8 garments not only had to be created exactly as commanded, they also needed to be "new and beautiful...if they are ragged, dirty, too long or too short...the service performed is null and void". Clearly the intended goal was for the Kohen Gadol to look regal and majestic- as only then would he be fit to represent the Jewish nation in his service in the Beit Hamikdash.

Emerging from these parshiot is the clear lesson that we must be deliberate about the way we dress and present ourselves- and that our dress and manner should appropriately reflect our life role and position. The Gemara in Shabbos 114 accordingly states that a Talmid Chacham is prohibited from wearing clothes that are patched or stained, as it is unbecoming someone of his stature. Our outer appearance, our tradition teaches, is of great importance.

Strangely, however, a seemingly opposite message emerges from the Chag of Purim. We are all familiar with the special custom of dressing up or wearing masks on Purim. While numerous reasons are offered for this custom, one of the more prominent explanations is that on Purim we cover our outer appearance in order to shift the attention to our inner selves, to who we really are. Purim is a day where we focus on our *pnimiyut*, our inner qualities, rather than on outer superficialities. Some authorities explain that the Purim Megillah is called מגילת אסתר because, on Purim, we try to be מגלה ההסתר, "to reveal the hiddenness", on many levels at once. On one level, we reveal the hand of G-d in a story where He does not appear and thereby reveal His in our own lives. On another level, we reveal the hidden part of ourselves, and the depth of our true nature.

How strange, therefore, that Purim, a day when we turn the focus away from our external selves in order to highlight our internal selves, should so often coincide with the parsha of Tetzave, the parsha that most clearly highlights the importance of dress, appearance, and external features. Is this pairing just a coincidence, or might there be a meaningful message to be learned?

It seems to me that there is a profound message to be learned from the juxtaposition of Tetzave and Purim- a critical balance that emerges when these two sources are viewed together. On the one hand, Parshat Tetzave teaches us that our appearance does matter-that we must pay attention to how we

dress and how we look- for how we present ourselves does convey clear messages to those around us and to ourselves. At the same time, the message of Purim reminds us that *while our outer appearance matters, it does not define us*. We are so much greater and deeper than the clothes that we wear, than how we appear to an outside world. Every person has tremendous depth- we each possess the ability to touch and shape the world in ways that move beyond the externals.

There is no avoiding the fact that in the world in which we live, how we look matters. Our exterior appearance affects the way that others view and interact with us- and how we view ourselves. Our clothing provide us with the opportunity to express ourselves, and to consciously convey specific messages to those around us. Even in our more insular communities, how we dress- what kippah/head covering we wear, the style of our apparel, the type of clothing we display- is often chosen deliberately to affiliate with a particular group or crowd.

Much of this phenomenon is natural- built into the human experience. In addition, our interaction with the secular world around us often cultivates an appreciation of beauty and physicality that is valuable and important. At the same time, an awareness of the inherent danger of focusing too much on externals should be ever-present in our lives. How easy it is to put too much weight on outer appearances, to completely define ourselves and others by how we, and they, look. The message of Purim is a crucially important one- a reminder of our inherent worth and value, a reminder that *what matters most is who we are on the inside, not how we look on the outside*.

As parents, we impress the value and importance of dress and outer appearance upon our children from an early age- sometimes consciously and other times subconsciously. We dress up our infants like dolls, and our toddlers in fun, matching outfits. We raise our children to be aware of their appearance, and of the importance of looking presentable and neat. We impress upon them the appropriateness of specific dress for different occasions and circumstances. Special occasions- Shabbatot, Chagim, family smachot- become opportunities for fancier outfits and dressing up. Discussions regarding tzniut, and dress in general, all convey the message that one's appearance is critically important. And as our children grow older and become more independent, clothing and outer appearance become a vehicle for their own self-expression, a way for them to convey their individuality and specific tastes.

All this is not only appropriate, but necessary. Outer appearance is an important part of life. As we have said, how our children dress will affect the way that others view them, and how they view themselves. As Parshat Tetzave and so many other sources underscore, Judaism appreciates the impact that outer appearance has upon a person's life, personally and socially.

At the same time, we must consciously work to maintain the correct equilibrium for our children in this area. The impact of the culture around us, and its focus on externalities, is pervasive and constant. The social norms of our communities and institutions, whether consciously or not, greatly emphasize dress and appearance. We must therefore balance these influences by constantly reminding our children that, as important as appearance and dress are, they are not definitional forces. We must teach them not to judge others simply by their appearance, but strive to get to know them and who they really are. As it says in [Avot 5:26](#), "אל תסתכל בקנקן אלא במה שיש בו"- "don't look at the container, but at what is inside

it". And we must actively imbue in our children the message of their own inherent self-worth and inner beauty. In a world that screams of superficiality and shallowness, it is essential that we instill within our children a sense of depth and meaning- and a refusal to define themselves by external appearances.

Thus, Parshat Tetzave and Purim coincide to teach us a fundamental lesson in parenting. Parshat Tetzave stresses the importance of dress and appearance in our everyday lives, and fosters an appreciation of their value. Purim reminds us to maintain the critical balance. Our clothes and external appearance, as important as they may be, do not define who we really are. The primary focus must be on developing, and appreciating, our inner selves.

Shabbat Shalom and Purim Sameach!