

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
with Reb Yoel Kahn

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WHITE GARMENTS

When the Kohen Gadol would serve in the Beis Hamikdash, he would wear eight attractive garments, known as “gold clothing” (since they also included gold). On Yom Kippur, however, he would replace these garments with four simple clothes made of linen, known as “white clothing.”

Even on Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol would sometimes wear the gold clothing—when he would perform the “outer service,” the regular services that would be done each day (such as the daily sacrifice, the *korban tamid*). However, when it came time to perform the “inner service”—the services exclusive for this holy day, he would remove the gold clothing, immerse in the *mikvah*, and don simple, white clothing in their place.

This seems difficult to understand. The Torah describes the clothing of the Kohanim as bringing “honor and beauty.” Among the above two categories of clothing, the gold clothing were obviously much more good-looking than the white. Since throughout the year the Kohen Gadol would wear gold clothing (and also on Yom Kippur, when performing the regular service), why is it that when performing the special service, done in the holiest spot—the Kodesh Hakadashim, he would replace his prestigious clothing with simple garments?!

BEAUTY BEFORE THE KING

The Ohr Hachaim gives two reasons for this:

1. As the Gemara states, “a prosecutor cannot become an advocate.” Since gold was used to form the Golden Calf, this material could not be used when trying to evoke forgiveness.
2. The verse states, “Do not beautify yourself in front of a king.” When standing in the Kodesh Hakadashim, where Hashem’s presence is manifest, it is incorrect to decorate oneself with handsome attire.

This second reason, however, requires additional explanation. The reason the Kohanim would wear nice clothing was not to bring glory to *themselves*, but to bring glory to *Hashem* (as

the Rambam explains in Moreh Nevuchim at length). If so, it would seem that when performing a higher type of service, the clothing should be even *more* beautiful. Why is it that the Kohen Gadol would wear simple garments?

From this we see that there are two levels Above: one where nice clothing is appropriate, and a higher level where such clothing is out of place, and unpretentious attire is preferable.

What does this mean?

SPIRITUAL SPLENDOR

All the services that took place in the Beis Hamikdash apply to each one of us. We each have our personal “Beis Hamikdash” where we must perform all the various categories of *avodah*, both that of the regular Kohanim and that of the Kohen Gadol, including the special service of Yom Kippur. Similarly, the two concepts of outer and inner service, corresponding to gold and white clothing, apply in our individual service of Hashem.

Of course, when we say that a person is wearing “gold garments” (in the spiritual sense), he has certainly reached the status of doing so. Otherwise, he would be nothing more than a hypocrite. Yet, such “clothing” are only appropriate on a lower level. When dealing with a higher plane, simple “clothing” is what should be worn.

There is a level of serving Hashem where our connection to Him is associated with beauty. Obviously, the beauty we are referring to is not physical but spiritual—beautiful intellect and character traits. (Fine-looking clothing are a mere manifestation of this spiritual splendor.) We study

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This connection is simple and unadorned; it is the “white clothing” with which we enter the Kodesh Hakadashim and connect to Hashem Himself.

Torah and work on our behavior, so that our *sechel* and *middos* will be beautiful.

But then there is a level where our connection to Hashem is higher than *sechel* and *middos*. A Jew is essentially connected to Hashem, and from this deeper perspective, our spiritual beauty is irrelevant.

It is this connection that we must reveal on Yom Kippur. As the verse states, when the Kohen Gadol performed the service in the Kodesh Hakadashim, “no one was found in the *Ohel Mo’ed*,” and the Yerushalmi adds that even angels were not present. When our essential connection to Hashem is revealed, nothing else carries significance—even angels.

THE CHILD AND THE STUDENT

On this level, there is no difference between the greatest Torah sage and the simplest Jew; both are equally connected to Hashem.

By way of example, let’s examine the relationship between a teacher and a student versus that of a parent and a child.

The teacher-student relationship is based on the extent of the student’s academic achievements. The more studious the student is and the better he understands the teacher’s lesson, the more he will be able to receive in the future. Furthermore, since the purpose of study is to lead to action, the student will ensure his conduct is consistent with what he has learned. In this area, there is surely a difference between one student and the next: one grasps the subject matter better than the other; one enhances his character traits more than the other.

With a parent and child, however, there is no such differentiation. Whether the child is smart or not, he is still his child! Each child is equal. It is, however, possible for a child to

forget who he is—he doesn’t feel his status as a child. In that case, all that is needed is for him to remind himself that he is his parent’s child. He can then take hold of his father, hug him, and kiss him, and nothing differentiates him from the other children.

Similarly, sometimes we might not feel that we are Hashem’s child. In such a case, the only thing we must do is to awaken the “child” within us, the fact that we have an essential connection to Hashem as a child to a parent. At that point, we are all equal.

TIME FOR WHITE

These are the two levels of connection to Hashem. There is the “outer service,” where we connect to Him with our intellect and emotions, striving to make them as beautiful as can be. But however lofty our faculties might be, they still take on a certain form (albeit a beautiful one)—the form of intellect, emotions, thought, speech, action, and so on.

Then there is the “inner service,” our essential connection to Hashem that is beyond any form. Of course, this connection

exists year-round, but Yom Kippur is the time to awaken it and allow it to come to the fore. At the end of Yom Kippur, we all call out together, “Shema Yisroel, Boruch Shem, Hashem Hu Ha’Elokim.” This cry does not come from intellect or even from emotion; it comes from our essence as Jews. This connection is simple and unadorned; it is the “white clothing”

with which we enter the Kodesh Hakadashim and connect to Hashem Himself.

For further study, see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 2, pp. 411–412. *Ibid.*, vol. 22, p. 95.

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