



# MESILOT

## *Pathways to the Soul*

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha  
of Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l

From the weekly lessons of his son  
**Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita**

Dedicated to the Success of  
Jonathan Schottenstein and his Family

# ...*~* PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL *~*...

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## Parshat Tzav

### The Tallit That Saved a Soul

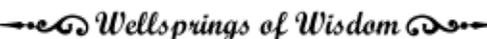
Rabbi Mordechai Gerlitz relates the following story:<sup>1</sup>

The winds of the Haskalah—the so-called Jewish Enlightenment—began to sweep through Jewish towns, slipping in through breaches that had opened in the strong wall of traditional religious life. Its victims were many. Most vulnerable were the young who lacked grounding and wisdom—vessels with no knowledge of G-d—who were easily enticed by its promise of “enlightenment” and drawn onto a crooked path from which few returned.

In their naïveté, they imagined that stepping out into the wide world, mingling with the nations, learning their ways, and adorning themselves with “modern” wisdom and science would raise the Jewish

people’s stature. The end, however, was often the same: spiritual ruin and eventual disappearance from the Jewish people. Experience proved—bitterly—that the Jewish people’s strength is, in fact, to remain distinct, as the verse says: “Behold, it is a people that dwells alone, and they shall not be reckoned among the nations” (Numbers 23:9).

Beyond the spiritual devastation—the waves of assimilation that consumed body and soul alike—the Haskalah left little enduring good for the Jewish people. Few of its standard-bearers left descendants faithful to their ancestors’ heritage. It became a public fact that the movement’s leaders left behind neither root nor branch among the chosen nation; their



1. *Emunei Am Segulah* (vol. I, p. 127), reprinted with consent of the author.

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children traded away their inheritance, converted, or simply drifted away.

The trouble began in Germany. The plague broke out there and spread eastward, striking the walls of the Jewish towns in Poland, Galicia, and beyond. In one such community lived a Jew named Reb Yedidya, and he paid a terrible price for the spirit of lawlessness that paraded as enlightenment: a son of his strayed from the path of his fathers, grazing in foreign pastures and soaking up a culture completely at odds with the Torah.

When the father learned that his son had fallen into that snare, his grief knew no bounds. He tore his hair, ripped his garments, and sat as a mourner. Yet not a string in the son's heart was plucked; the youth's conscience remained unmoved.

He would not turn back.

Closing his door to the rebellious son had its effect—on the son's pocket. The well-laid table at his

father's stately home, which had sustained him since childhood, was no longer within reach. The familiar roof was gone, and his money ran out. He began to taste want and feel the darkness of poverty. But the pull of his desires was stronger than any hardship. He preferred a life of abandon and hunger to a life of reverence and sufficiency; as the saying of the sages goes, "One measure with frivolity is preferred over nine measures with abstinence."

After some years in his bleak condition, a rumor reached Reb Yedidya: his son had found favor with a well-to-do Gentile in town who now wished to take him as a son-in-law. The son—thoroughly ensnared by the Haskalah and unmoored from the Jewish religion—saw no problem with this. His conscience did not trouble him.

For the father, this was unendurable. His heart felt ready to burst with pain and shame, his mind reeling. Even friends feared for his

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well-being, lest the news carry him to an early grave. They gathered to consider how to help him and first tried to reason with the son: they pleaded that beyond sinning against G-d, Torah, and people, he was also shedding his father's blood with his own hands. Their words, however, fell on sealed ears and a closed heart.

Seeing they could not sway the son, they turned their thoughts to the father. After much discussion, they urged him to travel to the town of Belz and pour out his heart before the holy Rebbe, Rabbi Yehoshua of Belz. The tzaddik's name was revered far and wide. From near and far, Jews streamed to him to seek blessing, counsel, and mercy.

"Surely the tzaddik," they said, "will bring relief to Reb Yedidya's broken spirit. If the son cannot be saved, at least the father must not die for the son's poor choices."

With a reeling heart, Reb Yedidya came before the Rebbe

of Belz and told his story from beginning to end. The Rebbe listened with full attention. When the father finished, the Rebbe of Belz said gently:

"My dear Jew, if you will heed my advice, change your approach. Do not push your son away with both hands and banish him. On the contrary—begin now to draw him close. Show a kindly face, as though you have put aside all the pain, and treat him with the affection a father shows a son who brings him joy. As his wedding approaches, hold nothing back. Give generously, as a Jewish father provides for his child in honor of marriage.

"When your hearts are brought near again, bring him to me in Belz before the wedding."

The father trembled. The Rebbe's counsel felt unbearable: to draw close a son who had cast off Torah and mitzvot and lived as a Gentile? To provide him with the goods of a wedding—would it not be better, he cried inwardly, to bury the

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plan before it ever took place? But when the Rebbe of Belz repeated his words, the father found no room to object. He bent his head and accepted the charge.

The son received the message with satisfaction: the door was open once more, and he could return under his father's roof. "What reason did not win, time did," he told himself with pride. "Despite his 'old-world fanaticism,' the 'old man' finally concluded it's better to make peace with his enlightened son than lose him entirely."

What the son had not imagined was how far the change would go. Not only did his father avoid contentious subjects, he also covered the wedding preparations with paternal care. Day by day, the warm relationship between them grew, and gratitude took root in the son's heart. When his father later asked him to travel to Belz for the Rebbe's blessing, he could not refuse.

The reception in Belz was remarkable. With unusual

patience, the Rebbe of Belz gave the groom time, asked about his studies and activities, and inquired into the match itself. Emboldened, the son began to present the "enlightened" view that saw no wrong at all in the gravest sin of intermarriage. The Rebbe listened quietly, his face composed.

At length the Rebbe of Belz asked, "All that aside, these are Gentiles. How do you know there are no murderers or Jew-haters among them—men who would not hesitate to harm a Jew who enters into their family?"

"G-d forbid!" the groom sprang up as if stung. "That is unthinkable. This is an aristocratic, progressive family. They long ago abandoned antiquated beliefs and raised themselves above distinctions of race and religion. The greatest proof is that they chose me as a son-in-law without demanding I abandon my own faith! Among such people, not a trace remains of that old senseless Jew-hatred. It is obsolete."

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“Even so,” the Rebbe of Belz said softly, “it would be wise to equip yourself with a small amount of protection on your wedding day. In a great crowd of Gentiles, one cannot be sure there will not be even a single Jew-hater whose anger might stir at the sight of a Jewish groom.”

The Rebbe motioned to his attendant, who brought a small white tallit katan. Handing it to the groom, the Rebbe of Belz said, “Take this as protection. Do not forget to wear it on your wedding day.”

The groom had no way to decline. He accepted the garment and promised to wear it, adding—very earnestly—that although he did not believe in such things, he would honor the Rebbe’s request out of respect.

Before the father and son departed, the Rebbe of Belz told the father he must attend the wedding. “You will not sit at one table with the Gentile family,” he said, “but I rely on your son to arrange a separate table for you, so you may ‘partake’ in the

celebration. And remember and remind your son to wear the tallit katan. It is an important protection. Do not forget.”

Perplexed and heavy-hearted, Reb Yedidya returned home with his son. When he had set out for Belz, a small hope still beat within him that a miracle would happen and the Rebbe of Belz would deter the match; now even that hope was gone—and he was asked to be present at the very wedding.

“If only the earth would open its mouth,” he thought on the day itself as he took his place at a side table, “I would leap in without delay. Woe to me that I have lived to see this: my son joining a Gentile family. May my large degree of pain be felt by every enemy of my people.”

The Gentile in-laws and their relatives took care to show themselves as being enlightened and progressive. They tolerated the sight of the bearded Jewish father at a table off to the side, attired in full traditional dress. No open hostility showed on

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anyone's face. The groom himself made sure his father noticed how gracefully the family behaved, as if to prove the broadmindedness he had proclaimed that they had.

After the guests had partaken of the meat and wine, they rose to make merry as was their custom. Soon the hall rang with loud laughter, singing, and the rough merriment that followed heavy drink. Reb Yedidya shrank into his corner, wishing he could squeeze into a crack in the wall rather than witness the events unfolding before his eyes. The hall took on the feel of a country tavern on a late Sunday afternoon.

The heat grew, and the air thickened. Gentlemen began to remove their frock coats and whirl about in their shirtsleeves. The groom, after proving his prowess in drink and dance, stepped aside to cool off, removing his tailored jacket. Breathing easier, he returned to the dance—without his coat.

At that moment, one of the guests—himself a member of an “enlightened” Jewish family—spied the fringes of the tallit katan peeking from under the groom's shirt. A cry burst from his throat and froze the room: “A Jewish garment!” he shrieked—one shout, and a hushed silence fell. All eyes turned to the groom. Someone stepped forward, tugged at the fringes, and held them out for all to see. The hall went still, as if seized by a spirit.

The first to move was the father-in-law. Leaping toward his “son-in-law,” he snatched up a nearby bottle and began striking him in the face in a murderous rage. In moments the others regained their wits and rushed forward, venting their fury on the Jewish groom who had dared show up at the wedding festivities with a Jewish garment on his body.

The father immediately grasped the danger, sprang from his corner, and dragged his son out. As it was, he was beaten across his entire body; from head

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to foot, there was not a single area that remained unmarked.

Father and son hid nearby for a long time, the night covering their flight while a pack of drunken boors hunted them around town with savage shouts. The scene resembled a pogrom. Toward dawn, when the clamor ebbed, they slipped away to safety, hired a wagon, and hurried out of town.

All the way home they sat in silence. Reb Yedidya did not point to the lesson that was clearly to be learned; he allowed his son to do so himself. Let the young man decide how much his “nobility,” “progress,” and “enlightenment” had meant to the Gentiles—and what became of a Jewish “enlightenment” that built itself upon Gentile wisdom and assimilation into their world. The conclusions were seared into his flesh through bruises and scars.

When he had recovered, the son insisted on traveling to Belz to thank the Rebbe personally. He now understood what the

Rebbe’s protection had done for him—how a simple, sacred garment had kept him from being absorbed into that “enlightened” crowd. He never forgot, even into old age, the verse he had learned in the hardest way possible: “Behold, it is a people that dwells alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.”

To summarize: the son cast off the yoke of Heaven, and his father fought against him using every tool at his disposal. But the Rebbe of Belz taught him that only with pleasantness and love—only with a shining face and genuine closeness—can one find a pathway to the heart. In the end, the Rebbe of Belz activated the tremendous power of the “Jewish garment,” and thus rescued the confused soul from the jaws of the abyss...

Such is the strength and power of clothing that we shall explore in our parasha.

But before we focus on the power of ‘garments,’ let us once again sharpen the message that we gleaned from the above story...

## The Five Sages of Bnei Brak

At the beginning of the Passover Haggadah, we read about five sages who gathered to celebrate the Seder night together.

The Haggadah relates:

*“It happened that Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Tarfon were reclining in Bnei Brak, and they were retelling the Exodus from Egypt all of that night, until their students came and said to them: ‘Our Masters, the time for the morning Shema has arrived.’”*

In *Ma’ayan HaMo’ed* on the Haggadah (p. 131), Rabbi Shalom Meir Wallach writes as follows:

Five sages sat together engaging in the story of the Exodus from Egypt. However, Rabbi Akiva’s connection to the lessons of the Exodus runs much deeper.

One of the great Jewish sages, the holy Rabbi Tzadok of Lublin, of blessed memory, pointed out (*Divrei Sofrim*, sec. 16)

that at the birth of Yitzchak, his father Avraham Avinu—the father of the nation—was one hundred years old, and Sarah his wife was ninety: extremely advanced in age, such that by natural means it was impossible for them to bear children. This is aside from the fact that Sarah was naturally barren. And then—precisely then—after despair, when hope was finished, their only son Yitzchak, the heir to their heritage, was born.

Why were the Jewish people created in such a way, by this process? In order to teach the Jewish nation as a whole, and each of its members, that “there is no despair in the world at all.” It came to demonstrate that *“even if a sharp sword rests upon a person’s neck, he should not despair of mercy.”* There is no despair—whether in matters of the body or matters of the soul.

So it was in the physical formation of the nation, with

Parshat Tzav - The Five Sages of Bnei Brak

the birth of Yitzchak. And so too in the spiritual formation of our nation at the Exodus from Egypt. Then, too, they were in a situation void of hope—a nation of slaves under a repressive rule that worked them ruthlessly “*with mortar and bricks and all kinds of work in the field.*” They went on deteriorating from level to level, down to the depths of degradation—the forty-ninth gate of impurity. So much so that even the angels could not discern any difference between them and the Egyptians, and asked: “What difference is there between these and those?” Even the Jews themselves could not digest the news of their redemption. “*They said to him: ‘Our teacher Moses! How can we be redeemed? Behold, all of Egypt is full of our idols!’*”

And then a transformation occurred—a drastic change with the Divine command: “Draw forth and take for yourselves” (Exodus 12:21) – withdraw your hands from idolatry, and take for

yourselves the service of G-d! In one instant, they went “*from slavery to freedom, from subjugation to redemption, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to a festival day, and from darkness to a great light.*” So symbolic it is that their redemption came at midnight, when the darkness is at its peak—and then, as the holy Zohar teaches (Zohar, Bo 38a), there was a Divine revelation and a bright light shining as at noon in the summer month of Tammuz!

Rabbi Tzadok continues: Therefore, a Jew must never despair at all. Even if he sees himself sinking, going deeper and deeper into the matters of this world, he should not despair of himself by saying that he will no longer be able to separate from its lowliness. For there is no despair at all for a Jewish person, and G-d can help in any matter. The entire Jewish nation came after absolute desperation—when no one believed it possible, not even Sarah believed she would still be remembered with a child. For this is the essence of every Jewish

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person: to believe that there is never any cause for despair, since G-d can always help, and “Is anything too wondrous for G-d?”

We were commanded to remember the Exodus from Egypt every day, morning and night, in order to remember that there is no place for despair and that one must not lose hope—to remember that such things have indeed happened: in the midst of the greatest darkness, at the peak of the night, a great light shone for us and the redemption suddenly came.

This was most poignantly epitomized by Rabbi Akiva, who applied this lesson of the Exodus in his own life. He was the son of converts, with no pedigree, and was utterly poor. He was a shepherd, tending the flock of one of the wealthiest men in Jerusalem before the Temple’s destruction—a fabulously rich and generous man nicknamed *Kalba Savua*, because his home was open to the poor, and any pauper who came to his house,

even if he entered as hungry as a dog, left there satisfied (“savua”).

Kalba Savua had an unmarried daughter named Rachel—wise, discerning, and possessed of fine intuition. Suitors came for her from all sides—wonderful prospects: young men who were wise and understanding, of good character and poetic soul; young men with strength and vigor... Yet Rachel rejected all the proposals outright. With her keen intuition, she sensed that “a great treasure” lay hidden within Akiva, the simple shepherd. She approached Akiva and said to him: “If I agree to marry you, will you promise to go study Torah?” Akiva agreed.

When Kalba Savua heard that his talented daughter had become betrothed to an ignorant, impoverished shepherd with no lineage, he flew into a rage. He fired the shepherd and disowned his daughter, driving her out of his house. The couple married in the dead of winter, and they chose a hay barn as their dwelling. They would cover themselves at night with bundles of straw for warmth.

**Parshat Tzav - The Five Sages of Bnei Brak**

In the morning, they would spend time picking from each other's hair the stalks of straw that had clung to them...

He encountered many difficulties at the beginning of his studies, for he did not even recognize the shapes of the Hebrew letters. One day, he saw stones that had been hollowed out by dripping water, and this awakened him: "If water, by constant persistence, can engrave a rock, then all the more so can the words of Torah engrave a place in my heart!"

The very next day, he went together with his son Yehoshua to the elementary school. He sat with him on the benches of the first grade and repeated along with him the aleph-bet. By the end of that day, he knew how to read. He discovered hidden abilities within himself—a wondrous memory and lightning-fast comprehension. He requested permission from his wife to go up to Jerusalem to learn Torah. Permission was granted with joy. He left and immersed himself in the world of Torah—a

world open to anyone and everyone...

For twenty-four years, he sat and learned with immense diligence (with Rachel's blessings and consent), and in those years he succeeded in raising twenty-four thousand students!

All that time, his wife Rachel struggled alone: without parents—since they had disowned her; without her husband—for she had willingly sent him away to learn Torah; and without livelihood or proper clothing, in terrible poverty.

Then, after twenty-four years, Rabbi Akiva returned home accompanied by his thousands of disciples. All of the townspeople went out to greet him—the rising star in the Jewish world, the tremendous sage who had acquired the entire Torah with unimaginable effort and skill. He had a unique ability to absorb everything—law and lore, exegesis and mysticism—and to organize it all in a wondrous order.

All of the local townspeople came out, and so did his wife.

## Parshat Tzav - The Five Sages of Bnei Brak

One cruel and heartless neighbor turned to her and sneered: “Where do you think you’re going? Now he’s a great man; surely he will cast you aside...”

She was destitute, weathered by hardship. When she saw her husband from afar—for the first time after all those years—surrounded by twenty-four thousand admiring students, his white beard flowing over his chest, his face aglow with the light of wisdom—while she herself was dressed in rags, poor and storm-tossed—she tried to push her way forward, but the wall of students blocked her path.

Suddenly, her husband lifted up his eyes and saw her. “Clear a path for her,” he said, and he stepped toward her. “My Torah and that of all of my pupils—*are truly hers.*”

In that instant, she became a prominent and respected figure. In a moment, she emerged from darkness to light...

For such is the way of Providence: in the midst of the greatest darkness, at the height

of the night, the light shines forth and redemption arrives!

The early commentator, Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel, wrote in his commentary *Zevach Pesach* the following on this passage of the Haggadah:

*“It happened with Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, etc., who were reclining in Bnei Brak”* – Although Bnei Brak is the name of a place, the meaning of Bnei Brak here refers to something else. *Bnei Brak* literally means shining vessels, bright vessels like fine linen and blue wool; and on account of their gleam and shine, they are called so.”

Rabbi Ben Zion Pandler (*Gei Chizayon*, p. 114) points out that in addition to the beautiful vessels that were there, the sages who reclined there were also dressed in shiny silk garments.

However, we must understand: why did the author of the Haggadah bother to note this seemingly unimportant detail?

Before answering this point, let us turn to our parasha...

Parshat Tzav - Lifting the Ashes of the Altar

**Lifting the Ashes of the Altar**

The first service performed in the Holy Temple each and every day was *Terumat Hadeshen*. As the Mishnah describes (Yoma ch. 2, Mishnah 1-2):

“Originally, whoever wanted to perform the removal of ashes from the altar could do so... But when the Court saw that this led to danger (as explained there in the Mishnah when the rush up the altar caused injuries), they decreed that the ashes would only be removed by lottery...”

In our parasha we are commanded regarding this service, as it states: “The priest shall don his linen tunic, and he shall wear linen breeches on his flesh, and he shall lift up the ashes of the burnt-offering that the fire consumed on the

altar, and put them down beside the altar” (Leviticus 6:3).

It is a mitzvah for the priest to wear the priestly garments and lift off each day a portion of the ashes (produced by burning the offerings, and called *deshen*) that had accumulated atop the altar. Using a *machtah* (a fire-pan), he would set that ash aside on the floor of the *mizbeach* (altar) in the place designated, to the east of the ramp. There, the ash was miraculously absorbed into the ground.

After the priest (who won the lottery) fulfilled the mitzvah of *Terumat Hadeshen* (“lifting the ash”), his fellow priests would ascend the altar and sweep the remaining ashes from the entire altar surface, gathering them into a heap called the *tapuach* (the ash pile) in the center of the altar.<sup>2</sup>

*~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

2. As stated in the Mishnah (Tamid 2:1-2): “His fellow priests saw that he had descended, and they ran and came; they hurried and sanctified their hands and feet from the laver, they took the

rakes and the shovels and went up to the top of the altar ... they began piling the ashes upon the *tapuach*; and the *tapuach* was in the middle of the altar ...”

**Parshat Tzav - The Removal of the Ashes**

This was a daily mitzvah. In addition, there was another mitzvah performed

occasionally, called the mitzvah of *Hotza'at Hadeshen* (“removing the ashes”).

**The Removal of the Ashes**

When the ash on the *tapuach* accumulated to an excessive amount, they would remove it and carry it outside the city (of Jerusalem).<sup>3</sup> This is what the Torah commands (in our parasha): “He shall take off his garments and don other garments, and he shall carry the ashes outside the camp to a pure place” (Leviticus 6:4).

In this verse we are instructed in an additional mitzvah: “*He shall take off his garments and don other garments, and he shall carry the ashes.*” That is, if the same priest who lifted the ashes also wishes to take them out, he must first remove the

priestly garments he is wearing and put on different garments.

Back in Parashat Tetzaveh, we were commanded regarding the priestly garments in general. In broad terms, there are three categories of sacred garments: the four garments of an ordinary priest, the eight garments of the Kohen Gadol (High Priest), and the special white garments worn by the High Priest on Yom Kippur.

Here in our parasha we now learn further that there are garments suited to the regular Temple service, and additional different garments suited to performing the removal of the ashes.

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

3. The ashes were removed whenever the heap became too large and there was no longer enough room on the altar for the required fire pile.

This removal is called *Hotza'at Hadeshen* and is not obligatory every day. Rashi comments on

Leviticus 6:4: ““And he shall carry out the ashes’—those accumulated on the *tapuach*; when the pile is big and there is no space for the arrangement, he removes it from there. This is not an everyday obligation, whereas *Terumat Hadeshen* is a daily requirement.”

**Parshat Tzav - The Sanctity of Jewish Attire**

We must understand: why is so much attention paid to the garments worn during these rituals?

For us to understand this matter, our discussion will elucidate the concept of clothing in Judaism in general.

**The Sanctity of Jewish Attire**

In a lecture by Rabbi Shimshon Dovid Pincus (*Tiferet Shimshon*, Shemot, p. 341), he said the following:

In Parashat Tetzaveh it is written: “And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for honor and for beauty.” (Exodus 28:2).

That parasha goes on at length describing the special, splendid, and sacred garments that the Kohanim wore during their service in the Temple.

However, in fact, all of the Jewish people are called “priests,” as it is written: “And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). Every Jew constantly stands and serves before G-d—through his prayers, his Torah learning, and the fulfillment of the commandments that fill our lives. Therefore, just

like the Kohanim in their Temple service, each and every Jew should have distinctive attire, showing that he is one of the servants of G-d.

A Jew’s attire should be distinct in three ways:

First, it must be modest, and not scripted according to the newest fashions of the non-Jewish world, which exist solely to arouse lustful thoughts and to scorn all that is sacred.

Second, one must beware of clothing that is forbidden by the Torah—namely, a garment that combines wool and linen threads, known as *shatnez*. The prohibition of *shatnez* is a prohibition no less than eating pork.

Third, one should wear a garment of mitzvah—namely, the *tzitzit*, which is equal to all of the mitzvot.

## Parshat Tzav - The Sanctity of Jewish Attire

A person might imagine that clothing is, after all, only an external matter and not very important. But the truth is that there is deep, internal meaning to it, and therefore it occupies an important place in the service of G-d.

The natural function of clothing is primarily to serve as protection for a person's exterior—shielding the body from external elements such as cold, heat, and the like. However, in reality, clothes also serve to guard a person's inner self. This is evident to our eyes: we see that someone dressed in a manner that identifies him as a Torah-observant Jew will find it difficult to frequent or befriend people who have cast off the yoke of religion and fear of G-d.

It also provides great protection against negative influences. This phenomenon is not by chance—rather, clothes carry a sanctity that guards a person from sin.

The first to wear clothes were Adam and Chava, as it is written: “And the L-rd G-d, made garments of skin for Adam and for his wife, and He clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). Our Sages explained (Bereishit Rabbah 20:12) that the word for “skin” (‘or,’ spelled with an ayin) alludes also to “light” (‘ohr,’ with an alef) – for in truth, one whose garments follow the laws of modesty and holiness is always clothed in garments of light.

The garments of Adam and Chava were clothes that G-d Himself made for them, and they were literally coats of light. So too, anyone who takes care that his attire be like the attire of Adam and his wife—modest and appropriate garments and shoes—such a person is wrapped from head to toe in lights of holiness.

This is all the more true with *mitzvah*-garments, such as the *tzitzit*, which are literally coats of light that save one from harmful forces, just as the *mezuzah* protects the doors of the Jewish people.

**Parshat Tzav - The Influence of Conduct Upon the Soul**

Similarly, the head-covering (kippah) is a crown of splendor—symbolizing the soul’s ‘lamp of G-d’ that burns

atop our heads—and it guards us from all of the perils of the world.

This being the case, let us expand further...

**The Influence of Conduct Upon the Soul**

It is known from the great tzaddikim that a person’s external movements and behavior greatly influence his inner self.

Therefore, a neat and orderly personal appearance is of great importance; one’s external appearance affects one’s inner character, assisting one in attaining clear thought and stability of mind in the service of G-d.

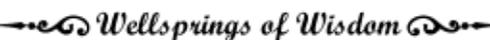
Conversely, if a person’s outward comportment is disorganized and lacking stability, and if his appearance is messy and unkempt, it is very likely that the inner recesses of his soul are likewise muddled and disheveled. Clearly, then, a person whose inner soul is confused and slovenly is not an appropriate vessel to learn and

receive Torah—certainly not to delve into it deeply or with any sound reasoning at all.

Accordingly, one must not make light of these matters, but rather properly arrange one’s appearance and keep oneself presentable in the eyes of others in view of how truly impactful it is.

In light of the above, it is clear why our Torah leaders—transmitters of our tradition—made a point of giving due attention to their respectable appearance and taught the same to their students. In this direction they also taught generations upon generations of holy and upright Torah teachers among the people of Israel.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, we are commanded in the Torah regarding this matter...



4. Rabbi Nosson Zvi Finkel, the “Alter of Slabodka,” was exceedingly

exacting about the students’ etiquette. Rabbi Dov Katz writes the following

**Parshat Tzav - The Influence of Conduct Upon the Soul**

in his work *The Mussar Movement*  
(vol. 3, p. 274):

“Anyone who appeared before him (the Alter of Slabodka), especially the younger students, felt as though he were passed through a scanner that scrutinizes every movement—he examined his students’ stance, his way of sitting, the motion of his hands and feet, the flicker of his eyes and the curl of his lips...

If he noticed that someone made a movement without thought—for example, idly fingering some object, playing with the tassels of the table-cover, rocking the chair on which he sat, and the like—he would correct him on the spot.

The Alter of Slabodka regarded every unconsidered motion as an expression of carelessness, inattention, and instability, whose consequences were undesirable.

He was just as particular about the students’ outward appearance—that they stand erect, their heads straight, and their stance firm and steady. He interpreted our Sages’ dictum (Berakhot 43b), ‘One who walks upright for even four cubits is as though he pushes away the feet of the Divine Presence,’ as referring to an inner uprightness of heart: a person who does not feel the Shechinah and G-d’s providence at every step, imagines, Heaven forbid, ‘My own strength and the might of my hand produced this success’; but if his mind is bowed to G-d and his heart is humble and broken, there is nothing wrong with a straight back and

a raised head. On the contrary—external movements influence the inner life, and an upright body and head help to uphold upright thoughts and a stable mind.

Rabbi Nosson Zvi also required his students to wear garments that were proper and clean, to be meticulously washed, and properly barbered; when he detected a student who was lax about his attire, he reproved him.

In the early years of the yeshivah they retained a special tailor to mend the students’ clothes, and Rabbi Nosson Zvi himself at times accompanied them to the tailor to ensure that the sewing was precise.

Once a student appeared before him missing a button; Rabbi Nosson Zvi took a button, thread, and needle and sewed it on for him. Similarly, he would scold a student who neglected his hair or fingernails and would sometimes send him home and order him to trim them immediately.

On one occasion he bought as a gift for an older student a pocket nail clipper in a leather sheath and warned him to guard it and use it. In such matters, too, Rabbi Nosson Zvi saw an expression of one’s inner forces and therefore devoted special attention to them.

Sayings often on his lips were: ‘A hole in the sleeve is a hole in the head,’ ‘A crumpled, shabby hat is the sign of a confused mind,’ and many others.

## Cleanliness and Dignity Before G-d

As we touch upon at length in *Chelev Ha'aretz* (vol. II, p. 80), we are instructed in the words of the Prophet Amos to “Prepare before beholding your G-d, O Israel!” (Amos 4:12).

The meaning of this is that before approaching G-d in prayer, in words of thanks, praise and exaltation, one must prepare one’s body to be most fitting by cleansing oneself beforehand.

There are two aspects of cleanliness: external cleanliness and internal cleanliness.

External cleanliness of the body includes properly washing

one’s hands, washing one’s face (and rinsing one’s mouth, i.e., brushing one’s teeth).

Internal cleanliness of the body includes cleaning out one’s innards (relieving oneself as needed).

Not only this, but from the verse “*Prepare before beholding your G-d*” we also learn that a person must take care that his general appearance be pleasant, clean, and orderly.

If when appearing before a prince or minister of flesh and blood—who is here today and tomorrow in the grave—a person makes a point to dress in

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Thanks to this educational approach, the students of the Slabodka Yeshivah assumed a new form and were fashioned into energetic, quick-witted young men, straight-backed and upright, well-mannered, light-hearted and good-tempered, integrated within society and the community, whose dress was neat, whose bearing was dignified, and whose dealings with others were commendable.

Thus, from the small seed that Rabbi Nosson Zvi planted in Slabodka, grew a

mighty tree with many roots and branches that spread its offshoots throughout the world and reached the very heavens: scores upon scores of institutions of Torah and reverence were established, thousands and tens of thousands of students were nurtured, a deep and comprehensive conceptual system developed, an immense influence penetrated wide circles, and the Mussar Movement continued to expand on a grand scale into many areas and far-flung corners of the world...”

**Parshat Tzav - Distinctive Garments for Bnei Torah**

handsome and respectable clothing, then how much more so when coming before the King of kings, the Holy One blessed be He, Whose glory fills the entire world, Who lives and endures forever and ever, Who is the Sustainer of the universe and in Whose hand is all—how much more so must one attire himself in fine and honorable garments!

Thus, fortunate is the man who does this and the person who holds fast to it: to always be

careful that whenever he comes to perform the commandments of G-d—such as learning Torah or praying—his clothes are free of any stain or dirt, and that they are pressed, neat, and dignified. Likewise, one must make an effort to be sure that one's overall appearance is pleasant and honorable, leaving a good impression on those who see him. This is all part of the honor of Heaven, that those who serve before Him present a dignified appearance befitting the King.

**Distinctive Garments for Bnei Torah**

The above applies to every Jewish man and woman whose outward dress influences their inner character. If a person walks about in public wearing wrinkled, sloppy clothes, surely his inner faculties are weakened and his spirits will sink...

All the more does this apply to the holy community of yeshiva students—the beloved *Bnei Torah* who bear the King's crown, the crown of Torah (for, "*Who are royalty? The Torah scholars!*"). They

must place special emphasis on their attire—that their garments be distinctively proper when learning Torah and praying.

Even more so must they be exceedingly careful, whenever going out into the public sphere, that their clothes have not a speck of stain, that they are clean and properly pressed; that their faces appear bright and radiant, their hair and beards groomed nicely, and their *payot* (sidecurls) neatly arranged. This way, the

**Parshat Tzav - The Generation of Religious Persecution**

Torah will be honored and not, G-d forbid, be disgraced in the eyes of onlookers.

Most of all, Torah leaders and rabbis who teach G-d's laws and statutes to His people must be careful about this—more than others. For it is an obligation upon them, even more than upon each individual, to be distinguished in their dress and appearance. As King Solomon said: “The wisdom of the destitute is despised, and his words are not heard” (Ecclesiastes 9:16). That is, a sage who does not appear dignified in his dress—whose appearance is disheveled and makes him

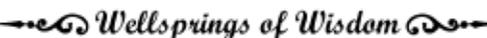
look impoverished—people tend to belittle his words and not accept them, for they do not regard him as a true sage. But when a sage comes before them well-dressed in a dignified, neat, and clean appearance, his image makes a powerful impression, and his words are accepted by his listeners.

Now, let us return to the question with which we opened: Why did the author of the Haggadah bother to mention the details of the fine vessels and silk garments worn on the Seder night so many centuries ago in Bnei Brak?

### **The Generation of Religious Persecution**

In the history of our nation,<sup>5</sup> the fall of Betar is regarded as one of the most fateful turning points. Sixty-two years after the destruction of the Second Temple, the Jewish people—led by Shimon bar Koziba—rose up in an attempt to throw off the yoke of the Roman conqueror.

Bar Koziba, who inspired the people with his heroism, succeeded in his mission and chose the fortified city of Betar as the center of his rebel government and his battle headquarters. For three years, the star of Bar Koziba shone, and his hand prevailed. The



5. *Rabbi Akiva and the Generation of Persecution* (p.117).

## Parshat Tzav - The Generation of Religious Persecution

greatest sages of the time, including Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues, recognized him as the King Messiah. When the Roman Empire saw that it could not overcome his revolt, it dispatched its finest legions. On Tisha B'Av of that year, they conquered Betar, destroyed it, and killed its inhabitants until not a remnant was left.

With the fall of Betar, the Jewish people's last attempt to rebel against their oppressors came to an end. From then on, Judea ceased to resist its foes, and the era of exile of the Jewish nation and the wandering outside the borders of their homeland began.

During the two years following this defeat, the Roman rulers imposed harsh and terrible decrees (*gzerot shmad*) upon the people of Israel. They decreed the death penalty for those who studied Torah or observed the mitzvot. They forbade Jews from setting foot in Jerusalem altogether (especially at the Temple site). They did not even permit

the slain of Betar—who had fallen in the war—to be buried.

Despite all this, the Romans accomplished nothing with their decrees against Judaism! Neither threats nor shouts nor punishments nor cruelties availed them. The Jews, the children of the living G-d, gave up their lives—literally—to uphold the holy Torah!

Of that generation—the generation of religious persecution—it was said in the verse: “Those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Exodus 20:6). The Midrash states (Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot, Remez 292):

*“Those who love Me and keep My commandments’ – Rabbi Natan says: These are the ones who dwell in Eretz Yisrael and give their lives for the sake of all the commandments. One (Roman officer) asks a Jew: Why are you being led out to be executed? – He answers: Because I circumcised my son. Another: Why are you being burned? – Because I read from the Torah. Another: Why are*

**Parshat Tzav - The Seder of Courage and Defiance**

*you being crucified? – Because I ate matzah. Another: Why are you receiving one hundred lashes? – Because I took the lulav in hand.”*

Only after the accursed tyrant Hadrian died and Antoninus Pius ascended the throne did

relief come, and all the decrees were canceled—including the ban on burying the dead of Betar. That day was declared a festival, and it was the last date recorded in the scroll *Megillat Ta’anit* (which chronicles special days on which fasting is forbidden).

**The Seder of Courage and Defiance**

However, during Hadrian’s brutal persecutions, his cruel soldiers prowled the streets in search of their next Jewish victim. Their joy knew no bounds whenever they found a Jew practicing a commandment. A satanic grin, a venomous laugh, a merciless cruelty—these were but some of the features that appeared in them at such moments.<sup>6</sup>

Then the month of Nisan arrived.

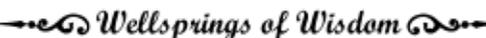
Hadrian called in the commander-in-chief of his forces and gave him an unequivocal directive.

The commander gathered the best of his troops and instructed

them: Equip yourselves with the finest weapons. Take swords made of steel (not mere iron), sharp, glistening spears, and ornamented shields. Mount white horses and go through every Jewish settlement in the land, and proclaim:

“By order of the Emperor, may his honor be exalted: Any man or woman who observes the Seder night and eats matzah on Passover will be put to death by torture, a most cruel, bitter, and merciless crucifixion!”

The sages—Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabbi Akiva,



6. *Passover Haggadah* with the *Yalkut Menachem* commentary (p. 20).

## Parshat Tzav - The Seder of Courage and Defiance

and Rabbi Tarfon—gathered together and discussed the decree. After deliberating, they decided to conduct the Seder in a concealed house, sealing all the windows tightly so that no light would be visible from outside.

Some of their students, who heard about this, were concerned for their teachers and volunteered to stand guard outside and keep watch for any “danger” approaching.

Thus we read in the Haggadah: *“They were reclining in Bnei Brak and telling of the Exodus from Egypt all that night, until their students came and said to them: ‘Our Masters! The time for the morning Shema has arrived.’”*

“All that night” – the author of the Haggadah reveals to us the extent of those holy sages’ self-sacrifice. Even though sitting down at a Seder table—in the eyes of the Romans—sealed their death sentence, they paid no mind and remained reclining *the entire night!* Despite being

in mortal danger and having every reason to curtail the telling of the Exodus, they kept telling of the Exodus from Egypt the entire night until dawn! They continued for so long that their students finally had to enter and say to them: “Our Masters! The time for reciting the morning Shema has arrived.”

In those times of fear and trembling, the holy sages wanted to muster all possible strength so they could observe the Seder night properly, with composure of mind and with joy. And therefore, among their preparations, they dressed in special shining silk garments (“Bnei Brak”) designated for Yom Tov and adorned their table with fine ornamental vessels, and the author of the Haggadah makes a point of noting this!

By donning the special Yom Tov clothing, they received illumination and special strength from Above. Thus, we further understand the great importance of proper clothing!

## Summary and Practical Conclusions

1. We are commanded in the Torah that before approaching to stand before G-d in prayer or in words of thanks, praise, and homage, we must prepare our bodies to be fitting for it—by cleansing ourselves beforehand. This involves both external and internal cleanliness. External bodily cleanliness includes a proper washing of the hands, as well as washing one's face and mouth. Internal bodily cleanliness includes cleansing one's innards (attending to the call of nature).

Furthermore, one should ensure that one's general appearance is pleasant, clean, and orderly. If a person will dress up in fine, respectable clothes to appear before an earthly dignitary of flesh and blood, all the more so should one dress in fine, honorable garments when coming to stand before the King of kings, the Holy One blessed be He. Thus, the trait of cleanliness encompasses both cleanliness from sin *and* cleanliness of one's body and clothing from dirt.

2. A Jew's attire should be distinctive in three aspects: (a) his clothing should be modest. (b) he must beware of any garment forbidden by the Torah, such as *shatnez* (a wool-linen blend). (c) he should wear a

*mitzvah*-garment—namely, the tzitzit, which is equal to all the other commandments.

3. At times, a person might think that clothing is merely external and not so important. But in truth, clothes contain an inner, profound impact, and thus they occupy an important place in the service of G-d. Besides serving as protection for a person's body from external elements like cold and heat, clothes also serve to guard a person's inner being. This is clearly observable: someone dressed in the garb of a Torah-observant Jew will find it difficult to mingle and associate with people who have thrown off the yoke of G-d. In this way, one's attire provides great protection from negative influences. This is not a coincidental phenomenon; rather, refined clothing carries a holiness that guards a person from sin.

4. It is known from our sages and saintly leaders that all of a person's external movements and behavior greatly influence his inner character. Therefore, a neat, respectable, and orderly appearance is of great importance. A person's external appearance greatly assists his inner spiritual life, helping him achieve clear thought and steadiness of mind in the

**Parshat Tzav - Summary and Practical Conclusions**

service of G-d. On the other hand, if a person's external behavior is erratic and unstable, and moreover if his look is disheveled and slovenly, it is likely that the inner realm of his soul is likewise disordered and untidy. And a person whose inner self is confused and untidy is not a proper vessel fit to absorb and attain the Torah—certainly not to delve into it deeply or grasp it with clear reasoning.

5. All the above applies to every Jew. But those who are Torah scholars, Bnei Torah, and Torah students must be all the more cautious in these matters. It is an obligation upon them—more than upon anyone—that their clothing and appearance be clean and orderly. If a sage does not appear dignified in his dress, and his look is slovenly and unkempt, people are prone to denigrate his words and not accept them, for they will not regard him as a sage at all. But when a sage appears before people dignified in dress and with a pleasant, neat, and clean appearance, his image makes a positive impression, and his words are accepted in the hearts of his audience.

6. The theme of the Seder night is that one must not despair. Even if a person

sees himself sinking into the matters of this world, he should not despair by saying that he can no longer repent and abandon his ways. For there is absolutely no despair for a Jewish person; G-d, may He be blessed, can help and save one from any situation.

We were therefore commanded to remember the Exodus from Egypt every single day, morning and night—to remember that there is no place for despair and one must not lose hope. We remember that such things have happened before: in the very midst of the darkness, at the height of the night, the brightest light shone for us and redemption arrived.

7. The Seder night is also an auspicious time for educating our children. As noted above, just as a person must never despair of himself, so too one must never despair of the education of one's children. This applies especially to those children who, unfortunately, have cast off the yoke of Torah. To bring them back to the right path, parents must use only pleasantness and love—through a shining countenance and genuine closeness. Only in this way can one find a pathway into one's child's heart.

**Shabbat Shalom!**



"Whoever brings joy to those in need, joy is brought to his home."

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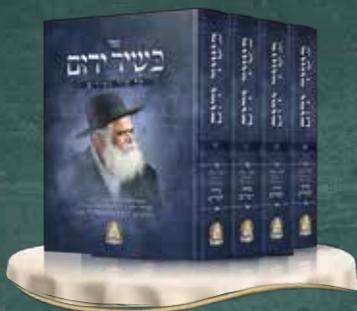
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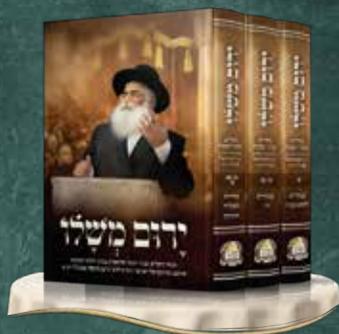


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10th of Nissan ,5786



City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
New York	6:57 pm	7:57 pm	8:28 pm
Miami	7:17 pm	8:10 pm	8:48 pm
Los Angeles	6:53 pm	7:49 pm	8:23 pm
Montreal	6:58 pm	8:02 pm	8:29 pm
Toronto	7:20 pm	8:23 pm	8:52 pm
London	6:07 pm	7:17 pm	7:39 pm
Jerusalem	6:40 pm	7:31 pm	8:15 pm
Tel Aviv	6:37 pm	7:28 pm	8:13 pm
Haifa	6:36 pm	7:31 pm	8:15 pm
Be'er Sheva	6:36 pm	7:30 pm	8:14 pm

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*Even if children are educated and steeped in Torah and mitzvot, if their upbringing is not founded on truth, it will not endure—for the Holy One, blessed be He, does not grant Heavenly assistance where there is falsehood.*

*Children must be educated along the path of truth, in holiness and purity, with clean, guarded speech. In this way a person merits that his children will walk in G-d's path with integrity; this is what one strives for in raising Jewish children—that they be "seed of truth."*



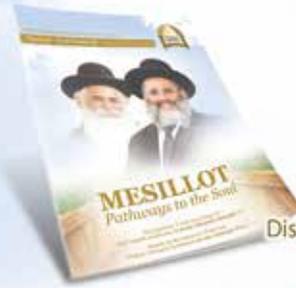
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