

Toras



Shades

The future's so bright, we need shades!

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd you shall bring close to you Aharon your brother and his sons with him from amongst the Children of Israel to serve [as Priests] for me; Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, Elazar and Isamar, the sons of Aharon" (Shemos 28:1). The Ramban says that the reason the Torah had to mention the names of Aharon's sons individually (even though it had already told us that his sons were included) was to teach us that they did not become Kohanim (Priests) automatically, but had to be anointed as well. Only after these five were anointed would those (subsequently) born to them automatically be Kohanim. Which left Pinchas, Elazar's son, out. He had already been born, but was not anointed, so did not become a Kohain until he earned it by taking a strong stand against intermarriage (Bamidbar 25:7-13).

The Shiras Dovid points out that since Pinchas would have been included in "Aharon's sons" had his father and uncles not been mentioned specifically, we see that the term "sons" includes grandsons as well. Only by mentioning the others but not Pinchas was he excluded. But why would the Torah exclude Pinchas? Any brothers that would be born will be Kohanim, as will all of his cousins. There must have been a reason why Pinchas was singled out from his entire family to prevent him from becoming a Kohain right away. Why did he have to wait to "prove" his worthiness?

The Maharal (Bamidbar 25:13) suggests that at the time the first Kohanim were anointed, Pinchas was still a minor, and therefore inappropriate to be anointed. However, even though we know that Elazar was at least 30 years old at the time (see Bamidbar Rabbah 3:7), he may have been much older than 30, and Pinchas may very well have been an adult. Besides, the Talmud (Zevachim 102a) says that at the time that his father and uncles were being anointed Kohanim, Pinchas himself was

"anointed for war." If he was old enough (or ready enough) to be the Kohain that led the battle, why wasn't he made a full Kohain?

Although it is possible that these are differing opinions (the Talmud and its source in Seder Olam Rabbah that

says Pinchas became the "anointed for wartime" on the 1st of Nissan, 2449 and those that say that Pinchas did not become a Kohain until the 40th year in the desert- see Zevachim 101b), the Ba'alay Tosfos (on Bamidbar 25:13) indicate they are not mutually exclusive, and in fact Pinchas was only made a "partial Kohain" until his heroic act in 2488. But why was he excluded from becoming a full Kohain right away?

One possibility might be that in order to establish the family that would become the priestly class as being the appropriate standard-bearers of Judaism, the initial "inductees" had to be recognizably superior in their righteousness. True, afterwards it would remain in the family, and the status of Kohain would be bestowed upon every son born even before he had the opportunity to establish himself as being worthy. Nevertheless, once it was established that this family was chosen because of its supreme righteousness, the best prospect of maintaining a righteous Priestly class was to "keep it in the family," where father could hand it down to son without the distractions of everyday life. They wouldn't have to work, because they got Terumah and the portions from the offerings, and there was no family plot of land that had to be cared for. They could focus purely on their tasks as Kohanim. (This idea was so worthwhile, that it would eventually be extended to the entire Tribe of Levi.)

While Pinchas was certainly righteous (and therefore worthy of being the "anointed one for wartime"), his righteousness could not be compared to that of his father, grandfather, and uncles. They had the advantage of having lived at least one generation longer than Pinchas, and therefore having that much more time to reach greater heights. Pinchas reached that level after having lived another generation (i.e. 38 years later), and was therefore "inducted" then. But until he reached that level, had he been included with the other five, it would have made it seem as if it was the

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family connection that was the criteria (as Korach would later charge) rather than the level of righteousness. For this reason, G-d had to exclude Pinchas initially, and wait another generation before giving Pinchas his much-deserved Kehunah. (This is similar to the Maharal's second approach.)

Another possibility might be based on the law that a Kohain becomes invalidated from the service if he kills someone (Berachos 32b, Orach Chaim 128:35). Had Pinchas already been a Kohain when he killed Zimri, he would have no longer been allowed to fulfill the role. By delaying his appointment, he was never disqualified. However, if having killed somebody makes it inappropriate to serve as a Kohain, why would having done so prior to the appointment make it any more appropriate? And why would this specific instance, which G-d obviously thought was praiseworthy, have invalidated him from the Kehunah? We see just the opposite, that Pinchas was rewarded for this very act by being given the Kehunah!

Yet another possibility might be based on the tradition (Pirkay d'Rebbi Eliezer 29) that Pinchas became Eliyahu Hanavi (Elijah the Prophet). Although all Kohanim after that initial anointing in 2449 are Kohanim simply by virtue of being born to a Kohain, prophecy is a level that must be attained. The leadership role of the Kohain is different than that of the Prophet. The Kohanim were responsible for the Temple service, for

helping those who needed atonement attain it, and for maintaining the integrity of Jewish law. The Prophet was the spiritual leader who gave the community instructions beyond the letter of the law, preaching not only against idol worship, but about the importance of justice; that G-d prefers the inspiration the offerings are supposed to arouse to the offerings themselves. It can be said that the Kohanim focused on the structure, the vessel, while the Prophet also focused on the flame. There were many who attended "schools of prophecy" (see Radak on Melachim II 2:3), but only a select few that became Prophets. It is not easy to attain the level of attachment to G-d needed to become a Prophet.

It is therefore possible that G-d delayed Pinchas' Kehunah precisely because he would later become Eliyahu Hanavi, who would represent G-d's word as His Prophet. Had he been made a Kohain right away, it might have been said that he hadn't earned his position as Prophet, that it was handed to him like every other Kohain. In order to ensure that he should be respected as the great Prophet he was, G-d made sure that even his Kehunah was earned. While every other Kohain (after the initial five) became Kohanim at birth, Pinchas only became a full Kohain after he stood up for Jewish law and proved he was worthy of it. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

My wife was in labor with our first child. Things were going pretty well when suddenly she began to shout, "Shouldn't, couldn't, wouldn't, didn't, can't!"

"Doctor, what's wrong with my wife?"

"Nothing. She's just having contractions."

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah dwells on the necessity for taking the finest olive oil to use as the fuel for the great candelabra that stood in the Mishkan and later in the Temple in Jerusalem. Olive oil was one of the great staples of the ancient world. It provided fuel, skin lotion, food and use as a lubricant in all sorts of mechanical devices. If there was an item of necessary multi-purpose use in the homes of our biblical ancestors it was olive oil. The Torah however specifies that the olive oil that was to be used as the fuel for the candelabra was to be pure, the first crush of the olives, beaten fine for the lamp. In this we have the general lesson of the Torah that out of all of the multiple talents and uses that a human being possesses, the first and best of these is to be employed in the service of G-d and His commandments. G-d is never to be offered what is second best, inferior, a purely default position and contribution.

Olive oil, with its many essential uses and importance is the symbol of this idea of using the many gifts granted to us by the Creator for His purposes and the betterment of human society. If one is willing and able to

offer the best that one has for the advancement of noble and holy causes then that cause is immeasurably strengthened and advanced. The candelabra is the symbol of our lives and achievements. The fuel that we use to light that candelabra must always be of the finest quality obtainable within our talents and means.

I think therefore that this is the reason why that olive oil is the preferred fuel for the performance of other mitzvot as well. In the Mishna there is opinion, though it is not binding according to halacha, that only olive oil should be used to light the Shabat lights on Friday nights. There are many Jewish women today who only use olive oil for their Shabat flames. The miracle of Chanuka was based on the small cruise of olive oil and therefore the preferred method of performing the Chanuka mitzvah is by using olive oil, though again other forms of flames are also acceptable. The latkes and sufganiyot of Chanuka are all fried or baked in olive oil. These are again examples of using the best for G-d's purposes. It is called in rabbinic terminology mitzvah min hamuvchar - doing the mitzvah in the finest and best way possible.

And that is why the Torah places so much emphasis on how the olive oil for the great candelabra is to be prepared and refined. By using the finest that we possess we can hope to achieve an eternal flame within our souls and within all of Israel as well. For the purpose of the great candelabra was not to provide light for G-d, so to speak, for He requires no light from us. The purpose was to light the eternal flame within the Jewish people. That goal and purpose must remain high on our agenda today as well. © 2006 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

*A woman got on a bus holding a baby. The bus driver said,
"That's the ugliest baby I've ever seen."*

In a huff, the woman slammed her fare into the fare box and took an aisle seat near the rear of the bus. The man seated next to her sensed that she was agitated and asked her what was wrong. "The bus driver insulted me," she fumed.

The man sympathized and said,

*"Why, he's a public servant and shouldn't say things to insult passengers."
You're right," She said. "I think I'll go back up there
and give him a piece of my mind."*

"That's a good idea," the man said. "Here, let me hold your monkey."

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd you shall make sacred vestments that are dignified and elegant for Aaron your brother” (Exodus 28:2).

European and American sartorial designers and clothing industrialists promulgate the slogan, "clothes make the individual". Judaism, which has always emphasized the inner personality rather than the external appearances with the teaching "the Compassionate One desires one's heart", might very well provide a substitute slogan, "clothes fake the individual". Nevertheless, Judaism does understand that one's external garb can very often influence and even change one's inner feelings: new and sparkling clothing, for example, can make almost anyone feel much more optimistic and perky, whereas old and unkempt garb can either signal or give testimony to a state of inner depression. For these reasons we are commanded to wear special garb for Sabbaths and Festivals, modest dress is a mandatory expression of a modest lifestyle, and the Kohen-priests display their unique leadership roles also by the uniqueness of their sacred vestments.

Since the Talmud teaches that the very ability of the priest-Kohen to perform the divine service is dependent upon his wearing the proper priestly garb-"When the (priestly garb) is upon them, the priesthood is upon them" (B.T. Zevachim 17B), it seems apparent that the unique priestly apparel must teach volumes about the nature and quality of the Kohen-priests' religious leadership. To this end, I would like to analyze the precise placement of the names of the tribes of Israel, which appear in two separate vestments of the High Priest.

"They shall make the ephod (a kind of vest, described by Josephus-Antiquities 3:7:5 -- as having sleeves and shoulder straps, with an opening in the center for the breast plate) out of gold thread, sky blue, dark red and crimson wool, together with twined linen, in a patterned brocade....Take two sardmyx (crypto-crystalline quartz with alternating red and white bands) stones and engrave on them the names of Israel's sons; there shall be six names on one stone and the remaining six names on the second stone...Place the two stones on the two shoulder pieces of the ephod as remembrance stones...Aaron shall carry their names on his shoulders before G-d as a remembrance" (Exodus 28:6-12)

Hence Aaron the High Priest carried about with him during his performance of the Temple service the names of the twelve tribes of his nation, and he carried them upon his shoulders.

Now we have just seen that there was an open place for the breastplate- the breastplate of judgement-upon the ephod. The Bible describes this breastplate in exquisite detail: "Make a breastplate of Judgement. It shall be a patterned brocade... Set it with four rows of mounted precious stones (emerald, topaz, sapphire, etc.)... The stones shall contain the names of the twelve sons of Israel, one for each of the twelve stones...Make two gold rings for the breastplate, and attach them to the two upper corners of the ephod...Aaron will carry the names of Israel's

sons on the breastplate of Judgement over his heart when he enters the Sanctuary. It shall be a constant remembrance before G-d" (Exodus 28:15-29)

Once again, Aaron is carrying about the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, but this time they are on his heart. Somehow this breastplate had the special capacity to help him in rendering important judicial decisions, such as whether or not to go to war. Hence the Urim and Tumim-literally lights and perfection, divinely inspired judgements-were imbedded within the names of these tribes placed upon his heart (Exodus 28:30).

Why two separate renderings of the names of the tribes, and why was one set of names on the High Priests' shoulders and the other over the High Priest's heart? And what are those mysterious Urim and Tumim?

I believe that the message at hand is a very profound one. The religious leaders of Israel-the nation of the Book, the nation of the law, the nation with a mission to the world-must first and foremost render judicial decisions for his people, determine national policy, provide religious, ethical and moral direction. But at the same time, he must be painfully aware that he has to take responsibility for his decisions; that he must take responsibility for his nation. Thus he must literally wear-carry and bear the burden-of every individual member of each of the twelve tribes; he must carry their names on his shoulders, he must take responsibility for the welfare and destiny of his people.

The Defense Minister of Israel, Shaul Mofaz, visited the family of Yosef Goodman z"l last week, son of the owners of the Efrat Pizzeria. Yosef was a beautiful, strong, idealistic and committed paratrooper who was tragically killed during a training accident. Mordecai his father asked the Defense Minister what was the most difficult aspect of his job. "Visiting bereaved families", he immediately replied. "I visit every one, because I feel very personally the responsibility for each loss...."

But the next question must be, what gives the High Priest the ability to render the difficult judgements he must render? They must be judgements of the mind, but they must also be judgements of the heart. He must realize that while he must certainly take into account the law, the traditions, the societal conditions, the national and world politics, he must also and even primarily be aware that he is affecting real people, individuals and families, by the ramifications of his decisions. Hence, the names of the tribes are on his heart and the decision must be not only of the mind but also of the heart.

And finally, he must also take into account the will of the people when he makes decisions which will affect their lives. That's why the Urim and Tumim, the light of revelation which are revealed when a proper decision is rendered, has their source in the names of the tribes, in the

decisions of the population of Israel. As the Talmud teaches us, "Even if the nation of Israel does not entirely consist of prophets, it does consist of children of prophets." © 2006 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

Proudly showing off his new apartment to a friend late one night, the drunk led the way to the bedroom, where there was a big brass gong.

"What's that brass gong for?" asked the friend.

"It's not a gong. It's a talking clock," the drunk replied.

"A talking clock? How's it work?"

"Watch this," said the drunk. He took a hammer, gave the gong an ear-shattering pound and waited. Someone on the other side of the wall screamed:

"Hey, you jerk. It's 3:00 in the morning!"

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In both the Purim and Joseph stories, seemingly meaningless sub plots eventually turn into major focal points.

In the Purim story, Mordechai exposes the plot to kill King Ahashverosh. The plotters are hanged and Mordechai's good deed is recorded in the Book of Chronicles. (Esther 2:21-23)

This narrative appears unimportant until much later when Ahashverosh, unable to sleep, has the Book of Chronicles read to him. When hearing of Mordechai's actions, he arranges for Mordechai to be led through the streets of Persia with great honor. This leads to Mordechai's ascent to power. (Esther Ch. 6)

A similar episode unfolds in the Joseph story. The butler and baker have dreams that Joseph interprets. Joseph correctly predicts that the baker will be hanged and that the butler will return to his place in the palace. (Genesis Ch. 40)

Once again, a seemingly insignificant story, until years later, when Pharaoh cannot sleep and seeks to have his dreams interpreted. Here the butler steps in, telling Pharaoh of Joseph's great interpretive skills. (Genesis 41:9-13)

Rabbi David Silber points out that both the butler and Ahashverosh remember a past good deed only when it serves to benefit them. The Megillah actually explicitly states that the king was told of Mordechai's heroism immediately after it took place (Esther 2:22), yet he chose to ignore it up until the point of that famous sleepless night. Only when in personal turmoil does he remember Mordechai.

This is also the case in the story of Joseph. Although Joseph had requested that the butler remember him, he does not. Only when Pharaoh is in personal chaos and the butler senses that he could get some credit in recommending Joseph, does he come forward.

Note the parallels in language. Joseph asks the butler to remember his dreams (ki im zechartani-Genesis 40:14). The butler fails to do so (ve-lo zachar-Genesis 40:23). Later, before Pharaoh, the butler states: "My sin I remember (mazkir) today." (Genesis 41:9) In other words, the butler realized that he failed to recall Joseph's greatness earlier. Similarly in the Megillah narrative, Mordechai's heroism was read by the King in the book of records of the chronicles (zichronot, divrei hayamim - Esther 6:1). Not surprisingly Purim falls on the day in the week following Shabbat Zachor.

Some people remember out of altruism, others from selfishness. The butler and Ahashverosh are examples of the latter type-they remember only when it suits their fancy. Our challenge is to remember the actions of others and keep them in our consciousness at all times, even at the times when we have little to gain. We must remember not because it suits us, but we must do so because it's simply the right thing to do.

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*Why do they lock gas station bathrooms? Are they afraid someone will clean them?
-George Carlin*

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Hear Conditioning

Whoever misses the Divine hand that touched the Purim story is not looking. And if he claims that he heard the Megilah, he probably was not listening. Imagine, the Prime Minister draws lots and decides to annihilate the entire Jewish nation. Within 24 hours he has approval from the ruler of the not-so-free-world, King Achashveirosh.

Within days, the plot is foiled, the Prime Minister is hanged and his prime target is promoted to replace him! Pretty political. Pretty miraculous. And definitely divine. Yet Hashem's name is not mentioned once in the Megilah. Why? Of course, the Megilah is replete with allusions. There are acronyms that spell the name of Hashem, and our sages explain that every time the word "King" is mentioned in the Megilah, it has a divine reference. But, still, why does the last book of the Prophets, a Divinely inspired Megilah, have only veiled references to Heavenly intervention?

It was a sweltering August day when the Greenberg brothers entered the posh Dearborn, Michigan offices of the notoriously anti-Semitic car-maker, Henry Ford.

"Mr. Ford," announced Hyman Greenberg, the eldest of the three, "we have a remarkable invention that will revolutionize the automobile industry. " Ford looked skeptical, but their threats to offer it to the competition kept his interest piqued. "We would like to demonstrate it to you

in person." After a little cajoling, they brought Mr. Ford outside and asked him to enter a black Edsel that was parked in front of the building.

Norman Greenberg, the middle brother, opened the door of the car. "Please step inside Mr. Ford."

"What!" shouted the tycoon, "are you crazy? It must be two hundred degrees in that car!"

"It is," smiled the youngest brother, Max, "but sit down, Mr. Ford, and push the white button."

Intrigued, Ford pushed the button. All of a sudden a whoosh of freezing air started blowing from vents all around the car, and within seconds the automobile was not only comfortable, it was quite cool! "This is amazing!" exclaimed Ford. "How much do you want for the patent?"

Norman spoke up. "The price is one million dollars." Then he paused, "And there is something else. We want the name 'Greenberg Brothers Air Conditioning' to be stamped right next to the Ford logo."

"Money is no problem," retorted Ford, "but no way will I have a 'Jew-name' next to my logo on my cars!"

They haggled back and forth for a while and finally they settled. One and one half million dollars, and the name Greenberg would be left off. However, the first names of the Greenberg brothers would be forever emblazoned upon the console of every Ford air conditioning system.

And that is why today, whenever you enter a Ford vehicle you will see those three names clearly defined on the air-conditioning control panel: HI -- NORM -- MAX.

The writers of the Megilah left us with a message that would accompany us throughout our long exile. You will not always see G-d's signature openly emblazoned upon every circumstance. However, throughout persecution and deliverance, He is always there. And just like on Purim His obvious interference is undocumented; but we know and feel it -- and we search for it, and we find it! So, too, in every instance we must seek His name, find it, and recognize it. It may not be emblazoned on the bumper; it may be hidden on the console -- but it is there. For Hashem is always speaking. All we have to do is listen. Joyous Purim! © 1996 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & Project Genesis, Inc.

"What would men be without women? Scarce, mighty scarce." – Mark Twain

RABBI LABEL LAM

Of Mice Traps and Men

One who reads the Megillah out of sequence has not fulfilled his obligation. (Megillah 17A)

The Sefas Emes asks, "Why is "Purim" not called "Pur"?" Why is it called plural - Purim for lots and not lot in the singular since

Haman is described as having cast a "pur" to reckon the most favorable day to attack the Jews?

Michael Behe introduces in his book "Darwin's Black Box" the concept of "irreducible complexity". The explanation is as follows. Take for example a simple mouse trap. It has a number of functional parts that make it a mouse trap. Any component piece of the trap is useless and meaningless without the other small number parts. It could never have evolved gradually. Of what use would a spring be without cheese for bait or a board for it to slam its gait upon. The unadorned mouse trap needs all the parts present to be functional. The parts of it would have to have been created with the finished end in mind.

Similarly, a snake with poisonous venom would need a hypodermic needle for a tooth to inject its payload. Of what use would the tooth be without the poison and why would the creature need such a potent poison to kill a horse in seconds if it was lacking the sophisticated delivery system?

One of the keys to understanding the Megillah lies in appreciating how a sequence of seemingly simple events form an organized chain- with an eerily predetermined result. In the end, it can be observed how the aggregate is "irreducibly complex". Minus any small piece in the puzzle and history would have looked so much different. If the King would have taken a sleeping pill instead of reading from a book of remembrances, had Esther not found grace in the eyes of the king, had the king not sent out his first foolish decree, had the king not relocated his capital in Shushan where Mordachai was quietly minding his own business before destiny backed up to his doorstep, then things would have turned out much different and the world would be unrecognizably different.

There is a growing paradigm in science that may help explain what is so deficient about reading or hearing the Megillah out of order. Surprisingly it is called, "Chaos Theory". It does not aim to demonstrate that things are random and meaningless. Quite the contrary, it postulates the notion that all matters of seeming wild randomness display surprisingly complex and beautiful order. Even the way cigarette smoke dissipates throughout a room leaves a delicate trail of artistry. One of the proponents of this theory, Joseph Ford, refuted Einstein's statement, "G-d doesn't play dice with the universe!" He says, "Yes, G-d does play dice, but the dice are loaded."

In the end Haman's toss of the "pur" happened within a grander context of a more profound "pur" -or lot for the Jews. Haman not only could not derail the Divine scheme of things but perversely he furthered and promoted it in the most profound way. Our sages tell us that more than all the words of all the prophets were effective in returning the Jews to G-d;

Haman was the catalyst to accomplish this when he received the royal signet ring of the king. His ultimatum resulted in the opposite of what he intended with his "pur". Why? Because another "pur" dominates incorporating and adjusting to all the smaller Machiavellian moves making rather a perfect sense of this nice game of dice - a grand Purim play of mice-traps and men. © 2006 Rabbi L. Lam & torah.org

Dr. Leroy, the head psychiatrist at the local mental hospital, is examining patients to see if they're cured and ready to re-enter society.

"So, Mr. Clark," the doctor says to one of his patients, "I see by your chart that you've been recommended for dismissal. Do you have any idea what you might do once you're released?"

The patient thinks for a moment, then replies, "Well, I went to school for mechanical engineering. That's still a good field, good money there. But on the other hand, I thought I might write a book about my experience here in the hospital, what it's like to be a patient here. People might be interested in reading a book like that. In addition, I thought I might go back to college and study art history, which I've grown interested in lately."

Dr. Leroy nods and says, "Yes, those all sound like intriguing possibilities."

The patient replies, "And the best part is, in my spare time, I can go on being a teapot."

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT" A

Summarized by Shaul Barth

Translated by Kaeren Fish

Our parasha speaks about the priestly garments; I would like to speak about clothing in general.

Rambam (Moreh Nevukhim III:33) describes the values that the Torah comes to teach Israel. One of these values is hygiene of the body and cleanliness of clothes. Rambam goes on to say that a person who emphasizes only these external values is a sinful and wanton individual, but still we see that great importance is attached to a person's outward appearance and manner.

In the Gemara we read of Rabbi Yochanan, who was so handsome that he used to station himself outside the mikveh, so that women emerging from their ritual immersion would set their eyes upon him and eventually give birth to handsome children. In one of his sayings, Rabbi Yochanan asserts that a Torah Sage must ensure that his clothing is clean and respectable; this, too, teaches us that a person must pay proper attention to his outer appearance. Even Rabbi Yochanan, blessed with an exceptionally handsome appearance, took care to ensure that his garments were clean.

During the 1960's, "hippies" introduced a trend of strange clothes and a peculiar appearance. By this they meant to show that a person's importance lies inside; therefore, there is no significance to the outer form that he assumes. Judaism does not accept this approach. Undoubtedly, inner character is most important, but external appearance also has its place. The culture of the '60's expressed a lack of shame, a sort of uninterest in how a person looked. Shame is a very important principle in Judaism. We see this evidenced in the fact that the very first thing that G-d does, after Adam and Chava are expelled from Gan Eden, is to sew them garments made of skins. The trend towards a lack of shame reaches its extreme in the form of nudist colonies: entire communities of people who go about naked, like animals. One of man's distinct levels of superiority over the animals is our sense of shame; this emotion is important, and it is important that we care about how we look.

When I was younger, I used to go into the students' rooms to see how they looked, whether they were tidy. Today I am too old for that, but it must be emphasized that there is importance attached to how things look, to external appearance. Clearly, a person who focuses only on externals is corrupt, but a normal person must take this aspect of reality into consideration. It was said that in the yeshiva of Slobodka, students who bought new suits would not come to wish the rav "Shabbat Shalom," because he would praise the new garment and would wish them to wear it well, and the students did not want to be treated in any special way. The rav did this because he wanted to show them that outer appearance is important.

The Torah places inner values as our top priority, but does not suffice with this. One interpretation of the sin of the sons of Aharon was that they entered the Mishkan without their priestly garments. They believed that what was important was inner values, and therefore if they really wanted to serve G-d, surely it would not matter how they were dressed. But they were mistaken. One cannot serve G-d in any manner that one chooses; there is significance to one's external appearance when approaching the Sanctuary, that way in which others see us is important. This, too, is one of the values to which the Torah educates us. *[This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat parashat Tetzaveh 5765 (2005).]*

A rabbi, a minister, and a priest were playing poker when the police raided the game.

Turning to the priest, the lead police officer said,

"Father Murphy, were you gambling?"

Turning his eyes to heaven, the priest whispered, "L-rd, forgive me for what I am about to do." To the police officer, he then said, "No, officer; I was not gambling."

The officer then asked the minister, "Pastor Johnson, were you gambling?"

Again, after an appeal to heaven, the minister replied,

"No, officer; I was not gambling."

Turning to the rabbi, the officer again asked, "Rabbi Goldstein, were you gambling?" Shrugging his shoulders, the rabbi replied, "With whom?"

RABBI YAAKOV FELDMAN

Project Genesis

Haman was a self-made man. His background isn't enunciated in the Megillah nor what catapulted him to his high position. He just seemed destined for greatness (or meanness, as we come to learn) from the start, and he was thus out of the experience of most of us. But at one point he seemed very much like us: when he allowed himself to boast to his wife and close friends about how well things were going for him-ironically, though, right before his downfall.

"You know," he said, though in other words, "I'm a very wealthy man with a large family who's become a great success in my field" (see Esther 5:11-12). "And now on top of all that Queen Esther has invited me, and me alone, to join her and the king at a private banquet" (v. 12). "Can you imagine?" he must have said.

And who among us but the greatest hasn't come home and shared much the same with his or her spouse about personal and professional successes and peaks. "I was promoted!" we might say, " ... I can't believe how far I've come, considering where I started out", etc.

Now, would anyone blame us for allowing ourselves a little credit with our loved ones or for glowing just a bit in the face of great good fortune? Why, we'd undoubtedly inject a number of humble recitations of "boruch Hashem" (thank G d) as well as an appropriate "blee ayin harah" (I hope nothing ruins it for us) here and there. Would anyone really accuse us of arrogance? I doubt it.

And yet we scorn Haman for his remarks, and even pat ourselves on the back for not making the mistake he subsequently made when he said that, despite all his good fortune, he was depressed and enraged because one guy-and a Jew no less, Mordechai-refused to bow down to him (see Esther 5:9,13).

"What a blowhard he was!", we'd say self-righteously, "and what a fool, since he was just about to lose it all"-as if our own pride wouldn't be smashed if someone in the office kept sticking his tongue out at us and refused to pat us on the back despite our promotion or the like.

Notice Esther's diffidence on the other hand, though. Three separate times she was offered the greatest career-move imaginable-control of half of the civilized world (see Esther 5:3,6 and 7:2)! -- and she never once mentioned it to anyone. So what is it that separates Esther and others like her from the rest of us?

First off, we need to know that according to some, Mordechai could have been accused of arrogance when he refused to bow down to Haman! (After all, halachically he probably didn't need to refuse, since Haman wasn't an idol in fact [see Rashi to Esther 3:2]). His detractors claim he only refused to bow down to Haman because Mordechai had once saved Haman's life and Haman had become his slave in return for that as a result, and Mordechai wouldn't deign to bow down to him out of rank pride (see Yalkut Shimoni 956)!

It seems to be that what set Esther apart was the fact that she truly internalized a lesson Mordechai himself taught her at a crucial point in the Megillah (for, you see, while Mordechai might have exhibited hubris, he apparently came to do teshuvah for that error, as we all can, by reflecting upon the idea we'll soon expand on).

There came a point in the Megillah where the crisis was coming to a head-

the Jews were about to be annihilated (G-d forbid!) -- and something dire had to be done. Mordechai suggested that Esther was in a unique position to appeal to King Achashveirosh to end the decree against the Jews, but she was afraid to speak out. And that's when Mordechai offered the insight he himself had apparently come to that had lead to his own humility.

He said to her, You know, "if you remain silent now, then relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place" since it was inevitable. "But you and your father's house will be destroyed" (Esther 4:14), because you'll have done nothing to help the process along.

For indeed, no one but G-d Himself is indispensable (see Derech Hashem 1:3-4 and Hilchot Yesodai Torah 1:1-3). Everything and everyone else is support staff at best and stage props at worst.

In fact, the halachic procedures involved in Purim make that point in a way as well. The Shulchan Aruch (Halachic Codes) points out that if the Megillah-reader, who plays such a vital role in the day, stops reciting the Megillah for one reason or another, that in fact someone else can quite simply step up in his place and continue on from where the first reader left off without a hitch (see O. C. 6:92:2). The point is that the all-important Megillah reading will always go on one way or another.

Apparently that was the lesson Mordechai himself came to learn and to pass on to Esther; and that seems to be what gave her the inner fortitude needed not to brag about her own accomplishments.

One thing does stand out, however. Even though Esther didn't publicize her good fortune, the facts are there for all to read; it's all recorded in the Book of Esther. We all know that she could have been in charge of

half the world despite her not having enunciated it. And that underscores another point, that what must come to be known always will.

In fact, that allows us new insight into the Mishna in Pirke Avot that reads, "Contemplate three things and you'll never come to sin: know what's above you-an eye that sees, an ear that hears; and that *all your deeds being are inscribed in a book*" (2:1).

That's to say that the only way to avoid the cardinal sin of arrogance is to know deep in your bones that G-d's "eyes" and "ears" know full-well what has to be done in the world, and what will be done in the end. And that the lesson for us is that if we assume the roles allotted us in the great drama without arrogance or an untoward degree of self-consciousness, that our part will be "inscribed" in a book, just as Esther's was. And that we will have mattered indeed-without our having to assert that. © 2006 Rabbi Y. Feldman & torah.org

The old mohel, still did circumcisions. One afternoon he was called to the Goldberg house. The baby and guests were waiting anxiously.

The mohel came out of the room a minute after he'd gone in and asked Mr. Goldberg, "Do you have a hammer?"

A puzzled Mr. Goldberg went to the garage, and returned with a hammer. The mohel thanked him and went back into the bedroom. A moment later, he came out and asked, "Do you have a chisel?" Mr. Goldberg complied with the request.

In the next ten minutes, the mohel asked for and received a pair of pliers a screwdriver and a hacksaw. The last request got to Mr. Goldberg.

He asked, "What are you doing to my son?"

"Not a thing," replied the mohel. "I can't get my instrument bag open."



Totally cool people say...

Happy Purim!