

מתוקים מדבש

*Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah*

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Bemachashavah Techilah

Man relates to clothing in numerous ways. We wear them for modesty, to convey dignity or importance, for protection from the elements, via fashion we can make a statement about belonging, or not belonging, or to reflect other moods and the atmosphere we wish to project.

The mitzvah of *tzitzis* is given in two unconnected verses. In *Shema* it is described as "... [T]hey shall make for themselves *tzitzis* on the corners of the garments (*vigdeihem*) through their generations, and they shall put on the *tzitzis* of the corner a blue thread" (Bamidbar 15:38). In *Devarim*, the description is "You shall make for yourself large cords (*gedilim*) on the four corners of your clothing (*kesusecha*) that you cover yourself (*techaseh*) in" (*Devarim* 22:12).

The term *tzitzis*, whose root means "to sprout", speaks of an extension of the corner. It refers to the individual strings, as the verse tells you to wind another thread around them. However, when the Torah speaks of *gedilim*, it refers to the cord as a whole, using a term that literally refers to it as a larger string, not in terms of its composition from individual threads. One focuses on the loose ends of the strings at the end of the tassel, the other to the wound and knotted cord at the top.

The Gemara writes that in the ideal, a *tzitzis* should have the loose strings twice as long as the knotted portion.¹ Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that this aspect of the mitzvah contains an important statement of the Jewish ideal. The Torah exists to provide rules and channel our abilities, to direct our talents, not suppress them.² While *kesus* and *lechaseh* speak of covering and hiding appearances,

The Torah exists to provide rules and channel our abilities, to direct our talents, not suppress them.

the word *begeid* speaks of the newly created appearance. The prophet Yishayahu uses the same root in a negative sense when he exhorts, "*uvogeid velo vogdu bo* – you act within a guise, but they did not hide behind a guise from you" (*Yishayahu* 33:1). *Begadim* are not clothing in the role of coverings; they impart an image, significance to the wearer and importance to his deeds and abilities. The *pasuk* has us place *gedilim*, the channeling of our talents, on our *kesusim*, our coverings, our clothing worn for reasons of protection and modesty. On *begadim*, however, we place *tzitzis*, the extension of ourselves into the world.

¹ Menachos 39a

² Collected Writings vol. III, pp. 124-125

The choice of term in this week's *parashah* is quite significant when it says, "And you shall make sacred *begadim* for Aharon your brother, for honor and splendor" (*Shemos* 28:2). Throughout the entire *parashah* and in normal usage the items of *kohein's* uniform are notably referred to as *bigdei kehunah*.

Hebrew offers another term for clothing: *levush*. When Rivka dresses up Yaakov to make him seem like Esav, the Torah not only uses "*vehilbishah* – and she dressed him" for the clothing, but also "the skins *hilbishah* on his hands and on the back of his neck" (*Bereishis* 27:15-16). *Levush* is the flip side of *begeid*. A *begeid* creates a new image for the person for the sake of that new image. A *levush* creates a new image to hide an unwanted reality. And yet, it is not the functional modesty and protection offered by a *kesus*, clothing as a covering.

A large part of the Purim story is told in clothing. When Haman's decree is proclaimed, Mordechai "tears his garments (*begadav*), and he donned (*vayilbash*) sackcloth and ashes" (*Esther* 4:1). He leaves the realm of *begadim* and dons *levush*. Esther dons special clothing to appeal to Achashveirosh, and that too is "Esther clothed herself (*vatilbash*) in royalty" (*Ibid* 5:1). The *levush malchus*, royal garb, is also suggested by Haman as one of

the means of honoring “the man the king wishes to value” (Ibid 6:8-9). Even after Mordechai is given Haman’s mansion and position in the government, “Mordechai left from before the king in *levush malchus, techeiles* (blue wool), bleached white, a large gold crown and a robe of fine linen and purple...” (Ibid 8:15).

In contrast, Ya’akov gave Yosef a *kesones passim*.³ *Kesones* is different from the words we have looked at so far, in that it does not mean clothing in general, but a particular kind of clothing, a tunic or coat. A *kohein* too – both the *kohein gadol*⁴ and the regular *kohein*⁵ – wore a *kesones* as one of his *begadim*. A *kesones* is therefore a *begeg*, a means of assuming the

³ Bereishis 37:3

⁴ Shemos 38:4

⁵ Ibid v. 40

responsibilities of a new role. The royal implications of a *kesones* are reinforced in the book of Shmuel, when we are told that when Amnon sent Tamar from his home, she also wore a *kesones passim*, “for that is how princesses dressed” (Shmuel II 13:18). The original *kasnos* were the “*kasnos ‘or* – cloaks of skin” that Hashem made for Adam and Chavah when He expelled them from the garden.⁶ According to Rabbeinu Bachya⁷, these *kasnos* were precursors to the *bigdei kehunah*, and therefore were to be passed down to the first-born to help him assume a priestly role. The midrash relates that this was true until Nimrod stole the garments, Esav then acquired them when he killed Nimrod and Yaakov took it when he dressed up as Eisav

⁶ Bereishis 3:21

⁷ Ad loc

and received the *berachah*. At that point it was restored to the appropriate owner.

A *kesones* stands in stark relief to the *levush malchus* of Persia. As a *begeg*, a *kesones* was designed to create a new man, not to hide the old. And what sort of new person? An *oveid Hashem*.

Interestingly, these relationships to clothing have parallels in the non-verbal processes of *teshuvah*. There are four steps to *teshuvah*: abandoning the sin, remorse over past actions, confession, and accepting to do better in the future. Three are mental, the fourth, a necessary articulation to make these changes real. A *levush* hides the old form, and the old sins. A *kesus*, worn for modesty, is a means of avoiding shame and causes of embarrassment. And the *begeg* sets the tone for the future.

RABBI GIL STUDENT

Bakeish Shalom

The religious personality instinctively feels the superiority of the spiritual and the inherent subordination, even meaninglessness, of physical appearances. In a world in which the ultimate goal is connection with the Divine, of what significant concern is external presentation?

It is thus surprising that, after the stunning defeat of Haman, Mordechai was raised to a higher position and dressed in royal garments. We are told, "Mordechai left the king's presence clad in royal apparel of turquoise and white with a large gold crown and a robe of fine linen and purple" (Esther 8:15). I know that I would personally see such an event and think, "Is this supposed to impress me?" Mordechai was a highly spiritual person – a scholar, a teacher

and a leader. That is impressive. But his wardrobe, whatever it may be, is not.

Granted, the point is not that he was wearing fancy clothes but that he was dressed in royal garments. He was treated like a king, or a king's top minister, and it was the respect from the king that the clothes implied that was so impressive and not the costume in itself. But, is that supposed to inspire in us awe of Mordechai? That he was honored by a king who was ready to allow the entire Jewish nation to be destroyed? Whether Achashverosh was a stupid king or an evil one, of what value is his show of respect?

There are other occasions in which we are also supposed to be impressed by shows of greatness. The Torah tells us about Yosef: "And

Par'oh removed his ring from his hand and put it on Yosef's hand. He then had him dressed in garments of fine linen and he placed a gold chain on his neck. He also had him ride in his second royal chariot and they proclaimed before him, 'Avrech'" (Bereishis 41:42-43). This, too, is intended to impress us. Yet, one can wonder of what value is the respect of someone like Par'oh. From his wise men, perhaps, a sign of respect would be an indication of great intelligence. But from a king who may not be particularly worthy, why should we care to whom he gives respect?

The answer, the Alter of Slabodka¹ says in his typical fashion, is that it is significant. A king is someone who has been placed in a

¹ Or HaTzafun, vol. 1 p. 215 ff.

position of power and influence by G-d and this ruler's evaluation of a person is, indeed, important. When he shows respect to a person it is noteworthy. If we had been alive at that time and had seen Achashverosh, we would have been obligated to say the special blessing one recites upon seeing a king.² We are to be impressed if Achashverosh or any other king chooses to honor someone, however he may manifest that respect.

If it is the case, the Alter continues, that when a king dresses a person in royal garments we should be impressed by the act, how much more should we be awed when G-d

² Berachos 58a

The first berachah of *Shemoneh Esrei* praises Hashem with the phrase “*haKel haGadol haGibor viha-Norah* – the G-d, the Great, the Almighty, and the Awe Inspiring”. This expression was first uttered by Moshe Rabbeinu in a lecture to *Bnei Yisrael*.¹ A student who led the congregation as *chazan* before the early *tanna* Rabbi Chanina once embellished his praises of Hashem, continuing well beyond these four simple adjectives. After he was finished, Rabbi Chanina corrected him, “Have you finished all possible praise of your Master?” No list of compliments could completely describe Hashem. Had Moshe not spoken these words, and Hashem not told him to write them into the Torah, we would not have the *chutzpah* to use these four.²

The same phrase is also found at the conclusion of the poem

¹ Devarim 10:17

² Berachos 33b

takes a human soul and dresses it with skin, bones, sinews, etc. The Master of the universe has chosen every single person individually and honored him with royal garments. That is how important each person is, and that is how significant every human body is. It is the Divine clothing that has been given to each of us.

Imagine, then, how much more significant such a body is if it is used to perform good deeds. When the arms that were given to you by G-d are used in the performance of a mitzvah, they are elevated even beyond the lofty status that they initially inhabited. They are not merely the limbs of a body, or even

only the royal garments given to a respected person, but they are the wise gifts of G-d being used in the ideal and foremost manner. Such is the potential of the human body.

But if this Divine gift is used improperly, for the wrong goals and aberrant purposes, then the royal garments are soiled. The King has granted you an honored endowment and you have squandered it while He watches. A person is created on a holy and elevated level but must take care not to lower himself and mistreat his precious gift.

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Sefasai Tiftach

“*Nishmas*”. There, the poet goes even further and gives each one an explanatory phrase. This yields the strange result that the very same poem that says that “even if our mouths were filled of poetry like the sea, and our tongues – joy, like the many waves, and our lips – praise like the expanses of sky... we would still not be sufficient to praise you”, this same poem then praises G-d in four words!

According to the Vilna Gaon, “*haKel haGadol haGibor viha-Norah*” is not only included in the first berachah of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, but it is also the basis for the structure of the rest of the *berachah* too. To the Vilna Gaon, these four names of G-d form a progression. They summarize how man approaches G-d.

Kel means more than G-d, and “*elohim*” is also used to refer to judges or legislators. To be *HaKel*, THE Legislator, means that Hashem rules over the entire universe, His authority is all-inclusive.

We usually think of Hashem’s Immanence and His Transcendence, His Infinity and His relating to us personally, as opposites. However, Rabbi Yochanan said, “Wherever you find G-d’s greatness, that is where you find His humility”.³ Perhaps we can understand this apparent paradox by contrasting G-d’s properties to those of humans. Schools have a problem of overcrowding. There are just so many students a teacher can adequately pay attention to. As the number of students grows, each one can only get less and less attention. Not so Hashem. His infinity is not just that He is “*haKel*”, G-d over all, but also “*haGadol*”, great enough to give personal attention to each person.

HaGibor. We said already that Hashem legislates to all, and that He is not limited to looking only at the universal picture, but can pay attention to each and every one of

³ Megillah 31a

us. The combination of these two facts yields “*HaGibor*”. G-d has the power and uses it to guide each of us in our daily lives.

VihaNorah. There are two types of Divine intervention, the behind-the-scenes subtle activity, which the non-believer dismisses as mere luck, and the flashy miracle that defies the law of nature. While the former is more common, it is the miracle that inspires awe.

According to the Vilna Gaon’s approach, these thoughts are elaborated twice in the *berachah*, once before the quote of the verse, and once after. They provide the structure for the entire blessing.

The *berachah* opens “*Baruch*”. Chazal write often, “‘*berachah*’ is a term of increase”. The relationship between the idea of “increase” and G-d is unclear. One understanding is to say that it is a statement of fact, rather than a request. We are saying “You are maximally increased”. This is “*haKel*”.

Ata Hashem. It is incredible that man has the opportunity to talk to G-d, to refer to the Creator as “You”. What grants us that power? *HaGadol*, He is big enough to attend to each of us. We are saying, “Hashem, He who Was, Is and Will Be, You are so transcendent, You even have the ability to be immanent.” G-d is not too great to care about a single inhabitant of some uninteresting planet in some typical galaxy. No, because He IS great, because he IS above limitation, is why we can say “*Ata*”, “*You*”.

Elokeinu. The Vilna Gaon teaches that this corresponds to “*HaGibor*”. *Elokeinu*, our G-d, is different in implication than *HaKel*, The G-d. There is possessiveness, this might and authority of *HaKel* doesn’t only apply to the big picture, but he guides each of us, to our fates and our destinies.

Elokei Avoseinu. In our lives, Hashem’s intervention is subtle. However, for our forefathers He performed miracles. Whereas *Elokeinu*, our G-d, refers to Hashem’s constant guiding of history, *Elokei Avoseinu*, G-d of our Fathers, asserts that the same One can work outside of the laws of nature.⁴ In order to work toward the day when we too will merit an age of miracles, we next recall each forefather – Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov – by name, to recall and resolve to emulate their very different approaches to divine service.

At this point we repeat the core phrase, after which we elaborate on the themes in a different variation.

Kel Elyon. This is “*haKel*”, G-d above all.

Gomel Chassadim Tovim. Hashem supports us through His kindness. “*HaGadol*” means that He not only looks at the universe as a whole, but Hashem is great enough to pay attention to each of us as individuals.

ViKonei hakol. The Vilna Gaon translates “*konei*” in our context from the root of “*lisakein*”, to fix. *Konei hakol*, Hashem fixes all, heals the sick, raises the down-trodden and the depressed. He heals each of our lives – *HaGibor*.

Zocher chasdei avos – *VihaNorah*. Hashem remembers how our fathers went beyond the call of obligation, and we ask Him to go beyond nature for us as well. *Umeivi goel livnei vineihem*. *Umeivi* – *lehavi*, to bring the redeemer, not *lishloach*, to send him. The purpose of the messianic redemption is that it heralds an era in which Hashem’s rule will be visible. *Lima’an shemo*, for the sake

of His name. *Bi’ahavah* – with love. The Rambam defines love as a perception of one’s unity with the beloved. The Jewish people and our fate are in a sense part of *shemo*, the visibility of Hashem’s presence in this world. The redemption of the *mashiach*, in turn, will redeem the Jewish people, whose fate proclaims Hashem’s Hand in history. We ask Hashem to bring the *mashiach* for the sole purpose of making His Presence felt; it is an end in itself.

The final phrase before the closing, “*Melech Ozer uMoshia uMagein* – King, Helper, Savior and Protector” can be seen as a similar progression to “*haKel haGadol haGibor viHanorah*”. *Melech*, like *Keil*, is a Ruler who is responsible to society as a whole. *Ozer*, helper, implies the personal relationship of *haGadol*. *UMoshia* parallels His intervention in our lives, saving us when we are in trouble, the *Konei hakol*, in contrast to *uMagein*, Hashem’s protection to those who go beyond the call of duty on His behalf.

Baruch Ata Hashem... as above. *Magein Avraham*. Avraham would tell his guests, “Don’t thank me, thank the Creator of heaven and earth, who is truly the one who gave you this food.” This is the Protector of Avraham.

Editor: Gil Student

Associate Editor: Micha Berger

Mesukim Midevash is a project of The AishDas Society, offering words of machshavah, mussar and tefillah each week. For more information, email mesukim@aishdas.org or call (201) 757-0246.

© 2004, The AishDas Society and the authors. Permission is granted to quote any material if content is quoted by name and is not modified.

⁴ For more on this topic, see last week’s column, <<http://www.aishdas.org/mesukim/terumah.pdf>>