



## The Pardes Parsha Discussion by Rabbi Alex Israel

### Tetzave: Who is Hiding Under Your Mask?

Do the Clothes Make the Man? Our Parsha talks about clothing, the garments of the High Priest. And it seems so appropriate to be reading about the elaborate and ornate vestments of the Kohen Gadol at Purim time. After all, the Purim story is narrated, amongst other literary devices, by means of clothing:

4:1 Mordecai rent his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and he went out into the midst of the city and cried [with] a loud and bitter cry.

5:1 On the third day, Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace.

6:7-8 For the man whom the king delights to honor, let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn... and a royal crown placed on his head.

8:15 Mordechai went out ... in royal apparel of blue and white, with a great crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad.

Sackcloth and ashes are transformed into royal clothing, expressing the impending doom and destruction that is transformed to rejoicing. And of course, we mask ourselves on Purim, donning all manner of costume. Clothing plays an important role in human society. Maybe that is why the Torah is so pedantic to craft meaningful garments for the High Priest, regal clothing which represents God (the Tzitz / headband is engraved "Holy to God"), but also Israel (the breastplate is engraved with the names of the 12 Tribes).

But are clothes in fact masks? Is clothing something which expresses my true essence or perhaps it obscures and hides the real person? In Hebrew, the word "beged" – a garment – bears the same letters as "bagad" – indicative of betrayal or subterfuge.

**So let's discuss:**

- What is the relationship between our clothes and ourselves?
- Is a policeman only a law enforcer due to his or her uniform, is the doctor an authority only while wearing a white coat?
- When we get “dressed up” for a party or a wedding, what do we feel? Why?
- Are our work clothes our real self, or the casual dress of a Sunday at home? Or maybe our pyjamas?
- Is your Purim costume really your hidden desires, something you cannot normally express?

**Two perspectives:**

Sefer Hachinuch discusses the High Priest's clothing in the following manner:

A person is affected and transformed by means of his or her actions... hence, it is fitting that the priest wears special clothes that any moment in which he will glance at his body, he will be immediately reminded and reawakened to before Whom he serves.

Here the clothes affect the person who wears them. They elevate and focus him.

But others suggest a different dynamic:

Since Aharon must sanctify himself and act in a pious manner... he should be viewed in the eyes of the people as a person who is separate and above them... the clothes of splendor led people to understand that God saw Aharon as special (Netziv. Haamek Davar)

Here, Aharon's clothing reflects his elevated status, his holy personal comportment. It reflects and exposes his inner sanctity.

In truth, both are correct. We need clothing to express who we are to society. But at times, my clothes actually do affect me. For this reason, they can offer a false impression, or alternatively, they can help me raise myself as a human being. Sometimes clothes are a masquerade to hide the ugly person underneath, and at other times, they display the true person.

As we play with our masks and costumes this Purim, let us give some thought to who we are under our masks, to allow our true self to express itself to the outside.

Shabbat Shalom, and Happy Purim!