

You shall make vestments for Aharon your brother, for glory and splendor. (28:2)

The *Kohanim*, especially the *Kohen Gadol*, were to wear vestments that reflected the nobility of their station and service. The commentators offer a number of explanations for the terms "*glory*" and "*splendor*," as well as the reasons for demanding that the *Bigdei Kehunah* be such garments that are similar to those worn by royalty. Let it suffice that the *Torah* demanded that the vestments worn by the *Kohanim* were to be unique in their beauty, thereby dignifying the *Kohanim* and Hashem, Whom they served. Indeed, if a *Kohen* served in the *Bais Hamikdash mechusar begadim*, not wearing all of the priestly vestments, he was liable to *kares*, Heavenly excision, before his time. We may question the necessity for this overwhelming emphasis on the *Bigdei Kehunah*. The idea of *hiddur mitzvah*, beautifying a *mitzvah*, applies to all *mitzvos*. Why did the *Torah* single out the *Bigdei Kehunah* as a *mitzvah* that requires beauty and perfection?

Horav Avigdor Halevi Nebentzhal, *Shlita*, distinguishes between the concept of *hiddur mitzvah*, which applies throughout all *mitzvos*, and the necessity for the *Bigdei Kehunah* to be made *l'chavod u'lesiferes*, for glory and splendor. For every *mitzvah*, in addition to the actual commandment that the *mitzvah* be fulfilled, there is a separate *halachah*, law, that demands this *mitzvah* be performed with beauty and dignity. For example, a *Sefer Torah* should be written with a beautiful script, the letters clear and precise. Yet, if the letters are kosher, the *Sefer Torah* is deemed kosher, even if the letters are not overly distinctive. The *Bigdei Kehunah*, however, must be regal and beautiful as part of their composition. *Tiferes* and *hadar* comprise the actual *mitzvah*; they are not supplementary criteria regarding the *mitzvah's* appearance.

Horav Nebentzhal points out that it is necessary to be cognizant of the relationship between the principal component in a *mitzvah* and its secondary aspect. A *succah* which fulfills the architectural specifications for a kosher *succah* is completely valid for *mitzvah* performance, regardless of its outer and inner decoration. As mentioned before, this is not true regarding the *Bigdei Kehunah*. This idea can be applied to life in general. One must learn to prioritize what is truly essential and place less emphasis upon the ancillary.

Let us examine the concept of material possessions. Certainly it is difficult to perform many *mitzvos* if one does not have the necessary wherewithal. Without money, one will have a difficult time purchasing a *Lulav* and *Esrog* or *Matzos*. There is a place for money, however, second place. *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* were criticized for placing the well-being of their sheep ahead of their children.

The same idea applies to precedence in *mitzvos* and *chumros*, stringencies, that are erroneously prioritized. Horav Nebentzhal cites Horav Chaim Shmuelewitz, *zl*, who commented regarding this story in the *Talmud Yoma*, 23a: Two *Kohanim* were racing up the *Kevesh*, ramp, in order to be the first one to get the *Terumas Hadeshen*, ashes from the burnt sacrifices. In his overwhelming desire

to perform the *mitzvah*, one *Kohen* grabbed a knife and slew the other *Kohen*. Unquestionably, this violent act is outrageous. The same *Kohen* who was overcome with love and devotion to serve in the *Mikdash* because it is Hashem's command, "forgot" about Hashem's command of "*Lo sirtzach*," Do not murder!

Rabbi Tzadok was delivering *divrei hisorerus*, words of arousal and inspiration, to all those who witnessed this tragic act, when suddenly the father of the *Kohen* who died cried out, "The knife did not become *tamei*, actually contaminated; my son is not yet dead!" During his son's final moments, the father was concerned about the *tumah* of the holy vessels of the *Bais Hamikdash*! The tragedy would be diminished, the pain of his son's death would be decreased, by the knowledge that the knife did not become contaminated.

The Rabbis of the *Talmud* address this shocking response: were the *Kohanim* overly stringent with the laws of ritual purity, or were they overly lenient in regard to human life? The *Talmud* responds that they did not accept the same degree of stringency for human life as for ritual purity. Rav Chaim commented that even had the *Talmud* responded that they were not lenient in regard to murder, but simply following the letter of the law, for ritual purity was an area for which they had profound respect, it would still have been a travesty of Jewish law. The mere thought that anything, any area in Jewish law, would take precedence over the sanctity of human life is in itself a tragic and destructive attitude. This undermines the foundation of Judaism itself. It is forbidden to forget to distinguish between the *ikar*, fundamental and essential requisite, and the *tafel*, secondary, and -- in this case -- insignificant principle. Regrettably, some of us have still not established appropriate priorities.