

## They shall take the gold, the turquoise, purple and scarlet wool, and the linen. (28:5)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* was commanded concerning the construction of the *Bigdei Kehunah*, Priestly Vestments. For this purpose, he was to obtain gold, turquoise, purple and scarlet, various colors of dyed wool, from the people which were to be used to make the *Eiphod*, *Cheshev ha'Eiphod*, *Choshen* and *Avnet*. *Sheish* is flax/linen. Thus, the *Bigdei Kehunah* were constructed of *shatnez*, a mixture of wool and linen. Given the reality, one would conjecture that while *shatnez* is prohibited to be worn by a Jew, the *Bigdei Kehunah* constituted an exception to the rule. In other words, a dispensation is made for the Priestly Vestments, allowing for them to be constructed of the forbidden mixture of wool and linen.

**Rabbeinu Yosef Bechur Shor** has an understanding of this *halachah* which is diametrically opposed to general conjecture. He explains that, similar to the prohibition of making *Shemen Hamishchah*, anointing oil, or the *Ketores*, Incense, for general use, and in accordance with the prohibition against constructing one's home with architecture resembling the *Bais Hamikdash* or making a *Menorah* of seven branches like the *Menorah* in the Temple – *shatnez* is prohibited for use by the general public, because it is reserved for *Bigdei Kehunah*. Thus, *Bigdei Kehunah* – and only *Bigdei Kehunah* – are supposed to be made of *shatnez*. The prohibition of *shatnez* is based upon the fact that it resembles the holy Priestly Vestments.

**Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl**, explains why the *Kohen Gadol* specifically should be the one to wear a garment comprised of wool and linen. The **Zohar Hakadosh** posits that the dyed wool represents the *middah*, Attribute, of *Rachamim*, Mercy, while the *pishtan*, flax/linen, represents the Attribute of *Din*, Strict Justice. These two attributes are incongruous with one another. To mix the two together creates a tension which is counterproductive – unless they come together in a perfect situation, such as for the *Kohen* during his service. When the *Kohen* stands before Hashem and performs the *avodah*, service, he achieves a level of *sheleimus*, perfection, which is otherwise rarely accomplished. At this point, a fusion of justice and mercy achieves *tiferes*, beauty and complete harmony.

I take the liberty of explaining this concept further. In his commentary to the beginning of *Sefer Bereishis*, *Rashi* observes the Torah's choice of referring to Hashem as *Elokim* as opposed to *Yud – Kay – Vov – Kay*. The name *Elokim* represents *Din*, an attribute that does not allow for leeway, compromise or negotiation. This *middah* does not exclude any aspect of sin. One is guilty. The four-letter Name, however, represents Hashem's Attribute of Mercy, an attribute which reflects Hashem's dealing with the shortcomings of His creations on a compassionate basis, thus viewing them in a more positive light.

Hashem was originally thought to have created the world using the process of *Din* as its “engine,” hence, the opening Name of *Elokim*. When Hashem saw that the world could not possibly endure if

the *hanhagah*, guiding principle, would be Strict Justice, He placed *Middas HaRachamim* into the equation and joined it with *Din*, to sort of temper down the Justice. This is why His Name is now written in the four-letter form implying *Rachamim*. The mixture of *Din* and *Rachamim* is not natural. As is the case with opposing attributes, a tension exists between them. Yet, the Almighty mixed them together. This is why some *Chassidim* place a few drops of water to dilute the wine for *Kiddush*. Wine represents *Din*; water represents *Rachamim*. Thus, they emulate Hashem in diluting and weakening the wine/*Din* with a little *Rachamim*.

The *Mesillas Yescharim* explains another aspect of this mixture. Each component of the mixture impacts the other. Both remain in a “weakened” state. For example, *Middas HaDin* demands that punishment be swift and uncompromising, consistent with the grievous nature of the sin. *Rachamim* dilutes this by allowing for time to elapse before punishment is exacted. The punishment is less severe. This allowance of time encourages the vehicle of *teshuvah* to play a role in ameliorating the sin and decreasing the severity of the punishment. Indeed, *teshuvah* – if successfully implemented – can even expunge the sin completely. In most instances, the *Din* must be “placated.” Therefore, the punishment will be meted, but in a much more amenable version.

Returning to the original thesis, Rav Galinsky explains that we all possess a conglomerate of attributes – character traits which are, by their very nature, opposites of one another. Two objectives are demanded of us: first; we should not lock ourselves into one *middah*. Diversity is good, for it allows for a harmonious relationship between the *middos* so that each one “rubs off” on the other. Second, one must know when to use a specific attribute. There is a time for compassion and a time for justice; a time for tempered justice; a time for compassion with common sense. One may not have mercy on cruel, evil, unconscionable people. Indeed, *Chazal* say that one who has misplaced compassion will one day be guilty of misplaced justice; thus, he will render guilty one with whom he should have dealt with greater compassion.

This is the lesson of *shatnez* in the *Bigdei Kehunah*. It is important that we coalesce the attributes which normally create tension with one another. When we serve Hashem, we should attempt to emulate His way of doing things. Hashem diluted Strict Justice with Mercy. The *Kohen Gadol* wears both – wool and linen – to exemplify and impart this lesson. Our primary focus should be one of kindness and mercy, but, yes, at times, we must apply justice – with restraint – but justice no less. There is no such thing as a bad *middah*; it all depends on how and when we apply it. When considering two diverse antagonistic attributes, it is necessary that one be paradigmatic of the *sheleimus* achieved by the *Kohen* during his *avodah*. This is the lesson of the prohibition of *shatnez*: one may not create the tension inherent between strict justice and mercy only in a situation which manifests perfection.