

Clothes Creates Folks

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Introduction

I'm the proud owner of a synthetic pink wig; I bought it near the central bus station for NIS 20! When I made my entry to the Central Synagogue *Megillah* reading it was pleasant to see the heads of the little girls turn in delight, something I hadn't expected. Coming out of Shabbat I didn't really feel like dressing up for Purim at all, but it was easy to just stick on the wig, easier than making a *tichel* (headscarf) look good. When I returned home from the *Megillah* reading I discovered that my mood had greatly lifted!

The following anecdote serves as an example of how our mood and spirit can be expressed through the choice of our garments. It also illustrates the effect our choice of clothes has on how we are perceived by others: The wife of a certain Rabbi had a tendency to become depressed. She explained her husband that whenever she got depressed she would wear her clothing inside out. This would be a sign to leave her alone and not demand anything from her. One morning when her husband noticed that she was wearing her clothes inside out, he went upstairs and changed his clothing to wear them inside out as well. When he came down, his wife asked him bewildered, "What's this??" He answered, "Please leave me alone, I am depressed today." The wife then went upstairs changed her clothing back to normal. When the husband asked, "What's this??" She exclaimed, "Well, one of us needs to function in the house!"

Wearing My Mink with My Pink

I often use clothes as a mood-lifter. Staying in a house-robe all day can reinforce sadness and negativity, whereas getting dressed up in festive colorful clothes makes you happy. Knowing you have something special to wear even helps you get out of bed in the morning. The styles, textures and colors of what we wear not only affect our mood, but moreover, project our image to the world. I recall as a child in Denmark an exhibition in the national museum called 'Clothes shapes Folks.' Indeed different types of people are characterized by their garments. I once asked a Vishnitzer Rebbetzin about the difference between the Chasidut of Vishnitz and that of Belz. I can't remember exactly what she answered but it had to do with the difference about their style of garment. I think one of them wears long white socks while the other doesn't! I have a really nice fur perhaps it's even a mink coat which I inherited from an older student. It's warm, comfortable and I love its light brown color. Nevertheless, I haven't barely worn it, because it kinds of 'pass nisht' in Bat Ayin to wear a mink coat. It has a connotation of *bourgeois* upper class which I don't identify with. Yet, on Purim anything goes, and I delight in wearing my mink with my pink!

Detaching from Our Self Image Ad Incognito



Talking about color, my granddaughters play a game where they take turns describing a certain person while the others have to guess who. The description of me was, “she always wears blue!” In general I wear turquoise, indigo blues and purples expressing the spirituality of the higher energy centers. However, on Purim when everything is *הוא וְנִהְפָּךְ הוּא* / *v'nahafoch hu* (upside down)¹ I decided to wear all opposite pinkish colors to go with my wig. On Purim we dress up to extend ourselves beyond the boundaries of our self-perception, and the image we project into the world. It was so liberating to detach from the ‘turquoise Rebbetzin’ image. The Talmud instructs us to “enter a state of higher consciousness (literally to be perfumed) to the extent that we won’t know – *דעת/da’at*) the difference between the curse of Haman and the blessing of Mordechai.”² Some people get so dressed up on Purim that they become totally incognito.

A Garment for the Soul

The need for garments is the direct consequence of eating from the Tree of Knowledge – *דעת/da’at*.³ Before the sin, “they were both naked, man and his wife, but they were not embarrassed.”⁴ The soul then was not so attached to the body. It was able to detach itself at any time, and it therefore, did not need a garment to cover it, since the body itself was only like a garment. Our body was so refined and transparent that it reflected the light of our soul. However, in our ‘after-eating-from-the-Tree’ state, our body is no longer an opaque garment for the soul, rather it has become a mask concealing our true inner being, covering and darkening the light of our soul. The coarseness of our body separates it from Hashem. It is the separation that causes our embarrassment which needs to be covered. The purpose of garments is to conceal the mask of our body and through the choice of texture, style and color, express our inner essence and bring forth the hidden sparks of our soul.

Clothes Conceal yet Reveal

The Hebrew word for clothes *לבוש/levush* literally means, ‘for embarrassment.’ Our bodies have become our lower selves which we need to hide by our dress, the covering of our naked embarrassment. The Hebrew word for garments – *בגד/beged* is connected to the word for traitor – *בוגד/bogged*, and *מעיל/m’eil* –robe is likewise connected with *מעילה/meilah* –treachery. Our clothes comprise an outer shell, which hide our inner essence. With our clothes we play a certain role.

The way we dress reveals something very deep about our personalities. Sometimes consciously, other times unconsciously, we chose the kinds of clothing which represent what we identify with. Our style of dress represents the way we like to be perceived in the world. Whether our clothing is true to our inner essence or a disguise trying to project an artificial image of ourselves that is the dilemma and challenge we need to solve within our own consciousness.

Bodies of Light

¹ *Megillat Esther* 9:1.

² *Babylonian Talmud, Megillah* 7b.

³ See *Bereishit* 3:7.

⁴ *Bereishit* 2:25.

Before eating from the Tree, Adam and Eve's had pure light-bodies. Their eating caused their אור/*ohr* – light to be transformed to עור/*or* – skin. Since then we wear garments to cover the covering of the skin and become closer to the original light of the soul. Yet, the external clothing that we wear in this world mustn't make us forget about the original spiritual garments that we also need to clothe ourselves in the next world. Just as a soldier or fireman needs certain garments to be able to do his task, so too, do we need spiritual garments to appreciate the glory and splendor of G-d as revealed in the next world. We can recreate these garments from our Torah and Mitzvoth. כִּי נֵר מִצְוָה וְתוֹרָה אֹר – “For a mitzvah is a candle, and Torah is light.”⁵ These spiritual garments will enable us to return to our original state when our bodies exuded pure light.

The Blinding Nakedness of the Snakeskin

In order to reclaim our spiritual garments we need to first remove the snakeskin – עור/*or*. It is interesting that the Hebrew word for ‘skin’ – עור/*or* is spelled the exact same way as the Hebrew word for ‘blind’ – עור/*iver*. This same word is related to the Hebrew word for naked – ערום/*arum*. Perhaps we can explain the connection between skin, blindness and nakedness as follows. Our nakedness became apparent when our light was transformed to skin. This nakedness, induced by the snake blinded us to the light of Hashem. This is the deeper meaning of the verse: וְהַנָּחָשׁ הָיָה עָרוֹם /*v'hanachash haya arum* – “The snake was naked/skin/blinding ...”⁶ The primordial snake caused our blindness to Divine light transforming it to the nakedness of the skin. This snake energy is perpetrated in the personality of Vashti, who also wanted to strip the Jewish girls of their Divine image when she made them work on Shabbat naked.⁷ This way she intended to prove that their souls were lacking the splendid spiritual garments.⁸

Defying Amalek by Dressing up in the Supreme Spiritual Garments

Amalek only has power over us when Israel lacks their spiritual garments of glory. Likewise Amalek had no power over the Jews who were protected by the clouds of glory in the wilderness, since these clouds were akin to our original spiritual garments. Amalek was only able to overcome those who fell away from the cloud and remained without spiritual clothing. When Israel lusted for the meal of Achasverus' party, they were stripped off their glorious spiritual garments. This is the underlying reason for Haman's evil decree. According to the Zohar, when *Esther dressed up in מלכות/Malchut* – (Royalty),⁹ she dressed up in the supreme spiritual garments of Adam and Eve before the sin. She caused Israel to repent, and once again get dressed up in glory and cleave to the Most High. Esther's dressing up in *Malchut* is what nullified Haman's decree, and enabled Mordechai to “go out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white and with a great crown of gold, and with a wrap of fine linen and purple.”¹⁰ This was a sign that Hashem had accepted the repentance of the Jewish people.

Expressing our Individual Uniqueness while Accepting the Contribution of Others

⁵ Mishlei 6:23.

⁶ Bereishit 3:1.

⁷ Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 12b.

⁸ Maharal, *Ohr Chadash*, p. 96.

⁹ Megillat Esther 5:1.

¹⁰ Megillat Esther 8:15.



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The original eating from the Tree of Knowledge brought about the awareness and embarrassment of our own separate existence which in turn caused insecurity, jealousy and hatred throughout our generations. The need for conformity in clothes is an outcome of this insecurity. In contrast, Aharon, the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) wore the names of all the children of Israel upon the breastplate on his heart with twelve unique precious stones representing each of the tribes. This was his reward for being happy in his heart for the achievements of others. Aharon was happy and not jealous when his younger brother Moshe was chosen to be the leader of Israel.¹¹ This kind of happiness and acceptance of the other's true unique qualities returns the *Shechina* to Israel. Our fragmentation into groups of *streimels*, black hats, knitted *kipot* etc. wouldn't have to cause so much tension and *sinat chinam* (senseless hatred) if we only would understand how our personal choice of identification doesn't negate the choices of others. If only we would realize the impact of expressing the unique spiritual garments of our soul, while simultaneously accepting and embracing someone else's individual contribution. This way we have the opportunity to gather in the dispersed sparks of the light of Adam and Eve's original spiritual garments and rebuild the holy Temple in Jerusalem!

¹¹ "Is not Aharon the Levite your brother? ... and also behold he comes to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart" (*Shemot* 4:14).