

Serving God in a White Cloak

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The 23rd day of Adar is the first of the seven days of inauguration (מִלּוּאִים, in Hebrew), during which the consecration of the desert Tabernacle was conducted. The Tabernacle served as the first fulfillment of the commandment to establish a Temple for the Almighty: וַיַּעַשׂ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם.¹ Of course, the Jewish home is considered a Temple in spirit and thus, the 23rd day of Adar is also related to the joy of a wedding between a *chatan* (a groom) and *kallah* (a bride).

During the seven days of inauguration, Moshe Rabbeinu served as the High Priest, but unlike every other High Priest that followed, Moshe did not don the eight special garments of the High Priest but served the Almighty in a white cloak alone.² This is noteworthy because if a priest from the family of Aaron serves in the Tabernacle or Temple without the special garments of the priesthood then his service of the Almighty is defiled.

The white cloak in which Moshe served alludes to the cloak referred to in the *Zohar* as the "cloak of the sages" (חֵלְיוֹקָא דְרַבְּנָן).³ The cloak of the sages is the spiritual body which every *tzadik* is destined to wear in the World to Come. It is by and through this cloak that the souls of the righteous are privileged to grasp the essence of the Almighty.⁴ Chassidut states that in the future, every *chassid* will become a Rebbe himself, meaning that even simple people will be able to share in the understanding and experience of the essence of the Almighty with the *tzadikim*. Thus, it follows, that in order to do so we need to experience the donning of the cloak of the sages, or correspondingly, to vicariously experience the work of Moshe Rabbeinu as the High Priest during these seven days in the Tabernacle, serving in his white cloak.

As always, to experience a particular reality described in the Torah (in our case, Moshe serving in the white cloak) we must contemplate and integrate the teachings of the Torah, and especially the teachings of the inner dimension of the Torah, Kabbalah and Chassidut, into our understanding and into our daily lives.

The Ba'al Shem Tov taught us that every aspect of the Torah, every story or commandment related, even though it may not seem to be so, is relevant to every single person, wherever or whenever he (or she) might be living. The key to bonding with the Torah and to living all of its aspects into a part of our daily lives, is to uncover the deeper meaning latent within. So let us try to understand the significance of Moshe's special service in a white cloak during these seven days as it is described in the Torah.

The *Tanya* explains that every Jew has two souls: a Divine soul and an animal soul.⁵ The verse in the Bible that most describes the Divine soul is "...the portion of God from above..."⁶ The word "portion" in Hebrew (חֵלֶק) is related to the Hebrew word for "cloak" (חֵלֶיֶק). Hence, we may infer that the Divine soul itself refers to the cloak of the righteous and to Moshe's white cloak. In other words experiencing Moshe serving in a white cloak is akin to experiencing one's Divine soul.

The Bride as the Divine Soul

We noted above that the consecration of the Temple is the spiritual root of building a Jewish home, that is, of a couple getting married. Every couple that weds and lives in holiness creates a dwelling place for the Divine Presence (the *Shechinah*) in their home,⁷ just as the Temple is the dwelling place of the Almighty's Divine Presence. Carrying this correspondence further, we may ask, what is the parallel to Moshe serving in a white cloak when consecrating one's home, i.e., when getting married (or when deciding to reintroduce the Almighty into one's already existing marriage, regardless of how many years old it is)? The answer is that relative to the man, the bride, one's wife, represents one's Divine soul. As if to say, that the woman herself is the white cloak, for this cloak, as we just explained, is one of the manifestations of the Divine Soul.

We have already mentioned that the High Priest from Aaron's family would wear eight garments. Every other priest (called a *cohen hedyot*) wore four garments. Indeed, once a year, on Yom Kipur, the High Priest would also wear

only four garments, all white. Thus altogether, there are three different numbers of garments that a priest might wear while serving in the Temple: 1, 4, and 8.

These three numbers are the values of the three letters that make up the word "one" in our quintessential statement of monotheistic faith: "Hear O Israel: *Havayah* is our God, *Havayah* is One."⁸ "One" in Hebrew is written אָחַד. The first letter, the *alef* (א) is equal to one and thus corresponds to Moshe's white cloak. The second letter, the *chet* (ח), is equal to eight and thus corresponds to the High Priest's eight special garments. The third letter, the *dalet* (ד), is equal to four and therefore corresponds to either the four garments of the simple priest or the four white garments worn by the High Priest on Yom Kipur. Because in a Torah scroll, the word "one" (אָחַד) is inscribed with a large *dalet*, we conclude that this letter specifically symbolizes the four white garments of the High Priest more than it does the four simple garments of any other priest.



Let us take a deeper look at what serving in a white cloak symbolizes. We already noted that there is a strong relationship between the consecration of the Temple and matrimony. We have also seen that the white cloak symbolizes the woman as one's Divine soul. What we need to comprehend more fully is the notion of service.

"I Was Created"

One *Mishnah* (saying of the sages) that the Rebbe loved very much and repeated many times, is: "I was created to serve God."⁹ The particular connotation of the Almighty used in this saying is "*Koni*" (קוֹנֵי), which means "My Proprietor," referring to the Almighty as he who owns all that is in the world. In the language of the sages, this connotation also describes God as the symbolic husband of creation. The word for "serve" here is more literally translatable as "to assist" (לְשַׁמֵּר). It is also the word used to describe marital relations in the idiom of the sages. How does this all relate to the three sets of garments mentioned above?

When reciting the *Shema* aloud, the word "one" (*echad*) is pronounced such that the *alef* is not elongated, while the *chet* is carried a little, and the *dalet* is elongated the most. Chassidut explains this in the following way: the *alef* refers

to the soul before it descends to enter the body. At this stage it is entirely one with the Almighty (alluded to by the *alef's* numerical value of 1). The *chet* refers to the descent of the soul from heaven to earth, where it enters a physical body; the numerical value of *chet*, eight, represents the seven heavens and the earth through which the soul passes on its journey from being one with God to the body that it enters. The *dalet* represents the task that the soul has been given to accomplish during its life on earth; the numerical value of the *dalet*, four, represents the four corners of the earth, the space in which we perform our Divine mission in life. That is why we pronounce it for the longest amount of time.

Thus, though we begin our mystical contemplation during *Shema* with our origin in the Almighty, feeling that we have descended in order to be incarnated in a body, the final and main feeling should also be that we have been endowed with a Heavenly purpose to perform in our lives. In other words, that we are all emissaries of the Almighty on earth and through our bond with the generation's leader, the Rebbe, we can carry our purpose out.

Now taking this particular correspondence of the word "one" and integrating with its correspondence with the three sets of priestly garments we find that:

- Moshe's white cloak symbolizes our soul as it was one with God.
- The High Priest's eight garments symbolize the descent of the soul from God to our body. The service of the High Priest in his eight special garments awakens in the consciousness of the Jewish People the memory of our soul descending "from the highest peak to the deepest pit." In the words of the sages, this memory and arousal of consciousness is called: "Know from whence you have come." The contrast of the source of the soul to its present state of reality is alluded to by the fact that four of the High Priest's eight garments were white (the source), while the other four were colored (reality).
- And, the four white garments of the simple priest, inspired by the four special white garments donned by the High Priest when entering the Holy of Holies on Yom Kipur, correspond to our soul's fulfillment of its Divine task in life.

To understand this, we note that one of the differences between a High Priest and a simple priest is that the High Priest is never to leave the sanctified Temple

grounds,¹⁰ while a simple priest may. When leaving the Temple grounds to enter the realm of the seemingly mundane, one must receive inspiration from the Holy of Holies, from the unique service of the High Priest, whose conscious bond to God is never severed, through the means of Divine service of the simple priest, who upon concluding his service in the Temple leaves the realm of the holy to enter the realm of the mundane—all for the sake of fulfilling one's task on earth. In a certain sense it is the simple priest who is entrusted with the role of spreading the teachings of the Torah to all people, each in his own place. And for this reason the entire Jewish People is called "a nation of priests."¹¹

So now we have an understanding that serving in a white cloak, like Moshe Rabbeinu is akin to recalling our Divine soul as it was one with God, and utilizing that feeling to motivate our commitment to fulfilling our task, that is serving the Almighty here on earth, in our present life, and in our current reality.

"I Was Not Created"

However, the statement of the sages: "I was created to serve my Proprietor," has another alternate reading. It reads: "I was not created but to serve my Proprietor." Essentially, both readings seem to say the same thing, but they are actually very different and lead to a different understanding of what it means to serve the Almighty in a white cloak like Moshe Rabbeinu. Whereas the first reading begins with the existential feeling that "I was created," the second begins with a statement of self-nullification: "I was not created." Though eventually the double negation (caused by the conditional "but") of the second reading leads to the same conclusion as the first, this is a beautiful example of how double negation is not exactly the same thing as just saying something positively.¹² Beginning to look at one's role in life with selflessness (*bitul*, in Hebrew) is closer to the simple meaning behind the white cloak donned by Moshe Rabbeinu when serving in the Tabernacle. The Divine soul, and Moshe Rabbeinu himself, personify the quality of self-negation (following Moshe's own statement that: "We are nothing...", as explained elsewhere). All the more so, now that we have seen that the white cloak itself, a singular garment used during service in the Tabernacle, represents the state of the soul when it is purely one with the Almighty, and as yet has no

(even seemingly) independent existence. Starting to think about one's ultimate role in life should ideally begin with a feeling of self-abnegation.

In the idioms of Chassidut, the first reading reflects the notion that "reality is permanent, while Godliness is an innovation." The second reading reflects the notion that it is "Godliness [that] is permanent, while reality is continuously being recreated."

In essence, both notions can be the basis of creating for the Almighty a dwelling place in reality.

Individuality and Community

These two modes are strongly reflected in this week's double Torah reading of *Vayakhel* and *Pekudai*. *Vayakhel* reflects the sense of "I was not created, but to serve my Proprietor," while *Pekudai* reflects the sense of "I was created to serve my Proprietor." *Vayakhel* means "bringing all of the people together." As explained by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, this reflects the negation of the individual, giving him room and standing only as part of the collective. This is the feeling of "I was not created but...." *Pekudai* stems from the word meaning "a census." Each individual is counted separately, and each stands in his or her distinct place. Thus, the Torah reading of *Pekudai* reflects the notion that "I was created...." Both are joined (and this is the first time in the reading of the Torah during the year that any two Torah readings are joined) to reflect that the two readings, as opposite as they may seem, do indeed belong together.

In essence, the joining of *Vayakhel* and *Pekudai* symbolizes the joining of a man and woman in matrimony. Chassidut explains that the rectified state of the male is self-negation, while the rectified state of the female is one of individuality. The male reflects the state of the soul as it is joined with the Infinite above, while the female represents the state of the soul in the body as it is occupied with its earthly task and mission. The joining of these two modes of existence is necessary in order to create a complete individual. Indeed, from the beginning of the Torah, *Vayakhel* is the 22nd Torah reading and *Pekudei* is the 23rd. The sum of 22 and 23 is 45, the numerical value of "man" (אָדָם), a complete man being the union of male and female, as explicit in the story of creation.

The Marriage See-Saw

That the rectified state of the female is individuality seems to contradict the simple meaning of the word "bride," *kallah*, in Hebrew, which stems from the word meaning "termination" (כְּלוּת). As explained in Chassidut, the bride symbolizes the state of termination of the soul—כְּלוּת הַנֶּפֶשׁ. The *chatan* is usually depicted as the one with individuality who instills the sense of the same in his wife.

The explanation is that the *chatan's* original state of being is spiritual, and this requires him to come down (to seek individuality) in order to create a relationship with his wife. But, ultimately, the whole reason for his coming down is to ascend back up to an even higher place. This is called in the Talmudic literature: "Descent in order to ascend," יְרִידָה צֹרֶךְ עֲלִיָּה.

The *kallah* is the opposite: she is naturally grounded and therefore seeks to "terminate," that is ascend beyond, her self. However, the goal of her ascent is only to bring her *chatan* back down into grounded reality. In a similar Chassidic idiom coined by the Mittler Rebbe, this is known as a movement of "Ascent in order to descend," עֲלִיָּה צֹרֶךְ יְרִידָה.

The joining of both vector forces together yields the rectified union between the male and female aspects of every couple.

1. Exodus 25:8.
2. *Rashi* to Leviticus 8:28; based on *Ta'anit* 11b.
3. *Zohar* I, 66a. *Pardes Rimonim Sha'ar* 31, ch. 5.
4. As explained elsewhere, all the revelations of the lights of צהצחות, the lights of the *sefirah* of crown, will all be experienced through this cloak.
5. Chapter 1.
6. Job 31:2.
7. "A man and a woman that have so merited have the Divine Presence between them" (*Sotah* 17a).
8. Deuteronomy 6:4.
9. *Mishnah Kidushin* 4:14.
10. Leviticus 21:12.
11. Exodus 19:6.
12. We saw another example of this quality of double negation in this year's Purim farbrengen.