

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Tetzaveh
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Tetzaveh – What did the Ephod look like?

In this week's Parsha of Tetzaveh, the Torah focuses on the special garments that were made for the Kohen Gadol and for the other Kohanim, to be worn while they served Hashem in the Mishkan.

Hashem instructs Moshe as follows:

“And these are the garments that they shall make: a Choshen, an Ephod, a robe, a tunic of chequered texture, a cap and a sash. They shall make holy garments for your brother Aaron and for his sons to serve me [as Kohanim].”¹

One of these special items was the Ephod. The Ephod was similar to an apron and it was worn by the Kohen Gadol over his tunic and robe. The Torah provides instructions as to how to make the Ephod.² However, the exact appearance of the Ephod is not clear from this description. Apparently, the commentators did not have a reliable tradition as to how the Ephod actually looked. They tried to work out its appearance from the description in the Torah. Rashi provides us with his view of what the Ephod looked like:

*“I have not heard, nor have I found ... an explanation of [the Ephod's] design, **but my heart tells me** that it is belted around his back, and its width is like the width of a man's back, like the apron which is called a 'porceint'³ which noblewomen wear when they go horse riding.”*
(Rashi to Shmot 28:4)

Rashi admits that he does not have a reliable source for the appearance of the Ephod. Yet, why did Rashi write “*my heart tells me*”? And why was Rashi familiar with what women wore when they went horse riding?!

There is a very interesting story behind this comment of Rashi.⁴ Rashi was careful to guard his eyes and avoid looking at inappropriate sights. However, one day when he was walking to the Bet Midrash, he was startled and was forced to look up. Right in front of him was a group of non-Jewish noble women riding on horseback. No doubt the women were not dressed modestly. Rashi was troubled by this. He wondered why Hashem allowed him to see an inappropriate sight, especially since he was trying to follow the Torah's precept to guard one's eyes. Later, when Rashi came to write his commentary on the Ephod, the image of the noblewomen riding their horses came back to him. This image enabled him to visualise how the Ephod must have looked. He then understood why Hashem had caused him to see this sight. It was in order to provide him with clarity as to the appearance of the Ephod and the appropriate explanation of these verses. That is why he wrote “*my heart tells me...*”

We can learn some important lessons from this incident.

¹ Shmot 28:4.

² Shmot 28:6-12.

³ This is an old French word. Rashi often uses old French (which was the vernacular of his time) to explain concepts.

⁴ This idea is from R' Pinchas Menachem Alter (1926 – 1996), the 7th Rebbe of the Hasidic dynasty of Ger.

Everything that Hashem does has a reason

Rashi was troubled by the fact that he saw an inappropriate sight. He could not understand how such an occurrence could have any positive benefit. However, he later discovered that this sighting was precisely what he needed to allow him to perfect his beautiful commentary on the Torah and to explain a difficult passage. As Nachum Ish Gamzu⁵ used to say: gam zu l'tova (this too is for the best)!

Intellectually, we may realise that everything that Hashem does is for the best. However, with our limited perspective, we often do not see the bigger picture. It can be difficult to translate this knowledge into our hearts in order to feel that this really is for our good. Sometimes, we are blessed to see how the challenge is for our best, like the incident with Rashi and the horse riders. However, in those times when we cannot see the benefits, the trick is to retain our emunah in Hashem's goodness nonetheless. The Netivot Shalom⁶ provides a beautiful analogy. He explains that our emunah in the dark times can be likened to the sun going behind a cloud. Even though the day turns dark, we know that the sun is still there, it is just momentarily covered. This emunah sustains us during the dark times. This emunah does not come easily and requires us to train ourselves. One way that we can do this, when we are faced with a challenge, is to try to think of creative reasons for how the challenge can end up being for our best. This can be a positive and uplifting exercise. Another way is to repeat over and over phrases such as "gam zu l'tova".

The importance of guarding our eyes

Rashi was troubled that he saw the noblewomen riding on horseback. His struggle reinforces just how important it is to keep the positive mitzvah to guard our eyes.⁷ This is based on the pasuk "You shall not stray after your heart and after your eyes."⁸ The Gemara teaches us that the Yetzer Hara exerts influence over us based on what we have seen with our eyes.⁹ It is well known that images that we see can stay in our mind for a long time. What we see has a powerful influence on what we think. And our thoughts influence our speech and our actions. Thus, guarding our eyes can have an enormous positive influence on our behaviour and the type of person we can become.

This important mitzvah can be difficult to keep in modern society. We are constantly bombarded with inappropriate images, and these images are increasingly accessible due to modern technology. In order to combat this, we should make an effort to shift our gaze to holy and permissible sights and then retain those holy images in our minds eye as much as possible. We can be inspired by Yosef HaTzaddik. When he was seduced by Potiphar's wife, the image of the face of his holy father Yaakov kept him strong.

Let's try something this week:

1. Remember that everything that happens to us is planned by Hashem for a reason and is ultimately for our best. When we cannot see the good, we must hold on tight to our faith.
2. Be aware of the mitzvah to guard ones' eyes. Remember that though this may be a difficult mitzvah to keep, it is a vital step in order to help us make the right choices and stay on the right path.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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⁵ Rabbi Akiva's teacher.

⁶ By Rav Sholom Noach Berezovsky (1911-2000), the Slonimer Rebbe.

⁷ Sefer HaChinuch, mitzvah 387.

⁸ Bamidbar 15:39.

⁹ Sotah 8a.