

Mussar HaTorah

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Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Acharei Mos

“AND HASHEM SPOKE TO MOSHE AFTER THE DEATH OF AHARON’S TWO SONS...‘WITH THIS SHALL AHARON ENTER THE HOLY...’”
(VAYIKRA 16:1,3)

**The proximity of this story
is a reminder**

RABBEINU YONAH (Acharei Mos, third paragraph) gives two reasons why the incident of the death of Aharon’s sons immediately precedes the laws of the *kohen gadol* entering the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur: Firstly, the sons of Aharon were so close to Hashem, so inspired to serve Hashem on ever higher levels, that they mistakenly, but with the purest of intentions, added an *avodah* – an act of service to Hashem. The proximity of this story is a reminder that the *kohen gadol* in the Holy of Holies should not add anything to the *avodah*. Secondly, reminding the *kohen gadol* about the death of these righteous individuals underscores his need for a serious mindset during the *avodah* – to perform it with fear, reverence and trepidation, and not to entertain haughty feelings when he contemplates that he alone was chosen to serve on Yom Kippur. This is also why, Rabbeinu Yonah continues, the *kohen gadol* wears white clothing instead of his normal golden attire – to remind him to avoid feelings of hubris.

**With such awe and
trepidation possessing
every fiber of his being –
can he feel arrogance?**

The *kohen gadol*, chosen to enter the Kodosh HaKadoshim on Yom Kippur, was obviously a very holy man. Rabbeinu Yonah tells us that though he may be on such a high level that he is in danger of creating his own *avodah* to Hashem. His motivations have their source in the purest, most lofty and sanctified feelings a human being can experience – similar to the sons of Aharon. On the holiest day of the year, and in the holiest place on earth, he enters knowing that even these pure motivations do not excuse him if he makes the slightest change in the prescribed *avoda*. With such awe and trepidation possessing every fiber of his being – can he feel arrogance? And if he would have feelings of arrogance because of his position, would merely changing to white clothing be effective to eradicate these small but deeply embedded feelings? If the *kohen gadol* feels arrogant over his singular honor, despite such spirituality and holiness, would white clothing change those feelings? No matter what he wears, he is still the *kohen gadol* performing the service to Hashem in the Kodosh HaKadoshim?!

The human being has such complexity of personality, such a mind-boggling capacity to embrace a range of feelings with such delicate sensitivity! He can be overcome with sacred trepidation, in a place and time where angels fear to tread, and know that precision is so critical that even pure-hearted desire to add to the service can spell instant death – and yet at that same moment, with all his closeness to Hashem, all his fear and awe and spiritual yearning, he can be afflicted with the despicable abomination of arrogance. Even more amazingly, this hardy pathogen of haughtiness, which managed to exist despite all the background of spiritual antibodies which we would expect to eliminate it, can be successfully treated by a mere change of clothing. The choice of clothing we wear has such powerful influence over us.

**It can create negative
traits, or it can cure them**

Let us beware of the insidious nature of arrogance which can afflict the greatest of men in the holiest of times and places. How much more so are we vulnerable to egotism and feelings of self-importance. Let us also bear in mind the powerful effect our clothing has upon us – it can create negative traits, or it can cure them. May we always be inspired to walk humbly with Hashem, and dress in a way that only befits and enhances our *avodas Hashem*.