

PHYSICAL OBJECTS POSSESS NO POWERS. THEY ARE ALL CREATED, AND THEREFORE ARE RULED BY NATURAL LAW, NOT NATURE'S GOVERNORS. SO TOO GOD'S MIRACLES - GOD GAVE NO POWER TO OBJECTS - THAT IS AN ERROR.

Jewish Law admonishes those who feel the Mezuzah has any protective properties

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of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices*

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Parshas Tetzaveh

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And you shall make sacred garments for Ahron your brother for dignity and glory." (Shemot 27:2)

The garments of the Kohen Gadol – the High Priest – were designed to create an impressive visual appearance. Halacha also regulated other aspects of the Kohen Gadol's appearance. In these cases, as well, the purpose of the regulation was to assure a positive physical appearance. Our pasuk indicates that this attention to appearance was intended to assure

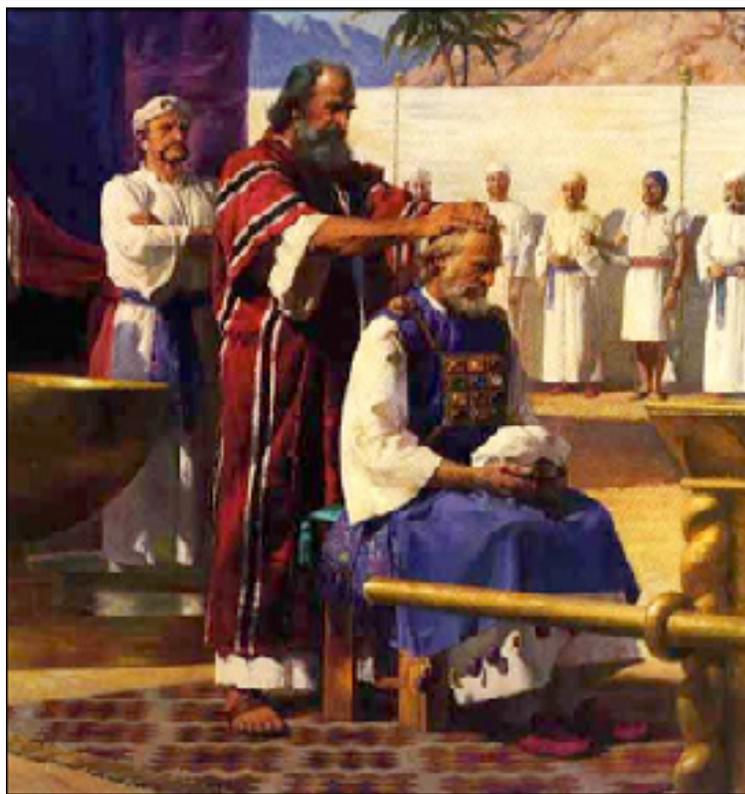
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The High Priest's Garb

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The High Priest alone had rights of entrance into the Holy of Holies, and only on Yom Kippur. This is the most sanctified of all locations on Earth. It represents man's closest approach to God, and mimics Moses' approach to God on Mount Sinai; both cases included cloud.

Cloud alludes of the ever-present veil which exists between man and God. Even at Revelation at Sinai, and even in connection with the most perfected man who ever lived and who ever will live - Moses - there was "darkness, cloud and thick cloud." ("And any form was not seen, only a voice", refers to what was witnessed at Sinai.) It was essential that the Jews realize ignorance - cloud - in relation to knowledge of God's essence. The High Priest is also commanded to smoke the Holy of Holies with incense, again creating a veil. Man has no faculty by which to grasp another person's thoughts. We are limited. Certainly, we cannot know God or His thoughts. We can only perceive that which is in some way connected to our senses, which God is not. The clouds teach the idea of the impregnable veil between man and God. God told Moses, "You cannot know me while alive." (Exod. 33:20)



Moses poured oil on Aaron's head as per God's command

As the priest was to be exemplary of man at his optimum, he displayed certain, prized qualities. I would like to suggest an idea behind a few of the garments worn by the high priest which embellish his role. My belief is that the "tzitz", the gold plate worn on the priest's head reading "Holy to God", was to demonstrate that one of such perfection, has his intelligence focused on, and subjected to God. His mind - represented by his forehead - is tied to God. In contrast, but complimentary, the priests' heart goes out to his

brethren, seen in the Breastplate bearing colorful and precious stones representative of all twelve tribes, and worn on his heart.

Another garment was the Ephod, a robe, with two onyx stones set in settings of gold on each shoulder. From rings attached to these settings, there hung the Choshen, the breastplate we just mentioned. But what catches the attention is that again on the black onyx stones are the twelve names of each tribe. Why two sets of the tribes' names? Why is one colorful set of tribes' names suspended from the black

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This week's issue is dedicated to the memories of: Rav Aharon b'r Yaakov Moshe z"l,; haisha hachashuvah Rachel bas HaRav Rav Baruch z"l Rav Yaakov Issur b'r Dovid Moshe HaLevi; haisha hachashuvah Sasha bas Rav Yonah HaLevi

The High Priest's Garb

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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stones with the tribes' names? Is there an idea behind the "suspension"?

I once heard an interesting explanation from a rabbi; black represents death, more than color seen in life. We might refer to that which is burned, or a plant which is dead, as proof of the connection between the lack of color, and death. Perhaps the colorful tribes represent the tribes in existence, i.e., us, the living Children of Israel. The black onyx stones represent the actual individual sons of Jacob, i.e., Reuben himself, Shimone, Levi, themselves, etc. What this would mean, is that the living Jews are "suspended" on our forefathers. That is, our merit today is suspended (based) on the merit of Jacobs perfected sons, who have died, represented by black onyx stones. This teaches that our distinction and merit before God is based not on ourselves, but on the fact that we are descendants from those great individuals. The High Priest wears this display so as to call upon God's mercy. He beseeches God to remember those twelve dead tribes for the sake of being benevolent to those living twelve tribes. The High Priest calls upon God to remember us, Who desired the creation of the Jewish nation through these twelve.

Addressing ornate garments, we must be careful not to fall prey to idolizing objects. Even the Choshen which housed the Urim v'Tumim, a prophetic system, never itself possessed powers, as nothing has power but God alone. Not people, not objects. It is impossible to be otherwise. All things are created, and are subject to laws of

creation, therefore, they can not alter creation.

I recently read an article by a rabbi who attempted to deter Jews from ascribing powers to the Ayin Hara, the "Evil Eye." At first, I was excited at the prospect that other teachers see Judaism clearly. But as I read the article, I saw that this rabbi too felt there is a power of an Evil Eye. He was only attempting to persuade Jews to ask God to defend them from it. But this rabbi indeed felt a defense was needed, displaying his belief in the nonsensical notion of powers other than God. This is a form of idolatry.

Rashi states that when the brothers of Joseph came down to Egypt, they were commanded by their father Jacob to enter Egypt through separate entrances so the Ayin Hara should not have power over them. How do we understand this Rashi? Allow me to briefly expound:

Ayin Hara can be explained very simply: It refers to a psychological state. If one says, "My! What a beautiful baby". Others will say, "Don't give it an Ayin Hara". Does this mean that admiration of an infant can cause some change in that child? Not at all. Words have no power, other than producing a change in the listener. What might happen is that another mother will be jealous that this statement wasn't made about her child. She may develop unconscious jealousy and aggression towards the favored baby or the mother. The unconscious of a person is very cunning, usually going undetected, and seeks satisfaction. This jealous mother might unconsciously, and "accidentally" pour some of her

hot drink on the mother, or the child. But the act of spilling doesn't assume a new power in the universe. It is explained by an existing, natural emotion - jealousy. The fact that spilling occurs on the heels of the statement of admiration is not due to a power, but to jealousy acting out through the unconscious. This mother can't tolerate another child receiving more admiration than her's, and unconsciously, she pours her drink on the other mother, satisfying her aggression.

We need not create false, mystical explanations of Ayin Hara. A person with chochma (wisdom) of human nature will understand this very easily.

The same applies to the brothers as they entered Egypt. Jacob knew that his sons were of great stature, as we see that just two destroyed an entire city. Jacob figured that 10 men of great stature, coupled with a foreign appearance walking through the gates of Egypt would raise some eyebrows. Imagine 10 tall foreigners walking through Tel Aviv Airport. Security would definitely be suspicious. There was no reason for the brothers to bring undue suspicion upon themselves. Jacob wisely commanded each of them to enter through a separate gate. This would minimize any attention. Jacob's suggestion was a smart one, and was not based on a fear of mystical powers. Rather, it was based on his understanding of human psychology and the desire for his son's safety. Jacob wished that no "suspecting eyes" cause harm to his sons through trumped up charges.

Our forefather Jacob desired to be buried outside of Egypt, lest



the Egyptians make his grave into an idolatrous object. (Rashi) Jacob knew the nature of man, that it seeks to deify leaders. This is yet another permutation of man seeking powers for his security.

Tying a thread around Rachel's tomb does not instill power in that red bendel. There is no such thing as power out side of God, other than our own muscular strengths and the forces of nature. Rachel had no powers, and even pleaded with her husband Jacob for children. Had she any powers, she would make her own miracle. It is therefore contradictory that fools invest power into a Rachel who openly testified to being powerless.

It is to my dismay that I now see Jewish bookstores run by rabbis, selling red bendels. The Tosefta in Talmud Sabbath, chapter seven, clearly states that this practice of wearing red strings was a heathen custom and is prohibited.

Help the Jewish people. When you see stores selling these chamsas, red bendels, and devices to "protect" your cars, inform them of the grave prohibition they violate. Tell them to read the Tosefta and think about their actions, how they are bereft of reason - God's gift to us. As a Rabbi once taught, wisdom is so prized a possession in God's eyes, God allowed His name to be associated with it, "Tzelem Elokim."

When you see idolatrous practices, it is your duty to denounce them so others are not misled. Speak out. By remaining silent, you encourage further corruption. ▣

An Enlightening Metaphor

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

"Nare mitzvah, v'Torah Or" - "A (single) flame is a command, and Torah is light." (Proverbs, 6:22)

To my amazement and enjoyment, I have learned many lessons from this brief statement. One idea is that mitzvah is a quantity of Torah: Mitzvah is but a single flame, it has the property of illumination but not in the necessary quantity to benefit man's entire existence. Whereas Torah is a complete system, it provides the full spectrum of the element (light) necessary for man's existence.

We learn that man cannot survive on mitzvah alone, just as man cannot survive with a single candle. Heat and light are essential for man's health, cooking and occupations. Interestingly, it does not say "and Torah is heat", but "light". This teaches that the more essential component of light is its illuminating property - that which benefits man's mind - and not heat which is a benefit to man's body. We derive the lesson that man's true perfection exists in his mind - his thoughts and values - not bodily perfection.

Man's life depends on abundant light. So too, a single mitzvah perfects but a small part of man. Man is a multifaceted creature with many components in dire need of guidance. Only the Creator knows man best, and can prescribe the proper actions and ideas essential for man's goal of happiness and perfection. The full range of commands and ideas encapsulated in the entire Torah is the correct prescription for man's well being. No more - no less.

Light is used as a metaphor for Torah and mitzvah equally. This teaches that Torah as a whole system and in parts is what removes darkness, i.e., ignorance. Torah is essential for man's understanding of reality. Without Torah man remains ignorant.

We also learn that mitzvah - actions - are but a small part, they are but a flame. Torah on the other hand - a system of knowledge behind the commands - is more essential. Our appreciation of God's knowledge which formulated the commands is the goal. According to Maimonides, commandments are a means to occupy our actions when we are not learning. The Talmud too describes Rav Shimon ben Yochai's students comparing all commands to Torah study and deriving that nothing compares to Torah study, not even other commands: (Proverbs 8:11) "For better is wisdom than pearls, and all desirous things do not compare to it." This means anything desirous - even other commandments - do not compare to Torah study.

Wisdom is how God's world operates. True appreciation for God, and our best existence here on Earth can only happen if we conform to how things truly operate, and conform our minds' ideas to God's system. Strict adherence to truth and all that is real will guide us to the most pleasant lives. More essentially however, by being honest and studying the world and the Torah with the goal of apprehending what is based on reason, we come to a true appreciation of God. Without reason, we see even religious Jews attracted to nonsensical practices as red bendels, checking mezuzot when ill, carrying books and chamsas as amulets, thereby removing themselves from God. Their concept of God is complete wrong through these gravely corrupt, idolatrous distortions. They have no share in the world to come. If they would only study what the Torah and our Rishonim teach, they would see the light. "And I have seen that wisdom surpasses folly, as is the benefit of light over darkness." (Ecclesiastes 2:13) ■

Public Debates

Reader: It is clear from your website that a person must engage in honest intellectual investigation if he is to arrive at the fundamental truths underlying all aspects of our world: man, Torah, Judaism, our relationship to G-d, etc. I am curious then, of the position most orthodox Rabbi's take not to support public forums and debates where the merits of Judaism can be compared openly to other corrupt "forms of Judaism", such as Reform and Conservative. Surely a side-by-side comparison of the two schools would reveal the overwhelming truth of Torah Judaism and the emptiness of the others. Yet, in my experience, orthodox Rabbeim frown upon, and even often prohibit, the participation of other orthodox laymen and Rabbeim from participating in these events. Observers often view this as a form of intellectual cowardice (chas v'sholom) on the part of the orthodox, assuming these Rabbeim avoid public debates out of fear of being proven wrong. Many also view this abstention as contributing to divisiveness in the community (I personally know of a number of non-observant Jews who maintain these views). Why do so many Rebbeim pass up a chance to spread true divrei Hashem to the olam when the opportunity is presented? Thank you for any insight you can provide.

Mesora: Although we state, "Know what to respond to a heretic", there is no law governing public versus written teaching. "Knowing what to respond..." means knowledge of Torah includes knowledge of the flawed arguments in opposing positions. "Torah" means not only knowledge of how to act, but knowledge of how to defend Torah. This means that Torah must also include knowledge of its exclusive nature - the "only" system of truth. If one does not have the answers to a heretic's attack,

he is lacking in his knowledge that the Torah is completely correct.

Each person is free to do as he wishes. We are guided by halacha alone, and not by conventional means. The Torah does not prohibit debates. Avraham Avinu argued with others, Ramban debated in his "Disputation at Barcelona", and Gaviha ben Pasisa also debated as recorded in Talmud Sanhedrin 91a, and his debate was even condoned by the Rabbis. On three occasions, Gaviha ben Pasisa was given permission to debate with other peoples in front of Alexander. Gaviha's goal was to shield the Torah from shame, and make a "kiddush Hashem", a sanctification of God's Torah. He succeeded all three times.

But Gaviha and Ramban both were under attack. Debate was a necessity. They did not initiate a debate. Regarding Avraham, his goal was to expose idolatry. He cared for others, so he argued against their views. I do not know if his forum was ever a staged debate, but rather, as casual conversations. Under normal circumstances, I do not see the need to debate when one may deliver their valuable views to the same number of Jews - if not more - by spreading their ideas in conversation or in print, as God has done with His Torah. The presence of two people face to face does nothing more to strengthen one's arguments. Content alone must impress one's mind, not eloquence of speech, or a charming personality. Additionally, viewing a debate actually removes one from the activity of independent study, arriving at reasonable conclusions with one's own mind, and at his own speed of comprehension.

A final thought: When one is requested to "face-off" at a public debate, my guess is that such an invitation is at times fueled by the host's desire to trash the guest. One who sincerely wishes to debate points of view, need not do so in person, or in staged debates. If he does wish a personal confrontation, Rabbis are certainly wiser to pass. The real goal of such "gracious hosts" is often personality assassination - not a search for objective truth. I am certain many times there arises a pre-debate on whose "turf" to debate. This substantiates my suspicion of the host's true interest in ideas. I would debate that point. ■

Parshas Tetzaveh

RABBI BERNARD FOX

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that the Kohen Gadol would be treated with dignity and respect. This is surprising. Our Sages often taught the importance of not being impressed by superficial behaviors or appearances. Instead, we are to assess a person based upon the individual's inner self. Why does the Torah stress superficial aspects of the Kohen Gadol? More shocking is the prohibition against the Kohen Gadol's marriage to a widow. This prohibition is also designed to protect the public image of the High Priest. Why should the Torah acknowledge a shallow prejudice against the widow? Would it not be preferable for the Torah to allow this marriage? Such a policy would counter any social stigma attached to the widow.

These laws demonstrate one of the unique qualities of the Torah. Torah takes human weakness seriously. The Torah was created to govern an actual society. In the real world, prejudice and superficiality exist. The Torah recognizes these faults. At the same time, it attempts to correct human behavior. Both measures are essential. Failure to recognize human frailty would result in a system poorly equipped to deal with an actual human being.

The Torah also attempts to improve upon these human limitations. The garments of the Kohen Gadol are an excellent illustration of the Torah's method of dealing with this dilemma. The Torah requires that the Kohen Gadol wear beautiful garments. However, these garments are more than attractive vestments. Every detail of design is guided by an intricate system of halacha. The observer is attracted to the beauty of the garments, and hopefully, this initial interest leads to contemplation of the ingenious laws. The observer comes to recognize that the greatest beauty is not in the superficial material dimension. Instead, true beauty is found in the world of knowledge.

"And these are the garments that they shall make: a breastplate an ephod, a jacket, a patterned tunic, a turban, and a belt. And they shall make sacred garments for Ahron your brother and for his sons so that they will serve as priests to me." (Shemot 28:4)

The pasuk describes various garments of the Kohen Gadol. In total, the Kohen Gadol wore eight garments. Maimonides comments that the eight golden garments of the Kohen Gadol consisted of the four worn by the common priest, plus the jacket, ephod breastplate and headband. This statement troubles the Kesef Mishne. In fact, only the four special garments included gold thread. The other garments worn by both the Kohen Gadol and the common Kohen did not include gold thread. Why, then, does Maimonides refer to all eight of the garments as "golden"? Perhaps, Maimonides wishes to teach an important lesson. The eight garments of the Kohen Gadol are not individual items. Instead, they merge into a single vestment. The four common garments join with the four woven with gold to create a new entity. This new, integrated, vestment is the "golden vestment" of the Kohen Gadol. In this case, the individual garments are not "golden" because they contain gold thread. They are golden through inclusion in the overall vestment.

"And you should make a Breastplate of Judgment of a woven design. Like the design of the Ephod you shall make it. You shall make it of gold, blue, purple, scarlet wool and twisted linen." (Shemot 28:15)

The Kohen Gadol wore eight garments. These consisted of the four garments worn by every kohen and an additional four special vestments. One of the special vestments was the Choshen Mishpat – the Breastplate of Judgment. The Choshen hung from the shoulders of the Kohen Gadol. The vestment was made of woven cloth. Embedded into the Choshen were precious stones representing the shevatim – the tribes of Bnai Yisrael.

The Choshen had a unique function. Questions could be posed to the Kohen Gadol. He would respond by consulting the Choshen. Maimonides explains this process based upon the Talmud. The question would be brought to the Kohen Gadol. He would immediately be overcome with the spirit of prophecy. The Kohen Gadol would look at the Choshen. The response would be transmitted to him in a prophetic vision. The answer was expressed through the letters engraved upon the stones of the Breastplate. Not every issue could be resolved through the Choshen.

Rashi comments, in Tractate Eruvin, that questions of halacha were not addressed in this manner. In the Prophets we find that the Choshen was consulted on national issues. A king might refer to the Choshen for guidance regarding a military campaign. The limitations upon the use of the Choshen reflect an important principle of the Torah. Prophecy cannot be used to resolve issues of halacha. Such questions are the responsibility of the Sages and the courts. They must address these issues using the standards of halacha and their own intellects.

Rabbaynu Yonatan ben Uziel makes an amazing comment that seems to contradict this principle. The Choshen is referred to, in our pasuk, as the Breast-plate of Judgment. What is the relationship between the Choshen and judgment? Rabbaynu Yonatan ben Uziel explains that the Choshen could be consulted over legal issues! This seems to contradict the principle that issues of halacha cannot be resolved through prophecy. The last mishna in Tractate Edyot suggests a similar contradiction. Our Sages teach us that the Messianic era will be preceded by the reappearance of Eliyahu the prophet. The mishna explains that Eliyahu will help prepare the path for the Meshiach. Raban Yochanan ben Zakai posits that one of Eliyahu's functions will be to clarify issues of lineage. Maimonides explains that Eliyahu will identify those individuals who have become completely alienated from their Jewish roots. They will be welcomed back into Bnai Yisrael. In addition, impostors whose lineage is imperfect will be identified and

excluded from the Jewish people. This would seem to be another example of prophecy used as a means to resolve an issue of halacha.

Rav Tzvi Hirsch Chayutz Ztl, based upon a careful analysis of Maimonides' comments, offers a brilliant response. He explains that the limitation of prophecy as a tool in halacha needs to be more fully understood. This limitation excludes prophecy from being used to determine the proper formulation of the law. For example, in order for a person to be punished by the courts for eating a prohibited substance, a minimum quantity must be ingested. Assume a person consumes less than this amount. Perhaps, the individual eats a portion of prohibited fat that is less than the size of an olive. Is this prohibited by the Torah or is this activity prohibited by the Sages? This issue is disputed by Rebbe Yochanan and Rebbe Shimon ben Lakish. The dispute revolves around the formulation of the Torah prohibition. Such an issue cannot be resolved through prophecy. Sometimes a question of halacha develops in a case in which the formulation of the law is clear. Questions of lineage often develop in this manner. The question does not stem from a dispute regarding the formulation of the criteria in halacha. Instead, the application of these laws is uncertain. Consider a case in which we simply do not know the lineage of the individual. Rav Tzvi Hirsch Chayutz suggests that prophecy is not excluded as a means for resolving these factual questions.

This explains the mishna in Tractate Edyot. Eliyahu the prophet will not resolve issues of lineage through altering the formulation of the law. This would indeed constitute a violation of the principle excluding prophecy from matters of halacha. Eliyahu will deal with factual issues. He will divine the true family history of the individual and determine the true facts in the case. This approach can also explain the comments of Rabbaynu Yonatan ben Uziel. There is a place in halacha for prophecy and the Choshen. This is the area identified by Rav Chayutz. Questions that are factual and not related to the formulation of the halacha could be referred to the Choshen.

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Parshas Tetzaveh

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And for the sons of Ahron you should make tunics. And you should make for them sashes. And hats you should make for them, for honor and glory." (Shemot 28:40)

This pasuk enumerates three of the garments worn by the kohen. The Jerusalem Talmud in Tractate Yoma notes that the plural is used in reference to the tunics. The Talmud explains that this alludes to the requirement to make two tunics for each kohen. These comments are difficult to understand. All of the garments in the passage are described in the plural. Yet, there was no requirement for the kohen to have two sashes or two hats. The plural is apparently used in agreement with the subject of the pasuk. The pasuk is describing the garments of the sons of Ahron. The subject – the sons of Ahron – is plural. Accordingly, the reference to each garment is in the plural!

Rashi, in his commentary on Tractate Yoma, discusses of the two tunics of the kohen. The Talmud explains that one of these tunics was of lesser quality. Rashi comments that each tunic had a specific function. The garment of lesser quality was worn when removing the ashes from the altar. This garment was then removed. The kohen dressed himself in the better tunic to perform his other services. This practice was designed as an expression of respect. The garment used to remove the ashes from the altar became soiled. It was henceforth unfit for the more elevated priestly services. Rashi's comments explain the need for two tunics. However, why must the first tunic be of lesser quality? Rashi apparently maintains that the requirement for two tunics was not merely practical. The first tunic was specifically of lower quality in order to distinguish it from the primary tunic. The primary tunic was worn during the offering of sacrifices. In order to emphasize the special significance of the primary tunic and the service associated with the garment, a secondary tunic was created. Its lower quality emphasized the sacredness of the primary tunic. In other words, it would have been

inappropriate for the two garments to be of equal quality. This would fail to emphasize the elevated status of the primary tunic. From this perspective, it appears that the two tunics were not independent garments. Instead, they functioned as a single unit. The secondary tunic alluded to the sanctity of the primary garment. The two tunics are really one entity consisting of a primary and secondary element.

Now the comments of the Jerusalem Talmud can be better appreciated. The pasuk refers to this single entity of the tunic. However, the Sages created an allusion to the dual components of this entity through reinterpreting the pasuk in a non-literal sense. The passage now has a twofold meaning that accurately describes the tunic as a single unit composed of two parts. (Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon [Rambam / Maimonides] Mishne Torah, Hilchot Klai HaMikdash 10:11.) □

Mezuzah

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

There are many Jews who believe that the mezuzah has some "power" of protection. Ask these people if you can light a match to a mezuzah and it should not burn, and they will respond, "of course it burns." Our obvious response, "If a mezuzah cannot protect itself, how can it protect anything outside itself?"

Fools who look to the mezuzah for physical protection have already been admonished by Maimonides, (Hilchos Mezuzah, 5:4). There, he calls such people fools for looking to the mezuzah for protection. He states that they take a command which is in fact for the lofty purpose of guiding us towards profound ideas on the Unity of God, His love and His service, and they make it into an amulet of benefit. Maimonides states they have no share in the next world.

These fools make the same error as those who wear red bendels. Just as the Tosefta in Talmud Sabbath (Chap. 7) says red strings on fingers are prohibited, so too those who mock God's command of mezuzah. I would like to quote the Shulchan Aruch, in the Gilyon M'harsha, Yoreh Daah, 289, page 113 on the bottom, "if one affixes the mezuzah for the reason of

fulfilling the command, one may consider that as reward for doing so he will be watched by G-d. But, if one affixes the mezuzah solely for protective reasons, it in fact has no guidance, and the mezuzah will be as knives in his eyes". These are very strong words from this very well known author. But what is his lesson? He is teaching us that God is the only source of protection, and that physical objects have no power. Rather, if one feels they do, these objects, even a mezuzah, will be the opposite, "knives in his eyes" - something destructive. We say every shabbos, "He (God) alone does wonders". Do we not listen to ourselves as we pray?

It is of the utmost importance that above all, we have the correct notion of God. He alone is the only source of power in the universe. Magic, enchanters, psychics, voodoo, etc., are all hoaxes. Even the Egyptian astrologers of old were correctly explained as having used slight of hand. (Saadia Gaon in "Emunos v'Daos") There is no such thing as witchcraft. God's distinction is exclusive. To assume other powers in the universe means to assume a diminution in God.

I would add one important observation: The notion that mezuzas have powers, is actually the opposite of its real purpose. Mezuzah, tfillin and tzitzis serve to take man's investment of security in physical objects, and redirect it towards God. Man invests strength in his limbs, ego in his clothing, and security in his home. God commands us to realize our error, and redirect our security towards Him alone, as this is the truth, and our thoughts are false. We are to remind ourselves of God as we enter our homes and see the mezuzah. We reflect on our frail bodies as we don tfillin. And we loosen the grip of the ego as we incorporate tzitzis into our wardrobe. Maimonides groups mezuzah, tfillin and tzitzis under one heading, and I believe it is for this reason. Similarly, leprosy strikes one's home, then his clothing, and finally one's body - the same three objects. The purpose? To teach a specific individual that he is a victim of evil speech. But God teaches man in a merciful fashion: first, through objects of his identification before attacking his body. Identification is closely related to security.

If we understand the mitzvot by in depth study as God desires, we will protect ourselves from all foolish notions which unfortunately circulate with popular appeal among our brethren. As long as they abandon Torah study and simply "follow the leader", they will remain victims of nonsensical notions and forfeit their World to Come." Only he or she who uses their mind will learn what is real, and will no longer be deceived by Jewish pop culture. □

Gentile Equality

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Yesterday I was learning a midrash Tanchumah from Parshas Vayeishev and it was titled "V'Yosef hurad mitzruyma". It asks if one is allowed to make havdalah with a candle from a goy. It answers that one is not allowed to because it did not rest from work. It continues on and says, if one uses it its as if one is making the goy important and the pasuk says, "Kol hagoyim keayim negdo" (which is part of a posuk in yeshaya chapter 40 posuk 17). My question is, is this midrash taken literally? Im trying to understand what the posuk means but I can't understand how goyim are like nothing to God. Please look up the midrash and look at the story it brings down after the posuk.

Mesora: When a person is worthless before God, it is only if they severely violate the Torah's 7 Noachide or 613 Jewish commands. Torah violation in general does not make one worthless before God, as God knows that man sins. The very institution of teshuvah - repentance - teaches that God prefers the repentance of the wicked and not his death. This is a paraphrase of the actual statement in Isaiah 18:23, "Do I indeed desire the death of the wicked? So says God. Is it not in his return from his path that he may live?" God desires all mankind exist, and that they live according to Torah principles. A gentile who follows God is priceless. The Talmud in Sanhedrin 59a says that a gentile who studies Torah is as a Kohane Gadol - a high priest. We must say that the Tanchumah quoted refers only to one who does not follow God's Torah. □