

## Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky **Beauty and Honor: Divine or Empty?**

This week's *parsha* describes the garments worn by the *kohanim*. There is a general description of these garments as being there for "*l'kavod u'tiferes* - honor and glory" (Shemos 28:2). We naturally assume that important buildings and officials would look especially grand and dignified. But one wonders why Hashem's service would demand the grandness that we associate with human enterprises. As a matter of fact, when we speak of those terms, of 'glory and honor', we tend to see them in somewhat of a negative light. At best, it's a necessary contrivance.

Another fascinating point to note about the various adornments on the vessels in the *Mishkan* is that they all have to be of the item itself. Thus, the *menorah* had many intricate designs on it, but it all had to be hammered out from one piece (Shemos 25:31); they could not be made separately and then welded on. Similarly, the designs on the curtains had to be woven in, not sewn on. Obviously, this is a more refined form of craftsmanship. But one would expect that when we are dealing with items that are of Divine nature there is a lot more to it than merely eye-catching design and craftsmanship.

We also find that the Torah will occasionally single out someone for their beauty. Thus, Rachel, Yoseph, and David are all singled out for their appearance, being of great beauty. Obviously, this is not simply a factual description but is telling us something of significance.

Let us think a moment of Hashem's purpose in creating the world. Hashem wanted a spiritual world that would penetrate even physical darkness, and within that darkness express itself and project its image and message. Thus, even a person who is of physical substance learns to understand that physicality is empty and that only the spiritual is worthy.

When an object expresses itself to others, we call that 'beauty', or *tiferes*. Thus, when I adorn a most important venue in a way that reflects the dignity and significance of its content, then I have actually furthered its goal. The point of beauty, *kavod*, and *tiferes* is that the content of the object project itself and impress itself on the people interacting with it.

But does not the *passuk* say that "charm and beauty are empty" (*Mishlei* 31:30)? The answer is, indeed, that is the point of it. When one takes a vessel that's empty and contains nothing of value but adorns the outside in a way that it seems to project value and importance, one is perpetrating a lie. But when dealing with something of great value and real content, by projecting its value one is actually delineating and highlighting the truth.

This helps us understand the constant emphasis on having the decorations on the divine vessels coming from within rather than being pasted on. If its beauty is something that came from the outside and is added to it, it inevitably is not really expressing the inner truth. But when the truth breaks through from the inside, and its beauty projects outwards, then the beauty is truly reflecting the content. Thus, Shlomo *Hamelech* says, "the wisdom of a person radiates from his face" (*Koheles*



8:1). Wisdom is inside one's mind, but if it is powerful enough it will radiate outwards.

Apropos of Purim this week, we see the exact opposite with Achashverosh. *Chazal* say that he took the garments of the *kohanim* and wanted to show them off (*Megillah* 12a). He made a huge party to show all of his glory and greatness. He embodies something that is all beauty and glory, and no substance whatsoever. His kingdom rises and falls on beauty, and nothing but that.

This gives us real understanding concerning the creations of beauty and glory. They are meant to be the final piece that connects us to Hashem. An orator with a profound message who is able to articulate it in a way that is beautiful and pleasing is really accomplishing something most worthy. He is taking the truth and connecting it to people in a way that they will absorb it.

A person who lacks articulation and eloquence may have the truth, but the truth falls short of influencing, and being absorbed by, the listener.

But the person who is all articulation and beauty with no substance or content is a travesty. People grasp his words, but the words have nothing to tell them. Like a child who sucks a pacifier, eagerly thinking that they're drinking milk, but their stomach continues to hurt them because there is no nourishment forthcoming.

The *Beis Hamikdash* is Hashem's words, projected through the articulation of beauty and majesty, and that is why it has such a profound effect upon us.

**More *divrei Torah* from Rabbi Lopiansky**

**More *divrei Torah* on *Parshas Tetzaveh***

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