

Parshas Bo (reprint) – MD Spitzer

Egyptian Clothes

As Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, with dough on their backs and matza & morror leftovers on their shoulders, the Jewish people made sure to obey Moshe's command to request valuables from their Egyptian neighbours. This was in order to fulfill Hashem's promise to Avrohom that his descendants would leave Egypt with great treasures.

Thus the Possuk says, "Bnei Yisroel did according to the word of Moshe, and they asked from the Egyptians silver, gold & clothes" (12:35).

It is understandable that the Jews would want gold and silver, but why did they ask for the Egyptians' clothes? Furthermore, this was not just their request, but rather a specific command from Moshe. What was so special about these clothes? Why were they classed as "great treasures", on par with silver and gold?

Surely the Bnei Yisrael were praised for not wearing Egyptian clothing?

This question is further compounded if one recalls the famous Medrash which praises the Jews for remaining distinct from the Egyptians through their names, clothes and language. If this was considered such a virtue, why would they now be *commanded* to take these exact clothes and wear them on their journey to becoming the Am Hashem?

A simple answer, offered by some Meforshim, is that when the Medrash says that the Jews were distinct in their clothing, it does not mean to say that they did not wear Egyptian clothing or fashion, but rather they were distinct by virtue of their modesty. Therefore, it is not a contradiction for them to request the more modest Egyptian clothes on their way out of Egypt.

However, our original question still remains - why would Moshe *command* the Jews to request the clothing? What was so unique about the clothes that put them on the same level as silver and gold?

The Chasam Sofer's answer

The Chasam Sofer offers a fascinating answer. He cites Rashi (Shemos 12:12), who writes that during makas bechoros even the gods of the Egyptians were punished. Their animal gods were killed, wooden idols rotted, and metal images melted. Similarly, explains the Chasam Sofer, the Egyptians were so steeped in idolatry that even their clothes were embroidered with pictures of idols. During makas bechoros, these idols vanished, and the images on their clothes disappeared!

Moshe therefore commanded the people to request these clothes from the Egyptians in order to remember this wondrous miracle and the message it carried. The idols which disappeared from their clothes symbolised the yetzer hora - the tests and temptations that confront a person. Although tests and temptations are very difficult to overcome, and seem so real, in actual fact they are only dimyonos - figments of the imagination, which *can* be conquered if one fights and holds out long enough. They will vanish in an instant, and their only purpose is to test us; they have no substance of their own.

The yetzer hora is just a smokescreen

In this vein, R' Chaim Friedlander explains the phrase in the tefillos of the Yomim Noraim "vechol horishoh kuloh keoshon tichleh" – that in the future "all evil will disappear like smoke". Why is evil compared to smoke? R' Chaim explains that if one looks at smoke from afar, it appears to be a thick black mass; something real and tangible. However, if one approaches the smoke and touches it, he realises that really it is nothing, with no substance at all. Similarly, the tests we experience seem so real, the temptations are so strong, but if one holds out and fights his battles, he will see that it was just an illusion, a product of his imagination, and it can be overcome.

Hence, Moshe *commanded* Bnei Yisroel to take these clothes with them on their way out of Egypt, so that when they would later say, "We can't cope, our yetzer hora is too strong for us", they could look at the Egyptian clothes and be reminded that the yetzer hora has no substance of its own. It only exists in order to be overcome.

Therefore, the Egyptian clothes were considered *as valuable* as the gold and silver, due to their timeless message: Torah & ruchnius are the only constants. The idols - the temptations not to keep the Torah - are just transitory and illusions.