

Who Takes the Garment

Two weeks ago we stood in shul on Yom Kippur and made commitments, and Sukkos and Simchas Torah carried us forward. Now the Yomim Tovim are behind us, and the question is not whether we meant it; we did. The question is whether we will act. “Vayikach Shem va’Yefes es hasimlah” (9:23). Rashi notes that the verb is singular, vayikach, and explains that Shem exerted himself more in the mitzvah. Shem started, and Yefes joined. Shem’s descendants merited the tallis with tzitzis, while Yefes’s descendants merited burial (Yechezkel 39:11). Both brothers carried the same garment and achieved the same result for their father. Why do the rewards differ in kind?

The Maharal explains that a reward grows out of the act, as branches grow from a root, and so reveals what the act really was. Yefes, from yofi, is bound up with the guf. He cared for the dignity of his father’s body, and his children receive burial. Shem, the essence of a thing, is bound up with the nefesh, and his children receive a mitzvah of the soul. The body by its nature does not begin things; it can follow, even respectfully. Zerizus, the drive to be first, belongs to the nefesh.

The parsha closes with another beginning. “Vayikach Terach es Avram bno” (11:31). In *Abraham’s Journey*, the Rav argues that Terach began his own teshuva, yet Avraham truly directed the move and arranged it so everyone would think the decision was Terach’s. Shem went first where no one saw. Avraham went first and let someone else be seen.

Tishrei is public; even etiquette brings a person to Kol Nidrei. Cheshvan is private. No one checks whether we kept the kabbala we made at Ne’ila, so now we focus on ethics. Fittingly, Shem’s reward is tzitzis, worn every day, often unseen. Pick one commitment from Yom Kippur and start it this week, before anyone notices: the chesed no one organized, the shiur no one else will begin, the call to someone who is alone. Vayikach Shem: may we be the ones who take the garment.