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“RABBI’S MUSINGS (& AMUSINGS)”

*Erev Shabbos Kodesh Parshas Behar-Bechukosai (38th day of Omer)*

*23 Iyar 5777/ May 19, 2017 - Avos Perek 4*

*Shabbos Chazak! - Mevorchim Chodesh Sivan*

The Staum family are proud Leviim. We look forward to Moshiach coming so that we will have the great merit of singing in the Bais Hamikdash.

Although it would be an even greater zechus to be Kohanim, there is a juvenile benefit to not being a Kohanim. You see, Kohanim need to be particularly vigilant to make sure they wear nice socks. In Eretz Yisroel that's true every day; in chutz la'aretz it's true on Yom Tov. Before kohanim duchan (bless the congregation with Birchas Kohanim) they remove their shoes. As the kohanim take their place in front of the shul, their socks are quite noticeable. This is especially true if they are wearing colored socks or socks with designs.

Personally, even if my socks happen to match by coincidence on any given day, they always seem to have holes in them (despite my wife's best efforts to constantly replace them). There's also another rather obvious reason why it's beneficial for the Kehilla that my shoes remain on my feet.

Although my socks can remain incognito, my shoes are not as fortunate. Being that in our shul, Kehillat New Hempstead, my seat is atop the podium in front (the congregation feels the need to always keep an eye on me), my shoes are more visible than they would otherwise be.

Now that I have a teenage son who possesses some sense of style (which he inherited from his mother), he recently offered to pick out shoes for me. I agreed, and the shoes arrived a few days later. Since I have begun wearing them, more than one person has complimented the shoes, but added that they are a little too snazzy and stylish for a rabbi.

As we grow older, many of us have the experience of looking at our parent's wedding album and thinking how "out of style" our parents look. My father looked handsome at his wedding, but - seriously Abba - a brown, three-piece suit?!

We are all convinced that we are far more stylish than our predecessors. That holds true until the day our children look through our wedding albums and laugh at us. (For me it came sooner - it was as shortly after we got married and Chani went through my closet and got rid of much of my wardrobe.)

We can take solace, however, that chances are in another generation the styles will come back around. Our grandchildren may be impressed with how stylish their grandparents were, especially because it seems to have skipped a generation. “Abba, how come you don't get a suit like Zaydei had at his wedding?”

I once heard that Rav Avrohom Pam zt"l noted to someone who commented that he had very stylish glasses, that he had them from when he was young, and they were in style the last time around.

A friend of mine often quips that he refuses to pay a lot of money to walk around broadcasting someone else's name, unless that person is willing to walk around wearing clothing that bore his name. (As of this writing Mr. Tommy Hilfiger is still refusing to wear a shirt with the name Goldstein on it...)

Styles are a funny thing. Masses of people will dress in a certain way and wear certain clothes, because masses of people dress a certain way and wear certain clothes.

Someone once asked Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky why yeshiva students always wear the same thing - white shirts and black pants? Rabbi Orlofsky replied that it makes it easier for them to know what to wear in the morning. The questioner retorted that dressing in that manner squelches one's individually. Rabbi Orlofsky replied, “If your clothing is what expresses your individuality, you don't have any real sense of individuality.”

The Torah has a very clear perspective on clothing. Clothing are called *begadim*, an expression of *begidah* - betrayal, because our clothing often mask our true identity. At times, we hide behind our clothing, and portray ourselves in a way that differs from who we really are.

Mesillas Yesharim encourages us to dress respectfully, but not aristocratically. Our clothes should remain merely clothing, not a means to define us.

In his fantastic book, 48 Ways to Wisdom[[1]](#footnote-1), Rav Noach Weinberg zt'l, warns that we need to beware the Marlboro man. His urbane and cool appearance has convinced many young people to begin smoking, despite all the warnings against it. “Insanity is contagious, unless you have the courage to remain true to your convictions.” This is true in how we dress as well.

If we truly wish to express our individuality, we need to dig deeper and reveal the true essence of who we are, not just by hiding behind our clothing.

Otherwise we may end up just being the kohain with the wacky socks or the rabbi with the stylish shoes.

Shabbat Shalom & Good Shabbos

 R’ Dani and Chani Staum

1. It is one of the greatest “self-help” books I’ve ever read – it’s refreshing, motivating, and inspiring, and it’s based on the wisdom of a Torah giant who lived it. I have been reading one “way” each day of sefiras haomer this year. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)