

תנא דבי אליהו, כל השונה הלכות בכל יום מובטח לו שהוא בן העולם הבא

IT WAS TAUGHT IN THE ACADEMY OF ELIYAHU, WHOEVER STUDIES TORAH LAWS  
EVERY DAY IS ASSURED THAT HE WILL BE PRESENT IN THE 'WORLD TO COME'

## Chapter 2, Question 2

### *Should one be particular in the order of wearing clothing?*

Most of us could quite confidently say that we know very well how to dress and undress ourselves. And since the art of dressing is a skill that is learnt and mastered since early childhood years, it would therefore certainly come as a surprise if one discovered that the way he has been dressing for so many years is not in fact in line with the halachic rulings of the Shulhan Aruch! Could the spiritual concepts of 'right' and 'wrong' really apply to such matters like how one wears a jumper or ties one's shoe-laces? In this essay we will discuss what the proper appearance of one's clothing should be, and the correct halachic order in which one should wear their clothes. We will also address the much deeper question of why the manner and order in which a Jew dresses is so fundamental.

The Rambam<sup>1</sup> gives a detailed halachic guideline for what the correct appearance of a Jew's clothing should be:

מלבוש תלמיד חכם יהיה מלבוש נאה ונקי, ואסור לו שימצא בבגדו כתם או שמנונית וכיוצא בהם. ולא ילבש לא מלבוש שרים שהכל מסתכלים בהם ולא מלבוש עניים שהוא מבזה את לובשיו, אלא בגדים בינוניים נאים.

*The clothes of a Talmid Hacham should be nice and clean, and it is forbidden to be found on his clothing a stain or dirt, and the like. And he should not wear 'noblemen's clothing' that would cause all to gaze at him, nor 'poorman's clothing' that degrade those who wear them. Rather [he should wear] average, nice clothing.*

1. הלכות דעות, פרק ה', הלכה ט'.

Even though the Rambam seems to be addressing the style of a *Talmid Hacham's* code of dress, nevertheless this is a halacha which would apply to **all Jews**. The reason being that the Rambam defines a '*Talmid Hacham*' simply as a person with spiritual goals - someone who is striving to gain the wisdom of the Torah. It would therefore be safe to assume that all observant Jews fall into this category.

So what is the ultimate message of the Rambam above? In a nutshell, the Rambam is saying that the image of a Jew in the street should be that of a person who does not stand out in any extreme way. He should appear presentable, but free from excessive materialism. He should look humble, but not in a way that would degrade himself. Over the centuries of our exile Klal Yisrael have lived through various sociological and political changes in society along with the differing fashion trends that they manifested. We have lived amongst the glamorous and over-dignified dress codes of the Victorian era with its noblemen and aristocrats, and we have walked the streets of the liberal 'hippy' and 'bohemian' movements that plagued the 20th and 21st Centuries. Yet the accepted dress code of the religious Jew has always remained simple, presentable and very much in the middle spectrum of extremes. This is indeed a characteristic that we should be proud of.

The guideline of this Rambam led to the following ruling by the Shulhan Aruch:<sup>2</sup>

**ידקדק בחלוקו ללבשו כדרכו, שלא יהפך הפנימי לחוץ:**

*One should be particular regarding his garment to wear it in the correct way,  
[i.e.] so that it is not worn inside out.*

The Mishnah Berura<sup>3</sup> explains that the reason why one should be particular not to wear his clothes inside out is simply because of how negatively he would otherwise be perceived in the eyes of people. As seen in the Rambam, a Jew has an obligation to look presentable at all times. The clothes one chooses to wear and the manner in which he wears them tell a lot about the sensitivity of a person, his attitude towards life and society, and the lifestyle he has chosen to lead. Wearing one's clothes inside out would surely look odd and would cause a *hillul Hashem* (desecration of Hashem's name).

2. סימן ב', סעי' ג' ומקורו בשבת דף קיד.

3. שם, ס"ק ד'.

The issue of potential *hillul Hashem* is so severe that the Mishnah Berura then states that if a *Talmid Hacham* realizes that his clothes have been worn inside out, he should immediately **take them off** and put them on again the correct way. It is important to note that in this case where the Mishnah Berura refers to a '*Talmid Hacham*', what he means is a **learned individual** (as opposed to the Rambam's definition above).

However, according to the Ben Ish Hai<sup>4</sup> **every Jew** would be required to take their garment off and put it on the right way - not just a *Talmid Hacham*. The Ben Ish Hai could have taken into account that there may be deeper mystical reasons why one's clothes should not be worn in such a fashion. This is because the Shulhan Aruch made no distinction between outer and inner garments in this respect, i.e. according to the Shulhan Aruch one would still have to ensure that his very inner garments are also not worn inside out even though such garments are not in view of the public eye. In fact the Mishnah Berura quotes<sup>5</sup> in the name of the Prisha that the חלוק 'haluk' garment referred to by the Shulhan Aruch above is in fact the **inner most garment** worn against one's skin. Additionally, the Seder Hayom<sup>6</sup> (Rabbi Moshe ben Yehuda Machir, 1598) declared quite openly that there are in fact mystical aspects to this halacha. He writes that '*one should never wear their garment inside out for any reason... even if the garment is underneath all his other garments... because there is a deep aspect to this and it is fitting to be particular to observe it... Hashem's secrets are for those who fear Him!*'

Coming to our next question... is there a particular order by which one should get dressed? Indeed we find that the Shulhan Aruch does outline the correct procedure of how one should put on their shoes in the following halachic rulings:<sup>7</sup>

ינעל מנעל ימין תחלה ולא יקשרנו, ואחר-כך ינעל של שמאל ויקשרנו, ויחזר ויקשר של ימין:  
כשחולץ מנעליו, חולץ של שמאל תחלה:

*One should wear the right shoe first and not tie it, and then wear the left one and tie it, and then go back and tie the right.*

*When one takes off his shoes, the left shoe should be taken off first.*

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4. וישלח, אות טו'  
5. שם, ס"ק ג'  
6. דף א'  
7. סימן ב', סעי' ד-ה'

The Mishnah Berura adds<sup>8</sup> that the concept in which the right shoe should have precedence over the left is in fact a rule that applies to all matters, e.g. when one is washing himself he should wash his right arm first and then his left. Therefore we can learn from here that when one puts on a jumper, for example, he should **first put his right arm through** and then his left arm. This is because by keeping the clothing on the right arm for a longer period of time (even if it is for a second or so) inevitably gives greater respect to the right side.<sup>9</sup> The same idea would also apply to the performance of mitzvot - that they should be done with the right hand, e.g. giving tzedaka, etc. Now is there a source for all of this? Is there any indication from Scripture that the 'right' is more preferable than the 'left'? The answer is that there are indeed many examples from Tanach which indicate quite clearly that *right* is 'best'. For example, we find that the Torah was given with Hashem's right hand:<sup>10</sup>

**למו מימינו אש דת למו - From His right hand He presented the fiery Torah to them.**

We also find the following pasuk in Tehillim:<sup>11</sup>

**הימין ה' רוממה - The right hand of Hashem is raised triumphantly.**

But there is one limb in the body that should be prioritised before all others. The Ben Ish Hai<sup>12</sup> writes that when one dresses himself he should always start by covering his **head first**. [The Mishnah Berura explains<sup>13</sup> that the reason for this is because the head is considered the 'King' of all the limbs of the body.] After ensuring the head is covered the Ben Ish Hai says<sup>14</sup> that one should then proceed with covering the **lower half** of the body, i.e. with his trousers or the like. It is logical to assume that the source of the Ben Ish Hai's ruling here is from the Rambam who outlines the order of how a Kohen Gadol should put his clothes on when preparing for the service in the Beit Hamikdash. The Rambam says that the Kohen Gadol should put his trousers on first!<sup>15</sup>

8. שם

9. עיין שם מ"ב, ס"ק ח'.

10. דברים לג:ב.

11. תהילים קיח:טז.

12. וישלח, אות יז.

13. שם, ס"ק ז'.

14. שם, אות טו.

15. הלכות כלי המקדש פרק י, הלכה א, ומקורו ביומא דף כה.

Initially it may seem bizarre that there are actual halachot regarding the order of putting on or taking off clothes! Does it really make that much of a difference to the greater scheme of things if we tie our left shoelace first before our right one? I would like to share a moving story that I personally heard from a very special individual, which may shed some light on this topic. Here is the story in the man's own words:

*“ It was a Friday afternoon and I was driving home to Bnei Brak from Jerusalem. On the way I saw a soldier who was holding his hand out to catch a ride up north. I stopped the car and asked the soldier where he was going. He answered ‘Haifa’. I was initially surprised as it was quite close to Shabbat coming in and I knew he would not make it there on time, but I took another look at him and he did not look at all observant. So I told him I could only take him till Bnei Brak and he would have to find another lift from there. He agreed and we set off. On the way we spoke a lot and discussed our differing attitudes towards religion, etc. When we got to Bnei Brak I decided to make the soldier a proposal. I suggested that he stay by me for the whole of Shabbat. He would be under no obligation to join me for any of the Shul services, etc. He would be free to simply relax, eat and sleep and that’s it. I told him that I would be happy to drive him all the way to Haifa on motzei Shabbat if he stayed. The soldier thought for a while and then surprisingly agreed! Shabbat came and the soldier, who was no doubt very tired from his training, did exactly that... he ate and slept and before we knew it, it was motzei Shabbat. We got into the car to head for Haifa. On the way the soldier said to me, ‘I have been really touched by your kindness... and I know it is your wish that I become a more observant Jew, so I am hereby willing to take on one small religious practice in your merit, which you can choose for me.’ I was really shocked! I tried hard to think which one mitzvah I could possibly suggest that would be shayach for him to take on. For some reason the mitzvah of the order of putting on one’s shoes came to my mind. I suggested it and he accepted to take it on and we said our farewells. A few months later when this soldier was back at his army base, he was training one day under the supervision of his Commander when he realised that he had forgotten to put on his shoes in the correct halachic order. He quickly came out of line and began taking his shoes off and putting them on again correctly. His commander noticed his peculiar behaviour but simply dismissed his actions as a random anomaly. The next day the soldier realised he had again forgotten to put his shoes on properly - he stepped out of line again and began putting his shoes on and tying them in the correct halachic order. This time the commander became infuriated. He demanded an explanation. The soldier explained the issue, and the commander - who had no appreciation for religious values, became incensed and punished the soldier by placing him in solitary confinement. It just so happened that that same day his platoon were going on an important helicopter exercise mission. The soldier was really upset he could not take part in the mission as it would have been an invaluable experience for him. It was this unfortunate mission that underwent the famous fatal accident where two military helicopters collided in 1997 in Northern Israel killing 73 people r’l ! ”*

I was told this story first hand by the man who gave the soldier the lift. The soldier of the story was the only survivor of that battalion and today he is living the life of a fully observant Jew. This story, if anything, teaches us that we should never disregard or undervalue any mitzvah or tradition that is brought down by our Hachamim. We cannot always know the deep reasons behind every mitzvah, but what we can know is that every religious individual has his own chronicle of miracle stories to tell.

The source of the halacha regarding the order of putting on one's shoes is rooted in the Talmud in tractate Shabbat.<sup>16</sup> A difference of opinion is raised regarding a statement made by the great Amora - Rabbi Yohanan and a seemingly contradicting Baraita (an authorless Mishnah that holds much halachic weight). Rabbi Yohanan exclaimed that just like the tefillin is worn on the left hand so too should the shoe be worn on the left foot first. Rabbi Yohanan's reasoning is due to the fact that the left side is elevated and treated with better respect since it merits the mitzvah of tefillin. Another way to understand this is since tefillin (which is an item that is tied) goes on the left arm, so too should the left shoe (which is also tied) be tied first.<sup>17</sup> The Baraita however disagrees and states that one must wear their right shoe first and then their left shoe. The Gemara then quotes Rav Nahman the son of Yitzhak who resolves the dispute by ruling that:

**כִּי יִרְאֵה שָׁמַיִם יִצְאָה יְדָיו שְׂתִיהוּן**

***One who fears Heaven should fulfill both opinions.***

The Gemara clarifies that the way one can do this is by putting on his right shoe and not tying it, then putting on his left shoe and tying it, and only then tying the right.

Now that we are becoming experts on how to dress ourselves, let us take a look at this topic on a much deeper mystical level! The Ben Ish Hai adds another very important halacha regarding the manner of wearing clothes. He cautions, in the name of the Ari z'l, that one should never put on two garments in one go, i.e. together. Such a simple action could cause a person memory loss r'l. His words are as follows:<sup>18</sup>

16. דף סא.

17. ב"י שם.

18. שם, אות טז.

יזהר שלא ילבש שני מלבושים בהיותם זה בתוך זה ביחד, דקשה לשכחה!

*One should be careful not to wear two pieces of clothing whilst one is inside the other, i.e. together, because it causes forgetfulness!*

Most mystical truths are far beyond our limited comprehension. And this difficult task (to understand the mystical) becomes even more hopeless when we attempt to explain Hashem's secrets through the medium of finite 'words'. However, one of the Ben Ish Hai's many skills was his ability to explain and clarify the cosmic teachings of the Ari z'l in a way that could reach the grasp of even the average Jew. In the very beginning of his holy sefer, the Ben Ish Hai gives us a clear 'surface explanation' of why wearing two garments together causes memory loss. Here is a loose translation of his derasha in conjunction with the words of the Ari z'l that he quotes:<sup>19</sup>

Every garment is surrounded by a special external protective 'aura' or spiritual light called an **אור המקיף** *Ohr HaMakif*. And there is nothing that has the ability to push away the **קליפות** *Klipot* (which are harmful spiritual forces created by a person's sins) like the power of the **אור המקיף**. When a person puts on a garment, the **אור המקיף** manifests as a powerful force that surrounds him and **deflects** the potential perils of the *klipot*. However, when one wears two pieces of clothing together (in one go) he does not allow the **אור המקיף** to manifest between the two garments. The result would be that *klipot* could now enter and harm the person. One of the harms that the *klipot* are known to cause is memory loss!

As a side point, it is interesting to note that various garments have different levels of this 'aura' depending on the garment's spiritual status. For example, a four cornered garment which has kosher tzitzit attached to it has the highest level of **אור המקיף**. This is the deeper understanding of the well known verse from the Shema, which refers to the tzitzit;

**וראיתם אתם וזכרתם את כל מצות ה'**

*And you shall see them and you shall remember all the mitzvot of Hashem...*

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שער הכוונות, סוף ענין ברכת השחר. 19.

There are some opinions<sup>20</sup> who say that one should also be particular not take off two garments at the same time, but the Ben Ish Hai was **not** concerned about this and the issue is clearly regarding putting on two garments together.

In summary, a Jew's clothing should always appear clean, presentable and should not portray any extremes of status, wealth or non-Jewish ideology. If one discovered that he has worn any of his clothes inside out he should take it off and put it on again the right way. The order of wearing one's shoes is; to wear the right shoe first and not tie it, and then wear the left shoe and tie it, and then go back and tie the right shoe. The right side of any garment always has precedence over the left side. The order of dressing oneself in general is to first ensure one's head is covered and then one should cover the bottom half of the body, i.e. by putting one's underwear or trousers on first. One should be careful never to wear two pieces of clothing together in one go.

### **Rabbi Yosef Haim David**

This document contains divrei Torah. Please treat it with necessary respect.

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מנחת אהרון כלל כב', אות יב'. 20.