The mission of **Torah Is Geshmack** is to bring out the richness and enjoyment of Torah for everyone, and in doing so bring them closer to Hashem.

תשפ״ו

The Watch: Beauty Versus Display

Dovid Kopel

I was on a חול המועד (*the intermediate festival days*) trip with my family recently, and we stopped at a mall. I had to go into a store to get my watch strap repaired. While I was waiting, I tried on a watch, just out of curiosity. The saleslady asked, "Do you like it?" I told her it was a little too ostentatious for my taste. She smiled and asked, "Don't you like to stand out?" I smiled back and said, "Not for me, thank you." What I was thinking, though, was something deeper.

In Yiddishkeit, we absolutely believe in beauty. The בגדי כהונה (*priestly garments*) were beautiful. We wear nice clothing לכבוד שבת (*in honor of Shabbos*). We set the table with a nice קידוש cup, with flowers, with things that make Shabbos feel elevated. I'll buy a nice tie now and then too. There is nothing wrong with appreciating something beautiful. But there is a difference between beauty and display.

Sometimes something beautiful gives כבוד (*honor*) to the moment. It enhances the שמחה. It helps a person feel that this time, this occasion, is special. That feels to me like a Yiddishe way of using גשמיות (*physicality*): not as an end in itself, but as something that can serve something higher.

I have a friend who is quite wealthy and buys very fancy suits. But he is so צנוע (*modest*) about it that you would hardly know it. He wears the price tag on the inside, so to speak. He enjoys it, he feels good in it, and he makes the occasion feel special — but he does not wear it in a way that begs to be noticed. I think that is a beautiful thing.

Because the question is not whether a person can enjoy גשמיות. Most of us are not the גר״א, trying to be פורש מן הגשמיות (*separate from materiality*) in that absolute way. That is a different מדרגה (*level*). We live in this world. We use this world. We enjoy things in this world. The question is how.

Do we do it with צניעות, or in a showy way? Do we use something beautiful to enhance the occasion, or to magnify ourselves? That, to me, is the difference. "Standing out" is a different language. That is not about honoring the moment. It is about drawing attention to yourself — being noticed, being admired, being seen. That is not an ideal that speaks to me.

Of course, none of us are מלאכים (*angels*). We all enjoy things. We all get pulled by physical pleasures. We all buy things because we like them, not because every action is perfectly pure. The goal is not perfection. The goal is honesty.

I remember once in yeshiva speaking to the משגיח (*spiritual mentor*), HaRav Beryl Weisbord שליט״א. I told him, "I know I don't eat בקדושה (*in holiness*), but I know that if I don't eat, I can't learn my סדר (*study session*), and I want to learn my סדר." He smiled and said something like, "Just know that you aren't eating לשמה (*for its own sacred sake*)."

I also once heard Rav Heineman say something very sharp about eating לכבוד שבת. A person says he is eating לכבוד שבת, but the real question is: are you eating לכבוד שבת, or לכבוד your בויך (*stomach*)? That is the right kind of השקפה (*outlook*). Know yourself. Be honest with yourself.

We do not have to be fake. We do not have to pretend we are above every physical desire. But we also should not turn indulgence into an ideology. There has to be some balance, some ישרות (*straightness*) — to enjoy what is normal and human, while still being clear with ourselves about what is really driving us.

It is okay to like nice things. But I think it matters how we like them: with צניעות, or with a need to be seen; with dignity, or with display. Maybe part of being a בן תורה is wanting to look nice not in order to stand out, but in order to give כבוד to Shabbos, to a special occasion, and to the kind of life we are trying to live. May we be זוכה to know ourselves honestly, to elevate the world around us, and to live in this world with קדושה.

Dovid Kopel · TorahIsGeshmack.com

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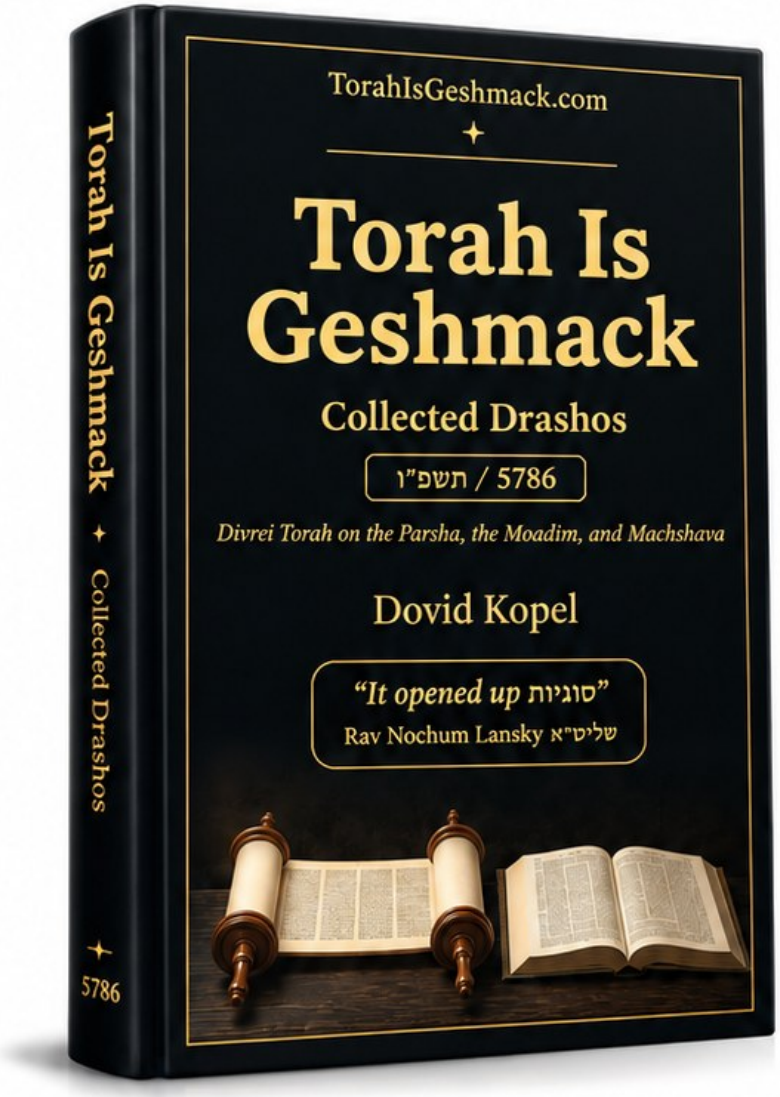
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