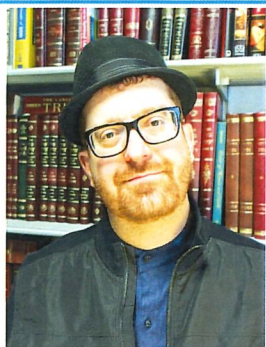


## From Garment of Tender Resolve to Fragrance of Devotion: An Invitation to Dive Deeper this Coming New Year

Rav Aubrey Glazer



What is the invitation to gather and even dive deeper into this coming New Year? Simply put: from donning the garment of tender resolve to smelling the fragrance of devotion - this is our invitation as to why we gather each year, especially this advent of 5786.

### Kittel as Compassion: White Garment of Tender Resolve

Compassion - how do we wear it on our sleeves? The *kittel* - a simple

white robe - wraps itself around our most sacred Jewish moments: worn under the marital *chuppah*, on Yom Kippur, and even at the Seder, and, eventually, in burial. In every appearance, it's a garment of compassion - toward others, toward ourselves, toward the life we are called to sanctify. White in Jewish tradition is not the absence of color; it's the gathering of all light. In the prophet Isaiah's vision, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow," the whiteness is divine compassion actualized - a resetting, a tender mercy that sees the soul beneath the stains. I recall hearing once of a person who brought their ancestor's *kittel* to their own wedding. His father had passed when he was a child, but the garment still carried faint traces of wine from a past Seder, wrinkles from Yom Kippur prostrations. Wearing it under the *chuppah* was not just a tribute; it was an embrace, the living compassion of generations stitched into one white robe. The *kittel* is deliberately unadorned, equalizing in its plainness. Whether worn by a bridegroom or a sage, it strips away status and ego. On Yom Kippur, as we stand in the *kittel* before God, we are all simply souls clothed in the same humble mercy. What will you be wearing on your sleeve as we approach the New Year? How can we don the garments of tender resolve no matter the size or style?

### Heart as Etrog: Fragrance of Devotion

Open-heartedness - how do we foster it in a world of broken heartedness? In the four species we bring together on Sukkot - the *lulav* (palm), *hadas* (myrtle), *aravah* (willow), and *etrog* (citron) - our blessed sages found a correlate to a part of the human body. This year amidst our broken heartedness, let us focus upon the *etrog*, with its golden skin and sweet scent, is the *lev*, the heart. Why? Recall that the heart in Jewish tradition is not just the seat of emotion; *lev* is the integrating core of intellect, will, and feeling. The *etrog* is unique among the species: it has both taste (symbolizing learning and knowledge) and fragrance (symbolizing good deeds). A heart that beats with compassion and integrity produces both - the wisdom to discern and the kindness to act.

The story is told of a poor farmer who, after months of saving, bought the most beautiful *etrog* he'd ever seen. On the way home, he saw a family stranded on the road before the holiday, hungry and cold. He sold the *etrog* to feed them. That year, his *sukkah* felt

fuller than ever - not because the ritual was complete in form, but because the heart of the *mitzvah* was alive within him. The "missing" *etrog* became the most fragrant heart of all. Unsurprising then that the *etrog*'s enduring growth - ripening slowly and sometimes staying on the tree for a whole year - is also compared to a heart that's never finished becoming. True devotion is not a momentary burst, but a continual season of ripening, in which the sweetness deepens over time.

### Heart and Compassion Together: Cultivating Your Inner Sukkah

How do we enter the Inner Sukkah? From the *kittel*'s of compassion to the *etrog*'s symbolism of the heart, we experience an authentic rhythm of Jewish time. The heart without compassion can harden; compassion without a grounded heart can become untethered. Together, they form an inner *sukkah* - a place where the core self is both protected and open to the wind.

Consider a Shoah survivor I once met in Jerusalem, who told me he still kept a *kittel* in his closet, though he no longer fit into it. And each *Sukkot*, he would spend hours holding his *etrog*, inhaling its scent. "The *kittel* reminds me," he said, "that even in white shrouds there can be love. And the *etrog* reminds me my heart survived." His rituals were not about obligation alone - they were about keeping his humanity awake. How can we keep our hearts awakened amidst the sleep that feels we are experiencing?

I invoke these symbols to invite us into a living practice together in community this cycle of the Awesome Days with this intention:

- Hold the *etrog* as if cradling someone's heart, aware of its fragility and worth.
- Wear or envision the *kittel* as a choice to approach others without armor, without rank - just soul to soul.
- Let these moments interrupt the rush and ask: *Am I leading with my heart? Am I clothing myself in compassion?*

The invitations here are grounded, but not limited to the hasidic masters who taught that the most transformative *mitzvah* is the one you "clothe" yourself in - making it visible not only in deed but in countenance and tone. The *kittel* and the *etrog* are precisely such garments of the soul.

If you care to tend to your soul then, may your heart be as fragrant as the *etrog*, ripening with wisdom and kindness through every season. May your compassion be as pure as the *kittel*, wrapping others in gentleness and grace. And may you find, in the weaving of heart and compassion, a *sukkah* that shelters you - and all who enter - with joy. I invite us all to embody our garments of the soul this coming New Year 5786 - may it be a true blessing for us all!



Hadassah is bringing MeshugaNotes, OSU's acapella group, to Beth Jacob on Sunday, Oct. 5th at 2:00 pm. More information can be found on Hadassah's Facebook page.