

When I Dress

*W*hen I put on my jacket
I think of the Yiddish folk expression
“A tzadik in peltz,”
“A tzadik in a fur coat.”

What is meant by that expression?
The Rabbi of Kotzk explained it in this manner
One man buys himself a fur coat in winter
to keep himself warm
Another man buys kindling wood for his household
Where do they differ?
The first wants to keep only himself warm
The second wants to give warmth to others, too.

How should I live and how should I pray?
Not to deny myself the joys and warmth of this world
Not to live with ascetic altruism
Not to live only for others
But to live for myself, with others
To warm myself without leaving others out in the cold.

Now did Hillel sum it up?
“If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
But if I am only for myself, what good am I?”
Let me follow the wisdom of Hillel
and not the ways of the tzadik in a fur coat.

