

CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN

by Rabbi Elly Broch

"You shall make vestments of sanctity for Aaron your brother and his sons to minister to me." (Shemos/Exodus 28:4) The garments that were made to be worn by the Kohanim (priests) who served in the Temple were extremely ornate and impressive, as a glory to G-d to Whom they served. Sefer HaChinuch (1) expounds upon the importance of a salubrious Temple, and for the garments worn by the Kohanim to be so beautiful, thus introducing a foundation in Torah psychology. A person is influenced by his acts and the external environment in which he finds himself. One chosen to serve in the Temple must maintain a sense of awe, as he is in the presence of G-d. In addition, those who come to the Temple to atone for their indiscretions or to show gratitude to G-d must also conduct themselves as appropriate in the Creator's presence. Due to the environment in the Temple, engendered by the physical stimuli, such as the ornate implements and beautiful clothing of the Kohanim, plus the lofty spiritual sensitivity and sterling character of those around this precinct, those who experienced the Temple were transformed. Moreover, whenever the Kohanim noticed the clothing they were wearing, this reinforced the concept as to the importance of what they were doing and Whom they were serving. The clothing that they were wearing and the environment in which they served were all conducive to awareness of G-d.

The Talmud (Bava Basra 21a) describes the indispensable work of Yehoshua ben Gamla, who lived during the Second Temple period. He instituted public education for children of all backgrounds and socioeconomic status. Initially, he established schools only in Jerusalem, which required many to travel, based on the verse "From Zion will go out the Torah." (Yeshaya/Isaiah 2:3) Tosafos (2) explain that since those in Jerusalem would experience great sanctity, and would witness the Kohanim performing the service, this would encourage greater fear of Heaven and enthusiasm for Torah. Yehoshua Ben Gamla was not only concerned with what the students would learn, but also the environment most conducive for growth.

We are all influenced by our dress and surroundings to a greater degree than we are aware. Journals are replete with research concerning conformity, and the influence of positive and negative environmental factors on later development. Since we tend to gravitate towards the norms of our surroundings, it is important to choose our environments carefully. Seemingly unimportant details such as the clothes we wear and the environment in which we live can exert a large influence on our behavior, our thoughts and our service of G-d.

Have a Good Shabbos!

- (1) Classic work on the 613 Torah commandments, their rationale and their regulations, by an anonymous thirteenth century Spanish author
- (2) The glosses of twelfth and thirteenth century French and German rabbis on the Babylonian Talmud printed in all editions of that work alongside the Talmudic text

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