

# JEWISH CLOTHING

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The emphasis in this week's parsha on the clothing of the kohanim - the priests of Israel of the family of Aharon - raises the issue of "Jewish clothing" as practiced throughout the ages. The vestments of the kohanim were divinely ordained and their exact description undoubtedly contains within it realms of spirituality and service to God and man. These garments were meant to reflect "honor and glory" on those who wore them- and to the entire household of Israel. In fact, in Second Temple times, when there was no longer any remaining anointment oil that could be used to inaugurate the kohanim into the service in the Temple, the Talmud teaches us that donning the vestments of the priesthood was deemed to be sufficient to officially install them into their holy positions.

Thus, to a great extent, clothing made the person. As such, I feel that it is quite understandable that Jews always placed a great stress upon what clothing they wore and how they dressed. Naturally, the type and style of "Jewish clothing" varied in different ages and locations. The Jews of Persia and Iraq did not wear Polish fur trimmed hats nor did Polish Jews wear head scarves or turbans. The Jews of Amsterdam in the seventeenth and eighteenth century wore triangular cockaded hats and the Lithuanian rabbis of the nineteenth century wore gentlemanly tall silk top hats. But the common denominator to all of this is that, from the time of Moshe onwards, Jews attempted to dress distinctively, albeit always within the confines and influences of the surrounding general population.

"Jewish clothing" was always meant to be modest, neat and clean. It was to be an "honor and glory" to the wearer and the Jewish society. The Talmud speaks very strongly against Torah scholars who are somehow slovenly in the appearance of their clothing. Poverty was never allowed to be an excuse for stains or dirt on one's garments. In the Temple, the used clothing of the kohanim was still considered to have an element of holiness to them even if they could no longer be worn. Wicks for the candelabra were fashioned from them.

Clothing was never looked at as being a purely inanimate object. After all, the first clothing for humans was fashioned for Adam and Chava by God Himself, so to speak. Ill treatment of clothing was deemed to be a punishable offense. King David, in his old age was not warmed by his clothing any longer. The Rabbis attributed this to the fact that he mistreated the clothing of King Saul earlier in his life.

I think all of the above helps explain the importance that clothing, the type of individual "uniforms" that Jews in the world and here in Israel, play in our communal and personal life. Each of us and the groups that we belong to attempt to wear clothing that will be an "honor and glory" to us individually

and to the group collectively. We should therefore not only treat clothing with respect but we should respect as well the wearers of those different types of clothing that conform to our traditions of modesty and Jewish pride.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

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