

# CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN II

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The garments of the kohanim - the priests of Israel - occupy a great deal of space in this week's parsha. These garments were meant to bring "honor and glory" to those who donned them. But they were also meant to bring "honor and glory" to all of Israel. For when our religious leaders are objects of honor we, their followers and public supporters also share and bask in that glory.

The garments of the kohanim represent their sense of devotion and service to the God and people of Israel. This sense of devotion and holiness was supposed to cover the kohein at all times and to become part of his personality and worldview.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch points out that this was the message of the rabbis that stated that nothing was to be between the actual body of the kohein and the clothing that he wore. The garments of "honor and glory" were to become the very being, the skin if you will, of the kohein himself. Only if he constantly operated on the lofty plane of service and honor to God and Israel could he meet the challenge of being a kohein.

Clothes may or may not make the man but the sense of honor, duty and loyalty that the garments of the kohanim represented certainly defined the sense of greatness that was expected from him. Once having had the privilege of wearing those holy vestments, the kohein was bound forever to the concept of "honor and glory" that those garments represented and demanded.

Clothing plays a great role in current Jewish society. Certain sectors of our society identify their closeness to God and tradition in terms of the clothing that they wear. There is no doubt that clothing makes an impression upon those who see us and upon those who wear it. Research has shown that schools that have a dress uniform have an ability to deal with problems of student discipline more easily than the free and open schools of casual, whatever you like type of dress.

But there is a responsibility that comes with wearing special clothing. And that responsibility is to be people of "honor and glory." The Talmud states almost ironically that he who wishes to sin should travel to a place where he is unknown and to wear "black clothing" so that his behavior will not reflect on the whole of Israel.

There are differing interpretations of what "black clothing" means in this context. But it is clear that it means a type of anonymous and casual clothing that will not reflect upon the Torah community and Judaism generally. One cannot wear the garments of "honor and glory" and behave in a fashion that contradicts those values. Wearing garments is something that should never be taken lightly. For with

the garments come the responsibilities and challenges as well.

In the Second Temple when the anointing oil crafted by Moshe no longer existed, the rabbis stated that just donning the garments of the priesthood became the installation ceremony of the kohanim. I think that this is true in our world and time as well.

Shabat shalom.

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