

# THE PRIESTLY GARMENTS: FOR SPLENDOR OR FOR SERVICE?

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 451, How Many Shabbos Candles. Good Shabbos!

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## **The Priestly Garments: For Splendor or For Service?**

Rav Elya Meir Bloch makes a very interesting observation regarding the priestly garments (in his sefer Peninei Daas). The pasuk [verse] says, "And you shall make garments of sanctity for Aharon your brother, for glory and for splendor (l'kavod u'l'tiferes)." [Shemos 28:2]. Similarly, another pasuk, several pasukim later says, "And for the sons of Aharon you shall make Tunics and make them Sashes; and you shall make them Headdresses for glory and for splendor." [Shemos 28:40].

The special garments that the Kohanim wore were beautiful. They were like royal garb. Their purpose was not just functional. It was for bestowing glory and splendor.

Rav Elya Meir points out what appears to be a contradiction. The pasuk immediately following the first quoted pasuk says, "And you shall speak to all the wise-hearted people whom I have invested with a spirit of wisdom, and they shall make the vestments of Aharon, to sanctify him to minister to Me (l'kadsho l'kahano li)." [Shemos 28:3]. Why, Rav Elya Meir asks, was the emphasis on their glory and splendor when commanding Moshe to make the garments, but the emphasis was on their functionality (so that they will be able to minister to Me) when giving over the instructions to the artisans to actually make the garments?

Rav Elya Meir explains that each of the vessels constructed for the Mishkan had enormous metaphysical powers in the Heavenly worlds. The whole purpose of the all of the Temple Service with all of its symbolism and meticulous detail was so that what we do down on this earth will have an effect on the world above. As such, the purpose of the priestly garments was that when they would perform the Divine Service in those special garments, the garments would instill sanctity in them and the Service would be effective.

The garments had to be made exactly the way G-d deemed, because that is the only way that they would 'work' to serve their intended purpose. Technically speaking, the garments did not have to be

beautiful. They could have been overalls or work clothes, in terms of what they had to achieve in the metaphysical world.

Except that people are human and whether people work in overalls or whether they work in beautiful royal garb does make a difference to those people themselves. For example, when the nine U.S. Supreme Court justices enter the court, they do not enter in jeans and sneakers or in work clothes and sit on folding chairs. They put on their black robes and they sit in plush leather chairs. The aura of those robes and those chairs has an effect on them. They are thereby constantly reminded that they are presiding over the highest court in the land and that what they are doing is amazingly important. The garb and surroundings have a profound effect on them.

It was similar with the Kohanim. Yes, in terms of the efficacy of the clothing for accomplishing the Divine Service, overalls would have 'worked'. But in terms of the effect on the Kohanim, ensuring that they would constantly recognize the significance of what they are doing and the profound effect that they are going to have, it was necessary to 'dress up', for glory and for splendor.

Now it becomes clear. When the Torah told Moshe that clothing was supposed to be made for "Aharon" and for "Aharon's children," the pasuk stressed that they must be made "l'kavod u'l'tiferes" [for glory and splendor]. That indeed was the focus of the Kohanim. However, regarding giving the order to the artisans to make the garments, their intent needed only to relate to the spiritual effect the garments are supposed to have. Therefore, the emphasis there was not on glory and splendor but "l'kadsho, l'kahano li" [to sanctify him, to minister unto Me].

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## Parents / Teachers Need The Patience of Hillel To Get Their Messages Across

The Talmud [Shabbos 31a] tells the story of a Gentile walking behind a synagogue who heard the reading of the portion relating to the making of the priestly garments. He asked one of the Jews present, "Who wears these beautiful clothes?" They told him that they were worn by the Kohen Gadol [High Priest]. The Gentile decided: "I will go convert so that they will make me a Kohen Gadol and I will be able to wear these beautiful garments."

He then went before Shammai and told him that he wanted to convert to Judaism on the condition that he would become the Kohen Gadol. Shammai, who was well known to not suffer fools gladly, took a beam from his house and pushed the Gentile away.

The Gentile then approached Hillel with the same proposal. Hillel patiently told him, "If you want to become the Kohen Gadol, you must first learn the rules of priesthood." He advised him to go study the rules of the Sanctuary and the priesthood and then he could come back and discuss conversion. The Gentile began to study the laws of the Sanctuary and the priesthood. When he came to the pasuk, "the stranger who comes near shall be put to death" [Bamidbar 3:10] the Gentile asked, "who

is this referring to?" He was told, it applies even to David, King of Israel. Simply, anyone who is not a Kohen cannot do the Temple Service.

The Gentile realized that he certainly would not qualify to be a priest, let alone the Kohen Gadol. Years later, this convert went back to Shammai and told him "if I had only gone to you I would have never become a convert, but because of Hillel's patience with me, I now have come under the Wings of the Divine Presence."

One may ask about Hillel's approach: Granted, he was not quick tempered like Shammai and was not about to hit the Gentile with a 2 by 4, but why didn't he tell the Gentile straight out "you won't be able to become a Kohen Gadol since you were not born a Kohen"? Why was he being so coy, telling him to sit and learn, as if that would somehow lead to his one day becoming the Kohen Gadol?

We see from this Gemara, that it is necessary for a teacher to pick the time when the student will be ready to learn a particular lesson. Sometimes a teacher wants to teach something but at that moment his disciple is just not ready to hear what he wants to tell him. The teacher can try to stand on his head and teach the lesson, but the student just won't understand him. He is not in the mental state to accept it.

If this Gentile would have been directly told by Hillel, "I'm sorry there is no way you can become the Kohen Gadol," the Gentile would have had the same reaction to Hillel as he had to Shammai. At that moment, he wasn't on the level to listen to such a 'put down'. He just didn't have that mindset!

Hillel's wisdom was to send the fellow to school. Let him learn the truth in a non-threatening academic intellectual context. Let him sit by an open Gemara, let him read the pasuk of Chumash and innocently find out what is behind the prohibition. Then he will be able to accept it.

There are so many times - particularly with our children - when we want to give something over to them. We want them to know a certain law, a certain practice, or a certain way to behave. They are not ready for that message yet. It is like trying to teach a two year old how to read or like trying to teach a six month old baby how to walk. He is not developed enough -- either mentally or physically -- for our desired lesson to get through.

This Gemara teaches us that one has to know when and where to deliver the lesson that teaches a given point. Hillel had the know how to bring this Gentile under the Wings of the Divine Presence. We as teachers and parents must try to aspire to emulate his wisdom and his patience.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter

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