



Whom Does the Choice of our Clothes Affect?

Letting our Apparel Reflect Our True Essence

Dressing modestly is a great challenge for our generation. We seek freedom to the highest degree. No-one is going to tell us what to do and how to dress, especially not the men! Pamphlets with pictures of modest necklines, certified by lists of prominent Rabbis, proclaiming that women’s immodesty and licentiousness prevent the final redemption, only turn certain women further away from the Torah. A hammer on the head never helps in the long run. It also won’t go off well, telling women – even ever so softly – that we have a mitzvah “not to put a stumbling block in front of the blind” (*Vayikra* 19:14), and that certain men have ‘blind spots’ when it comes to seeing immodest women. Many young women of today won’t hear of dressing a certain way for the sake of others, even for the sake of protecting others. It’s all about being in touch with our own inner essence and expressing what is truly right for ourselves. I have heard many young women exclaim, “My clothing must reflect who I am and that’s it. I don’t want to dress in a certain way in order to protect others from immorality. The men need to grow up, take responsibility for themselves and learn to control their own negative urges. Their weakness is not my problem.” Yet when you speak to these same women from the perspective of self-dignity, explaining how dressing modestly is for their own benefit, and how to take pride in their spiritual accomplishments, rather than in their physical body, then you may get their attention. G-d has endowed all of us with certain gifts. Physical beauty is one of G-d’s gifts, that we received without having to work for it. Yet, it is our hard work and perseverance to overcome challenges, that refine our personality and indicate who we really are. Inner traits such as humility, kindness, devotion and faith, rather than our feminine curves, which reflect our true essence. Why would we distract others from knowing our inner essence by highlighting our physical attributes through immodest attire?

Garments for Making a Positive Impression

In addition to reflecting who we really are, garments throughout the generations represent people’s position and task in life. We need to choose practical clothes, that serve us best and are most suitable for our particular job. There are innumerable different work uniforms for various companies, from corporate apparel to retail-inspired; wrinkle-free garments for customer-facing roles to light and durable work shirt options for dirtier jobs. Whereas, house painters may wear old jeans and stained shirts, doctors wear white laboratory coats. Uniforms speak volumes when it comes to maintaining a consistent, professional image. Uniforms make a positive impact and are what customers expect. Thus, in the workforce, people dress not only to express their true selves, but mainly to make a certain favorable professional impression on others. The garments of the Kohanim, who served in the Temple, was no exception from this rule:

כפר שמות פרק כח פסוק ב ועשית בגדי קדש לאהרן אחיך לכבוד ולתפארת:

“You shall make holy garments for your brother Aharon, for honor and glory” (*Shemot* 28:2).

What is the significance that the garments of the Kohanim had to be **ולתפארת**//*chavod u’letiferet* – ‘for honor and for splendor’? Aharon had to command the respect of his fellow Israelites. For this reason, the priestly garments had to be glorious and majestic. Through these

garments, the Israelites understood that Hashem wished to honor Aharon, and that he was worthy of being a chariot for the Divine Presence (*Ha'emek d'var* ibid). Thus, even external beauty is part and parcel of Judaism. The Temple is so magnificent and awe-inspiring, in order to open our hearts to return to Hashem (*Nachshoni*).

The Dual Purpose of the Glorious Priestly Garments

Yet the garments of the kohanim had a dual purpose: They were not only for the sake of Israel but also for the sake of the Kohen himself. The choice of our dress influences both our own mindset and the way others perceive us. 1. External beauty serves as a means of magnifying the glory of Hashem and His service. The garments of the Kohanim imbue all who look upon them with the glory and splendor of G-d and his Holy Temple. Just as a king has guards who wear uniforms that signify to the passerby that the person who lives in the building is of great importance, so too, the Kohanim, by wearing their uniforms, reveal the importance of their work and their "boss." They inspire awe and respect, making it clear to all Israel that Hashem wishes to honor Aharon, and that he is worthy of being a vehicle for the Divine Presence. When people come to the Temple, and meet the Kohen dressed in his glorious garments, their hearts are inspired to return to Hashem. 2. The glory of the priestly garments influences the thoughts and intentions of the Kohanim, ensuring that the Kohen has a proper state of mind during the Temple service. When he wears special clothing for the occasion, whatever part of his body he looks at will arouse him to realize that the presence of G-d is to be found in the Temple, and to remember before Whom he stands (*Sefer HaChinuch*, Mitzvah 99). According to Malbim the word כְּבוֹד/*chavod* – "honor" indicates the Kohen's superior spiritual level (for himself), whereas the word תִּפְאָרֶת/*Tiferet* – "glory" reflects the effect that the devotions of such a person can have on others (for the sake of Israel).

Garments for Profound World Transformation

The effect of the attire of the Kohanim was more than skin deep. The Kohen Gadol's garments represent another aspect: the perfection of humanity. Each exquisite garment was fashioned by Moshe according to the Divine directives, in order to affect a profound world transformation. Each of the Kohen Gadol's eight garments had the ability to rectify the iniquities of Israel and return them to their original perfection in Eden before the sin. The כֵּתוֹנֶת/*ketonet* – "tunic" atoned for the sin of murder; מִכְנָסַיִם/*michnasayim* – "pants" would atone for adultery; the מְעִיל/*me'il* – "robe" for lashon hara (evil speech); the אַבְנֵיט/*avnet* – "sash" rectified impure thoughts; the אֶפֶד/*efod* – "apron" was for idol-worship, the חֹשֶׁן/*choshen* "breastplate" atoned for unfair judgement; the מִצְנֶפֶת/*mitznefet* – "turban" rectified haughtiness; whereas, the זִיֵּץ/*tzitz* – "the golden head plate" atoned for brazenness (*Babylonian Talmud, Zevachim 88b*).

Priestly Garment	Atones for
כֵּתוֹנֶת/ <i>Ketonet</i> – Tunic	Murder
מִכְנָסַיִם/ <i>Michnasayim</i> – Pants	Adultery
מְעִיל/ <i>Me'il</i> – Robe	Lashon Hara
אַבְנֵיט/ <i>Avnet</i> – Sash	Impure thoughts
אֶפֶד/ <i>Efod</i> – Apron	Idol-worship
חֹשֶׁן/ <i>Choshen</i> – Breastplate	Unfair judgement
מִצְנֶפֶת/ <i>mitznefet</i> – Turban	Haughtiness
זִיֵּץ/ <i>Tzitz</i> – Golden Headplate	Brazenness

Choice of Modest, Multicolored Materials

Returning to the topic of dressing modestly, we can learn from the impact of the garments of the Kohanim, that what we chose to wear is not only to reflect our inner essence, but also to put us in a proper mindset for our role in life, as well as to inspire others positively, rather than having a negative effect on them. We don't live in a vacuum – in our own little bubble disconnected from others. We must take responsibility for our actions and realize that what we do and what we wear do indeed influence others. Therefore, we must be smart in our choice of dress, by all means avoiding seductive styles that may allure 'the weaker sex' into depravity. Just as we are responsible for the effect that our actions have on others, why should our choice of dress be any different? Clothing can give us respect and honor and help us to get into the mindset of our role in life as a *Bat Melech* (Daughter of the King). Although, we have so many wonderful and exciting choices of how to express our soul in various modest, multicolored materials, textures and design, in a sense our clothes serve as a divine uniform to assist us in our divine task on earth. Although I'm aware that it is not 'politically correct,' I venture to recommend that we dress up for the part of striving to be a servant of G-d in our everyday lives. Perhaps with some effort on our part and help from Above, our own personal service may be accepted by G-d like the service of the Kohen in the Temple.