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Parashat Tetzave **11 Adar 5783 – March 4, 2023**

There is an old saying, “clothes maketh the man”. This means simply that a person’s appearances count for a lot. Part of this parashah focuses on leadership and their unique dress required for the fulfillment of the mitzvot of the service in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

The “uniform” of the Kohanim is described in great detail. It serves as a constant reminder for Aharon and his descendants, and the people of the responsibilities of the Kohanim. The question is, what impact does one’s clothing have on the role they play as a public figure? Is there a greater meaning for the specificity which the clothing had for the service of HaShem?

The Kohen Gadol (High Priest) had eight parts to his uniform. The Sages believed that each piece represented different values that are considered central to being a good and decent human being, as well as crucial aspects of any leader with integrity. The eight characteristics are:

1. The tunic atoned for bloodshed.
2. The breeches (short trousers) atoned for lewdness.
3. The turban made atonement for arrogance.
4. The sash atoned for impure thoughts of the heart.
5. The breastplate atoned for neglect of civil laws.
6. The ephod (linen apron) atoned for idolatry.
7. The cloak atoned for slander (there were bells on the bottom).
8. The crown worn on the forehead atoned for brazenness (inappropriate chutzpah).

These moral values are crucial for the Kohen Gadol and the priestly tribe in general. As spiritual leaders, they serve as an example for all of us as it is written, “and you shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”. While we may not wear the clothing of the kohanim, or the Kohen Gadol, we should behave as if we are, everywhere, in everything we do, all the time.

What is it that allows the Jewish people to survive Egypt and two thousand years of diaspora? It is that they kept “Jewish clothing”, a kippah (yarmulke), tzitzit (tallis), tefillin, and modest dress to serve as reminders of physical and spiritual reflection of these and other values. What is seen on the outside is a first impression and a method of communication. Those who do not practice this way but hold the essence of Israel, faith, land, and people in the depth of their hearts should be mindful of the holiness we represent as members of our people. Even when we have differences of opinion, we should be inspired to fulfill the mission left to us by our ancestors.

If it is true, and I believe it is, that a person’s appearance is relevant to leadership, then dress for success. When we dress for success, we represent ourselves as Jews, and as human beings willing to lead by the example of the Kohanim.

Shabbat Shalom!

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Nathan W. Langer

