

Tzav: Symbolic Garments

- Nisson Shulman.

(Shamati meAvi-Mori, Harav Moshe Yitzchok Shulman, zt"l). The symbolic meaning of clothing, designating social status, occupation, beliefs, and function. Thus, the four garments unique to the High Priest, Tzitz, Choshen, Efod and Meil. What each one symbolizes. How garments played a part in every facet of the Purim story starting with Ahasueros' first banquet when the Midrash tells us he donned the priestly garments.

TZAV (Shamati meAvi-Mori, Harav Moshe Yitzchok Shulman, zt"l)

"Clothes do not make the man". But they do designate his station in life, often his profession, and also express his personality. For a man or woman dresses as they would like to appear to others.

The philosopher Spencer actually tried to prove that clothing was used to designate social status long before it was used for protection against the elements.

In the same spirit Rav Yohanan said, mani mechabdoti, "My clothes give me honor.

We are all familiar with uniforms. The soldier, the diplomat, the clergyman, the doctor, have that in their garments which designates what these men do in life. So, too, the apron of the Mason and the Fez of the Shriner, are symbols of the credo of the group. And therefore, in the Megillah, garments stood for something.

Mordecai in sackcloth and ashes expressed the sorrow and contrition of a people that were facing catastrophe. Before Esther appears in Ahasueros' forcourt, she dons special clothing, "Vatilbash Esther malchus". Haman's ambition to seize the King's throne, is perceived in his answer to the King, saying that the man the king wishes to honour be paraded before the people in the king's garments and on the king's horse – note that Haman's request was the the replica of the King's crown be placed upon the horse. The king omitted that instruction. Apparently, Ahasueros thought Haman went a little too far with that request. Mordecai's promotion to the king's grace is expressed in the statement that he left the King's presence in royal garb – umordechai yatza milifney hamelech bilevush malchut, techelet vargaman.

That is why the Talmud stresses that the sacrifices in the Holy Temple had to be performed by priests only after they had dressed in the proper priestly uniform, because each garment had a symbolic significance.

To understand the role of the priest, and the "priest people" - for such we are - we ought to learn something about the garments of the priests, especially about those worn by the High Priest.

There were four garments worn exclusively by the High Priest, mentioned in our Torah portion: tzitz, choshen, efod, and meil. The "Tzitz" represented holiness, and on it were engraved the words, "holy to the Lord". The "Hoshen" was the breastplate with twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel, united as one. It was tied to the "Ephod", the apron, which was affixed to

the shoulders, to emphasize that we not only feel the love, but must also bear the burdens of the tribes of Israel. The "Meil", the outer garment, was floor length, and around its edge were bells, to let others know of the priest's presence. Just so the gifts of holiness, of Torah and the message of Israel must be taught to the world.

These garments were to teach lessons, not only to the High Priest, but also to all the people of Israel that he represented. They teach that all of us must strive together for the goal set before us; to be a people "holy" or dedicated to the Lord, ready to bear the hardship of our brothers everywhere, bearing responsibility to our Jewish people whatever their condition, arevim ze laze, enveloped by the mitzvot in every action, symbolized by the floor length coat, and we must live in such a way as to be an example of love, kindness, righteousness and justice to all the world, the bells which ring out to others.

Then these garments will be lekavod uletiferet.

So when Ahasueros, at the banquet he made at the beginning of the Megillah, donned the garments of the High Priest, he was mocking basic attitudes of our people.

Some say the Megillah should have started with Mordecai. NO! With Ahasueros! We have to know how to live in an alien society!