

TETZAVEH (EXODUS 27:20-30:10)

Clothes **FAKE** the Man

2007 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

Judaism is a way of life that places great emphasis on minute details. There is a way to make meat kosher and a way not to make it kosher. A tiny, barely discernable nick in a slaughtering knife can mean the difference between a Glatt Kosher steak and the garbage pail. A Mezuzah is written in a very exacting manner, and prayers need to be recited in a certain way.

As well, there are very specific rules as to the conditions under which the Temple Service was to be conducted. There is considerable amount of protocol. The Priest had to be properly attired; it would be a grave sin for him to officiate in the Temple without his Priestly garments. He had to be anointed with specially prepared olive oil.

And, oh yes, one more thing. He had to be a descendant of Aaron.

"You (Moses) should bring near to yourself your brother Aaron and his sons... Make holy vestments for your brother Aaron, for honor and glory...and Aaron will bear the names of the Children of Israel on the Breastplate on his heart when he enters the Sanctuary as a constant reminder before G d." (Exodus, 28: 1, 2, 29)

This was one fancy set of clothes. Every Kohain-Priest had four special garments that he wore for the Temple Service. The High Priest had eight. The pants, robe, and turban worn by every Priest in the Temple were made very skillfully of the finest linen. The belt was made of linen and multi-colored wool. (This mixture is normally forbidden.) In addition, the High Priest wore other garments, some of gold, and some of other materials.

Nachmanides explains that these were similar to royal garments of the day. (He cites, for example, that one of the reasons that Joseph's brothers were jealous of him was the fact that their father had given him a royal/priestly-looking robe.) In the Purim story that we'll read this week, the Persian king tried to demonstrate his prestige by wearing the High Priest's garments, which the Babylonians had stolen when they destroyed the Temple.

Yes, these were very special clothes. There was a Breastplate that was embedded with precious stones. These stones were engraved with the names of the Tribes of Israel. There was a crown with the words, "Sanctified to G-d" on them. Without every one of those clothes, without them being perfectly clean, and

perfectly tailored, the Service was invalid. (For more information on the importance of these clothes, see "Dress to Impress".)

But the clothes were not the most important part:

"You (Moses) should bring near to yourself your brother Aaron..."

The Talmud, quoted by the Yalkut Yehudah, relates the following discussion between G-d and Moses:

G-d: "Go and appoint a High Priest."

Moses: "From which Tribe?"

G-d: "Levi."

Moses: "With what shall I anoint him?"

G-d: "With anointing oil."

Moses was happy to see that his Tribe had been selected for this great honor. After all, the Levites are a very distinguished Tribe. Who, if not they, should be honored by having one of their own anointed as High Priest?

G-d corrected Moses:

"... You should bring ... YOUR BROTHER AARON ..."

It had nothing to do with being a Levite; it had to do with being AARON.

The Talmud goes on to state that although he needs to be anointed, "... his Service is not a Service unless the names of the Tribes are engraved over his heart, as it is written, *'and Aaron will bear the names of the Children of Israel on the Breastplate on his heart when he enters the Sanctuary as a constant reminder before G d.'*"

The Yalkut Yehudah explains:

People sometimes make the mistake of putting "tribal pride" first. (This is why Jews tend to vote for Jews, Italians vote for Italians, etc., regardless of their qualifications, or lack thereof.) Another mistake people make is that of placing the main emphasis of religion on ceremonial nitty-gritty. (The Priest has to be anointed; his "uniform" has to be just so, Tefillin must be positioned in just the right spot, etc.) The Talmud dispels this notion by stating:

"... his Service is not a Service unless the names of the Tribes are engraved over his heart, as it is written, *'...and Aaron will bear the names of the Children of Israel on the Breastplate on his heart when he enters the Sanctuary as a constant reminder before G d.'*"

Yes, the High Priest must be anointed. Yes, he must wear his High Priest uniform, complete with the Breastplate and all the engraved names. Without those requirements, the Temple Service would be a waste of time. (Actually worse!) Of perhaps greater importance, however, was the fact that Aaron "... will bear the names of the Children of Israel on his heart."

What made Aaron special was the fact that the Children of Israel were engraved IN his heart. They were his people; he loved and cherished them and constantly prayed for their well-being. (See "Bless Your Heart!")

Another person could have put on the High Priest garb and been anointed with the proper oil, but if he weren't Aaron, it wouldn't work.

During the time of the Second Temple, the High Priesthood was, for the most part, a political position. Sometimes, there were two; the "official," titular High Priest, and the fellow who actually did the work in the Temple.

Rabbi Ken Spiro, in his on-line Crash Course in Jewish History, writes:

"According to the Talmud, during the First Temple period of about 410 years, there were only 18 High Priests. During the Second Temple period of 420 years, there were 300 High Priests! We know (from the Talmud, Yoma 9a) that Yochanan was High Priest for 80 years, Shimon was High Priest for 40 years, and Yishmael was High Priest for 10 years. That means in the remaining 290 years there were 298 priests – one ever year or so."

They were dropping like flies! Another year, another High Priest! Why was that? After all, they did what they were supposed to do! They wore their High Priest "costumes"! They dressed the part, so what was the problem?

The problem was that clothes are only a cover. If a person who is worthy of serving as the High Priest does what he is supposed to do, including dressing the part, he is truly a High Priest. However, the clothes alone are insufficient. You can pour anointing oil on his head, and you can dress him "to the nines" (actually, Eights!) in Priestly garments. But if he is not an Aaron, if he's not a person who *"... will bear the names of the Children of Israel on his heart"*, he will be nothing more than a well-dressed, oily phony.

When the Persian king asked Haman how to reward a loyal subject, Haman thought the king was referring to HIM. As such, Haman came up with as juicy a reward as he could think of:

“...Have them bring a royal robe that the king has worn and a horse that the king has ridden, and a royal crown on his head...and parade him on horseback through the city square... (Esther, 6:8-9)

How pathetic! Haman was a wealthy and powerful man. He had everything he could have needed or wanted. So what does he ask for? He wants the world to see him wearing the "Emperor's Old Clothes!"

And the king himself was no better. As mentioned above, when the king wanted to impress people, he dressed in the clothes of the High Priest. Who was he trying to fool?

How silly! These little people tried to be what they weren't by dressing in someone else's clothes. The only people they were fooling were themselves!

A few months ago the world was shocked to observe a member nation of the United Nations hosting a conference dedicated to Holocaust denial. This conference brought out a rogues' gallery of known anti-Semites. To add insult to injury, a group of misfits dressed in traditional Chassidic garb joined the group of Israel haters. Men who looked for all the world like traditional religious Jews publicly embraced a man whose goal is to see Israel eradicated.

How does such an event take place? How do children of Holocaust survivors participate in a conference whose purpose was to deny the obvious truth? How could they stand arm-in-arm with people who want to see them dead?

There are only two possibilities. They are either wicked, evil, despicable people, or they are out of their minds. I prefer to give them the benefit of the doubt and assume that they're nuts.

In any event, they have caused an uproar: "Rabbi Sepowitz, what do you think of Rabbi _____?"

"Who's Rabbi _____?" I ask.

"You know, he's that rabbi who went to Iran!"

"Rabbi?!" I responded. "Who says he's a rabbi?"

"Well, he looks like one!"

Oh.

The clowns who went to Tehran may very well keep strictly Kosher homes. They may very well observe the Sabbath every week and put on Tefillin every weekday. But their disgraceful actions indicate that there is not a lot happening in their lives when it comes to genuinely serving G-d and His children. A rabbi doesn't embrace Nazis. If someone who looks like a rabbi embraces Nazis, all that means is that he couldn't possibly be a rabbi.

There are those who choose to criticize Torah Judaism for its perceived over-emphasis of ceremony and regulation. They are, of course, wrong. When G-d writes in His Torah that He expects us to observe the minutia of Jewish Law, He obviously indicates that it is of the utmost importance.

However, in one respect, they are correct. It is possible to lose oneself in the pomp and circumstance of religious ritual.

A person can dress like a High Priest. He can go through the sundry rituals of a High Priest. But if someone looks like a High Priest and doesn't ACT like a High Priest, he is nothing but an empty suit.

Have a great Shabbos and a happy Purim.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

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