

## תצוה

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## UNIFORMS

ועשית בגדי קדש לאהרן אחיך לכבוד ולתפארת

“And you shall make holy garments for your brother Aharon, for glory and majesty” (*Shemos* 28:2).

The expression “for glory and majesty” associated with the *bigdei Kehunah* identifies outward beauty as an intrinsic part of Torah life. External beauty can be a means to achieving higher spiritual development (Rashi *ibid.* 3), or it can be viewed as a *mitzvah* in and of itself (Rambam, *Sefer Hamitzvos* 33). It certainly served to magnify the glory of Hashem and His service. Obviously, the wearing of special uniforms has a unique significance to Kohanim and to *Klal Yisrael* in the *Beis Hamikdash*, and to individual members of *Klal Yisrael*, in general.

The *Gemara Menachos* (44.) presents a remarkable parable. Once a man who was very scrupulous about the precept of *tzitzis*, hired a very expensive harlot in a distant seacoast town. As he was about to consummate his sin, the four fringes of his *tzitzis* struck him across the face. Whereupon he controlled his evil desires, and left with his purity intact.

The fact that this individual wore a religious garment saved him from a misdeed. One of the purposes of this *Gemara* is to stress the importance of a uniform. The *tzitzis* reminded the man that Hashem exacts punishment and issues reward in the future. Without the benefit of a uniform this individual would have drowned in the abyss of immorality.

In Tractate *Shabbos* (156:) there is a similar story regarding Rabbi Nachman ben Yitzchak. His mother was informed by astrologers that her son would be a thief. As a preventive measure, she did not permit him to be bareheaded. She trained him “to cover your head, so that the fear of Heaven may be upon you.” His mother’s message to him was very clear; the wearing of a religious uniform would be a constant reminder to him of his sense of duty.

The Torah (*Shemos* 28:3) informs us that the *Kohanim* were required to wear the *bigdei Kehunah*, the priestly uniforms, when they performed the *avodah* in the *bais Hamikdash*. The reason for this is obvious — the uniform helped them focus their attention on their holy work (Ramban, *Shemos* 28:2). This is a lesson all the uniformed services have learned. A soldier, policeman, or fireman feels the urgency of his sense of duty while he is in uniform. When out of uniform, a soldier is just an ordinary citizen, without a mission or sense of obligation. The uniform forces him to focus his attention on the importance of his duties, even to the point of self-sacrifice.

There are a number of references in the Talmud to the attire of *Chazal*. In *Berachos* (50.) Rava refers to Rafram bar Papa as “you black pot.” In *Pesachim* (88.) Rav Nachman refers to Rav Eina Saba as “you black pot.” Again in *Megillah* (14:) Rav Nachman refers to Rav Eina Saba as a “black bowl”. The Maharsha suggests that Rav Nachman may have been alluding to Rav Eina

Saba's ugliness. Is it really possible that a *Tanna* would openly insult and disparage another *Tanna*? In *Avodah Zarah* (16:) Rav Assi refers to Rabbi Zeira as "you black pot." Rashi (ibid.) suggests that he may have become grimy through toil (many Rabbis in Talmudic days were workmen) or that due to his preoccupation with his studies he had neglected the tidiness of his clothes. Again, it is difficult to accept that an Ammora would openly insult and disparage another Ammora. It is unlikely that *Chazal* wore dirty clothes, for the *Gemara* clearly teaches that a *talmud chacham* who wears soiled clothing is deserving of dire punishment (*Berachos* 43:, *Shabbos* 114.).

Perhaps what is depicted here is a trend among *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* to wear dark colored attire. This helps to explain the tendency among modern-era *Rabbonim* to favor dark colored garments. Again, the Rabbinical attire is a uniform which helps the clergy to focus their attention on a higher calling. In fact, the *Tanna* Rabbi Yochanan referred to his special garments as "my honorers" (*Shabbos* 113:).

The *Chovos Halevavos* indicates that "*Hachitzonios me'orerer es hapenimios*" — the external inspires the internal. External dress, if directed toward a specific trend, will inspire the wearer to that end. Thus, if one exhibits himself to the world as a *talmud chacham* by means of his dress, he will be compelled to conduct himself accordingly. (The *Sefer Hachinuch* expresses similar sentiments in his philosophical exposition of the *mitzvah* of *netilas lulav* 285, and of the *mitzvah* of *Korban Pesach*.)

Shlomo *Hamelech* describes the dress of the virtuous woman:

עוז-והדר לבושה ותשחק ליום אחרון

Strength and honor are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come  
(*Mishlei* 31:25).

The Ralbag (ibid.) asks: what is the connection between the beginning of the *pasuk* and its conclusion? At first the *pasuk* describes her wonderful attire: strength and honor; and then the *pasuk* continues that she will rejoice in the next world. What is the connection? The Ralbag explains that strength and honor are references to good character; and good character is the clothing of the soul. Hence, she will rejoice at Judgment Day because her character will stand her in good stead. In an absolute sense, the soul also requires clothing; not of a material nature, but rather of a spiritual fabric. It is character which clothes the soul.

Basically, the uniform marshals the efforts of individuals toward a regimented code of ethics. This is precisely the purpose of the Torah and its *mitzvos*: to encourage man, through the use of everyday behavior, to elevate himself from the natural state of animal to the exalted state of coming close to Hashem. For *mitzvos* are merely the organized, regimented department of the mundane, directed toward a singular purpose (Maharal, *Tiferes Yisrael* 2). In effect the *taryag* (613) *mitzvos* are the uniforms by which *Klal Yisrael* strives to become closer to Hashem. (Maharal, *Tiferes Yisrael* 12).

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto (*Derech Hashem* 1) explains that the world operates with the system of "*hester Yechido*" — the invisible Divine Presence. The goal of mankind is to achieve *gilui Yechido* — the revelation of the Divine Presence — to the extent that the revelation becomes so self-evident that it results in *hasagas Yechido* — the realization of the Divine Presence. This transition is accomplished by utilizing the *eidei Yechido* — the witnesses to His Presence, which

are in actuality the *mitzvos* (Maharal, *Tiferes Yisrael* 4). The performance of the *mitzvos* make the unrealized realized, the hidden evident, the invisible revealed, and the mysterious ultimately understood. The *Gemara* (*Megillah* 14:) clearly states that to invest oneself with Hashem's Holiness is signified by the expression "to clothe" oneself. The *mitzvos*, in effect, are the uniform with which *Klal Yisrael* is clothed.

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