

And make holy garments for your brother Aharon, for honor and distinction... They shall cover Aharon and his sons when they enter into the Ohel Moed... to serve in the Sanctuary...It shall be a statute forever for him and for his descendants after him. (28:2,43)

The idea of clothing making the man is a Madison Avenue stratagem. In truth, as we see from the *Bigdei Kehunah*, Priestly vestments, clothing is actually a reflection of the man. They do not make a person, but they do convey a message and allow us a window into the wearer's personality and character. The *Bigdei Kehunah* were an essential part of the character of the *Kehunah*, Priesthood. Their significance is evident from the instructions concerning their construction. The validity of the sacrificial service is dependent upon the priestly garments. Indeed, they are a *chukas olam*, statute forever, such that, without these garments, the *Kohen* is viewed as a *zar*, stranger, and may not serve in the Sanctuary.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, observes that the Priestly garments must be supplied and owned by the nation. This explains why only a *Kohen* dressed in these garments may be called a *Kohen* altogether. Only in this attire does he come forward to represent the nation as its noble servant. Only in this manner does the ritual he performs become that service which the nation was commanded to render to the Sanctuary. Only thus can the ideas – both esoteric and ritualistic – attain the character of a duty commanded by Hashem. Only then does the service which begins as an act of obedience transform into devotion symbolizing the nation's commitment to Torah.

Rav Hirsch explains that, without the Priestly vestments, the *Kohen* is merely an ordinary individual, with his ritual taking on the character of personal predilection – not the representative of the nation. Thus, he produces the very antithesis of the attitude which the Sanctuary is intended to foster. *Rav Hirsch* goes as far as to posit that without his Priestly garments, the individual personality of the officiating *Kohen* stands lacking, with all the human failings and shortcomings that can afflict even the finest and best among us. Without his garb, the *Kohen* might well present a defective version of the ideal which the sacrifices should symbolize.

When the *Kohen* stands before Hashem, radiant in his Priestly attire, he presents himself not in terms of the personality he might be, but rather, as the character he should have in accordance with the requirements as dictated by the Torah. By the very act of donning the garments for the express purpose of carrying out the service in the Sanctuary, he makes both himself and those whom he represents aware that, as a person, he is still inadequate regarding the demands symbolized by the Sanctuary.

Rav Hirsch posits that clothing per se is a reminder of man's moral calling. Indeed, it is the most conspicuous feature that characterizes a creature as a human being. Clothing was first given to

Man when Hashem sent His children out of *Gan Eden* into the world, in which toil and renunciation were a way of life. The external mundane world, with its physicality and attendant moral dangers, presents constant obstacles which might lead man astray, thus causing him to descend to the level of beast. Clothing is his reminder.

In the *Talmud Sanhedrin* 94a, *Chazal* relate that Rabbi Yochanan *Kari lei l'mani mechubadosai*, the *Tanna* Rabbi Yochanan referred to his clothes as his honor guards. Indeed, the appropriate garments imbue a person with dignity and respectability, often signifying his station in life. **Horav Yisrael Belsky, Shlita**, adds that the manner in which a person dresses reveals the inner truth about himself. One who feels that he is an *eved Hashem*, a servant of the Almighty, dresses the part – with a clean, pressed shirt, tucked in, thereby presenting himself in a respectable manner which brings honor to the Torah world which he represents.

In contrast, is the person who wants to feel free and unencumbered – unrestrained by convention and tradition. He may choose a hairstyle that fits in best in a bar or casino, and wear clothing that is provocative, which sends a foolish message or makes a negative statement. Some go so far as to mutilate their bodies. These practices are designed to shock spectators and project an image of living beyond normal human convention. These styles reflect the baseness of the human condition, the sad state of affairs and insecurity that the wearer presents about him/herself. Their lack of self-respect is evident. The only question is what prompted this tragic response.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that every style of garment conveys a message. When a person wears clothing that identifies him as a *ben Torah*, he is heralding to those with whom he comes in contact that he belongs to a unique club. He is a member of a group of people who are dedicated to spiritual growth, whose relationship *vis-a-vis* the physical world in which they live coincides with the will of Hashem. Wearing clothes that are proper and modest in nature manifests respect for oneself and respect for others.

There are people who, by the clothing they wear, convey a false message. They present themselves as G-d-fearing, righteous individuals when, in fact, this could not be further from the truth. Their clothing and public demeanor are designed to fool the world, such as when an unsavory and immoral character dresses up like a holy person and portrays himself as such, while concealed behind closed doors he commits the most vicious acts of moral degradation. Indeed, there are even those who make use of their rabbinic garb to pass as distinguished scholars, thereby granting themselves license to commit acts of indiscretion, and to slander and malign those who have the nerve not to respect their “public” image.

Yes, clothes tell us something about a person. I have, over the years, come across a number of “wardrobe” stories, many of which I have used. I have two new such stories which convey a penetrating message. In “The Life and Times of *Reb* Rephoel Soloveitchik,” the reader garners a glimpse into the lifestyle of the *Brisker Rav*, *zl*, his devotion to Torah, *Klal Yisrael* and family. The *Brisker derech*, way, in *ehrllichkeit*, integrity, is characterized by a lifestyle of *pashtus*, simplicity.

They were *mistapek b'muat*, subsisted on the bare necessities, avoiding the luxuries and financial pursuits which undermine the struggle to achieve *emes*, truth. Rav Rephoel remembers that, as small children, he and his siblings were inculcated with instructions from their father regarding what is significant in life and what is not, what to place on the scale of values and what not. Rav Rephoel was wont to say, "I lack nothing." His wife and daughter attested: "We never craved luxuries, and we were neither attracted to nor influenced by the latest styles and merchandise in the display cases. Everything in our home was the most basic and simple in nature."

Shortly after their marriage, Rav Rephoel and his *Rebbetzin* moved into their new apartment. It was not large; it was not lavish; it was simple, equipped with the very basics they needed to live. Rav Rephoel asked his father if he should make a *Chanukas HaBayis*, consecration of a new dwelling. The *Brisker Rav* replied that for the first meal which they eat in the new apartment, they should invite a poor man to share their meal. This would be their *Chanukas HaBayis*. We now have an idea of the type of individual Rav Rephoel was and his perspective on life.

Rav Rephoel never owned a new suit until he married. Everything that he wore until that point was a hand-me-down from his older brothers. During the War of 1948, he had one suit which he wore both for *Shabbos* and during the week. When the suit needed cleaning for *Pesach*, he was informed by the dry cleaner that it could be cleaned easily at home by brushing it down with kerosene. He cleaned his suit with kerosene, but could not bring it indoors because of the odor. He stayed indoors all day, while the suit aired out on the balcony.

Rav Rephoel once received a suit from his brother that was made of strong, good quality cloth. It had become too frayed to wear. Rav Rephoel took it to the tailor who turned the material inside out and cut it down to size. When Rav Rephoel brought the suit home to show his father, the *Brisker Rav* said, *Es iz tsu shain far dir*, "It is too nice for you (to wear now). Put it away in the closet." He put it away until he became a *choson*. He wore this suit to his wedding.

The next story concerns **Horav Michael Forschlager, zl**, a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar of repute, who lived in Baltimore, circa early twentieth century. He was a true Torah genius as attested to by such distinguished *Roshei Yeshivah* as *Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl*, *Horav Yitzchak Yaakov Ruderman, zl*, *Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl*, *Horav Yisrael Gustman, zl*, and the *Satmar Rav, zl*. His *Rebbe*, the *Avner Nezer* offered him *semichah*, ordination, at the age of eighteen. Rav Forschlager demurred, claiming that he did not want to practice rabbinics. Well before the age of thirty, he was considered to be among the most brilliant Talmudists in Europe. He spent his life engrossed in Torah study, writing brilliant novella. He shunned the limelight. His greatest enjoyment in life was speaking in learning with those who came to visit him. Our story, which was related by Rabbi Yechiel Spero in "Touched by a Story," is about one such incident and the lifelong impression it left on two *yeshivah* students.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* of Ner Israel, *Horav Yitzchak Yaakov Ruderman*, would send older students to Rav Forschlager's home on *Erev Shabbos* to speak in learning with him. One Friday afternoon, two

bochurim, students of the *Yeshivah*, knocked on the apartment door of *Rav Forshlager*. When they entered the apartment, they felt they had walked into a different world. The apartment – if one could call it that – was sparsely furnished. Whatever furniture was there was old and chipped, the couch was thread bare, the floor covering was worn and cracked. This was, however, not the most striking aspect of the visit. It was the sweater which *Rav Michoel* wore. The fabric was tattered, discolored and worn out. The mere fact that the sweater did not simply fall apart was incredible. They had never seen anyone wearing such a deteriorated garment.

Apparently, from the appearance of the small apartment, *Rav Michoel* cared about only one thing: *Torah*. *Seforim* lined the shelves from floor to ceiling. The dining room table served as a place to eat, but, even more so, as a place to study. It was overflowing with *seforim* – some opened, others still closed, but about to be opened. *Rav Michoel* made room at the table, so that the students could sit, but, before they began learning, he had to do one more thing. He left the room and, a few moments later, returned sporting another sweater – one that was slightly less torn, less discolored, and perhaps slightly more presentable. *Rav Michoel* noticed the students sort of staring at him, so he took the time to explain his behavior.

“Let me explain why I changed sweaters. I own two sweaters: one for *Shabbos* and one for the weekday. Prior to your arrival, I was wearing my weekday sweater. After all, I am home alone. When I saw that I would be speaking with two *bonei Torah*, students of the *Yeshivah*, it was such a *kavod*, honor, I felt it important to change into my *Shabbos* sweater. After all, where would be my *kavod haTorah*?” This is how a *gadol*, Torah giant, understands *kavod haTorah*: to change sweaters in honor of two *yeshivah* students who came to speak in learning. Nothing but *Shabbos* “finery” could be sufficient for such distinguished guests.