

You shall make holy vestments for Aharon your brother, for glory and splendor. (28:2)

The *Kohanim* are to be clothed in vestments which reflect their wearers' noble position. These garments were similar to the garb worn by royalty. They gave glory to Hashem as they lent splendor to the *Kohanim* who wore them. The *Kohen* serves as the spiritual mentor to *Klal Yisrael*. His total demeanor, including his clothes, must reflect the lofty position he holds. He teaches *Torah*, the code of Jewish Law authored by Hashem. As the Almighty's representative for disseminating His *Torah*, his mode of dress must reflect dignity, sanctity and splendor. When the people gaze upon the *Kohanim* donned in their beautiful vestments, they will accord them the respect they merit.

The *Torah's* focus upon the *Kohen's* external appearance seems inconsistent with his focus in life. The *Rambam* at the end of *Hilchos Shemittah v'Yovel* writes that the *Levi* did not receive a portion in *Eretz Yisrael* because Hashem distinguished this *shevet*, tribe, for devotion to His service and to teach His *Torah* to the people. *Shevet Levi* is not to be involved in the mundane. They do not go to war like the other tribes; they do not inherit the land or bequeath it to others. They constitute Hashem's army. He is their portion.

Why is it that Hashem's legion, the tribe who is to devote itself totally to Him, who is to divorce itself completely from the pedestrian affairs of life, is required to dress in a regal manner? Is it appropriate for the individual who is most removed from everyday life to place so much emphasis on the manner in which he dresses? Should someone who wears the "crown of Hashem" concern himself with clothes?

Horav Shmuel Truvitz, Shlita, explains that just as the other tribes are adjured to show deference to the *Kohen*, to exalt his position and to give him special honor, so too, should the *Kohen* himself reflect upon his position. He must remember who he is and what he represents. In other words, the *Torah's* demand that the *Kohen's* vestments be exceptional is as much a command for the *Kohen* himself as it is for the people. He must maintain himself on a level becoming his station in life. The vestments he wears completes the picture. They complement the *kedushah*, holiness, inherent in the *Kohen*. Without them the *Kohen* is missing a very significant aspect of his total persona. He may not serve without his vestment, because they constitute an integral part of the *Kohen's* total demeanor.

The idea that one must recognize his own lofty status is an important one. All too often people fall prey to sin and depression because they fail to realize who they are. The respect we receive from others is commensurate with our own self-respect. If we do not appreciate who we are, how can we expect others to do the same?

The *Yalkut Shimoni* in *Bereishis* cites Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel who says, "All the days that I

served my father I never came within one hundredth of the manner in which Eisav served his father, Yitzchak. When I served my father, I dressed in everyday clothes. When I went outside I changed into my finer, fancier clothes. Eisav, on the other hand, served his father dressed in *bigdei malchus*, clothing fit for royalty.” The question is compelling: If Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel felt that something was lacking in the way he was dressed when he went to visit his father, why did he not change into better clothes? Why would he believe that his *Kibbud Av* was not as good as Eisav’s if he could simply don fancy clothes and do as Eisav did?

The *Baalei Mussar* explain that wearing fancy clothes as an end in itself has little significance. Eisav distinguished himself in that he recognized that serving and honoring one’s father was such an important and sublime thing to do that it mandated wearing the finest clothing. It is not the clothes; it is the underlying idea that those clothes represent. Eisav had the correct idea. Regrettably, he did not follow through.

Horav Chaim Shmulevitz, zl, supplements this idea. Eisav sensed that wearing these stately garments transformed him into a more distinguished person. After all, do not clothes reflect the person? He became more dignified, a greater person, making his act of *Kibbud Av* that much greater. When an activity is performed by a prominent person, it lends greater significance to the endeavor. Wearing distinctive clothing without sensing that they do something for the wearer undermines their significance. If the person does not feel different, then the *mitzvah* will not be distinct either. Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel did not sense the need to wear new clothes because he did not feel that they would accomplish anything for him. Clothing was not something this great *Tanna* needed to make him feel any more important. His self-image did not need any external reinforcement. Consequently, putting on fancy clothes would have created a superficial facade, something which would only have demeaned the *mitzvah*.