

“You shall make vestments of sanctity for Aharon your brother, for glory and splendor.” (28:2)

One Friday night shortly after he arrived in America, the *Satmar Rebbe*, z.l., spoke to his *chasidim* about the significance of wearing the European garb: *Shtreimel*, fur hat, and *bekishah*, long silk frock. During his talk, he cited the *Ksav Sofer*'s comment regarding the *pasuk* detailing Hashem's instructions to make Priestly vestments for glory and splendor. He explained that during the time of the second *Bais HaMikdash*, there were *Kohanim* who did not measure up to the Priestly standard expected of them. They needed the special vestments to remind them of their exalted position and its concomitant responsibilities. There were, of course, *Kohanim* whose spiritual plateau and moral rectitude were totally proper. They wore the vestments for their true purpose: for glory and splendor.

The *Rebbe* was concerned with the fact that upon arriving on these shores, many *chasidim* changed their mode of dress. No longer were they bedecked in the traditional garb worn by the Jew of pre-war Europe. Some were even shaving off their beards and *payos*. The *Rebbe* said, “In Satmar, prior to the war, the *shtreimel* and *bekishah* were worn *l'kavod u'lesiferes*, for glory and splendor. They enhanced one's *Yiddishkeit*, since regardless of what they were wearing, they still continued to be observant Jews. In this country, I am afraid wearing traditional garb is of a compelling nature. It is not simply for glory and splendor. It is to maintain and reinforce our *Yiddishkeit*. It protects us from mingling freely with contemporary society. It is inherent that we look different, so that we will act differently”

While there were those who felt the *Rebbe* was perhaps a bit too radical in his perspective on life in America, his impact on Orthodoxy – specifically due to his extreme views – is unquestionable. The Jew must distinguish himself in all areas of human endeavor, both physical and spiritual. He must transcend his environment and remain steadfast in his beliefs. The *Satmar Rebbe*'s customs, customs that have been part of Jewish life for centuries, influenced and protected generations of Jews to come – even those who did not agree with him.