

And you shall make holy vestments for Aharon, your brother, for honor and for glory. (28:2)

The *Kohen Gadol's* vestments were unique in that they atoned for various communal sins. The *Talmud (Zevachim 88b)* teaches that: the Robe worn by the High Priest atoned for bloodshed; the Breeches atoned for lewdness, the Turban atoned for arrogance; the Belt atoned for impure meditations of the heart; the Breastplate atoned for neglect of civil laws; the Apron atoned for idolatry; the Cloak atoned for slander; and the Crown worn on the forehead atoned for brazenness. In other words, when the *Kohen Gadol* walked, he was a walking source of absolution. Apparently, when the *Kohen* wore his vestments, which were made for the express purpose of sanctifying him to Hashem, he (by his very demeanor) symbolized purity of character. Thus, his demeanor influenced the nation to refine their character traits, which would minimize the risk of sinful behavior. The *Kohen Gadol* was an individual whose every trait was honed to perfection. A person who observed the *Kohen Gadol* immediately understood and acknowledged the error of his ways.

The *Kesones*, Robe, expiated the sin of murder. First and foremost, this does not mean that the egregious act of murder committed by a person is wiped clean without punishment. The murderer is punished accordingly. If for some reason (lack of witnesses), however, the murderer is not punished by the court, the sin of murder blemishes the pristine nature of the Heavenly sphere. This stain is cleansed and atoned for by the *Kesones* worn by the *Kohen Gadol*. How does this occur? *Horav Eliyahu Svei, zl*, cites *Sforno* who explains *kavod* and *tiferes*, honor and glory/beauty, in the following manner. The *Kohen Gadol* wore garments to give honor to Hashem, since he specifically wore them when he carried out the Priestly service. The beauty the people beheld when they observed the *Kohen Gadol* resplendent in his vestments is the result of the nation's reverence for the *Kohen Gadol*. As a teaching priest, the entire nation are his *talmidim*, disciples, as they are engraved upon his heart (*Choshen*) and shoulders (*kispos ha'Ephod avnei shosham*). (The names of the twelve tribes were engraved on the Breastplate worn over the heart and on the *shoham* stones which were on the shoulders of the *Ephod*.) *Sforno* teaches us that all of *Klal Yisrael* (as a result of the names of the tribes being engraved on the *kispos ha'Ephod* and *Choshen*) are students of the *Kohen Gadol*, whose heart encompasses the entire nation. This relationship allows for him to expiate the sin of murder. His shoulders represent his ability to inspire each individual, thus elevating him. The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that when one wants to raise someone up, he places him upon his shoulders. This is the idea behind the *kispos ha'Ephod*. The *Kohen Gadol* not only cared for the nation; he also elevated them, which essentially is the role of a *rebbe/teacher*.

The *Kli Yakar* explains why specifically it was the *Kesones/Robe* – outer garment -- that atoned for bloodshed. Why not another garment? He cites *Rabbeinu Bachya (Bereishis 37:3)* who teaches that the body (the container which houses the soul) is similar to the *Kesones* in that it is the covering for the soul. When a person commits an act of murder, he sheds the *Kesones/body* from the soul. Thus, when the *Kohen Gadol* wore the *Kesones*, he was repairing the damage caused by – and atoning for – this act.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* contends, however, that the *kaparah*, atonement, effuses from the *Kohen Gadol* himself [through the medium of the *Kesones*]. It is the *Kohen Gadol's* character, however, that atones. Murder is the result of a lack of respect, a disdain for the value of human life. One who acknowledges his fellow's worth will not shed his blood. When *Klal Yisrael* saw how the *Kohen Gadol* carried the nation on his heart and his shoulders, not distinguishing among human beings, their background, their religious persuasion, or their material worth, they, too, learned to respect people. They comprehended the importance of valuing each and every person. Once this recognition became intuitive, murder (of any sort – even embarrassing, which is tantamount to murder) became unthinkable. In this manner, the *Kohen Gadol* wearing his *Kesones* atones.

Whereas clothing, so to speak, makes a person, in that they present him in a certain light, they can also cause him to lose sight of his real self. When one dons *Shabbos* garb, he feels *Shabbosdik* and acts accordingly. When one dons the garments usually worn by a *Rosh Yeshivah*, he becomes imbued with a sense of responsibility to act in an elevated manner. Wearing the garb of a monarch with the crown on his head will obviously infuse the wearer with a sense of royalty and renewed responsibility.

One who relies on clothing to serve as the vehicle for his self-identity, however, demonstrates a deficiency. The following anecdote elucidates this pitfall. A wandering Jew wandered into a small rooming house in Ukraine late one frigid, stormy night and asked for a room. "Sorry" was the innkeeper's reply. "I am filled up. In fact, because of the storm, I have two to three sharing a bed. One second, I have an idea. I have a large Cossack (seven feet tall) sleeping on a cot in the attic. Since you are small in build, you will be able to fit on the bed. Try climbing in beside him."

The accommodations were far from perfect, but at least he would have a warm place to rest his weary body. He thanked the innkeeper for his graciousness and prepared to climb the stairs to the attic. First, he asked the innkeeper to wake him before dawn. "I have to catch a train," the Jew said. He went upstairs and made for himself a small spot next to the Cossack, who was out cold, having imbibed a considerable amount of vodka, and he immediately fell asleep. Before he knew it, a hand was shaking him. "It is well before dawn," the innkeeper said. "Remember you have a train to catch."

The Jew dressed hurriedly in the pitch dark room and rushed to the train station. On the way to the platform, he passed a full-length mirror in which he saw before him a frightening image. He saw a Cossack staring at him from the mirror's reflection. He exclaimed, "That foolish innkeeper. He woke up the Cossack instead of the wandering Jew. I will never make it back to the inn in time to wake myself up in time to catch my train."

When our self-identity is determined by and predicated upon the clothing that we wear, we may suffer from an identity crisis. We are who we are, because of what we are and how we act – not because of the clothes we wear, the car we drive, the house in which we live, or the circle of friends with whom we decide to socialize. Perhaps, our external clothing and accoutrements might impel

us to live/act in a certain positive manner. If we delude ourselves into thinking that this is our true identity, however, we are in a serious predicament. “Be careful who you pretend to be. You might forget who you are” is a meaningful quote to encourage us to pursue our life’s aspirations.