

Torah Study offered to Congregation Beth Ohr

By Rabbi Eric M. Rosin

Shabbat P'Kudei

How Priestly Garments Teach that Leadership is a Shared Communal Practice

לְמַעַן־אֶחָי וְרַעִי אֲדַבְּרָה־נָא שְׁלוֹם בָּךְ
לְמַעַן בֵּית־ה' אֶלְקֵינוּ אֲבַקֶּשׁה טוֹב לָךְ:

L'ma'an achai v'rei'ai, adab'ra na shalom bach.

L'ma'an Beit Adonai Eloheinu, avaksha tov lach.

For the sake of my family and friends I will pray for your peace.

For the sake of God's house, I will seek your welfare.

-Psalm 122:8-9

Exodus 39:22-31

The robe for the ephod was made of woven work, of pure blue. The opening of the robe, in the middle of it, was like the opening of the robe, in the middle of it, was like the opening of a coat of mail, with a binding around the opening so that it would not tear. On the hem of the robe they made pomegranates of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, twisted. They also made bells of pure gold, and attached the bells between the pomegranates, all around the hem of the robe, between the pomegranates: a bell and a pomegranate, a bell and a pomegranate, all around the hem of the robe for officiating in -- as the Lord had commanded Moses.

They made the tunics of fine linen, of woven work, for Aaron and his sons; and the headdress of fine linen, and the decorated turbans of fine linen, and the linen breeches of fine twisted linen; and the sashes of fine twisted linen, blue, purple, and crimson yarns, done in embroidery --- as the Lord had command Moses.

They made the frontlet for the holy diadem of pure gold and incised upon it the seal inscription: "Holy to the Lord." They attached to it a cord of blue to fix it upon the headdress above -- as the Lord had commanded Moses.



Questions:

1. As we come to the end of the Book of Exodus, the Torah once again describes every part of the Mishkan (or Tabernacle) and, in this passage, the priestly vestments. Why is it so important to once again describe these physical objects in this spiritual moment?
2. Let's think about them. Put yourself in the place of one of the Israelites as the priest approaches. What do you feel as you hear the bells and turn to see the robes and the breastplates and the frontlet?
3. And now imagine yourself as the priest. What does it feel like to appear before the community wearing these materials, garments and talismans?
4. What does this discussion of clothing teach us about leadership? How might this shape the way that the leader experiences being in front of the people? How do the people experience this relationship?

Exodus 28:1-3

You shall bring forward your brother Aaron, with his sons, from among the Israelites, to serve Me as priests: Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, Eleazar and Itamar, the sons of Aaron. Make sacral vestments for your brother Aaron, for dignity and adornment. Next you shall instruct all who are skillful [Hebrew: *kol hochmat lev*, all who are wise at heart], whom I have endowed with the gift of skill [Hebrew: *ruach hochma*, the spirit of wisdom], to make Aaron's vestments. . . .

From the Commentary of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch on Parashat Tetzaveh (1808-1888)

As the priest is to be elect of the nation, the garments, in which he alone may function as Kohein, (or priest), are to be made by the nation, to be national

property. It is the garb of the nation in which the Kohein approaches worship. This explains why, in this passage the language of the Torah stresses that the garments are to be made with “wisdom.” In contrast, when the Torah describes the construction of the Tabernacle and the rest of the ritual implements, this quality is only mentioned [in passing]. In the making of the garments, more room was left for the taste of the maker. The garments had to be made with the definite idea in the mind of the worker of the purpose for which they were to be used. Then, and only then, did they give the priest the necessary holiness. . .

Questions:

1. According to Rabbi Hirsch, why is it so important that the Priestly vestments be made by the Israelites? Why were the artists and craftspeople who made these garments given more creative freedom than the people who made the different parts of the tabernacle?
2. About the relationship between the priest and the Israelites? Between the priest and God? Between God and the Israelites?
3. Picture yourself as the Kohein, how might the fact that you are wearing magnificent garments crafted by the wisest and most skilled artisans of the entire nation shape the way that you fulfill your responsibilities?

From the *Kedushat Levi* by Rabbi Levi Yizhak of Berditchev (1740-1810)

We are going to explain why it is the garments of the priests were made from public monies. Even though it is only the priest who performed the divine service and offered sacrifices, his service was not complete if he did not garb himself in love of his fellow Jews, for the sacrament of any priest who does not love the people Israel is worthless. . . .

Questions:

1. According to Rabbi Levi Yitzhak, why does the Priest have to wear clothing made by the Jewish people?
2. What does “loving his [or her] fellow Jews” have to do with the work of the priest?
3. What does this teach us about leadership in general? What relationship does the leader need to have with those whom he or she leads?
4. What role do the members of the community have in the process of leading?
5. How does this dynamic shape the relationship between the community and God? The Priest and God?
6. How does this conversation help us to think about the relationship to which we should aspire should you invite me to be your next rabbi?