

For the first time since the beginning of Genesis, balance and harmony through shared responsibility have been achieved, paving the way for the establishment of the formalities of public worship. Fraternal rivalry has finally ended, and now, the collaboration of Moses and Aaron exemplifies division of labor based on ability – a major step indeed. Impulsive, argumentative, tongue-tied, law-bound Moses is the otherworldly channel from HaShem to the people. Even-tempered, well-spoken Aaron, the conflict-shy compromiser, is fully of the people. He is their earthly channel to HaShem, so it is fitting that he becomes the first Kohen Gadol (High Priest). After last week’s elaborate building instructions for the *mishkan*, this week’s parashah turns to priestly clothing and investing the priests who will serve in it.

The vestments of the Kohen Gadol eloquently reflect his status and his responsibility. His breeches, tunic, and belt differ only slightly from those worn by all the Kohanim, but his turban is more elaborate, and he wears a robe (*me’il*) of *t’cheilet* (sky-blue) fine wool rimmed on the bottom by sky-blue woven pomegranates and trimmed with small bells made of pure gold which accompany his every step, and over it he wears the highly symbolic *ephod*, a sort of vest, woven of threads spun from gold, *t’cheilet*, crimson, and purple wool and twisted linen. On each of the shoulder straps is an onyx set in gold and engraved with the names of the 12 tribes. The *choshen* (breastplate) is fastened to the shoulder straps with gold chain. It is woven out of material similar to that of the *ephod*, folded double, and adorned with 12 gold settings set into each of which is a precious stone representing one of the tribes. Inside the fold are the *urim ve turim*, a parchment infused with mystical powers and worn over the heart. At the front of the turban is the *tzitz*, a plate made of pure gold inscribed with the words *kadosh l’adonai* (Holy to the Lord).

It is noteworthy that the Kohen Gadol wears the names of the tribes twice: on his shoulders, symbolizing the burden of responsibility he bears for the people, and on his heart, for the empathy he also must have. There has been much debate concerning the order of names engraved on the two shoulder stones. One opinion sees them arranged according to the mothers, with Leah’s six sons on one shoulder and on the other, Rachel’s two sons bracketing the sons of Billah and Zilpah, with the sons of each mother listed in order of their birth. With collective responsibility on his shoulders and individuals in his heart, the Kohen Gadol exemplifies balance and harmony between the collective and the individual, between duty and empathy, and between *gevurah* (power, judgment) and *chesed* (love, charity).

Ultimately, the clothes worn by the Kohanim epitomize balance and harmony. They are to be made *l’ch’vod ultiferet* (for splendor and beauty/harmony). The garments are fashioned of blue, purple, and crimson wool, and linen, interwoven with gold: animal, vegetable, and mineral. Noteworthy too, *sha’atnetz*, combining wool and linen, forbidden to the laity, is mandated for the Kohanim. If we compare the properties of linen and wool, we can begin to understand why.

linen	wool
good conductor of heat	does not conduct heat / flame resistant
smooth, cool to the touch	overlapping scales, crimps, rough
lint free	felts
breaks when bent	highly elastic
moderate shrinkage when heated	shrinks easily when heated
Lightweight – good for hot weather	bulky – good for cold weather
Egyptian symbol of light, purity, wealth – mummies wrapped in it	more “homespun” and utilitarian

Their differing properties complement each other. But they also share certain characteristics: durability, strength, high absorbency with wicking ability, noise and static resistant, and both may be used for common items as well as for objects of great elegance and luxury. The colors too, symbolize balance: crimson stands for our earthly realm (blood, animal), blue corresponds to the heavenly realm, and purple, a mixture of red and blue, signifies the connection between the two. The entire realm of human attributes as well as the connection between the earth and its Creator are eloquently balanced and reflected in the attire of the Kohen Gadol.

We can bring the message of these ancient elaborate instructions forward today by channeling our own strengths, recognizing our weaknesses, and collaborating with others who have complementing strengths and weaknesses. Working together we participate in *tikkun olam* – in helping create a better world for all its inhabitants.

Shabbat shalom!