YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat Tetzaveh**

**Sicha of HarAV Yaakov Medan**

**The Four Garments of an Ordinary Priest**

Translated by David Strauss

### I. The Trousers

And you shall weave the tunic in checker work of fine linen, and you shall make a turban of fine linen, and you shall make a sash, the work of the weaver in colors. And for Aharon's sons you shall make tunics, and you shall make for them sashes, and hats shall you make for them, for splendor and for beauty. And you shall put them upon Aharon your brother, and upon his sons with him; and shall anoint them, and consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister to Me in the priest's office. And you shall make them linen trousers to cover the flesh of their nakedness; from the loins even to the thighs they shall reach. And they shall be upon Aharon and upon his sons when they go in to the tent of meeting, or when they come near to the altar to minister in the holy place; that they bear not iniquity, and die; it shall be a statute forever to him and to his seed after him. (*Shemot* 28:39-43)

Throughout the Bible, the trousers are distinguished from the other seven priestly garments. In the initial presentation of the priestly garments, they are not mentioned at all; nor is there any mention of the forehead plate:

And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastplate, and an *efod*, and a cloak, and a tunic of checker work, a turban, and a sash; and they shall make holy garments for Aharon your brother, and his sons, that he may minister to Me in the priest's office. (*Shemot* 28:4)

Even in the verses cited above, the trousers are mentioned only after the verse that describes the dressing of the priests in their garments and summarizes their consecration. Only after it says: "And you shall put them upon Aharon your brother, and upon his sons with him; and shall anoint them, and consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister to Me in the priest's office," does it say: "And you shall make them linen trousers." In these verses, the forehead plate is mentioned together with the other six garments.

Similarly, in the account of the consecration of the garments of the ordinary priests during the seven days of investiture, there is no mention of the trousers. Mention is made only of the other three garments of the ordinary priests:

And you shall bring his sons and put tunics upon them. And you shall gird them with sashes, Aharon and his sons, and bind hats on them; and they shall have the priesthood by a perpetual statute; and you shall consecrate Aharon and his sons. (*Shemot* 29:8-9)

Later in the chapter, an account is given of the process of consecrating the garments, which includes sprinkling blood and anointing oil on them:

And you shall take of the blood that is upon the altar and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it upon Aharon, and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon the garments of his sons with him; and he and his garments shall be hallowed, and his sons and his sons' garments with him. (*Shemot* 29:21)

It would seem that according to the simple understanding, there was no sprinkling of blood or anointing oil on the trousers, since they were covered by the tunic.

The verses indicate that there is a fundamental distinction between the trousers and the other three garments worn by the ordinary priests. The purpose of those three garments is "for splendor and for beauty," whereas the role of the trousers was simply "to cover the flesh of their nakedness." Their purpose was "that they bear not iniquity and die." Thus, the purpose of the trousers was a matter of modesty.

It might be that priestly modesty was especially necessarily, in addition to the inherent value of modesty, also in order to create a clear distinction between the service of the God of Israel, which requires bodily modesty, and the worship of the nations – the Sumerians and the Egyptians[[1]](#footnote-1) - in which the priests were naked or almost naked when they performed their rituals.

In another context, we compared the priestly garments, and especially the tunic, to the tunics worn by Adam and Chava in the Garden of Eden. The trousers correspond to the fig leaf with which Adam and his wife covered themselves when the garment of light was removed from them and they needed minimal modesty after their sin. It would appear that this minimal modesty was connected as well to matters of sexuality.

Here the question may justly be raised: If the priests were commanded to wear trousers in order to cover their nakedness, why does the Torah command that they not go up by steps to the altar?

Neither shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness be not uncovered thereon. (*Shemot* 20:23)

Surely the trousers prevent the uncovering of the priests' nakedness in all situations, and in particular, when going up by steps to the altar!

There are two possible answers to this question:

1) The prohibition concerning going up by steps to the altar came before the priestly garments and priests in general, and thus there was a great need for it in its time. It had significance even for later generations, at times when minor *bamot* were permitted and there was no need for priests or for the priestly garments.[[2]](#footnote-2)

2) It is possible that in these verses we find two levels of modesty: The first and most fundamental level involves covering the genital area and the thighs, from the hips to the knees, and this is fulfilled through the trousers. The second level involves covering the calves, from the knees to the ankles, and this is fulfilled with the wearing of the tunic, which covers the entire body.[[3]](#footnote-3) This level of modesty reflects the dignity of the person serving before God. It is possible that the uncovering of the nakedness in this verse does not refer to the genital area itself, but to the calves, which, for a person who is serving God in the Temple, is considered nakedness owing to his elevated status. When going up by steps to the altar, this second level of modesty – which is unique to the priests – is liable to be profaned through the accidental uncovering of part of the calf, and therefore the priest must not go up by steps to the altar.

If so, the trousers cover the thighs, and the tunic along with the prohibition of going up by steps to the altar cover the calves. The level of modesty of the priest during his service parallels the level of modesty that *Chazal* require of a woman – although a woman is certainly not forbidden to go up by steps – when they said: "A woman's thigh is considered nakedness."[[4]](#footnote-4) This level of modesty is also required of a *sheliach tzibbur* during prayer, who must cover his calves and also his arms. There too the matter stems from the comparison to a priest performing his service.

In fact, while he is engaged in the service, the priest's entire body is covered, with the exception of his feet and hands. This explains why the priest must sanctify his hands and feet when he comes to perform the service in the Temple:

And Aharon and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat. (*Shemot* 30:19)

### II. The Sash

And you shall weave the tunic in checker work of fine linen, and you shall make a turban of fine linen, **and you shall make a sash, the work of the weaver in colors.** And for Aharon's sons you shall make tunics, **and you shall make for them sashes,** and hats shall you make for them, for splendor and for beauty. (*Shemot* 28:39-40)

And the turban of fine linen, and the goodly hats of fine linen, and the linen leggings of fine twined linen, **and the sash of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, the work of the weaver in colors;** as the Lord commanded Moshe. (*Shemot* 39:28-29)

The verse in chapter 39 teaches us that the "work of the weaver" that is required regarding the sash relates to the combination of the blue, the purple, and the scarlet. But from the verses in chapter 28 it might be understood that only in the High Priest's sash, described in the first verse, is "the work of the weaver" required, whereas the sashes of the sons of Aharon are just linen (made of six-twined threads), without blue, purple, and scarlet. Thus, their sashes were white, like their tunics and their hats. Nevertheless, it is possible that the work of the weaver in Aharon's sash was found also in the sashes of his sons, the ordinary priests, so that even the sash of an ordinary priest included blue, purple and scarlet on linen. This indeed is the halakha.[[5]](#footnote-5)

If this is the case, then in both the sash of the High Priest and in the garments of the ordinary priest there is a combination of wool and linen (*sha'atnez*) – for the sash made of *shesh* is linen, and the threads of blue, purple, and scarlet are wool.[[6]](#footnote-6)In sharp contrast, the sash of the High Priest on Yom Kippur was made exclusively of white linen, and it is called "a linen sash" (*Vayikra* 16:4). Similarly, in the cloak and in the *choshen* there was *sha'atnez*, and thisis the fundamental law of *tzitzit* on the garments of ordinary people. In light of this, it might be suggested that *sha'atnez* in ordinary garments is forbidden not because there is something wrong with it, but precisely because of its sanctity.

Where was the sash worn? There is good reason to conclude that the sash was ideally worn not at the waist as we are accustomed to do, but rather opposite the heart. Indeed, according to the exposition of R. Anani, the sash procures atonement for sinful thoughts of the heart:[[7]](#footnote-7)

The sash procures atonement for sinful thoughts of the heart, [for it atones] where it is [worn]. (*Arakhin* 16a)

So writes Targum Yonatan regarding the *mitzva* of wearing a sash:

They shall not gird themselves with anything that causes sweat. (*Yechezkel* 44:18)

They shall not gird it on their loins, but rather they shall tie it **over** **their hearts.** (*Targum Yonatan*, ad loc.)

The Rambam understood this translation as a binding halakha:

With regard to the sash, [where it should be placed can be understood from] the received tradition. It is stated (*Yechezkel* [44:18](https://www.chabad.org/16142#v18)): "They shall not gird themselves *bayeza*, [interpreted to mean] "in a place where one perspires." Yonatan ben Uziel received the same tradition from the prophets and translated the phrase: "They will gird themselves over the heart." (Rambam, *Hilkhot Kelei Ha-Mikdash* 10:2)

The sash covers, as it were, the heart and its thoughts, which may be unsuitable for the sanctity of the Temple and may invalidate the service of a priest who has a rebellious heart.

### III. The hats and the turban

And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastplate, and an *efod*, and a cloak, and a tunic of checker work, a turban [*mitznefet*], and a sash; and they shall make holy garments for Aharon your brother and his sons, that he may minister to Me in the priest's office. (*Shemot* 28:4)

And you shall make a plate of pure gold and engrave upon it, like the engravings of a signet: Holy to the Lord. And you shall put it on a thread of blue, and it shall be upon the turban; upon the forefront of the turban it shall be. (*Shemot* 28:36-37)

And for Aharon's sons you shall make tunics, and you shall make for them sashes, and hats [*migba'ot*]shall you make for them, for splendor and for beauty. (*Shemot* 28:40)

These verses indicate that the High Priest's head was covered with a "turban" (*mitznefet*), and upon it rested the forehead plate. The head-covering of the ordinary priests, the sons of Aharon, was a "hat" (*migba'at*). According to Rashi, the turban is identical to the hat.

"*Migba'at*" is a unique word. The Ramban, based on Targum Onkelos, explains that the word stems from the term *kova*, hat, the letter *gimmel* replacing the letter *kof.* This is a covering that sits firmly (*kavu'a*) on the head. According to the Ibn Ezra, the word stems from the term *giv'a*, hill, because a hat sitting high on the head looks like a hill. One of the *midrashim* (*Pa'ane'ach Raza*) understands *migba'at* as derived from the word *gavi'a*, cup, because of its shape.

The Rambam explains – and so it follows from the *Midrash Ha-Gadol[[8]](#footnote-8)* – that both the turban and the hat were made out of a strip of linen sixteen cubits long, which the priest would fold like a hat on his head. Even according to him, there was a difference between the *mitznefet* and the *migba'at*. Apparently, the *mitznefet* was lower and wider, so that the thread of blue of the forehead plate could go up above it. In addition, from the wording of the Rambam and the Ra'avad (*Hilkhot Kelei Ha-Mikdash* 8:3) it follows, according to my understanding, that the *migba'at* was made like a hat, which retains its form even when it was removed from the head, whereas the *mitznefet* would come apart every day and become a long strip of linen. Every day, the High Priest would wrap the linen strip around his head and tie it tight, and it would remain as a turban tied around the High Priest's head, rather than an independent hat. The difference between the *mitznefet* and the *migba'at* stems from the need to combine the *mitznefet* and the forehead plate, with its thread of blue, and with the *tefilin* between the forehead plate and the thread of blue.

According to the Ramban, there is a more substantial difference between the *mitznefet* of the High Priest and the *migba'at* of the ordinary priest:

The correct understanding is that the *mitznefet* went around the head, and the middle of the head was uncovered, and there the oil was poured. (Ramban, *Shemot* 29:7)

According to the Ramban, the linen strip was wrapped around the High Priest's head, but his head remained uncovered. It follows from this that the High Priest served with an uncovered head, without any type of hat whatsoever. This is a novel position.

R. Anani expounds as follows:

The turban procures atonement for those of arrogant mind, in accord with what R. Chanina taught; for he said: Let that which is [placed] high procure atonement for acts of haughtiness. (*Arakhin* 16a)

The strip of the turban corresponds to the strip of the sash. The strip of the sash is tied at the height of the *tefilin* worn on the arm and around the heart, and thus it procures atonement for the High Priest's sinful thoughts. The strip of the turban is tied around the head, near the *tefilin* worn on the head, and thus it procures atonement for haughtiness.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. See M. D. Cassuto, *Peirush al Sefer Shemot* (Jerusalem, 1988), p. 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I have not found any discussion about a prohibition of going up by steps to a minor *bama*, and it is quite possible that there is no such prohibition. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The biblical tunic is a sort of robe that covers the entire body down to the feet. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Berakhot* 24a. According to the simple understanding, the *gemara* is describing the portion of the leg between the knee and the ankle. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See *Yoma* 12b. According to R. Elazar ben R. Shimon, the sash of an ordinary priest was made of linen (*shesh* in biblical Hebrew and *botz* in rabbinic Hebrew, based on the Aramaic). According to R. Yehuda Ha-Nasi, whose view was accepted as the halakha, it was combined with threads of blue, purple, and scarlet. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See *Yoma* 12b and Rambam, *Hilkhot Kelei Ha-Mikdash* 8:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This also follows from Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* III: 7, 2 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Apparently in the wake of the Rambam, like many *midrashim* in this book, which was compiled by R. David Aladani, a disciple of the Rambam. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)