

פרשת תצוה

OVERVIEW

Following the detailed instructions for the building of the Sanctuary, the text continues with an exact description of the garments and accessories used by those who take part in the sacred service. Among them the high priest assumes a special position. His garments reflect his exalted status: chosen from the ranks of his brethren for his wisdom, piety, appearance and independence, the high priest personifies the dignity and passionate devotion of the people he represents.

His priestly garments number eight, they include: a breast-plate containing settings of precious stones which were held in place by chains of gold; the "ephod" in the form of a wrap closed in front; a robe and tunic of checker work, trousers, turban, belt and the show-plate. Four of these eight garments are also worn by the individual priests: trousers, belt, robe and turban. They wore no shoes or slippers. The priestly service was performed barefoot. Special ceremonies are prescribed for the inauguration of the priests.

The final item is the description of the golden altar designed to receive the sacred incense that is burned on special occasions.

COMMENTARY

The significance of the priestly garments

There is no doubt that the priestly garments were not meant to bestow a special distinction on their bearer in the eyes of the beholder. Rather they serve as a constant reminder to the priest to be ever aware of the importance of his position and of the tasks he is called upon to perform.

Two ingredients form the significant character of the priestly garments: fine linen and scarlet wool. Both trousers and turban were made of fine linen. The whiteness of the fabric symbolizes the simplicity and purity that should mark the priest's conduct and service. Nothing must be between his body and the garments. Nothing must separate the priest from his assigned task. - The various colors used in

producing the garments reflect the many nuances in the human character: whiteness for purity, red for life, sky-blue for divinity. They all contribute to the glory of true priesthood.

The Breast-plate

This plate worn by the high priest on his chest consists of a rectangular piece of cloth on which are fastened twelve precious stones each of which bears the name of one of the twelve tribes. They are used to solicit answers to specific questions addressed to G-d. This was made possible by the wondrous combination of certain letters that formed the answer as each emitted a particular glow. Few details are known as to the mysterious way in which the high priest communicated with the glowing letters of the "Urim and Tumim".

The outer garment (robe)

Made entirely of sky-blue wool, the robe's lower hem was decorated with pomegranates made of twisted scarlet threads. Golden bells alternated with the pomegranates whose rich deposit of kernels symbolize an abundant harvest; while the sky-blue color symbolizes the divine that dominates the actions of man. The bells - of whom it says "in order that their sound may be heard when he enters the sacred site" - symbolize the lofty thought which must inspire the priest when he "sows the seeds" before G-d.

The golden Head-band

The show-plate was a narrow oblong of pure gold extending across the forehead from ear to ear. It bore the simple engraved words "Dedicated to the Eternal". This inscription on a metal that symbolizes purity, resistance and steadfastness, reflected the determination of the high priest to inculcate these qualities in the nations he represents.

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