

The Priestly Garments

The Tzitz

Exodus 28:2

"ועשית בגדי קדש לאהרן אחיך לכבוד ולתפארת"

"And you shall make holy clothes for Aaron your brother, for honor and for beauty"

Maimonides: Positive Commandment #33

The 33rd *mitzvah* is that the *kohanim* are commanded to don special garments for dignity and beauty, and only thereafter to serve in the Temple.

The sources of this commandment are G-d's statements (exalted be He), "Make sacred garments for dignity and beauty for your brother Aaron"; "Bring forth his [i.e. Aaron's] sons and dress them with the tunics."

The priestly garments referred to are the eight worn by the *kohen gadol* and the four worn by a regular *kohen*. The *kohen's* service in the Temple is invalid in any case where he did so wearing either fewer or more than the garments designated for him for that service.

The *kohen* who performs the service lacking the proper garments receives *misah bidei Shamayim* (a Heavenly death sentence). Accordingly, we see him listed in the end of tractate *Sanhedrin* among those who receive this punishment.

Scripture does not state this explicitly, but states, "You shall dress them with belts [and with hats]...and with this they shall be *kohanim*." Our Sages explain that "As long as the *kohanim* wear their garments, their priesthood is intact, but when they are not wearing their garments, it is as if they are not *kohanim*." As we will explain later, a non-*kohen* who serves in the Temple receives a [Divine] death sentence.

The *Sifra* says regarding the verse, "And he placed upon him the breastplate": "This passage teaches us the law for that time and for all subsequent generations; for the daily service and for Yom Kippur. For the daily service he wears the garments that contain gold, and for the service of Yom Kippur he wears the white [linen] garments."

We can see from the wording of [another passage of] the *Sifra* that the wearing of these garments is counted as a positive commandment. It states, "Which verse teaches us that Aaron should not wear these garments for his own glory, but rather as one who fulfills the king's decree? The verse, 'And he did exactly as G-d commanded Moshe.' " This means that although these garments are exquisitely beautiful — made of gold, emeralds, rubies, and other precious stones — his intention should not be to adorn himself, but solely to fulfill the commandment given by G-d to Moshe, i.e. to constantly wear these garments in the Temple.