The Significance of a Change of Clothing

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Kohanim changing their clothes in order to engage in a less holy activity in the Tabernacle/Temple.

Not only is there a requirement for Kohanim to wear special clothing when performing the Tabernacle/Temple service, first introduced in the Parashiot of Tetzave\(^1\) and Pekudei,\(^2\) and according to one view\(^3\) codified as a law in Shemot 28:43 “And they (the special clothing) shall be upon Aharon, and upon his sons, when they go in unto the tent of meeting, or when they come near unto the altar to minister in the holy place; that they bear not iniquity, and die;\(^4\) it shall be a statute forever unto him and unto his seed after him”, but our Parasha states that for certain parts of the Divine Service the clothing had to be changed for a fresh set of garments:

VaYikra 6:3-4

And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen breeches shall he put upon his flesh; and he shall take up the ashes whereto the fire hath consumed the burnt-offering on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar. And he shall put off his garments, and put on other garments, and carry forth the ashes without the camp unto a clean place.

A more extreme example of priestly change of clothing.

Replacing one set of garments with another during the course of performing the Temple service takes on its most intense manifestation according to the Oral Tradition with regard to

\(^1\) Shemot 28:2 And thou shalt make holy garments for Aharon thy brother, for splendor and for beauty.
\(^2\) Ibid. 4 And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastplate, and an ephod, and a robe, and a tunic of checker work, a miter, and a girdle; and they shall make holy garments for Aharon thy brother, and his sons, that he may minister unto Me in the priest's office.
\(^3\) Ibid. 40, 42 And for Aaron's sons thou shalt make tunics, and thou shalt make for them girdles, and head-tires shalt thou make for them, for splendor and for beauty... And thou shalt make them linen breeches to cover the flesh of their nakedness; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach.
\(^4\) This verse serves as one of the bases for the view that the deaths of Nadav and Avihu were attributable to their not having worn the proper clothing when they offered up their offerings in VaYikra 10:1-2. See Yalkut Shimoni, Parashat Shemini #524.
the Kohen Gadol’s responsibilities on Yom HaKippurim. The Tora itself only describes a single change of clothes over the course of the holy day for the High Priest:

Ibid. 16:3-34

Herewith shall Aharon come into the holy place: with a young bullock for a sin-offering, and a ram for a burnt-offering. He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with the linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired; they are the holy garments; and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and put them on. And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two he-goats for a sin-offering, and one ram for a burnt-offering. And Aharon shall present the bullock of the sin-offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself, and for his house. And he shall take the two goats, and set them before the Lord at the door of the tent of meeting. And Aharon shall cast lots upon the two goats: one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for Azazel. And Aharon shall present the goat upon which the lot fell for the Lord, and offer him for a sin-offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell for Azazel, shall be set aside before the Lord, to make atonement over him, to send him away for Azazel into the wilderness. And Aharon shall present the bullock of the sin-offering, which is for himself, and shall make atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin-offering which is for himself. And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil. Then shall he kill the goat of the sin-offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the veil, and do with his blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the ark-cover, and before the ark-cover. And he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleannesses of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, even all their sins; and so shall he do for the tent of meeting, that dwelleth with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the Lord, and make atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about. And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleannesses of the children of Israel. And when he hath made an end of atoning for the holy place, and the tent of meeting, and the altar, he shall present the live goat. And Aharon shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of an appointed man into the wilderness. And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land which is cut off; and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness. And Aharon shall come into the tent of meeting, and shall put off the linen garments, which he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there. And he that letteth go the goat for Azazel shall wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. And it shall be a statute for ever unto you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and shall do no manner of work, the home-born, or the stranger that sojourneth among you. And the priest, who shall be anointed and who shall be consecrated to be priest in his father’s stead, shall make the atonement, and shall put on the linen garments, even the holy garments. And he shall make atonement for the most holy place, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar; and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make atonement for the children of Israel because of all their sins once in the year.’ And he did as the LORD commanded Moses.

But the Oral Tradition assumes many more clothing changes for the Kohen Gadol on Yom HaKippurim:

Yoma 30a (Mishna 3:3)

Five immersions and ten sanctifications did the High Priest undergo on that day.
Five times did the Kohen Gadol change his clothing on Yom HaKippurim. Each clothing change required immersion in a Mikva. Similarly, he had to sanctify his hands and feet twice each time (i.e., adding up to ten sanctifications in all), the first time in honor of the clothing that he was going to remove, and a second time in honor of the clothing that he was about to put on...

**The Talmud insists that there is a fundamental difference between these two instances of clothing change.**

Despite the parallelism between clothing changes for removing the ashes from the altar on the one hand, and the service of the Kohen Gadol on Yom HaKippurim on the other, the Talmud draws a clear distinction between these two different contexts whereby a Kohen changes his clothing as part of the rituals of the Temple service:

Yoma 23b
Our Rabbis taught: (VaYikra 6:4) “And he shall put off his garments and put on other garments and carry forth the ashes” —
From this I might learn (a “Hava Amina” which is eventually rejected) even as on the Day of Atonement (that the changes of clothing function in the same manner, and the Mitzvot being fulfilled are the same), [so] that he put off his holy garments and put on **profane garments** (the logic is as follows: If the High Priest on Yom HaKippurim changes the quality of his garments from golden ones to white ones, the ordinary priest with respect to removing the ashes, since he has no option to switch between golden and white clothing because he is permitted to only wear the four white garments of clothing, would switch from white clothing to non-sanctified, i.e., non-priestly, clothing).
(We therefore learn otherwise) to teach us [the true law] it says: “And he shall put off his **garments** and put on other **garments**”, thus basically equating the garments he put

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6 Kahati lists the following five services, each requiring a change of clothing:

1. The morning Tamid sacrifice—the golden clothing (the eight special garments normally worn by the High Priest, including golden garments, i.e., the Me’il, the Ephod, the Choshen and the Tzitz)
2. The special Yom HaKippurim services, i.e., the confessionals, the lottery on the two goats, the sprinkling of blood on the inner altar, the offering of incense in the Holy of Holies—the **white** clothing special for Yom HaKippurim;
3. The offering of the personal sacrifice of the ram as well as the ram on behalf of the people—the **golden** clothing;
4. The extraction of the fire pan on which the incense had been offered in the Holy of Holies (it had been left there when the final ritual of 2. was performed)—the **white** clothing;*
5. The afternoon Tamid sacrifice—the **golden** clothing.

* I recall R. Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht, Z"L, founding Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem B’Yavneh developing a talk whereby he noted that the need for a special trip into the Holy of Holies with all that was entailed, i.e., immersion in a Mikva, washing hands and feet, a change of clothing, etc. demonstrated how important it was to be careful to leave things in order, applying even to keeping one’s room neat!

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7 See fn. 6.
on with the garments he put off; just as the former are holy garments, so are the latter holy garments. If so, what does [the word] ‘other’ teach (implying that the latter are of different quality, and since the ordinary priest is assigned only one type of holy garment, how can there be a difference in quality between the former and latter clothing)? [They shall be] inferior (i.e., of lesser value; made of materials that are not as costly) to the former...

Consequently, the accepted view in the Talmud maintains that whereas the Kohens Gadol on Yom HaKippurim moves between two completely different types of clothing, the ordinary Kohen, vis-à-vis the removal of the ash, switches one set of the same priestly clothes for another set made of less valuable material. To understand this difference conceptually, whereas the Kohens Gadol continues to carry out holy acts, just in different parts of the Tabernacle/Temple, requiring different levels of holy garments, the ordinary Kohen who carries out the ashes is engaged in an activity that at best prepares the altar for subsequent service, but does not constitute an actual part of the Divine Service. Therefore the change of clothing is not a function of the location of the service, but rather the relatively lesser or even non-sanctity of the activity.

What is the nature of the requirement for the Kohen to change his clothes appearing in Parashat Tzav?

With respect to the nature of the requirement for the ordinary Kohen to change his clothes prior to his removal of the ash from the altar, RaShI and RaMBaN engage in a fundamental debate:

RaShI on VaYikra 6:4 d.h. U’Pashat Et Begadav
This is not a Mitzva obligation, i.e., a ritual requirement to switch clothing, but rather “Derech Eretz” (proper deportment). It would not be proper to dirty the clothing with which one performs the regular Temple service. (A parable:)
Clothing in which one cooks a pot of food for his master should not be the same as what is worn when serving the master by pouring a cup (of wine) for him.

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8 There is a minority view that disputes this position. See fn. 11.
9 Encyclopedia Talmudit (Vol. 7 “Derech Eretz”, column 572) defines “Derech Eretz” as it appears in Rabbinic literature (when RaShI quotes something, he is taking his cue from the Talmud or the Midrash), as “establishing a connection with other people informed by gentility, ethical sensitivity, culture, encouraging the advance of civilization, creative work, business interactions, natural types of conduct, etc.” Apparently, maintaining a respectful relationship between representatives of different social orders falls under the rubric of Derech Eretz. Since God is to be considered our King, Master, and Creator, by definition our conduct towards Him must be one of deference and respect. While this certainly applies in the Tabernacle/Mikdash where He is being directly worshipped, a religiously sensitive individual will inform all of his waking actions with a sense of respect for the Divine as well as those who have been Created in His Image.
10 The analogy between carrying out a Mitzva under certain particular circumstances and waiting on a master by pouring a cup of wine for him appears in the well-known Mishna in Sukka:
Sukka 28b
Consequently, “And put on other garments”—inferior/less valuable than the standard ones.

RaMBaN d.h. U’Pashat Et Begadav
(Quotes RaShI). And the intent of the Rabbis with respect to this (changing priestly garments for ones of lesser worth) is to say that the removal of the ashes require priestly garments, and the phrase “other garments” does not refer to non-sanctified ones.

But I don’t know why RaShI says that this is not a Mitzva obligation, because it would appear that it is obligatory on the Kohen that the clothing with which he offers up sacrifices and lifts up the ashes from the altar be clean, and therefore he should not carry out the Divine Service dressed in the clothes he was wearing when he carries out the ashes (since they inevitably will become soiled). This Mitzva is based upon the proper manner by which a servant should relate to his master. For this reason the Kohanim should have valuable clothing for the Divine Service and less valuable clothing for the taking out of the ashes. And all of this is in accordance with the explanation that RaShI wrote (i.e., the parable cited above).

But some of the Rabbis there in Yoma 23b say that the removal of the ashes does not require priestly garments (at all), and when the Tora states, “and put on other garments”, it refers to non-sanctified clothing. And the simple meaning of the text seems to be this, that the Kohen is Commanded not to dirty his holy linen garments when taking out the ash, and instead to put on non-holy garments when doing so.

They propounded a parable (for one who sits in a Sukka while it is raining heavily): To what can this be compared? To a slave who comes to fill the cup for his master, and he throws a pitcher in his face.

11 It would appear that such a view is authored by Reish Lakish:
Resh Lakish said: Just as there is diversity of opinion about the carrying forth of the ashes (there are conflicting opinions as to whether a blemished priest can do this aspect of the Temple Service, with those who insist that he can, maintaining that carrying out the ashes is not actually part of the Service. By extension, if it is not part of the Service, then priestly clothing need not be worn when it is performed), so there is about clearing them off the altar...

What is the reason for Resh Lakish’s view? He will tell you: If it should enter your mind that this [the clearing of the ashes off the altar] is considered a [regular] service — then you would have a service legitimate in two (as opposed to the standard four) garments (VaYikra 6:3 states: “And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen breeches shall he put upon his flesh; and he shall take up the ashes wheroeto the fire hath consumed the burnt-offering on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar.” Shemot 28:40 additionally mentions: “And for Aharon’s sons thou shalt make tunics, and thou shalt make for them girdles, and head-tires shalt thou make for them, for splendor and for beauty.”) Resh Lakish takes VaYikra 6:3 literally and therefore concludes that only requiring two of the four priestly garments demonstrates that this is not an actual part of the Temple Service and therefore can be done by a Kohen who is wearing non-priestly garments.)
Accounting for the dispute between RaShI and RaMBaN regarding the priests changing their clothes in order to carry out the ash from the altar.

Eliyahu Mizrachi, a commentary on RaShI, responding to RaMBaN’s critique, suggests that RaShI may believe that a Mitzva whose basis is nothing other than Derech Eretz,12 as in the case of trying to assure that the actual Temple Service not be performed in soiled clothing, cannot be considered an “obligation” per se. Perhaps acting in accordance with the meta-principle13 of Derech Eretz is to be so taken for granted, that it would be superfluous to dedicate separate Commandments for that purpose alone! While a source in the Talmud implies that Derech Eretz is mandated by the Written Tradition:

Berachot 63a
Bar Kappara expounded: What short text is there upon which all the essential principles of the Tora depend? I would say “Derech Eretz”14 as it is said, (Mishlei 3:6) “In all ‘Derachecha’ (lit. thy ways; in whatever one does; all human pursuits) acknowledge Him and He will Straighten thy paths.”15

12 It appears that Mizrachi is placing himself squarely in the school that advocates for hypothesizing about the reasons for Mitzvot. If we would take a more fundamentalist approach, i.e., since the Tora Commands that the ashes be taken out in “other clothing”, that is as much of a Mitzva as anything else Commanded by the Tora, there would be no room to make distinctions between Commandments whose basis is Derech Eretz and those that are not thought to be so.
13 I believe that there are certain Mitzvot and Halachic concepts that are not only Commandments in their own rights, but also overarching frames of reference for an observant lifestyle in general. See my forthcoming What’s the Point? A Framework for Evaluating Mitzva Performance.
14 Encyclopedia Talmudit, fn. 7 points out that this version of the text wherein there is added the phrase “I would say ‘Derech Eretz’” is in accordance with Menorat HaMe’or, Pt. IV, Chapt. 20, p. 393.
15 Commentaries on Mishlei 3:6—

| Ibn Ezra: | In all of your activities and your wisdom, know Him... |
| Metzudat David: | In all of your affairs know God, i.e., concentrate upon thinking about doing your activities in order that something good will come of it which will fulfill the Word of HaShem. Then He will lead you on a straight path and you will be successful. |
| MaLBIM: | “Derachim” are large paths and “Orchot” are small ones that are extensions of the large ones. Since the ways of wisdom are many, without limit, because wisdom can spread to all of the details which are so many, and it is impossible for one to anticipate and know how to deal with all of the details that will come before one, in accordance with Tora and wisdom, the author states that you should know God in all of your ways, including the path of mercy, the path of generosity, and the path of humility, proceed upon them in accordance with God’s Command that all should be based upon what is written, (Devarim 28:9) “And you will walk in His Ways”: just as He is Compassionate, so you should be compassionate... (see Sota 14a). |
that does not necessarily mean that Commandments might be explicitly formulated to try to promote such attitudes and behaviors. RaMBaN, on the other hand, might assume the position that we cannot automatically expect that individuals will necessarily possess the sensitivity to perceive and carry out what is proper Derech Eretz and giving honor where it is due; therefore only via a Commandment can one assure proper deportment in particular contexts, especially in the Tabernacle/Temple. For example, based upon the clear implications of the principle of Derech Eretz, wouldn’t it be obvious that engaging in the Temple service while drunk is at the very least, deeply disrespectful, and yet the Tora has to state explicitly: (VaYikra 10:9 “’Drink no wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tent of meeting, that ye die not; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations.”) Should it therefore be surprising that actual Commandments are formulated to ensure and perhaps even serve as paradigms for the application of the principle of Derech Eretz within broader contexts of everyday life?

**Applying the issue of the priestly change of clothing to contemporary situations.**

But the Talmud does not focus exclusively on the Tabernacle/Temple with respect to the implications of VaYikra 6:4. In Nechama Leibowitz’ Gilayon for Parashat Tzav for 5718, entitled “The Change of Clothes”, a source is cited from the Talmud that cites VaYikra 6:4 as a proof text for modern-day Halachic practice:

Shabbat 113b-114a

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“And He will Straighten thy paths”—that by means of Divine Assistance, even your smaller, individual paths will be straight, like for example the details of someone’s generosity, to know how much to donate, to whom to donate, and when, and how, etc.

These commentaries do not seem to see the verse in Mishlei as promoting “Derech Eretz”, but rather incorporating considerations about God’s Will and Goals into the calculus determining what and why someone chooses to do or not do something. The Menorat HaMe’or’s version of the Talmudic text appears to assume that if one extrapolates the correct assumptions regarding activities that are not explicitly Mitzvot, God will be Pleased, and it is as if HaShem Commanded such actions Himself, in effect by the individual conducting himself in accordance with “Derech Eretz”, he has “created” quasi-Mitzvot. This would constitute an incredible manifestation of being Mekadesh Chol (sanctifying the non-Holy).

16 The Tora provides rationales in addition to a presumption of the requirements of Derech Eretz for Kohanim not being drunk within the Tabernacle/Temple precincts:

VaYikra 10:10-1

And that ye may put difference between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; and that ye may teach the children of Israel all the Statutes which the Lord hath Spoken unto them by the hand of Moshe.’

Nevertheless, in my opinion, if one posits that the Derech Eretz factor plays a role in these considerations, then I would have thought that an additional Commandment should be unnecessary.

17 [http://www.nechama.org.il/cgi-bin/pagePrintMode.pl?Id=551](http://www.nechama.org.il/cgi-bin/pagePrintMode.pl?Id=551)
R. Acha b. Abba said in R. Yochanan’s name: Whence do we learn change of garments in the Tora?

Beit Midrash of R. Perachia: 18
I.e., From where do we know that one should change his clothes for Shabbat and for prayer and any other matter that involves Divine Service?

Because it is said, “And he shall put off his garments, and put on other garments,” and the School of R. Yishmael taught: The Tora teaches you “Derech Eretz”: In the garments in which one cooked a dish for his master, one should not pour a cup [of wine] for his master.

An anecdotal description of the application of this principle specifically to prayer appears in another part of Shabbat:

Shabbat 10a
Because it is said, (Amos 4:12) “Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.” Raba son of R. Huna put on stockings and prayed, quoting, ‘Prepare to meet etc.’ 19

Thinking about the leap that particularly Shabbat 113b-114a makes from the Divine Service of the priests in the Tabernacle/Temple to our engaging in prayer today does not come entirely as a surprise. Particularly following the destruction of the Temple, many Rabbinic sources suggest that prayer was intended to take the place of sacrifices, and if the priests were

18 Rabbeinu Perachia b”r Nissim was an Egyptian scholar in the 13th century, and the brother-in-law of R. Avraham ben RaMBaM, studying together with him and other disciples of Maimonides. In his commentary to the Alfasi Code on Shabbat, he cites Maimonides’ commentary to that tractate, and elucidates Maimonides’ views of many Talmud passages. He also quotes many Gaonic sources.—Bar Ilan CD-ROM/Tools/Biographies.

19 Maimonides codifies such practices with respect to prayer, although he invokes a different proof text:

RaMBaM, Mishneh Tora, Hilchot Tefilla Perek 5 Halacha 5
Proper clothing: What is implied?
One should adjust his clothing and make himself neat and presentable before [praying], as [implied by Psalms 29:2]: “They bow to God in resplendent holiness.”
One should not pray wearing [only] his undershirt, bareheaded, or barefoot - if it is the custom of the people of that place to stand before their most respected people with shoes...
It is customary for all Sages and their students to pray only when wrapped in a tallit.
required to wear special garments in order to carry out the Temple service, a similar expectation would be imposed upon us today. Apparently, a human being is incapable of only concentrating upon holy things with his mind; he requires external props, such as clothing, atmospheric setting, a Makom Kavua (fixed sightlines and seat), etc. to help him concentrate. But the analogy to the change of clothing for priests taking out the ashes from atop the altar appears to go one step further. When we are engaged in non-holy activities, which is for most of us the majority of the time, and we now wish to enter a new modality such as prayer or Shabbat observance, we have to deliberately and consciously indicate to ourselves that we are separating from our previous context and entering a new one, in effect the reverse of what the priests did in the Tabernacle/Temple vis-à-vis the ashes. It is as if our ordinary existences are figuratively “soiled” compared to when we explicitly stand before God or celebrate His Holy Rest, and we must literally separate ourselves, via a change in clothing, in order to even have a chance to properly engage in prayer or Shabbat observance. How specific and all-encompassing such changes must be would seem to remain somewhat subjective. Clearly wearing soiled or immodest garments would not be appropriate. Most people have special clothing for Shabbat that they do not wear the rest of the week. With regard to prayer, men during Shacharit, when they put on Tallit and Tefillin, don overt reminders that they are engaged in a holy activity. However, for the other daily prayers, or prayers like Birkat HaMazon, not everyone follows the practice to dress differently in order to remind themselves about what they are doing and hopefully thereby increase their focus and engagement. Perhaps the change of priestly clothing discussed in Parashat Tzav should inspire us to incorporate such practices into our lifestyles, in order to not only channel the Kohanim in the Beit HaMikdash, but also improve our Mitzva observance.