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*"For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."
Isaiah 56:7*

THE TEMPLE INSTITUTE

THE PRIESTLY GARMENTS

"And draw near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister to me in the priest's office; Aaron, Nadav, and Avihu, Elazar, and Itamar, the sons of Aaron. And you shall make sacred garments for Aaron your brother, for honor and for beauty. And you shall speak to all who are wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister to me in the priest's office. And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastplate, and an ephod, and a robe, and a quilted undercoat, a mitre, and a girdle; and they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, and his sons, that he may minister to me in the priest's office ... "(Ex. 28:1-4)

Moses was instructed by G-d that the garments of the priests were to be both dignified and beautiful; as precious as the garments of royalty. Indeed, the Talmud informs us that when the wicked Persian king Ahasuerus made a feast for his advisors and officers and sought to impress them with his greatness (as recorded in the scroll of Esther, which tells the story of Purim) he put off his own royal vestments and donned the uniform of the High Priest... which was more precious than his own. These priestly garments were in his possession since the First Temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians.

Understanding Life in the Holy Temple

It is noteworthy and revealing that one of the finest ways to gain insight into both the details of life in the Holy Temple, and to its inner spirit, is by a study of the priestly garments.

We shall see that these garments are essential in order for the priests to function in their sacred capacity; so much so that in their absence, the offerings made by the priests in the Temple have no validity! Without his uniform, the priest who serves in the Holy Temple is considered like a "stranger" serving before the L-rd - like an ordinary non-priest. What, then, is the basis for the garments' powerful significance?

The Garments Possess An Intrinsic Holiness

No priest, neither lay nor the High Priest himself, is fit to serve in the Temple unless he is wearing the sacred garments. As the Talmud states, "While they are clothed in the priestly garments, they are clothed in the priesthood; but when they are not wearing the garments, the priesthood is not upon them" (*BT Zevachim 17:B*). Conducting the service without these garments would render the priests the same as those who are not descendants of Aaron - all of whom are unfit for service

in the Temple.

Why does the Bible attach so much significance to the garments? Because their quality is such that they elevate the wearers - Aaron and all his descendants - to the high levels of sanctity required from those who come to serve before G-d in the holy place. These garments themselves possess a certain holiness; powerful enough to sanctify all those who merely come in contact with them, as we read in the prophets: "... so as not to hallow the people with their garments" (*Ezekiel 44:19*).

Actually, the Hebrew expression which we are translating as "sacred" or "holy" garments also means "garments of the Temple;" that is, the garments themselves show that their wearers are standing in the Divine service.

The Garments Atone for Sins

Another important quality of the priestly garments is that their very presence, worn by the priests during the Temple service, serves to atone for the sins of Israel. It is taught that just as the sacrifices facilitate an atonement for sin, so do the priestly garments (*BT Zevachim 88:B*).

This is one of the deeper aims of wearing these garments, and something for the priest to ponder while they are upon him. For his everyday actions in the Temple transcend his own personal idiom and take on a more universal theme... he makes atonement and spiritual rectification for all humanity.

Thus we are taught (*ibid.*):

1. The tunic, which covers most of the priest's body, atones for killing.
2. The pants atone for sexual transgressions.
3. The turban, worn on the head, atone for haughtiness.
4. The belt, wound about the body and worn over the heart, atones for "sins of the heart" - improper thoughts.
5. The breastplate atones for errors in judgment.
6. The ephod atones for idolatry.
7. The robe atones for evil speech.
8. The High Priest's crown atones for arrogance.

"For honor and for beauty"

The rabbis established that G-d's command for the priestly garments to be "for honor and for beauty" teach us that they must be new and dignified. If the garments were soiled, stained, or ripped, the priests may not conduct the service while wearing them - and if they did, the service would be invalid.

Another aspect of "honor and beauty" means that the uniform must fit each fit perfectly. It was forbidden for the pants, for example, to be too long or too short. The garments were made to order for each priest, tailored to fit his measurements exactly.

This tells us something of the tremendous work force needed to turn out these garments in such quantities that every priest in Israel could be supplied with his own garments. As we shall learn with regard to the incense offering, there were so many priests available for duty in the Holy Temple that no priest ever offered the daily incense service more than once in his lifetime, and it was offered twice daily for many hundreds of years! Yet each had his own garments.

The Garments Were Not Washed

Furthermore, although the priests were extremely neat, just as they were diligent and careful - still, they were working with the sacrifices. Any garment which became soiled to the extent that its stains could not be removed, those garments were not washed. When they became disqualified from use in this manner, they were shredded and used to fulfill another of the Creator's commandments! The tunics were used to make wicks for the menorah, and the belts and pants, wicks for the oil lamps of the Festival of the Water Libation which took place in the Women's Court during the Festival of Sukkot. This applies only to the garments of the ordinary priests, of which there were a great many. When the High Priest's uniform became unusable through wear and tear, it was not destroyed, but hidden away so that no other man could ever wear it.

The Production of the Garments

"And you shall speak to all who are wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister to me in the priest's office" (*Ex 28:3*)

Aside from the fact that the priestly garments must be made "for honor and for beauty," the above verse also instructs us that they must be made with wisdom and understanding... for they must be produced in exact accordance with all the nuances of the Biblical requirements.

Furthermore, they must be made with a special intention in mind - namely, that they are being created for the sake of fulfilling G-d's commandment.

The priestly garments are not sewn, like other clothes. Each item is woven, seamless, of one piece. The only exception to this is the sleeves of the robe, which are woven separately and sewn onto the robe afterwards.

The Three Categories of Priestly Garments

There are three separate categories of priestly garments:

1. The High Priest's uniform, which he wears all year round. These consist of eight garments, called the "golden garments."
2. The clothing worn by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. These are four garments called the "white garments."
3. The uniform of the ordinary priests, consisting of four garments.

The Golden Garments

The eight garments worn by the High Priest all year round are as follows:

The ephod, breastplate, robe, tunic, turban, belt, crown, and pants.

These are the garments described in these verses: "And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastplate, an ephod, a robe and a tunic of checkered pattern, a turban and a belt. And they shall make the sacred garments for your brother Aaron and his sons, to serve me" (*Ex. 28:4*).

"And you shall make a crown of pure gold" (*ibid. 36*). "And make for them linen pants" (*ibid. 42*).

The White Garments

With regard to the High Priest's service on the Day of Atonement the Bible states: "He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and he shall have the linen pants upon his flesh, and he shall be girded with a linen belt, and with the linen turban he shall be attired" (*Lev. 16:4*).

The four garments worn by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement are the tunic, pants, the turban and the belt. These garments are made from white flax; hence their designation "the white garments." They must be woven, as mentioned above, and each thread used must be six-ply - woven from six individual strands of fabric.

The High Priest had two tunics which he wore on the Day of Atonement. One-he wore in the morning, and the other at the evening.

After the conclusion of the Day of Atonement, he will never again wear the white garments in which he officiated on this day. They are hidden in the place where he removes them, as the verse indicates "And Aaron shall come into the Tent of Meeting, and he shall take off the linen garments, which he put on when he went into the holy place, and he shall leave

them there" (ibid. v. 23)

The Uniform of the Ordinary Priests

The ordinary priests wear four garments all year round-these are the same as the "white garments" worn by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement: tunic, pants, hat, and belt. Referring to these priests, the verse states "And for Aaron's sons you shall make for them tunics, and you shall make for them belts, and you shall make for them hats... and make for them linen pants..." (Ex. 28:40-42). These garments are to be made from flax, and they too must be created from threads consisting of six individual strands.

The Materials

Five Components in the Garments

Five different materials were used to create the priestly garments:

1. gold
2. techelet, sky-blue wool
3. dark-red wool
4. crimson wool
5. twisted linen

The gold was beaten into thin sheets, and then cut into fine threads. The techelet sky-blue color (said by the Talmud to resemble indigo - BT Menachot 42:B) was a dye obtained from an aquatic invertebrate known as chilazon. The exact identification of this animal, and the method used to produce the dye, is the subject of extensive research. While various attempts have been made to conclusively identify the chilazon, most recently it has been classified to the Mediterranean snail known as murex trunculus.

The dark-red color (said by some to more closely resemble purple), argaman in Hebrew, is also derived from a snail; possibly the murex trunculus as well. According to this theory, the difference in color is a product of the amount of time the substance is initially exposed to sunlight.

The crimson color is produced from a worm called by the Bible the "crimson worm," tola'at shani in Hebrew, a mountain worm which has been identified as kermes biblicus, the cochineal insect.

The Hebrew word which appears here for "linen" is shesh, which literally means "six." This indicates that each thread

used in these garments is required to be a six-ply linen thread.

Some of the garments were composed of all five ingredients; some contained three or four; some contained only one.

The Ephod and Breastplate

The ephod and breastplate were made of all five materials. Thus the Bible states regarding each, "And they shall make the ephod of gold, sky-blue, dark-red and crimson dyed wool, and twisted linen" and "And you shall make the breastplate of judgment, the work of an artist; after the manner of the ephod shall you make it: of gold, sky-blue, dark-red, and crimson dyed wool, and of twisted linen shall you make it" (*Ex. 28:6, 15*).

The belt: Three Different Types

Three different belts were worn by the priests in the Holy Temple:

1. The High Priest's year-round belt, part of the "golden garments." This was embroidered of sky-blue, dark-red and crimson dyed wools, and twisted linen: "And a belt of fine twisted linen, and sky-blue, dark-red and crimson dyed wools, the work of an embroiderer" (*Ex. 39:29*).
2. The belt worn by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement; one of the "white garments." This was made only of six-ply linen, as the verse states "and he shall be girded with a linen belt" (*Lev. 16:4*).
3. The belt of the Ordinary Priests: Regarding this item, there are two opinions among the scholars. Some maintain that it was the same as the belt belonging to the set of "golden garments," and thus consisting of four materials; others opine that it belongs to the "white garments" category and was made of linen alone.

The Pomegranates

The robe was decorated with pomegranates that were made from three materials: sky-blue, dark-red and crimson dyed wools. "On the bottom of the robe, you shall make pomegranates of sky-blue, dark-red and crimson dyed wool" (*Ex. 28:33*).

The Bells and The Crown

The bottom of the robe was also decorated with bells. These bells, and the High Priest's crown, were both made of pure gold exclusively: "A golden bell and (alternatively) a pomegranate... on the bottom of his robe, all around" and "and you

shall make a crown of pure gold" (Ex. 28:34,36).

The Robe

The robe was made exclusively of sky-blue dyed wool: "And you shall make the robe of the ephod completely of sky-blue wool" (*ibid.*, 31) Its threads were 12 ply.

A Closer Look at the Sacred Garment

The "Golden Garments"

I. The Ephod

The most important garment worn by the High Priest is the ephod. Its appearance can be likened to an apron; it was worn in back, on top of his other garments, and was fastened by a long belt in the front, opposite his heart. This belt was woven into the entire length of the ephod's upper hem. There were also had two shoulder-straps that were sewn onto the belt. These straps went behind, up and slightly over the upper corners of the garment, over the priest's shoulders. The settings for the two sardonyx stones were attached at the ends of these straps, on the shoulders.

The ephod covered the back of his body. Some opinions describe it as a sort of half-cape; others, more like a skirt. It was long - it extended from just below his elbows, all the way to his heels. It was slightly wider than a man's back, since it was to cover his back and extend a little towards the front on both sides as well, covering a portion of his belly from either side.

The Two Sardonyx Stones

Two sardonyx stones were fixed in settings of gold on the High Priest's shoulders; one on the right, and one on the left. The names of the tribes of Israel were engraved upon these two stones, according to the instructions of the verse: "And you shall take two sardonyx stones, and engrave upon them the names of the children of Israel; there shall be six names on one stone, and six names on the second stone in the order of their birth" (Ex. 28:9-10).

"Remembrance Stones"

The Bible calls these two stones "remembrance stones," as it is written, "And you shall place the two stones on the two shoulder pieces of the ephod as remembrance stones for the children of Israel. And Aaron shall carry their names before G-d on his two shoulders as a remembrance" (*Ibid.* v. 12).

The sages explain the meaning of this expression: when the High Priest entered into the holy place dressed in the ephod, the Holy One saw all the tribes of Israel inscribed before Him and He was moved to have mercy on His people.

Another two square gold settings were fixed on the High Priest's shoulders, directly under the sardonyx stones. Golden chains extended from these settings to the golden hooks in the rings of the breastplate, in order to fix the breastplate to

the ephod.

II. The High Priest's Breastplate

"And you shall make the breastplate of judgment, the work of an artist; after the manner of the ephod shall you make it: of gold, sky-blue, dark-red, and crimson dyed wool, and of twisted linen shall you make it" (*Ex. 28:6, 15*).

This garment is called choshen mishpat in Hebrew, which means the "breastplate of judgment" or "decision." Square-shaped and worn over the heart, it was called so because of the unique role which it played in helping to render fateful decisions.

According to the Biblical instructions and rabbinical traditions, the breastplate is a patterned brocade like the ephod. The threads of its fabric are gold, sky-blue, dark red and crimson wool, and twisted linen. The garment itself is set with four rows of small square stones, in settings of knitted or braided gold. Each row contained three stones-totaling twelve stones, one stone representing each of the twelve tribes of Israel. The name of the corresponding tribe was engraved on each stone.

The Stones

"And you shall set it with four rows of mounted stones; the first row: a ruby, an emerald, and a topaz. The second row: a carbuncle, a sapphire, and a quartz crystal. The third row: a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst. The fourth row: a chrysolite, an onyx, and an opal. These stones shall be placed in gold settings. The stones shall contain the names of the twelve children of Israel, one for each of the twelve stones; each one's name shall be engraved as on a signet ring, to represent the twelve tribes" (*Ex. 28: 17-21*).

Names that Defy Translation

Although we have provided a translation for these twelve stones as listed above, it is by no means definitive. We simply prefer to use these names, when faced with the alternative... that is, to present the original Hebrew names transliterated but untranslated. Our listing is rather more like a synopsis, or a sampling, representing different schools of thought. The exact, conclusive identification of these stones is actually one of the most difficult and elusive of all Temple-related studies. This is because the original Hebrew names of these stones as they appear here in the Bible are extremely obscure. They are not commonly used, and no description of the stones appears anywhere in the verses themselves. In the course of many years, as nations flourished and fell, and civilizations migrated to new lands, languages evolved and the meanings of words changed. Thus in one location, a word may have one meaning and connote a particular concept, while in another land, the same word may carry the exact opposite meaning.

Over 30 Different Opinions

Faced with this sort of situation, it becomes necessary to engage in what can be called "linguistic sleuthing" in an effort to arrive at a working conclusion. The names of these stones is particularly enigmatic: there are over 30 varying opinions as to the final identification of the 12 stones. These opinions include scholars and commentators from the entire historical spectrum of rabbinical literature and tradition, beginning with the most ancient-and therefore, in this case the most reliable opinions-those of the Aramaic translations of the Bible. And as is usual when it comes to eye-witness testimony, the information provided by Flavius Josephus is of interest and importance, since he himself was a priest who served in the Holy Temple.

In addition to the translational difficulties in this study, there are also other factors which should be taken into consideration in order to arrive at a realistic decision as to the true nature of these gems. These factors include various geological and gemological conditions and criteria, such as the respective degree of hardness and brightness of any candidate stone (since the stones are described by the sages as being both exceedingly bright, and strong as well - in order to withstand the engraving), and the regions on the earth where they can be found.

The Colors Correspond to the Tribes' Banners

In reality, the only fact which is known with absolute certainty is the color of each stone. Although absent from the Biblical passages, this is recorded by the Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah 2:7*), where it is stated that each tribe's stone on the breastplate matched the background color of its flag (the tribes of Israel camped and journeyed according to their ensigns during the years of their desert travels).

Thus even if some doubt exists with regard to the scientific classification of the gems themselves, we can still be certain as to their appearance based on the Midrashic description of their colors (again, arbitrarily using the 12 "most representative" names we have chosen for the purpose of listing them):

1. Ruby - Reuben - Red
2. Jade - Shimon - Green
3. Agate - Levi - Red, White, and Black Striped
4. Carbuncle - Judah - Bluish-Green
5. Lapis-Lazuli - Issachar - Blue
6. Quartz Crystal - Zebulun - Clear

7. Turquoise - Dan - Blue
8. Amethyst - Naftali - Purple
9. Agate - Gad - Grey
10. Aquamarine - Asher - Blue-Green
11. Onyx - Joseph - Black
12. Opal - Benjamin - A Stone Possessing All the Colors

Exhaustive Research Concluded by the Temple Institute

It will be of great interest to the reader to learn that over the course of nearly a decade, scholars at the Temple Institute of Jerusalem have conducted intensive research into the identity of the breastplate's stones, in an effort to reach a working conclusion that will allow the Institute's artisans and craftsmen to actually construct a kosher breastplate, which will fulfill the Biblical requirements for the stones-and thus be able to be worn by the next High Priest.

"The Engraving of a Signet Ring"

"The stones shall contain the names of the twelve children of Israel, one for each of the twelve stones; each one's name shall be engraved as on a signet ring, to represent the twelve tribes" (*Ex. 28: 21*).

What process is this engraving, similar to that which appears on a signet ring?

In a Talmudic analysis (*BT Sotah 48:B*), the sages taught that because of these instructions, the words were not written with any sort of ink. Nor were they carved out or chiseled with any metal tool - for the verse (*ibid. v. 20*) specifically indicates that the stones must be set into their golden settings while yet "in their fullness;" in order to carve or to scratch out from the surface, some of the stone itself would inevitably be missing.

Rather, a most unique method was utilized to carve the names into the stones of the breastplate. It was accomplished naturally, by one of G-d's creations. A worm called the shamir existed that could cut stones merely with its glance.

According to the rabbis, this creature was brought into existence during the original six days of creation, but ceased to exist following the destruction of the First Temple.

It is taught that Moses himself used the shamir for the stones of the original ephod and breastplate while yet in the desert, for the Tabernacle.

"Initially, the words are written on the stones in ink. Then the stones are simply exposed to the shamir, and the letters are cut into the stones automatically, of their own accord... like a fig which ripens and splits open in summer; it splits open but

yet no part of it is missing. And a valley splits open during the rainy season, but it too lacks nothing" (*BT Sotah 48:B*) - thus the stones remained "in their fullness."

How Were the Tribes Arranged on the Breastplate?

Above, regarding the two sardonyx stones that were placed on the High Priest's shoulders, we have quoted the verse "And you shall take two sardonyx stones, and engrave upon them the names of the children of Israel; there shall be six names on one stone, and six names on the second stone in the order of their birth" (*Ex. 28:9-10*).

When it came to those two stones, this verse clearly indicated that the names of the tribes should be engraved upon them in the order of their birth.

But in the context of the stones of the breastplate, scripture gives no such indication. Therefore, there is some controversy as to the order in which these names appeared.

In the opinion of Yonatan ben Uziel, author of an Aramaic translation/commentary on the Bible, the children of Israel's names were inscribed on the breastplate's stones in the order of their birth, and were therefore arranged in the following manner:

- Reuben Simeon Levi
- Judah Dan Naftali
- Gad Asher Issachar
- Zebulun Joseph Benjamin

Another Aramaic translation, the "Targum Yerushalmi," places the order of the tribes according to the Matriarchs; the six sons of Leah, two sons of Bilhah, two sons of Zilpah and two sons of Rachel. Thusly:

- Reuben Simeon Levi
- Judah Issachar Zebulun
- Dan Naftali Gad
- Asher Joseph Benjamin

When the reader tries to visualize the breastplate based on this information, he should bear in mind that in both cases, the order which meets the eye is actually reversed-since Hebrew reads from right to left.

It should be noted that both of these commentaries (which date back to the time of the Temple) are held in the highest regard as sources of both wisdom and authoritative knowledge. For the sake of brevity we have only presented these two opinions, but there are more schools of thought among the great sages: some hold that the names appeared in downward columns, rather than in rows across; some hold that the names of the tribes appeared on the breastplate in the same order in which they camped in the desert.

There is also a tradition which Moses received at the Sinai revelation, that all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet should be present on the stones. Since all of these letters are not found in the names of Jacob's progeny, several other words were also engraved upon the stones: the names of the patriarchs, Abraham Isaac and Jacob, and the words "the tribes of Jeshurun." One opinion is that the words Abraham, Isaac and Jacob appeared at the top of the first stone, over the name Reuben, and the other words on the last stone. Others maintain that all these extra letters were divided among the stones.

"A Remembrance"

Like the two sardonyx shoulder stones, the Bible states that the purpose of the twelve stones is "to be a perpetual remembrance before the Lord" (Ex. 28:29). When the High Priest bore the breastplate into the holy place, Israel was remembered for peace. The sages taught that the ephod served to invoke the cause of Israel's sustenance and material welfare, and the breastplate - her salvation, and deliverance from her enemies.

The "Urim V'Tummim"

"And you shall place the Urim V'tummim in the breastplate of judgment, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he comes before G-d" (*ibid.* v. 30).

The "Urim V'Tummim" is the Name of G-d

The Urim V'Tummim was the famed, oracle-like aspect of the breastplate by which a Heavenly answer was received for important questions. According to most authoritative opinions, the expression urim v'tummim actually refers not to the breastplate itself, but to the mystical Divine name of G-d which was written on a piece of parchment and inserted into a flap of the garment. The presence of the name facilitated the reception of Divine guidance through the shining of specific letters on the stones.

The Identity of G-d is the Source of Creation

What does this mean? What are the implications of this fact, the knowledge that it is the name of G-d itself which brought about the illumination of the urim v'tummim? This is indeed a lofty concept, but one whose lesson can be readily appreciated, at least on a simple level of understanding.

G-d is the Creator of all existence; His power is unlimited. He has no form whatsoever, neither has He beginning or end... He is the Supreme Being. He is perfect and absolute unity. And He is also totally unknowable.

Yet in numerous passages throughout the Bible, we are commanded to "know" G-d. "In all of your ways, know Him" (*Proverbs 3:6*); "And I shall betroth you in faith, and you shall know the L-rd" (*Hosea 2:22*) are but two examples of many such instances.

Truly, how can we come to know G-d, who is omnipotent and infinite? Yet we are commanded - and therefore expected-to do just that. And there is a general rule with regard to the Torah's commandments: the Holy One never makes unfair demands on a person (*BT Avodah Zara 3:A*).

Knowledge of G-d Through His Names

The sages of Israel teach that one way to know G-d is through awareness of His relationship to the universe which He created. Although it is taught that "no thought can grasp Him at all" (*Tikkunei Zohar 17:A*), and ultimately G-d's essence is not only unknowable, but unnamable as well-still, G-d's names describe His relationship with creation (*Shemot Rabbah 3:6*). Through these attributes of Divine interaction, we can at least attempt some glimpse of His greatness, according to our limited intellect. There are a number of names used throughout the Bible; one denotes the attribute of Divine mercy; another the aspect of strict judgment, and so on.

These Divine names of G-d are merely appellations which He has entitled us to use; they are not His true identity, which is beyond the reach of human knowledge. But it was through these names that G-d created heaven and earth, and it is by way of His names that He continues to direct every minute aspect of existence. Thus it is obvious that G-d's names, through which He summoned forth all creation from nothing at all, have great power. This power is the secret behind the prophetic revelation of the urim v'tummim.

From the Time of Moses

The urim v'tummim is unlike any other aspect of the priestly garments, for it was not created by those skilled artisans who fashioned the other items, aided by their understanding and inspiration; and it was not created from the donations or contributions of Israel, as were all the other appointments of the Temple. The entire matter is one of those mysteries which was handed down to Moses at Mount Sinai by G-d Himself, and its secret was transmitted orally down through the generations.

At the time of the original Tabernacle erected in the desert, Moses took the original urim v'tummim, written in sublime holiness, and placed it inside the breastplate of judgment, after Aaron donned the ephod. This is reflected by the verse

(Lev. 8:7), "... and he put the ephod upon him, and he fastened him with the belt of the ephod... and he put the breastplate upon him, and into the breastplate he put the urim v'tummim."

Only Questions of Congregational Importance

The process of questioning for Divine aid with the 'Urim V'Tummim' was done in the following manner: When a question arose whose implications were so consequential that the entire congregation of Israel would be effected-such as, for example, the question of whether or not to go out to war - then, the King of Israel (or the commanding officer of the army) would ask his question before the High Priest. An ordinary person, or someone not representing the entire community would not ask of the urim v'tummim.

The High Priest stands facing the Ark of the Testimony, and the questioner stands behind him, facing the priest's back. The questioner does not speak out loud, neither does he merely think the question in his heart; he poses his query quietly, to himself - like someone who prays quietly before his Creator. For example, he will ask "Shall I go out to battle, or shall I not go out?"

A Meditative Experience and a Prophetic Revelation

The High Priest is immediately enveloped by the spirit of Divine inspiration. He gazes at the breastplate, and by meditating upon the holy names of G-d, the priest was able to receive the answer through a prophetic vision-the letters on the stones of the breastplate, which would shine forth in his eyes in a special manner, spelling out the answer to the question. The priest then informs the questioner of the answer.

Flavius Josephus writes (*Antiquities* 3:8:9) that the stones also shone brilliantly when Israel went forth into battle. This was considered as an auspicious sign for their victory.

Another midrashic passage indicates that when the tribes of Israel found favor in G-d's eyes, each respective stone shone brilliantly. But when particular members of any one tribe were involved in a transgression, that tribe's stone would appear tarnished and dimmed. The High Priest would see this phenomena and understand its cause. He would then cast lots within the rank of this tribe, until the guilty person was revealed and judged (Midrash HaGadol).

What is the meaning of the words "urim v'tummim?"

According to the commentary of the famed Rashi, these words are derived from their Hebrew roots for "lights" and "perfections," since through the urim v'tummim, the question is illuminated through the letters and its subject matter is then perfected by the High Priest. The Talmud (*BT Yoma 73:B*) also indicates that the message which was received was called tummim, "perfect," because it was immutable.

III. The Robe

According to the opinion of most scholars, the robe was a closed garment, seamlessly woven from one piece of fabric, and slipped on over the head. It was worn over the tunic; the tunic was longer than the robe by one handbreadth, so it was visible underneath the robe at the bottom. The opening at the neck was round, with a hem that was doubled over and closed by weaving-not by a needle. The garment hung down in front and in back, and its length extended all the way down to the priest's feet. There is a difference of opinion as to whether there were sleeves.

As mentioned above, the robe was fashioned exclusively from techelet, the sky-blue dyed wool, with no other material. The Talmud (*BT Yoma 71*) records that its threads were 12-ply.

Pomegranates and Bells

Decorative pomegranates made of sky-blue, dark-red and crimson dyed wool were attached to the lower hem of the robe (each thread of each of these materials being woven from 8 individual strands). The verse tells us that these pomegranates appeared together with golden bells: "A golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, on the hem of the robe all around" (*Ex. 28:34*). Some opinions interpret this to mean that the bells and pomegranates were interspersed alternatively, in between each other; another holds that the bells were placed inside the pomegranates. The hem of the robe was woven over doubly in order to prevent it from ripping due to the weight of the pomegranates and bells. Again, no sewing was used for this: "And there shall be a hole for the head, in the midst of it; it shall have a binding of woven work round about the hole, like the opening of a suit of armor, that it not be torn" (*ibid. v. 32*)

These pomegranates were actually hollow spheres of fabric in the shape of pomegranates. We find a debate in the Talmud and other holy books as to whether there were 36, 70, or 72 pomegranates in all.

"And it shall be on Aaron when he comes to serve, and its sound shall be heard when he comes to the holy place before the L-rd, and when he goes out, so that he does not die" (*ibid. v. 35*).

IV. The Crown

"And you shall make a crown of pure gold, and engrave on it in the manner of a signet ring: ÔHoly to the L-rd' " (*Ex. 28: 36*).

The crown was a thin plate constructed of one piece of pure, solid gold. Unlike the crown worn by royalty on top of the head, this is worn across the forehead and extends from ear to ear. It was thin enough to arch across the forehead like a bow. Its width is described by Maimonides as 2 fingerbreadths, or app. 1 1/2 inches.

"Holy to the L-rd"

This crown was engraved with the words "Holy to the L-rd." At times, these words were written across two lines, and at times they were fit into one line. The Talmud (*BT Sukkah 5*) provides the eye-witness testimony of Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Yose who saw the crown in Rome (both the Talmud and Josephus inform us that after the destruction of the Second Temple, many of the sacred vessels were plundered and taken to Rome, where they were publicly displayed for many years): "Rabbi Eliezer said: I saw the crown in Rome, and the words "Holy to the L-rd" were written in one line." It was worn at all times while the High Priest was within the Temple, as the Bible states: "And it shall be worn on Aaron's forehead, that he shall carry the iniquity of the holy things (specifically, this is a reference to ritual impurity), which the children of Israel shall sanctify in all their holy gifts; and it shall always be upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the L-rd."

How Were the Letters Engraved?

The Talmud (*BT Gittin 20*) describes the process by which the letters were fashioned on the crown. They were raised, not sunken- "like a golden dinar." This was accomplished by digging out the letters from the opposite side until they were raised up. Maimonides (*Laws of Temple Vessels, Ch. 9*) writes that "they would pound out the letters in a form until their shapes were formed on the other side."

How Was the Crown Fastened?

The crown had three small holes: two on each end, and one in the center, along the upper edge. Through these holes, threads dyed with sky-blue color were run, and the ends of these threads were connected in the back of the priest's head. In this manner the crown, itself a thin plate, was kept tied and in place on the High Priest's forehead.

The Turban and the Crown

The turban was placed on the priest's head in such a way that a space was left between it and crown upon his forehead. This space enabled the High Priest to wear the tefillin, the phylacteries of the head (*see Deut. 6:8*). In the words of the Talmud (*BT Zevachim 19*) "The High Priest's hair was visible between the crown and the turban, and there he placed his tefillin."

The middle sky-blue thread was extended over the turban, where it was tied to the other strands at the back of his head. So it is written, " ... and the string shall be upon the turban" (*Ex. 28:36*).

V. The Tunic

"And they made the tunics for Aaron and his sons by weaving them of fine linen" (*Ex. 39:27*).

The tunic clung close to the body and extended from the priest's neck, down to the feet, just above the heels (each tunic

was made according to the priest's specific height and width). As it was one piece, it was donned by placing it over the head.

"Fine Weaving"

The expression used by the Bible to describe the method for producing these garments is translated as an act of "fine weaving." The tunics of both the High Priest and the ordinary priests were woven completely from linen fabric, each thread of which was made of six strands. There was absolutely no sewing or seams involved here with the exception of the arm-length sleeves, which by necessity were woven separately and afterwards sewn on.

"A Checkered Knit Pattern"

The Bible's instructions are for a "tunic of a checkered knit pattern" (*ibid.* 28:4,39). This indicates that the tunic was not woven with an ordinary cross-weave pattern, but of a pattern consisting of many small boxes, or cells. These cells were similar to the settings made for precious stones; some authorities maintain that it was a diamond-shaped pattern. Maimonides states that its overall appearance was like a honeycomb pattern.

VI. The Turban and the Hat

"And you shall make a linen turban... and for the sons of Aaron... and make for them hats" (*ibid.* v. 39-40).

The High Priest's Turban

The High Priest's turban was fashioned of a narrow strip of white linen, measuring 16 cubits (app. 24 feet long). It was wound around the top of the priest's head after the manner in which one dresses a wound, wrapping the material lengthwise over and over, similar to the traditional kafiyeh Arabic headdress.

Flavius Josephus (*Antiquities*, 3:7:3) maintains that a cap of sky-blue wool was placed over the High Priest's white linen turban. Over this cap, he continues, three horizontal gold bands were placed, topped off with a flower-shaped decoration. Thus the turban appeared like a crown, with an opening in front to allow for the placement of the tefillin and "crown"-the gold plate on his forehead.

The Hat of the Ordinary Priests

Many authorities hold that the ordinary priests' hat was exactly the same as that of the High Priest, except that the former's was wound on, and the latter's is simply placed on. Others maintain that the High Priest's is correctly called a turban because of its shape, whereas the hat of the ordinary priests was also wound around, but it had a conical shape upon the head.

VII. The Belt

The belt of white linen was only "3 fingerbreadths" (2 1/4 inches) wide, records both the Talmud and Maimonides. But it was made from an exceedingly long piece of fabric-its Biblical measurement, writes Maimonides, is 32 cubits... app. 48 feet!

The "Measurement" of the Heart

Earlier we learned that the belt "atoned for sins of the heart" and was worn over the heart. This is seen even in the detail of its measurement, 32 cubits: For 32 is the gammadria (the numerical equivalent; from the Greek gamma, the third letter of the Greek alphabet, equals tria, number 3) of the Hebrew word lev, meaning heart. The length of the belt itself serves as a reminder to the priest, as he officiates in the hallowed courts of the Lord, of the purity which his office requires, and of the unsullied intentions he must have as he goes about his duties.

A "Double" Embroidered Design

Josephus describes the belt as being hollow like the skin shed by a snake (*Antiquities 3:7:2*). It was a work of "embroidery;" when used in this context of Temple furnishings, the Bible uses this term to indicate that the same design was featured on both sides of the material. Although the belt itself was made of linen, the embroidery-a floral design-was done of colored wool threads (the three colors which we have mentioned), and attached to the white linen background. This combination of wool and linen together in garments is normally forbidden (*see Lev. 19:19*), but it was permitted for the priestly garments.

The High Priest and the Ordinary Priests: Was the Belt the Same?

The above certainly applies to the belt of the High Priest. But there is a controversy between the scholars as to the appearance of the ordinary priests' belts. Some authorities, such as Josephus (*ibid.*) hold that were the same as the High Priest's; other opinions (*such as the Talmud - BT Yoma 12:B*) maintain that the ordinary priests' belts were plain white linen.

One reason for this variance of opinions: The Talmud points out that since other items (e.g., the ephod and the breastplate) of the High Priest's outfit also contained this mixture of wool and linen, then it follows that the belt may also contain it. But since the ordinary priest's garments are all made of plain linen, his belt was also of unembroidered linen. This controversy has an immediate and important consequence: it teaches us that on the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest wore only the "white garments" of plain linen, so too his belt was of plain linen. In any event, there are also other opinions which hold that the ordinary priests' belts were also embroidered with the colored woolen threads.

The belt was wrapped many times around the body at the hips, but close to the heart. Its purpose was to separate

between the upper and lower portions of the body; Jewish religious law obligates this separation during prayer or the mentioning of anything holy. Josephus states (*Antiquities* 3:7:2) that when worn, the two ends of the belt hung in front, down to the priest's ankles. However during the actual service the priest would cast these two ends over his left shoulder, to prevent them from interfering with his work.

VIII. The Pants

"And make for them linen pants to cover their nakedness; they shall reach from the loins to the thighs" (*Ex. 28:42*)

The Pants Are Required For Modesty Alone

This verse indicates that the priest's pants do not serve the same purpose as the other sacred garments. For all the other items which make up their uniform are "for honor and for beauty"-they glorify the sacred office and bespeak dignity, not to mention their deeper significance, such as the power to atone, etc. But this does not apply to the pants; we are specifically informed here that their function was one of modesty alone, to cover his nakedness.

Made Without Openings

"We were taught: To what can the priests' pants be likened? To the knee breeches (riding pants) worn by horsemen; wide from the hips to the thighs, tied with a lace, and without an opening-neither in back nor in front" (*BT Niddah 13:b*).

These pants were closed; they did not have the usual openings which we are accustomed to. They extended from the waist until the knees, and were worn directly over the body. The tunic was placed over them. According to most authorities, the upper hem was hollow and had a lace running through it, which was tied at the waist. Josephus, however, maintains that these laces were around the knees, and the pants were fastened there (*Antiquities, 3:7:1*).

Donning the Priestly Garments

A Special Chamber of Wardrobes

"There were seven gates in the courtyard: three in the north, three in the south, and one in the east... the one in the east is the Nikanor Gate, and within it were two chambers, one on the right side and one on the left. One was the chamber of Phineas the Wardrober, and the other was chamber where the High Priest's meal offering was prepared" (*Midot 1,4*). During the time of the Second Temple, Phineas the Wardrober was the official who supervised the uniforms and the dressing of the priests.

Background: The Nikanor Gates

Location of The Nikanor Gates

Ascending from the Women's Court by way of fifteen steps (which correspond to the "fifteen songs of ascent" in the book

of Psalms-Psalms 120-134), we reach the great brass gates known as the "Nikanor Gates." These gates, constituting the main entrance to the Holy Temple, are named after the individual who imported the Corinthian bronze doors within them from Egypt, and donated them to the Holy Temple.

The Story of Nikanor

The Mishna (*Yoma 3,10*) relates that Nikanor brought the gates by ship from Alexandria, and when a storm came up and threatened to destroy the ship, the sailors were forced to throw one of the heavy brass doors overboard in an effort to try and save the vessel from capsizing. When this did not help matters and the storm's ferocity had not abated, they attempted to throw the second door into the maelstrom as well. But Nikanor stood up and grabbed the door, hugging it and crying "if you do this, throw me in as well!" His heart was broken within him because his contribution to the House of G-d had been diminished. The storm then immediately subsided, but Nikanor continued to be crestfallen over the lost door.

When the ship safely reached the Holy Land, however, a miracle occurred: The second gate, which had been thrown into the sea, came up alongside the boat!

To commemorate this miracle, these original bronze doors were kept in place even when later, all the other Temple gates were refurbished with gold.

Inside the Priestly Wardrobe:

"Windows" Were Assigned for Each Shift's Uniforms

We have already seen that a great number of priests served in the Holy Temple, and that those officiating were divided into shifts, which consisted of family groupings. Maimonides records (*Laws of Temple Vessels, 8:6-10*) that each one of these shifts had its own "window" in which the clothes for all the members of that respective shift were kept. Thus, he writes, there were 96 such cubbyhole-lockers; 4 windows for each of the 24 shifts. Within these windows, the clothing was kept in the same order in which it was put on.

The Ordinary Priests

The name of each shift was inscribed upon its windows; when the shift was not on duty, its windows were kept closed. Each shift which arrived to begin its tour of duty opened its windows on that first Sabbath and took its garments, and the windows were kept open during the entire week. At the close of their week, they returned their garments to the windows.

4 Windows for the 4 Garments

The items of clothing were kept separate in 4 individual windows; this way, the priest who arrives to take up his position

will not be confronted by a confused jumble of clothes. All of the pants for his shift were in one window, above which the word "pants" was inscribed; so it was with the belts, the turbans, and the tunics.

The High Priest

The High Priest had no window to store his "golden garments" which he wore every day. Instead, he placed these items within his own chamber at night, or whenever he left the Holy Temple (Maimonides *ibid.*). This chamber was located in the south side of the Temple court.

The Order of Dressing in the Priestly Garments

The Ordinary Priests

When it came time to enrobe themselves in the vestments of their office, the ordinary priests put on the sacred pants without removing their own civilian personal clothes. That is, the priestly linen pants were placed on over his own clothes, and only afterwards the civilian clothes were removed from underneath. Afterwards, the tunic was put on, and then the belt was tied. The hat was put on last.

The High Priest

The pants are worn in the same manner described above. After the belt is tied, the High Priest puts on the blue robe. The ephod is placed on over the robe, and the breastplate is fastened to the ephod.

With these garments in place, the High Priest's head is wrapped with the turban, and then the crown is tied on his forehead.

The Priests Must be Barefoot When Conducting the Temple Service

The priests wore no shoes or sandals; they would walk barefoot on the marble floors of the Temple courts. This is because the floor of the Temple complex was itself sanctified, just as the Temple proper. Therefore there must be nothing interrupting between the priests and the floor (*BT Zevachim 2, 1*), to the extent that if something comes in the way of contact between the priest's feet and the floor, his service is invalid (Maimonides).

"He shall wear the holy linen tunic, and he shall have the linen pants upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen belt, and he shall be attired with the linen turban; these are the holy garments; therefore he shall bathe his flesh in water, and put them on" (*Lev. 16:4*)

Maimonides states that it is these words which indicate that the garments must next to the skin, with nothing else interfering.

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