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Tetzaveh

“Make priestly garments for your brother Aharon, for dignity (kavod) and adornment (tiferet).”

(Exodus 28:2)

“When he showed the riches of his glorious (kavod) kingdom and the honor of his majestic (tiferet) greatness...”

(Esther 1:4)

The Sages tell us (Megillah 12a) that the use of the Hebrew words kavod and tiferet in the verse from Esther above is deliberate. It is intended as a reference to the garments of the High Priest, which Achashverosh wore at his party. This raises two questions. Firstly, what was the purpose of this behavior? Surely, Achashverosh must have had other clothing to wear; not only that, he was a king, not a priest! And if his purpose was to make a mockery of the clothing, how indeed can it be that Achashverosh was not punished for this terrible act? As far as we know, Achashverosh lived out his life in comfort. Contrast that to Belshazzar, the first to misuse the Temple's property, who was killed on the same night! In fact, the Gemara (ibid) notes this, saying that there was shock in Heaven when Achashverosh brought out the Temple vessels: “Rava said: A Divine Voice issued forth and said to them: ‘The early ones, referring to Belshazzar and his people, were destroyed because they used these vessels, the vessels of the Temple, and yet you use them again?’”

Perhaps we can explain the matter according to a comment made by the Ramban in this

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week's parsha. The Ramban explains that the priestly garments were, in fact, essentially royal garments. The use of royal dyes (derived from marine snails, like the "royal purple") in particular indicates to Ramban that the intention of the clothing is to make the priest--especially the High Priest--look like a king.

It was thus entirely sensible that Achashverosh would attempt to dress in these kingly clothes. Why, then, was he not punished? The Maharal (Ohr Chadash) explains that the Temple property that Achashverosh had used had already been used by Belshatzar, thus rendering it chullin and technically usable. Nonetheless, wearing them was the embodiment of chutzpah! It seems that Achashverosh intended to make a very specific point: these clothes were no longer important, for the Temple would never be rebuilt. We know that Achashverosh had calculated the years from the exile of Israel and concluded (erroneously) that the outer limit for their redemption had already elapsed. It was with this in mind that he made his crude demonstration.

Rebellion against tyrants is obedience to God.

Benjamin Franklin

Shabbat Shalom
Rabbi Asher Coleman

