

Dear Chavraya,

As a child, when occasion or whim called for stepping out of the limits of self, my preferred costume was that of a pirate. Burnt cork provided immediate facial hair and closet raids of stealth brought needed booty, such as baggy shirts, sashes, and bandannas. More often than not, my parents were complicit in the emergence of a child bolder to them and to himself than the one more often known. Costume, the way we dress in the day to day, and at times of dress-up play, speaks to the world of who we are, as seen by self and marked by role, or of who we might wish to be if by convention we could be unbound.

Clothing, by which to reveal and to hide, is central to this week's Torah portion, and to Purim soon to follow. The primary strand in *Parashat T'tzaveh* is the clothing of the *kohanim*, who serve in the *Beis Hamikdosh* on behalf of the people. In magnificent detail, the priestly garments are described with instructions for their making: *You shall... clothe them with tunics. And you shall gird them, Aharon and his sons, with sashes and wind high turbans for them; in this manner the priesthood will become their eternal due and so you will invest Aharon and his sons with full authority.* Authority and role are bestowed through the sacred vestments.

Transcending ego and personal inclination, the clothing is to remind the *kohanim* that they are not better, or in essence more exalted than the people whom they serve. Lest they think their service is about themselves, not enough its own blessing and reward, the rabbis taught that if *the clothes are lacking, the service that they serve is profaned.* Living up to the role as signified in the garb and the calling is the challenge that so often eludes, reminding that the inner garb is the one of finer thread, the more delicate to wear. The Hebrew word for clothing is *begged*, and for betrayal and deceit it is *boged*.

So too the garb of Purim, not of uniform but to each one their own costume, is also about transcendence, but of playful sort. There is catharsis in the letting go and becoming, remembering how to pretend, a good exercise for us all. Purim is about a world that is *hafuch*, turned upside down and inside out, in the silliness a reminder not to take self too seriously or to express it with pomposity. Grand in the way of opera, *Megillat Esther* is filled in its unwinding with the flowing garb of royalty. Taking our place in the palace of the story's telling, we become as though "born to the purple." Strangely, in the way of Purim it seems, words taken out of context, the rabbis find a hint of Esther in Deuteronomy 31:18, and perhaps of costumes too, *v'anochi haster astir panai / And I will surely conceal My face.* In the play of words is the allusion, from *astir / I will conceal* to *Esther*.

Wearing well the role within as conveyed by outer garb, there is expressed the sacredness of a calling; but in garb that hides deceit, hiddenness is sin. In garb that hides in order to reveal is the mystery of imagination. Dressing up in order to pretend, facets of self may come to be known, as the shy child with costume bolder than without, a trace of possibility to savor and hold on to in returning from the sea. Whether in priestly vestments or in princely array, may all the costumes that we wear sing in context of integrity and joy.

Shabbat shalom and *Chag Purim same'ach*,
Rabbi Victor