



Dress for SUCCESS

Clothes really do make the man

BY ROBERT SUSSMAN

IF A PERSON WEARS A WHITE LAB COAT, BELIEVING the coat belongs to a doctor, his ability to pay attention will increase sharply. But if he wears that very same white coat, believing it belongs to a painter, he will show no such improvement.

These are the findings in a field of study known as embodied cognition, which were published in *The Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* and written about in a *NY Times* article.¹

But, the effect only occurs if the person wearing the coat knows its symbolic meaning, which, in this case, was that “physicians tend to be careful, rigorous and good at paying attention”.

According to Dr Adam Galinsky, who led the study, it has long been known that “clothing affects how other people perceive us as well as how we think about ourselves”. Moreover, Galinsky notes, “We think not just with our brains, but with our bodies. Our thought processes are based on physical experiences that set

off associated abstract concepts.”

Galinsky and his team conducted three experiments in which the clothes themselves didn’t vary – but their symbolic meaning was altered. In the first experiment, participants were asked to wear either a white lab coat or street clothes. They were then tested on their ability to recognise incongruities, for example, the word ‘red’ written in the colour green. Those who wore the white lab coats made about half as many errors as those who wore regular clothes.

In the second experiment, participants were asked to wear either a doctor’s or a painter’s coat, or to see a doctor’s coat,

but not to wear it. They then were tested by having to look at two very similar pictures side-by-side and spot minor differences. Those who wore the doctor’s coat – which was identical to the painter’s coat – found more differences.

The third experiment further explored whether just seeing a physical item, like the coat, affected behaviour. Participants were asked to wear either a doctor’s or a painter’s coat, or were told to notice a doctor’s coat that was displayed on the desk in front of them for a long period of time. All three groups were then asked to write essays about their thoughts regarding the coats, after which they were tested in the area of sustained attention. Again, the group that wore the doctor’s coat showed the greatest improvement in attention.

The conclusion: “You have to wear the coat, see it on your body and feel it on

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your skin for it to influence your psychological processes.” Or to put it another way: “Clothes invade the body and brain, putting the wearer into a different psychological state.”

And the clothing we wear not only affects us, but it affects the people around us as well: “Other experiments have shown that women who dress in a masculine fashion during a job interview are more likely to be hired, and a teaching assistant who wears formal clothes is perceived as more intelligent than one who dresses more casually.”

The Torah tells us² the detailed requirements for the clothing that was to be worn by the Kohanim (the priests), as well as the special garments that were to be worn exclusively by the Kohein Gadol, while serving in the Mishkan (the Tabernacle – the mobile Temple that Hashem commanded us to build).

So important were these clothes that the gemara teaches³ if a Kohein performed the avodah (service) without wearing the proper garments, not only was his service disqualified, but he was actually deserving of death. The gemara derives this from a verse in the Torah which states: “*You shall gird them – Aaron and his sons – with a sash....and the Kehuna (priesthood) will be theirs for an everlasting law.*”⁴ The gemara explains this verse to mean that at the time that the clothes are being worn by the Kohanim – so too their special status as Kohanim is considered to be upon them as well. But, if the clothes are not on the Kohanim, then their special status as Kohanim is also not considered to be upon them – to the point that they are actually regarded as not being Kohanim at all, with the result being that it’s as if a non-Kohein performed the service in the Mishkan – and hence the severe penalty previously noted. The clothes the Kohanim wore went beyond being merely an adornment; they literally made the Kohanim who they were, profoundly affecting the people who wore them.

To read the explanation offered for this mitzvah given by the Sefer HaChinuch⁵, the *Book of Mitzvah Education* anonymously authored by a father for the purpose of educating his son, is like reading from the journal article previously cited – except the Chinuch wrote his book in the 13th century!

The Chinuch states: “At the root of this mitzvah is a principle that has been firmly established for us, that man is influenced according to his actions, and after those actions, his thoughts and intentions follow. And the agent who brings atonement (ie, the Kohein) needs to focus all of his thoughts and intentions on the service at hand. Therefore, it’s fit for him to be clothed in special garments that when he will look at any place on his body, immediately, he will be reminded and arouse his heart before the One who he serves (ie, Hashem).

“And for this reason, it was said that the length of the tunic was required to be on his entire body, until a bit above the heel and the length of the sleeve until the edge of his hand (ie, the wrist). And the length of the [Kohen Gadol’s] turban was 16 amos⁶ – just shy of 10 metres long – and it surrounded his head in order that he would see it whenever he looked up. And the sash, with which he girded his hips, its length was 32 amos – almost 20 metres long – and it went round and round his body, wrapping upon wrapping, until we find that the Kohein would feel it at all times with his arms because of its thickness which resulted from the many wrappings.”

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And it wasn’t enough that the Kohein wore these clothes; the Chinuch emphasises just how important it was that the Kohein was actually cognizant – at all times – that he was wearing them, to the point that Hashem actually designed them so the Kohein’s body would be constantly rubbing up against the various pieces, as well as be seen by the Kohein from every angle that he gazed.

But amazingly, the Chinuch continues that all of this was in addition to the matter of the honour that these garments provided for the Mishkan and for the service performed by the Kohanim, because, as a consequence of the Kohanim wearing these garments, the Mishkan would become magnified in people’s estimation, which would, in turn, soften the hearts of those who beheld the Kohanim in these garments, prompting those people to return to Hashem.

In other words, the clothes weren’t designed only having in mind the influence they would have on the people who wore them, but for the effect they would have on the people who saw them being worn!

And we see this also by other clothing that we are commanded by Hashem to wear. Regarding the four-cornered garment, which

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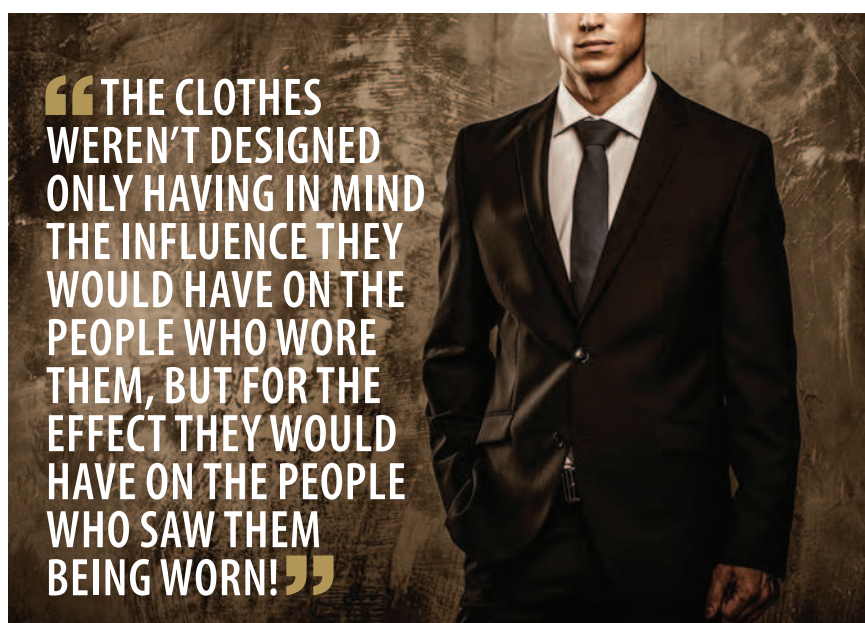
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we call a tallis, on which we are commanded to make tzitzis (knotted fringes on the corners), the Torah tells us that we will see these tzitzis and “remember all the mitzvos of Hashem and do them”.⁷ How will we remember the mitzvos? Rashi comments⁸ on this verse that the gematria (numerical value) of the word tzitzis is 600. Add to that the eight strings and five knots of the tzitzis and we’re left with a total of 613 – the number of mitzvos that our Sages teach are contained in the Torah.⁹ Our Creator understood that we are moved by what we wear and that movement is directly tied to our being cognisant of those garments.

Even clothing that we were not commanded by the Torah to wear, but which has become customary – for example, a yarmulke – is worn for a purpose: as a constant reminder that Hashem is always above us.¹⁰

It’s actually brought in halacha that we’re not allowed to wear our clothes inside out. Why? Because people will see the seams and the unfinished edges of the garment that will be on the outside of our clothing, and people will look down on us for being dressed like this.¹¹ The Mishna Berurah notes¹² regarding this discussion that the Rambam says the dress of a Talmud Chacham (a Torah scholar) should be nice and clean, and that such a person is actually prohibited from having a stain on his clothing.

The Alter of Slobodka, Rav Noson Tzvi Finkel, warned that if a rabbi had a stain on his coat, there was the potential that his “students’ revulsion [at the sight of the stain] might leap from the teacher to what he was teaching”.¹³ The Mishna Berurah states that a Talmid Chacham (a Torah scholar) should neither wear princely clothes that everyone will look at, nor should he wear the clothes of a poor man, which bring shame to the one wearing them. Rather he should wear average clothes that are nice. And we can now understand that this is for his bene-



fit, as well as the people who will see him in such clothes.

The *Shulchan Aruch* says¹⁴ that one should get dressed just before Shabbos in his finest clothes (in accordance with his means¹⁵). And the Mishna Berurah comments that a person should wear these clothes all of Shabbos, not putting on his weekday clothes until after Shabbos has concluded and Havdallah has been made.¹⁶ In fact, the Mishna Berurah comments that it’s best that a person’s entire wardrobe be special for Shabbos – including even his undergarments.¹⁷ And we can now understand this, because for clothes to have an influence on us, we must wear them; they must actually touch our skin. And he says further that even if a person is on the road all alone, or in a place where there are no other Jews, he should still dress in his Shabbos clothes because he is not wearing the clothes for those who can see, but for the honour of Shabbos itself!¹⁸ Part of the experience of Shabbos is dressing the part.

Like it or not, our clothes say something about us. More importantly, they actually influence the way we think and behave, as

well as the way other people think and behave towards us. If we want to become someone different from who we are, if we want to make a change in our lives, then we need to understand what makes us tick as human beings. We need to dress the part. Because when we do so, we literally change our minds – the very way we think – putting ourselves into a completely different psychological state. And just as important, we change the way everyone else in the world perceives us. ■

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¹Blakeslee, Sandra, “Mind Games: Sometimes a White Coat Isn’t Just a White Coat,” *The New York Times*, 2 April 2012 (http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/03/science/clothes-and-self-perception.html?_r=0)

²Parshas Tetzaveh

³Sanhedrin 83b; Zevachim 17b

⁴Shemos 25:9

⁵Mitzvah 99

⁶One amah is an arm’s length, approximately 18 – 24 inches (45 – 60 cm).

⁷Bamidbar 15:39

⁸Rashis on Bamidbar 15:39, d”h u’z’chartem es kol mitzvos Hashem; But see Ramban on Bamdibar 15:38 who disagrees with Rashi’s interpretation.

⁹See Makkos 23b

¹⁰See Kiddushin 31a; Shabbos 156b

¹¹Mishna Beruah 2:4

¹²Id.

¹³Blau, Dr. Rivkah, *Learn Torah, Love Torah, Live Torah: HaRav Mordechai Pinchas Teitz – the Quintessential Rabbi*, Ktav Publishing House, page 20.

¹⁴Shulchan Aruch 262:3

¹⁵Mishna Beruah 262:6

¹⁶Id. 262:8

¹⁷Id. 262:2

¹⁸Id. 262:6