

Third Temple preparations begin with priestly garb

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Wearing a turban and a light blue tunic threaded with silver, a man stands in a workshop in Jerusalem's Old City beside spools of white thread affixed to sewing machines. A painting of high priests performing an animal sacrifice beside the First Temple illustrates the function of the room.

On Monday, the Temple Institute started preparing to build a Third Temple on Jerusalem's Mount Moriah, the site of the Dome of the Rock and the Aksa mosque, by inaugurating a workshop that manufactures priestly garments.

After Efrat Chief Rabbi Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, a Kohen himself, gets measured for his own set of Kohanim garments, Aviad Jeruffi, the clothing's designer, strums "To Ascend to the Temple Mount" on his guitar in celebration.

Priestly garments have not been worn since the destruction of the Second Temple by Rome in 70 CE and cannot be functional until a Third Temple is constructed.

Kohanim, priests directly descended from Moses's brother Aaron, are recognized by the Institute as such if their paternal grandfather observed the tradition. Today, they have special religious responsibilities; in days of yore they performed the most significant duties within the Temple.

Approximately one-third of the commandments in the Torah cannot be accomplished without a temple, including the obligations of the Kohanim.

But a Third Temple seems a flighty dream with nightmarish political implications to many, as both a shrine, the Dome of the Rock, and the Aksa mosque, Islam's third holiest structure, currently stand on the Temple Mount.

Rabbi Yehuda Glick, director of the Temple Institute, says he assumes Muslims will be supportive when the Temple is ready to be built:

"We already have some Muslims who are secretly in touch with us," he says.

When the Temple is rebuilt, Kohanim must wear the proper outfit to perform their obligations, Glick continues.

Each set has a turban, tunic pants and belt and is individually tailored at a cost of NIS 2,500.

"If it were a bathrobe for watching SNL [Saturday Night Live], it would not be worth it. But we're talking about people who have a very strong yearning for working in the Beit Hamikdash [Temple]," says Glick.

Years of diligent research was needed to create the garments in conformance with Jewish law.

Special flaxen thread was imported from India and overseas travel was necessary to obtain the correct colors for the clothes, including to Istanbul, to purchase mountain worms from which the correct shade of crimson is derived.

The secret of the correct shade of blue has been lost since the destruction of the Second Temple, as the identity of chilazon, the snail from which it was extracted, was uncertain until the Ptil Tekhelet nonprofit organization identified it as the murex trunculus, aka hexaplex trunculus, the banded dye-murex found near the Mediterranean Sea.

"The Temple is not a message [just for] the Jewish people. It reunites the world all around one central prayer house. All the prophets say that at the End Times all the nations will be coming to Jerusalem and take part of building [the Temple]," Glick says.