

# Priestly Garments as Atoning Agents in Amoraic Literature

Shlomo Zuckier

Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ 08540, USA; shlomozuckier@gmail.com

**Abstract:** The garments worn by the priests in the Temple not only present a stark image of “glory and splendor” (Exod 28:2) but present an accompanying theology, as well. This paper will focus on one theological strand—the idea that the priestly garments atone—in classical Judaism. It will demonstrate that, while the biblical account of priestly garments sees them largely as functional or as serving primarily in non-expiatory roles, late classical rabbinic (i.e., Amoraic) literature features an extensive tradition that these garments serve to atone for a variety of sins. This paper traces several versions of that tradition in exploring the expansive account of atonement found in these rabbinic texts and contextualizing that within other developments in classical Judaism and rabbinic literature.

**Keywords:** atonement; priestly; rabbinic

## 1. Biblical Accounts of Priestly Garments

Exodus chapters 28 and 39 each offer expansive accounts of the priestly vestments and the process of producing them, with a set of four items prescribed for all priests and several others specifically for the High Priest.

The clothing items for the standard priest—tunic, hat, pants, and belt—seem to largely serve a functional purpose. The tunic, hat, and belt are to be worn “for honor and splendor” (Exod 28:40), to magnify and glorify the Lord in the Temple,<sup>1</sup> and the pants are worn “to cover flesh of nakedness” (Exod 28:42), functional clothing to befit the Temple functionaries.

By contrast, the High Priest’s clothing—the *ephod*-apron, breastplate, robe, and golden forehead-plate—may have had greater symbolic meaning and ritual purpose. The stones in the *ephod*-apron are referred to as “stones of remembrance of the Israelite people” (Exod 28:12), representing the twelve tribes. The breastplate housed the *urim ve-tummim*, which were used to inquire of the Lord for judgement (Exod 28:30) and war (I Sam 14:37, e.g.); the robe had bells that rang when Aaron entered the sanctuary “so that he would not die” (Exod 28:35). The depiction of the forehead-plate’s role, which might relate to atonement, will be discussed below.<sup>2</sup>

Secondary literature has attributed various functions and implications to these sartorial features. Haran (1978) has argued that, as the priestly vestments appear alongside, and derive from similar materials as, the building of the physical complex of the sanctuary, the clothing should also be understood as part of the Tabernacle complex. Just as the different locations within the Temple complex have different levels of sanctity, the clothing too instantiates a sense of graded holiness which distinguishes the High Priest from regular priests.<sup>3</sup> The ornate beauty of the priestly garments, and especially those of the High Priest, also serve “to highlight the distinct concept of priestly leadership” in the Bible<sup>4</sup> and to reveal their status and confer legitimacy upon them.<sup>5</sup> As noted by Oppenheim (1949), ancient near eastern literature features gods, kings and priests with distinctive clothing, indicating that Israelite priests, seen in context, are also meant to be seen as displaying a heightened status through their garments.

Certain garments may have had particular additional purposes or goals, as seen in the biblical verses noted above. Several accounts have been offered to flesh out the role of the pants, apparently a form of underclothes, in light of Exod 28:43 saying that priests



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should wear them “and not die” combined with Exod 20:23’s worry of a priest exposing nakedness before the altar.<sup>6</sup> Varying approaches argue that their role may be to serve as protective equipment shielding the priest from the dangerous Lord/altar<sup>7</sup>; to make the priest fit in better with his surroundings, a form of camouflage to avoid divine attack<sup>8</sup>; to avoid inappropriate full nakedness, as required only when changing clothing<sup>9</sup>; or to emasculate the priests, as appropriate for their submissiveness before the God of Israel, depicted as male.<sup>10</sup> These various accounts explicate further the need to cover nakedness, but none see the pants as attracting divine attention, in contrast to the High Priest’s clothing.

The High Priest’s clothing are generally depicted as serving more heightened purposes, often relating to the Lord, Israel, and their relationship. The precious stones in the *ephod*-apron and breastplate are both called a memorial (*zikkaron*; Exod 28:12,29), which includes Aaron reminding the Lord of covenantal obligations towards the community.<sup>11</sup> In addition, as Haran (1978) puts it, “The bells [on the robe] attract the sense of hearing, the stones on the ephod and the breastpiece awaken the ‘sense’ of memory, and the diadem on the high priest’s forehead evokes the ‘sense’ of grace,” invoking divine attention in a variety of ways, along with other activities within the tabernacle.<sup>12</sup>

One possible function of the priestly clothing that generally does not have much purchase in the biblical account is that of atonement. No language relating to atonement appears in descriptions of the priestly garments in biblical literature, with the exception of the case of the forehead-plate.

Exodus 28:38 describes the role of the forehead-plate as follows:<sup>13</sup>

וְהָיָה עַל־מִצְחָ אֹהֶל־וָנֶשֶׂא אֹהֶל־אֶת־עֲוֹן הַקֹּדְשִׁים אֲשֶׁר יִקְדִּישׁוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְקַלְמָתָם קֹדְשֵׁיהֶם וְהָיָה עַל־מִצְחוֹ  
תָּמִיד לְרָצוֹן לִפְנֵי יְיָ:

So it [the forehead-plate] shall be on Aaron’s forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things which the children of Israel sanctify in all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord.

This forehead-plate thus plays a role in two related processes: bearing the sin of the holy things (וְהָיָה עַל־מִצְחָ אֹהֶל־וָנֶשֶׂא אֹהֶל־אֶת־עֲוֹן הַקֹּדְשִׁים) and achieving acceptance before the Lord on behalf of Israel (לְרָצוֹן לִפְנֵי יְיָ). There is some ambiguity here, given the bivalence of נֶשֶׂא עוֹן, literally “to bear sin,” as either “to remove guilt” or “to be guilty.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, either Aaron’s (i.e., the High Priest’s) forehead-plate serves to *undo* the guilt incurred by improper offerings, or it *channels* that guilt away from Israel and to him. In either event, it allows for the offerings to be acceptable (לְרָצוֹן) before the Lord.<sup>15</sup> It thus emerges that, while this verse uses language adjacent to atonement (נֶשֶׂא עוֹן is often equivalent to כִּפּוּר,<sup>16</sup>), in this case it refers at best to a process of undoing ritual errors, as opposed to undoing sins committed more broadly in Israelite society. Thus, of the eight items of clothing, at maximum one might facilitate a form of atonement limited to ritual errors committed in the Temple.

## 2. Second Temple Literature on Priestly Garments

Second Temple literature has several presentations of the priestly garments, including some that emphasize their unique aspects. Examples of this include Sirach chapter 45, describing Aaron’s garments, and the famous chapter 50 on the garments of Simon the High Priest, partly preserved (in modified form) in the traditional Jewish Yom Kippur Liturgy. Other works featuring such presentations are Pseudo-Aristeas (*Let. Aris.* § 96–99), Philo (*Mos.* 2:23–26,143; *Quaest. Ex.* 2.112), and Josephus (*Ant.* 3.151–187).<sup>17</sup> The latter two often invoke cosmological motifs as represented by the clothing, in a form of allegorical reading often applied by those texts.

The passage at Wisdom of Solomon 18:20–25, also making a cosmological comparison, draws a connection between the priestly garments and atonement, asserting that Aaron ended the plague while offering incense (see Num. 27:11–12) because “on his long robe the whole world was depicted, and the glories of the ancestors were engraved on the four

rows of stones, and Your majesty was on the diadem upon his head,” which frightened the Destroyer (the force behind the plague), who then backtracked. While not all translations use the term for “atonement” here, it would seem to be that atonement figured in the process of ending the plague, in light of the language used.<sup>18</sup> There is thus a Second Temple precedent of atonement accomplished through the High Priest’s clothing, at least in one biblical episode.<sup>19</sup> However, the rabbis do not cite the tradition about Aaron’s ending the plague as being tied to his clothing, and there is no reason to assume they had direct access to this particular tradition. Still, it is possible that traditions tying the priestly garments to atonement circulated for the centuries between the Wisdom of Solomon and the Amoraic sources to be analyzed below.

### 3. Mishnah on Priestly Garments

Building on the biblical passages, the Mishnah (at mYom 7:5) delineates the priestly garments, presented as four items worn by all priests and four worn only by the High Priest:

כהן גדול משמש בשמנה כלים וההדיוט בארבעה בכתונת ומכנסים ומצנפת ואבנט מוסיף עליו כהן גדול חשן ואפוד ומעיל וציץ

The High Priest wears eight items of clothing, and a minor [priest] four: the tunic, pants, hat, and belt. The High Priest adds: the breastplate, *ephod*-apron, robe, and forehead-plate.

These vestments appear several other times in Yoma, often in relation to the High Priest’s changing from his usual eight items of clothing to a special set of white clothing for certain Yom Kippur rituals. No expiatory role is applied to these priestly garments in early (Tannaitic, 2nd -early 3rd century CE) rabbinic literature, and in fact some passages (see Sifra Nedava 3(4):9, discussed below) explicitly rule out such a possibility. This avoidance of expiatory language shifts when we look at the Amoraic period (late 3<sup>rd</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century CE), as will be considered below.

### 4. Amoraic Literature on Priestly Garments Atoning

The two Talmuds (Yerushalmi/Palestinian, redacted ~360 CE in the Land of Israel; Babylonian/Bavli, redacted ~600 CE in Babylonia) present various teachings about the priestly garments. These include: the necessity that they be worn for priestly status to be in place (bZev 17b); the fanciness of the High Priest’s clothing, especially on Yom Kippur (yYom 3:6; bYom 34b); details on how to construct the clothing (bYom 35b); the requirement that there not be anything underneath the pants (bYom 25a); and the exact text on the forehead-plate (bShab 63b). Various literary analyses relating to the priestly clothing have appeared in recent decades.<sup>20</sup>

Possibly the most extensive Amoraic teaching about the significance of these vestments is a fairly detailed tradition asserting that not only do the priestly garments atone, but that each one atones for a unique sin. This teaching is attributed to an early Amora, Rabbi Simon (mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century CE), and it appears several times throughout the Talmuds. This teaching found in the Yerushalmi appears as a close parallel in two Land of Israel Amoraic Midrashic collections—Leviticus Rabbah Tzav, 10:6 and Song of Songs Rabbah 4,<sup>21</sup> which will not be analyzed in depth here, given the closeness of the parallel.

### 5. Yerushalmi on Priestly Garments Atoning

The version of the teaching located at Talmud Yerushalmi, Yoma 7:3 appears as follows:<sup>22</sup>

אמר רבי סימון כשם שהקרבנות מכפרין כך הבגדים מכפרין. בכתונת ומכנסים ומצנפת ואבנט <sup>23</sup> כתונת היתה מכפרת לובשי כלאים אית דבעי מימר <sup>24</sup> על שופכי דמים כמה דאת אמר ויטבלו את הכתונת בדם

מכנסיים היה מכפר על גילוי עריות כמה דאת אמר ועשה להם מכנסי בד לכסות בשר ערוה  
מצנפת היתה מכפרת על גסי<sup>25</sup> הרוח כמה דאת אמר וישם את המצנפת על ראשו

אבנט היה מכפר על הגנבים ואית דבעי מימר על<sup>26</sup>

העוקמנים<sup>27</sup> א"ר לוי ל"ב אמה היה בו והיה מעקמו לכאן ולכאן

חושן היה מכפר על מטי הדין כמה דאת אמר ועשית חשן משפט

אפוד היה מכפר על ע"ז<sup>28</sup> כמה דאת אמר ואין אפוד ותרפים

מעיל ר' סימון בשם ר' יונתן<sup>29</sup>

דבית גוברין שני דברים לא היתה בהן כפרה וקבעה<sup>30</sup> להן התורה כפרה ואלו הן האומר לשון הרע וההורג

נפש בשגגה האומר לשון הרע לא היתה לו כפרה וקבעה לו התורה כפרה<sup>31</sup> זוגי המעיל והיה על אהרן לשרת ונשמע קולו יבא קול ויכפר על  
קול

ההורג נפש<sup>32</sup>

לא היתה לו כפרה וקבעה לו התורה כפרה מיתת<sup>33</sup>

כה"ג וישב בה עד מות הכה"ג<sup>34</sup> תני ר"א בן יעקב אומר נאמרה

כפרה בפנים ונאמר כפרה בחוץ מה כפרה האמורה בפנים בן הבקר מכפר על שופכי דמים אף כפרה האמורה בחוץ בן הבקר  
מכפר על שופכי דמים כאן בשוגג כאן במזיד שנייא היא עגלה ערופה בין שוגג בין מזיד א"ר יוסה כאן על חט ידוע וכאן על חט

שאינו ידוע.<sup>35</sup>

ציץ אית דבעי מימר על הגודפנים אית דבעי מימר על עזי פנים מ"ד על הגודפנים ניהא דכתיב ותטבע האבן במצחו וכתיב והיה על מצחו

תמיד מ"ד על עזי פנים ומצח אשה זונה היה לה<sup>36</sup>

Rabbi Simon said: Just as the sacrifices atone, so do the garments [of the priest] atone—the tunic, pants, hat, and belt.

The **tunic** would atone for those who wore mixed [wool and linen].<sup>37</sup> Some wish to say [it atones] for murderers,<sup>38</sup> as it says “And they dipped the tunic in blood” (Gen 37:31) [following the fabricated murder of Joseph].<sup>39</sup>

The **pants** would atone for uncovering nakedness (i.e., improper sexual relations), as it says “And make for them linen pants to cover their naked flesh” (Exod 28:42).

The **hat** would atone for the haughty, as it says “And they placed the hat on his head” (Exod 29:6).<sup>40</sup>

The **belt** would atone for robbers,<sup>41</sup> and some say for crooked people. R. Levi said: It was 32 cubits, and one would twist it this way and that.<sup>42</sup>

The **breastplate** would atone for those who tilt (i.e., miscarry) justice, as it says “And you shall make a breastplate of judgment” (Exod 28:15).

The **ephod-apron** would atone for idolatry, as it says “There is no ephod or teraphim” [as Israel turned to other gods] (Hos 3:4; cf. 3:1).

The **robe**: R. Simon in the name of R. Yonatan of Beit Guvrin said: Two things did not have atonement, but the Torah set their atonement,<sup>43</sup> and they are one who says evil speech and one who kills accidentally. One who says evil speech had no [stated] atonement, and the Torah set for him atonement in the bells of the **robe**: “And it shall be on Aaron to serve and its sound will be heard [when he enters the sanctuary and when he exits and he will not die]” (Exod 28:35): let a sound (קול) come and atone for a sound/voice (קול).

One who kills a person had no [stated] atonement, and the Torah set for him atonement with the death of the high priest: “And he shall sit [in the city of refuge] until the death of the High Priest” (Num 35:25). It was taught: R. E[liezer] ben Yaakov said: atonement is stated inside and outside [the Temple]; just as a young ox atones for murderers regarding the atonement inside [as part of the Day of Atonement sacrificial service],<sup>44</sup> so too regarding the atonement outside [the Temple] a young ox atones for murderers [through the beheaded calf]. (This

implies that there is a redundancy as two entities atone for murder!? The problem can be resolved as follows:) One case [the death of the high priest] relates to [atonement for] accidental [killing]<sup>45</sup> and the other [the beheaded calf] for [atonement for] intentional [killing]. But the beheaded calf is different, [since it atones] whether [the sin is] accidental or intentional (and thus a redundancy remains?) R. Yose said: Here [in the case of the death of the High Priest] it refers to a known sin and there [in the case of the beheaded calf] to an unknown sin.<sup>46</sup>

The **forehead-plate**—some wish to say [it atones for] blasphemers, and some wish to say [it atones for] those who are brazen. The one who says [it atones] for blasphemers, it makes sense, as it is written, “And the stone sunk into his [Goliath’s] forehead” (1 Sam 17:49),<sup>47</sup> and it is written, “And it will always be on his forehead [for acceptance on their behalf before the Lord]” (Exod 28:38). The one who says [it atones] for those who are brazen [makes sense, as it is written] “And you had the forehead of a prostitute [and were not ashamed]” (Jer 3:3).

This teaching runs through the four items of clothing worn by the standard priest and then the additional four garments worn by the High Priest, and suggests a sin (and in three cases, two sins) for which each atones. It incorporates a tangential discussion about two sins which originally lack a clear atonement; one is atoned by the High Priest’s coat and the other (unrelated to priestly garb) is atoned through the beheaded calf ritual and the death of the High Priest.<sup>48</sup>

This original Amoraic teaching appearing in the Yerushalmi<sup>49</sup> (it appears in no Tannaitic source) follows the order and structure of the *mishnah* (mYom 7:5) as it analyzes the eight clothing items.

Between R. Simon’s basic teaching and the explication of the eight priestly garments, the Yerushalmi (but none of the parallel Amoraic texts) somewhat awkwardly inserts בכחונת, ומכנסים מצנפת ואבנט, “through the tunic, pants, hat, and belt,” noting the four garments of the regular priests. This may just be a partial citation of the *mishnah* that is left in here, or it is reflective of some earlier version of this teaching.<sup>50</sup>

In each of these cases, the text utilizes some association of the clothing item—either physical association with the body part it covers or an exegetical association through a biblical verse relating to that clothing item—to determine what the corresponding sin that is atoned might be. It appears that the derivation of which sins are associated with which clothing items is secondary to the primary assertion that the garments each atone; once their expiatory power was established, this teaching subsequently needed to determine which sin correlated to which clothing item.

No reasoning or justification is supplied with the overall statement that these priestly garments atone; rather, it is baldly asserted (and attributed to R. Simon). The impetus to attribute atonement to these sources likely draws, at least in part, from some textual hints in the biblical passage on the priestly garments, Exod 28. The chapter includes language such as “and Aaron shall bear the sins of the holy things” (וְנָשָׂא אֶת־עֲוֹן הַקֹּדֶשִׁים), yielding “acceptability on their behalf before the Lord” (לְרִצּוֹן לִפְנֵי יְיָ; Exod 28:38), regarding the forehead-plate; “and his voice will be heard when entering the sanctuary before the Lord and when leaving, and he will not die” (וְנִשְׁמָע קוֹלוֹ בְּבֹאוֹ אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ לִפְנֵי יְיָ וְיִהְיֶה וּבִצְאוֹתָו וְלֹא יָמוּת; Exod 28:35), regarding the bells of the coat; “so that they not bear a sin and die” (וְלֹא־יָשְׂאוּ עֲוֹן וּמָתוּ) (Exod 28:43), regarding the pants; and for language relating to inspiring a remembrance before the Lord through the *ephod*-apron and breastplate (Exod 28:12, 29–30). These terms all bear some connection to atonement, avoiding death, or divine intervention, even if (as discussed above) on a straightforward reading they relate to avoiding ritual problems rather than resolving sins outside the Tabernacle. Additionally, the Bible’s extended focus on the priests’ ritual garb may itself have been understood by the rabbis as indicating that there was something significant about these items of clothing, which they took to be atonement.

As noted above, Tannaitic literature avoids making any such move towards seeing an expiatory role in the priestly garments. In fact, it actually diverts the passage closest to



expiation, Exod 28:38, away from atonement. For example, Sifra Nedava 3(4):9 makes it clear that the forehead-plate in Exod 28:38 refers not to atonement of sins but resolution of problems occurring in the sacrificial process. Another rabbinic text building on that Sifra passage clearly limits the resolution of sin to the ritual realm and not sins at large in the name of R. Hoshayah: “וְנָשָׂא אֶהָרֵן אֶת עוֹן הַקִּדְשִׁים וְעוֹן הַמִּקְרִיבִים לֹא עוֹן הַמִּקְרִיבִים” (Exod 28:38)—the sins of that which is brought and not the sins of those bringing.<sup>51</sup> By contrast, R. Simon’s novel approach here at yYom 7:3 explicitly makes this atonement about the “sins of those bringing,” i.e., about sins outside the Temple. The novelty of this teaching is further revealed when seen against the backdrop of previous interpretations minimizing the priestly garb’s expiatory significance.<sup>52</sup>

## 6. Babylonian Talmud on Priestly Garments Atoning

A similar teaching to that of the Yerushalmi appears in two parallel passages in the Bavli (bArak 16a and bZev 88b), although attributed here to a different Amora, R. Anani bar Sasson (a third generation Palestinian Amora):<sup>53</sup>

אמר ר' ענני בר' ישון למה נסמכה פרשת בגדי כהונה לפרשת קרבנות לומר לך מה קרבנות מכפרין אף בגדי כהונה מכפרין

כתנות מכפרת על שפיכות דמים דכתיב ויטבלו את הכתנת בדם <sup>54</sup>

מכנסים מכפרים על גילוי ערויות דכתיב ועשה להם מכנסי בד לכסות בשר ערוה

מזנפת מכפרת על גסי הרוח כדרכי חנינא דא"ר חנינא יבא דבר שבגובה ויכפר על מעשה <sup>55</sup> גובה

אבנט מכפרת על הרהור הלב אדיכא דאיתיה (דכתיב והיה על לב אהרן) <sup>56</sup>

חושן מכפר על הדינין דכתיב ועשית חושן משפט

אפוד מכפר על עבודה זרה דכתיב אין אפוד ותרפים

מעיל מכפר על לשון הרע אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא <sup>57</sup>

יבא דבר שבקול ויכפר על מעשה הקול <sup>58</sup>

ציץ מכפר על מעשה עיני פנים <sup>59</sup> כתיב הכא והיה על מצח אהרן וכתוב התם ומצח אשה זונה היה לך

R. Anani bar Sasson said: Why is the passage about the priestly garments juxtaposed to the passage about sacrifices (at Lev 1–8)? To teach you: Just as sacrifice atones, so do the priestly garments atone.

The **tunic** atones for murder, as it is said: “And they dipped the tunic in blood” (Gen 37:31).

The **pants** atone for uncovering nakedness (i.e., improper sexual relations), as it is said: “And make for them pants of linen to cover their naked flesh (Exod 28:42).

The **hat** atones for haughty people, like the words of Rabbi Hanina, as R. Hanina said: Let a high item come and atone for a haughty action.

The **belt** atones for [improper] thoughts of the heart, [atonement] for where it is located (the heart), (as it is said: “And it shall be on Aaron’s heart” [Exod 28:30]).

The **breastplate** atones for [perverted] justice, as it is said: “And you shall make a breastplate of judgement” (Exod 28:15).

The **ephod-apron** atones for idolatry, as it is said: “There was no ephod or teraphim” [as Israel turned to other gods] (Hos 3:4; cf. 3:1).

The **robe** atones for evil speech; the Holy One, blessed be He, said: ‘Let a voice-related matter (the robe with bells) atone for an action of the voice.’

The **forehead-plate** atones for actions of the brazen; it is said here, “And it shall be on Aaron’s forehead” (Exod 28:38) and it is written there, “And you had the forehead of a prostitute” (Jer 3:3).

This formulation of the teaching draws in many ways upon the material in the Yerushalmi. Most directly, it has the same order and structure of the clothing items, and the correlations between sins atoned and vestments are largely consistent. Still, the later Bavli version streamlines the earlier teaching somewhat in into a more terse, crystallized form.

The analysis below analyzes these differences. For reference purposes, a side-by-side comparison of the texts appears here, with relevant sections aligned and important differences bolded:

ירושלמי יומא ז:ג	בבלי זבחים פח:==בבלי ערכין טז.
אמר רבי סימון כשם שהקרבנות מכפרין כך הבגדים מכפרין. <b>בכתונת ומכנסיים מצנפת ואבנט</b>	אמר ר' ענני בר ששון <b>למה נסמכה פרשת בגדי כהונה לפרשת קרבנות</b> <b>לומר לך</b> מה קרבנות מכפרין אף בגדי כהונה מכפרין
<b>כתונת</b> היתה מכפרת <b>לובשי כלאים</b> אית דבעי מימר על <b>שופכי דמים</b> כמה דאת אמר ויטבילו את הכתונת בדם	<b>כתונת</b> מכפרת על <b>שפיכות דמים</b> , דכתיב ויטבילו את הכתונת בדם
<b>מכנסיים</b> היה מכפר על גילוי עריות כמה דאת אמר ועשה להם מכנסי בד לכסות בשר ערוה	<b>מכנסיים</b> מכפרים על גילוי עריות דכתיב ועשה להם מכנסי בד לכסות בשר ערוה
<b>מצנפת</b> היתה מכפרת על גסי הרוח כמה דאת אמר וישם את המצנפת על ראשו	<b>מצנפת</b> מכפרת על גסי הרוח כדרבי חנינא דא"ר חנינא <b>יבא דבר שבגובה</b> <b>ויכפר על מעשה גובה</b>
<b>אבנט</b> היה מכפר על הגנבים ואית דבעי מימר על <b>העוקמנים</b> א"ר לוי ל"ב <b>אמה היה בו והיה מעקמו לכאן ולכאן</b>	<b>אבנט</b> מכפרת על <b>הרהור הלב</b> אהיכא דאיתיה (דכתיב והיה על לב אהרן)
<b>חושן</b> היה מכפר על מטי הדין כמה דאת אמר ועשית חושן משפט	<b>חושן</b> מכפר על הדינין דכתיב ועשית חושן משפט
<b>אפוד</b> היה מכפר על ע"ן כמה דאת אמר ואין אפוד ותרפים	<b>אפוד</b> מכפר על עבודה זרה דכתיב אין אפוד ותרפים
<b>מעיל</b> ר' סימון בשם ר' יונתן גוברין <b>שני דברים לא היתה בהן כפרה</b> וקבעה להן התורה כפרה ואלו הן האומר לשון הרע וההורג נפש בשגגה <b>האומר לשון הרע לא היתה לו כפרה</b> וקבעה לו התורה כפרה <b>זוגי המעיל והיה על אהרן</b> לשרת ו <b>נשמע קולו יבא קול</b> ויכפר על קול	<b>מעיל</b> מכפר על לשון הרע אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא
ההורג נפש לא היתה לו כפרה וקבעה לו התורה כפרה מיתת כה"ג וישב בה עד מות הכה"ג כאן בשוגג כאן במזיד שנייא היא עגלה ערופה בין שוגג בין מזיד א"ר יוסה כאן על חט ידוע וכאן על חט שאינו ידוע. תני ר"א בן יעקב אומר נאמרה כפרה בפנים ונאמר כפרה בחוץ מה כפרה האמורה בפנים בן הבקר מכפר על שופכי דמים אף כפרה האמורה בחוץ בן הבקר מכפר על שופכי דמים	<b>יבא דבר שבקול</b> ויכפר על <b>מעשה הקול</b>
<b>ציץ</b> אית דבעי מימר על <b>הגודפנים</b> אית דבעי מימר על עזי פנים	<b>ציץ</b> מכפר על <b>מעשה עזי פנים</b> , כתיב הכא: והיה על מצח אהרן,
מ"ד על הגודפנין ניחא דכתיב <b>ותטבע האבן במצחו</b> וכתיב והיה על מצחו תמיד מ"ד על עזי פנים ומצח אשה זונה היה לך	וכתיב התם: ומצח אשה זונה היה לך!

The most significant point emerging from this comparison is the overwhelming agreement between the two Talmuds on the sins that are atoned by the various priestly garments. Of the Bavli's eight sins atoned by the eight garments, seven appear in the Yerushalmi for that same garment. Only one case—the belt, which atones for “thoughts of the heart” in the Bavli, has no parallel in the Yerushalmi, where it atones for either “robbers” or “those who twist” (presumably dissemblers).

There is reason to believe that the Bavli version here is drawing directly from the Yerushalmi version.<sup>60</sup> Probably the clearest indication that the Bavli is drawing on the Yerushalmi (or something very similar to it) is the similarity between them on an issue tangential to this paper appearing only in the Yerushalmi and Bavli versions (but not the LevRab or SosRab versions). The Talmuds raise the question as to whether murder is resolved by the tunic or something else (death of the High Priest and/or the beheaded calf). The Yerushalmi suggests a distinction between unintentional and intentional killing (*shogeg* and *mezid*), then raises a question and instead suggests a distinction between a known sin and an unknown sin. The Bavli (at both bArak 16a-b and bZev 88b) suggests

the difference between cases where it is known who killed him and those where it is not, then it raises a question and clarifies that this refers to intentional sin (*mezid*). This discussion, appearing as the full teaching regarding the atoning value of the priestly vestments is pitted against another authoritative source, is likely a later stage than the formulation of the teaching that the priestly garments atone. That this most developed and likely latest-formulated part of the passage appears only in the two Talmuds but not the other Aramaic material indicates that the Bavli draws from the earlier Yerushalmi. This is confirmed by the close affinity between the sets of answers overall, even as the Bavli reworks the answers of the Yerushalmi somewhat.

The Bavli's teaching retains the original order of the eight clothing items (despite not appearing as commentary on mYom 7:6 but in other tractates), although it lacks any cases with double explanations introduced by "some say." Thus, while in the Yerushalmi's final form three garments atoned for one of two sins, each priestly garment atones for one sin only in the Bavli.<sup>61</sup> The Bavli also has the complicated dispute and teaching regarding the two items that originally lacked atonement following the full list of eight garments and their atonement, rather than inserted in the seventh, as the Yerushalmi has it. Additionally, the Bavli merges two teachings by R. Simon into a single teaching attributed to R. Anani bar Sasson. It also offers a novel suggestion as to the general source for deriving the atoning nature of the priestly garb, namely the juxtaposition of the teaching of priestly garments to the sacrifices (at Lev 1–8).

In light of the manuscript evidence regarding the Yerushalmi, it seems likely that the Bavli had access to an earlier version of the Yerushalmi that lacked these (relatively late) alternate explanations. As noted earlier, two of the three cases of alternate explanations in the Yerushalmi feature one of the two atoned sins not in the main text but in a marginal note for the sole manuscript we possess. In both of these cases, that additional atoned sin appearing only in manuscript (wearing mixed wool and linen, and robbers) does not appear in the Bavli. One might thus theorize that these were later (possibly post-redactional) additions to the Yerushalmi, and the Bavli had access only to an earlier version lacking that passage. It is also possible, although more speculative, to suggest that the third case with alternate atoned sins, appearing in connection to the forehead-plate, also originally had one reason, with the second reason (blasphemers) added later to the Yerushalmi, after the authors of the Bavli passage had access to it.<sup>62</sup>

The Bavli version also reflects some changes from the Yerushalmi's version on a more granular level. First, instead of speaking of atoning for *sinners*, which the Yerushalmi does in almost all the cases,<sup>63</sup> the Bavli's formulation is to atone for *sins*. For example, in place of the Yerushalmi's tunic atoning for *murderers* (שופכי דמים), the Bavli has the tunic atone for *murder* (שפיכות דמים). In one case, the shift from the Yerushalmi's breastplate atoning for "those who pervert judgement" (מטי הדין) to the Bavli's atonement for "judgement" (דין) makes the meaning somewhat more general and less clear. The Yerushalmi's assertion that the belt atones for "those who twist" (עוקמנים) and mislead others is replaced by the Bavli's "thoughts of the heart" (הרהור הלב). In terms of prooftexts for the reasoning, the Yerushalmi and Bavli cite identical verses in almost all cases, with a couple of exceptions. In these cases, the Bavli keeps the same basic reasoning, but instead of citing a verse, asserts a similar point in the form of "let a matter of X atone for a [sinful] act of X" (בקול ויכפר על מעשה/יבא דבר שבגובה) (קול/גובה). This form appears only once in the Yerushalmi, in the case of bells of the coat, and it carries over to that case as well as two others in the Bavli (the hat and the incense, the latter of which appears in the Bavli following the material cited above). The Bavli text gives every impression of being a streamlined, edited version of the Yerushalmi's earlier teaching.

While these changes largely relate to form and function at a detail level, some larger-scale shifts are worth also considering, such as the contexts in which these teachings appear. While the Yerushalmi presents the teaching on the Mishnah in Yoma that delineates the priestly garments, the Bavli has no such discussion on this Mishnah (despite Bavli Yoma's frequent drawing upon Yerushalmi Yoma). Instead, the Bavli offers this teaching



in two places, bZeb 88b and bArak 16a. The discussion offered in each case is introduced as a tangent to a local discussion—in bZeb 88b as part of a discussion about the mending and resanctification of the priestly garments, and in bArak 16a as a challenge to teachings regarding atonement through *tzara'at* that overlapped with those of the priestly garments. This discrepancy in how the teachings appear reflects their origin; the teaching first emerged in the Yerushalmi as a derivation and outgrowth of the Mishnah, while for the Bavli the teaching was reworked as a treatment of the priestly clothing, and raised in an associative manner instead of as an expansion on the primary Mishnaic source about the priestly garments.

The somewhat tangential teaching regarding the two sins that lack atonement is preserved in the Bavli, but it follows the central eight priestly garments. This tradition is cited in bArak 16a in the name of R. Simon citing R. Yehoshua ben Levi, similar to the Yerushalmi's attribution to R. Simon; it appears in bZeb 88b simply attributed to R. Yehoshua ben Levi, which might indicate that this is the secondary version of the two Bavli sources. This teaching reflects several changes—it is clarified that these matters did not originally lack for *any* atonement, only for "atonement through sacrifices" (כפרה בקרבנות), which is an attempt to clarify the vague Yerushalmi formulation, although it presents several problems of its own.<sup>64</sup> More significantly, rather than teaching that the *priestly robe* atones for improper speech like the Yerushalmi, it asserts that the *incense* atones for it. Thus, in contrast to the Yerushalmi, where R. Simon is presented as the author of not only the overall teaching about priestly garments but also about the specific connection between evil speech and its atoning agent in the High Priest's coat, the Bavli has R. Simon (citing R. Yehoshua ben Levi) *arguing* with that very teaching, in asserting that *incense* atones instead, based on Num. 17:11–12. The source for the idea that incense atones for evil speech is attributed to Tanna de-bei Rabbi Yishmael,<sup>65</sup> both in this passage and at bYom 44a, indicating there may have been an earlier teaching that was imported here and presented as a teaching of R. Simon. The Bavli then resolves this conflict by asserting that one case (presumably the loud and public bells on the robe) refers to the atonement for public evil speech and the other (presumably the private incense, which takes place in the minimally accessible sanctuary) for private evil speech.

It is tantalizing to consider the possible relationship between this tradition, which asserts that incense rather than the priestly robe atones, drawing upon Aaron's actions at Num. 17:11–12, and the passage in Wisdom of Solomon 18:20–25 noted above. That passage reads Num. 17:11–12 to emphasize that the robe (and its universal designs) was the true cause of atonement rather than the incense that the biblical text more clearly presents as the cause of atonement. It is possible that this shared association—the competition between incense and the high priest's robe in interpreting the atonement of Num. 17:11–12—points to a common, shared tradition between these two teachings. However, in light of the many centuries between Wisdom of Solomon and the Bavli, as well as the indirect way this tension emerges in the Bavli, this seems less than likely.

The Bavli also relates to the contradiction raised by the other item in this teaching, that the death of the High Priest atones for murder, which is redundant in light of the teaching that the tunic atones for it. The Bavli resolves that contradiction as well, applying a distinction between a known murder and an unknown murder, as well as the distinction between intentional and unintentional killing, conflating the two alternative distinctions of the Yerushalmi (as noted above).<sup>66</sup> Unusually, while the Yerushalmi inserted the teaching that the beheaded calf atones and presented that in conflict with the teaching that the death of the High Priest atones, the Bavli leaves out the beheaded calf and sets up the death of the High Priest directly against the atonement through the tunic. It is possible that the Yerushalmi imported that dispute from a previous formulation (possibly R. Simon's original teaching), while the Bavli reorganized and pared down the teaching to focus on the materials relating directly to atonement through the priestly garb.<sup>67</sup>

In several ways, then, the Bavli draws upon the Yerushalmi's sources, but also modifies them in ways that affect the flow of the *sugya*, even as the resulting teachings largely

agree regarding what sins the eight priestly garments atone for. In both cases there is a connection to *tzara'at*, the skin disease. The discussion of *tzara'at* in the passage runs parallel to that of the priestly vestments. Both are atoning items that resolve a large number (seven or eight) of sins, with the identification of those sins coming on the basis of loose prooftexts. Additionally, more than half of the atoned sins on each list overlaps: both *tzara'at* and the priestly garments resolve evil speech, murder, improper sexual relations, and haughtiness.<sup>68</sup> In the version at bArak 16a in particular, one teaching is posed as a contradiction to the other, seeing the overdetermined possibilities of atonement for the various overlapping sins as problematic. All indications are that the lists were composed in some sense in conjunction with one another. It is notable, however, that in bZev 88b, the other passage listing the atoning qualities of the priestly garments, Rabbi Eini bar Sasson (a variant spelling of R. Anani to whom is attributed the list of eight atoning items) asserts that a certain dispute (over whether a particular list contained the number 36 or 72) was “the same dispute here [regarding priestly garments] as with viewing the [*tzara'at*] ailments.” One might speculate as to whether R. Anani bar Sasson (or someone else) might have offered a teaching asserting more similarities between these two realms, applied in relation to the sins for which they atone, which resulted in the overlapping lists related to *tzara'at* and priestly garments at bArak 16a.<sup>69</sup>

## 7. Contextualizing the Development of Atonement through Priestly Garments

Viewing this interpretive development as a whole reveals a remarkable shift from the biblical and Tannaitic sources, which do not see any atonement in the priestly garments, to the rich Amoraic sources with developed accounts of that atonement serving as a central theme of these garments.<sup>70</sup> This can partly be explained by the general rabbinic propensity to interpretive creativity, to be sure, but the specific nature and timing of the development might be explained more directly.

Swartz (2012), in his treatment of this passage, asserts that, in the wake of the destruction of the Temple, the role of the priestly vestments becomes representational rather than instrumental (p. 36): “When the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, the vestments, like all the accouterments of the cult, became of necessity not a physical object but an object of discourse only . . . ”<sup>71</sup> Such an account fits well with the phenomenon of expiatory priestly garments in the rabbinic view, but it does not explain why that only emerged in Amoraic as opposed to Tannaitic literature.

The particular Amoraic context of this development might be better understood in light of a particular interpretive trends in rabbinic literature around atonement in the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods. Tannaitic literature generally followed a very restrictive account of what serves to atone. The Sifra (3rd century CE midrashic commentary on Leviticus) asserts that אין כפרה אלא בדם, “there is only atonement with blood,”<sup>72</sup> at times also allowing for atonement through confession. Other Tannaitic material expanded categories of atonement to some degree, but primarily in a set of four categories that do not require the Temple—repentance, suffering, death, and the Day of Atonement. (See mYom 8:8.) However, Amoraic literature moves to expand atonement much further, to the point that one medieval compendium lists a total of 51 categories of Talmudic atonement.<sup>73</sup> The Talmud expands in this way by drawing and expanding upon biblical precedents, developing the “four categories of atonement” into further categories, and moving in directions that are altogether new. This includes a number of sacrificial categories lacking any link to atonement in Tannaitic sources that the Talmuds connect to atonement, including song over sacrifice (see yTa'an 4:2 = yPes 4:1); priestly consumption of sacrificial flesh (bPesah 59b, bYom 68b, bYev 40a and 90a, and bArak 4a); incense (bZev 88b, as noted above); and the altar (bKet 10b). The priestly garments participate in this trend, wherein the Amoraic rabbis see increasingly more atonement taking place not only through actions of sacrifice but also through phenomena that were a regular part of the Temple's function.<sup>74</sup>

As the rabbis see atonement in more and more areas, the priestly garments were a reasonable candidate to join that list. The prominence accorded to those vestments in the

Hebrew Bible, along with the hints towards atonement at Exod 28:38 and elsewhere, conspired to yield a set of priestly garments that atone. It is also possible that earlier traditions about the priestly vestments atoning (as seen in Wisdom of Solomon 18:20–25) were accessible to the rabbis. The rabbis then applied their creative interpretation in somewhat varying ways between the various Amoraic versions in determining precisely which sins are resolved by which garments.

One additional development in rabbinic understandings of atonement helps explain the shift in understanding of the priestly clothing. Marcus (2021) has demonstrated a rabbinic tendency to take processes that in the biblical context focused on the resolution of sin and impurity within the Temple and shift them to instead resolve sin or impurity of individuals outside the Temple.<sup>75</sup> This development functions similarly, as biblical passages such as Exod 28:38 primarily about resolving ritual problems and failings are instead understood to apply to human sins outside the Temple, and to extend to all eight priestly garments.

Seen in this light, the Amoraic rabbis view the priestly garments as not just giving honor to the priests wearing them, covering their nakedness, and, for the High Priest's clothing, playing other roles on the relationship between the Israelites and their God. Instead, the priestly clothing were transformed into sources of atonement themselves, with each item of clothing covering its own sin or sins. The clothes not only make the (priestly) man, but they yield atonement for Israel's sins, as well.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Blemishes, camouflage, and sanctuary service: The priestly deity and his attendants (Schipper and Stackert 2013, at p. 471).
- <sup>2</sup> The Garments of the High Priest: Anthropomorphism in the Worship of God (Schwartz 2021).
- <sup>3</sup> Temples and temple-service in ancient Israel: an inquiry into biblical cult phenomena and the historical setting of the priestly school (Haran 1978, *Temples*, p. 212).
- <sup>4</sup> Aaron's Vestments in Exodus 28 and Priestly Leadership (Nihan and Rhyder 2018, at p. 46).
- <sup>5</sup> See Holy Garments for Glory and for Beauty (Exod 28:2): Dress and Identity; Glorious Adornment: The Social Function of Cloth and Clothing in Israel's Tabernacle; Of Hems and Tassels (Quick 2021; Billington 2014, esp. at pp. 181–273; note also Milgrom 1982).
- <sup>6</sup> For an alternate reading of the relationship between those verses, see (Sperling 1999).
- <sup>7</sup> See A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (Propp 2006, pp. 522, 529).
- <sup>8</sup> See Blemishes (Schipper and Stackert 2013).
- <sup>9</sup> Die sprache des Textilen: Untersuchungen zu kleidung und Textilien im Alten Testament (Bender 2008, pp. 111, 211, 247–48, 251) (cited in Quick 2021, p. 115 n. 129).
- <sup>10</sup> Breeches of the Covenant: Gender, Garments and the Priesthood (Rooke 2009).
- <sup>11</sup> See "Aaron's Vestment" (e.g., Nihan and Rhyder 2018, at p. 52).
- <sup>12</sup> See (Haran 1978, p. 216). On the question of the intended audience of the bells, and an argument for it being a divine audience, see (Houtman 1990).
- <sup>13</sup> All Hebrew and Aramaic citations in this article use textual versions from the Responsa Project Database, with important manuscript variants noted.
- <sup>14</sup> See (Sarna 1989, p. 184). Note more generally on the ambiguity of ל.ו. (Schwartz 1994).
- <sup>15</sup> (Haran 1978, p. 215), takes *razon* here to mean "grace," and sees the forehead-plate as symbolizing all holy gifts, thus leading to the Lord's willingness to accept them. For further discussions of this issue, see (Nihan and Rhyder 2018, at p. 60). (MacDonald 2019) reads Exod 28:36–38 and this theme of undoing sin as a secondary, later addition; the goal of his article is to identify different voices among the discussions of priestly clothing that were later harmonized).
- <sup>16</sup> See Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions (Sklar 2010).

- See Wearing the Cosmos: The High Priestly Attire in Josephus' Judean Antiquities; The Semiotics of the Priestly Vestments; The Signifying Creator: Nontextual Sources of Meaning in Ancient Judaism; Rewritten Bible or Imitatio? The Vestments of the High-Priest (Pena 2021; Stein 1931, p. 48; Swartz 2012, esp. pp. 44–45; Marcos 2006).
- In the biblical ending of the plague, the MT at Num. 17:11 and 17:12 uses כִּפֵּר, “to atone”; LXX on those verses (in some editions numbered 16:46–47) has as the relevant verbs ἐξιλασσαι and ἐξιλασαστο, also meaning “to atone.” Significantly, Wisdom of Solomon 18:21 uses that same term, ἐξιλασµὸν, at 18:21, and should be best translated as “to atone.” Of course, there are also major differences between the accounts in Numbers and WoS, as the former sees that atonement as taking place through the use of incense, and the latter through the high priest's clothing intimidating the Destroyer.
- This understanding is noted by (Fletcher-Louis 2007), which attempts to utilize the idea of priestly clothing atoning in stories of Jesus' healing those who touch him, at Mk 1.40–45 and 5.35–43, although that argument is not fully convincing.
- The priestly clothes in rabbinic literature overall have attracted a fair amount of scholarship. (Lehman 2014) has written on rabbinic depictions of mothers who weave fancy priestly ritual garments for their sons serving as High Priests, considering the mother-son bond and rabbinic power relationships. (Feintuch 2010) reads some of those same stories with a focus on literary matters in Bavli Yoma chapter 3, concluding that the rabbis use those stories to contrast wealthy High Priests to the more modest figure of the Talmudist. (Lehman 2019; and Stemberger 2011) both consider the repeated change of golden vestments on Yom Kippur and its relevance for Tractate Yoma. (Weisberg 2012) writes on the gendered significance attributed to the wearing of priestly garments, read through the lens of a story on bMenahot 109b. (Grossman 2022) considers rabbinic and medieval debates over which priestly garments are worn during the daily taking out of the altar ashes as a window into understanding that process overall. These articles do not relate to the expiatory value of the priestly garments, or at best do so in passing. For example, (Lehman 2014) refers in passing to the expiatory power of priestly clothing as part of a broader survey on its significance (p. 57). An interesting exception to this is the work of (Tiemeyer 2006, at pp. 249–55), which associates the High Priest's changing of his clothes multiple times on Yom Kippur with the idea of day's atonement, drawing upon Zechariah 3:3–9, where “the cleansing of Joshua and his symbolic change of clothes are . . . the vital preparations for celebration of the Day of Atonement and its resulting removal of sin from the land (3:9)” (p. 251). This theme of cleansing the Temple does not appear in the passages to be analyzed in this paper.
- The Song of Songs Rabbah text overlaps partially with the Yerushalmi and partially with the LevRab passage in cases of textual divergence.
- The text presented is the Vilna edition. The Vilna and Venice editions and Leiden manuscript are nearly identical to one another, aside from minor orthographic differences (for which Leiden is closer to Venice). Additionally, two clauses, both presenting an alternate tradition as to what is atoned, appear as marginal notes in Leiden but appear in the main text of both printed editions. A parallel version of this teaching appears at Leviticus Rabbah, Tzav 10:6. Significant differences between that version and the Yerushalmi will be noted below.
- In place of these four words, which cite part of the Mishnah Yoma 7:5, LevRab 10:6 cites the entire Mishnah.
- The words כִּלְיָם אֵת דְּבַעֵי מִימֶר appear in a marginal note in the Leiden manuscript here.
- LevRab 10:6 has גִּסוּת.
- The words וְאֵת הַגִּבִּימִם וְאֵת דְּבַעֵי מִימֶר appear in a marginal note in the Leiden manuscript here.
- LevRab 10:6 has וְעֻקְמִינִין שְׁבִלֵב, “[those] crooked in the heart.”
- Venice and Leiden manuscript have עֲוֹבְדֵי עֵז.
- LevRab 10:6 reads נָתַן.
- LevRab 10:6 has וְנָתַנָּה, “and placed,” in place of וְקָבַעָה, “and set,” here and in the two below cases.
- LevRab 10:6 has בְּמָה יִתְכַפֵּר לוֹ בְּשָׁנִי here.
- LevRab 10:6 adds בְּשִׁגְגָה, “unwittingly.”
- LevRab 10:6 has בְּמָה יִתְכַפֵּר לוֹ בְּמִיתָת here in place of מִיתָת.
- Instead of citing Num 35:25, LevRab 10:6 cites Num 35:28, with nearly identical meaning.
- This section (beginning בֶּן רִ"א בֶּן יַעֲקֹב) does not appear in LevRab 10:6 and is likely an accretion inserted later in the Yerushalmi's version.
- LevRab 10:6 inverts the order of these two possible sins atoned by the forehead-plate, and has other minor changes in the discussion, as well.
- This interpretation may be tying this tunic to that of Joseph and presuming that Joseph's coat had a mix of wool and linen. Still, it is not immediately clear why the tunic would atone for the mixing of wool and linen. Although some of the priestly garments included a mix of wool and linen (and were permitted as an exception to the usual prohibition at, e.g., Deut. 22:11; see also bYom 12a), the tunic is not included in that list, which extends only to the belt, *ephod*-apron, and breastplate. See Exod 28:6, 25, 39.
- This expiatory function of the tunic does not appear at LevRab 10:6. If the LevRab version is earlier, and included a connection to the Joseph story, the Yerushalmi may have inserted murder, clearly the most blatant sin in that story (albeit only attempted murder) as a sin for the tunic to atone.

39 (Orlov 2016, pp. 39–41), drawing on (Boustán 2005, pp. 81–92), points to this teaching (in its parallel appearances at yYom, bZev, and bArak) as an example of a broader theme in Jewish literature and liturgy connecting the Day of Atonement to the attempted murder of Joseph by his brothers, which involved dipping a tunic (*kuttonet*) in blood (Gen. 37:31).

40 Raising one’s head high is a synonym for haughtiness; presumably this association is being drawn upon here.

41 LevRab 10:6 and Song of Songs Rabbah 4 explain, in their versions of this teaching, that the belt is hollow, including an invisible area, like robbers who work where they cannot be seen. LevRab 10:6: ומאן דאמר על הגנבים לפי שהיה חלול כנגד הגנבים שעושים מעשיהם בסתר (bSeder). LevRab 10:6: ומאן דאמר על הגנבים לפי שהיה חלול כנגד הגנבים שעושים מעשיהם בסתר (bSeder).

42 For two poetic uses of the idea that the belt atones, see (Katsumata 2009) for *E’zrah Gevurah* li. 291 (pp. 39, 85) and *Ba-Meromim* li. 247–48 (pp. 137, 176); see (Stal 2016) and esp. nn. 19–21. For alternative traditions relating to the atoning object of the priestly belt as well as several other garments, see (Hacohen 2008).

43 This formulation of two stages, where the items originally lacked atonement, only to find it later, is opaque. The text remains silent on what these two stages correlate to, as well as in regard to the source of the atonement’s revelation. It is further unclear as to why it distinguishes these two particular cases among other cases in which atonement is not immediately noted. The version in the Bavli attempts to clarify this by shifting the passage to say that they lack atonement in the context of sacrifice, but offer it elsewhere (שני דברים לא מצינו להם בקרבנות כפרה, בדבר אחר מצינו להם כפרה), which helps only to a degree, as most sins do not have their atonement explicitly noted in the context of sacrifices in the Bible either.

44 It is not clear why the ox brought inside the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement is said to specifically atone for murder, when it is usually seen as atoning more generally for the sins of priests (see Lev. 16:11).

45 One only goes to the city of refuge in a case of accidental killing. See Num 35:11.

46 One only goes to the city of refuge if they are the known killer. The ritual of the beheaded calf is only performed in a case where “it is not known who killed” the victim; see Deut 21:1.

47 Goliath blasphemed Israel prior to being killed. See 1 Sam 17:10,45, which use the verb פגח, a close synonym to פגם, the stem which the Yerushalmi uses to refer to the sin of blasphemy (גודפנין); see, e.g., 2 Kgs. 19:22, Isa 37:23, Ezek 5:15, Ps 44:17.

48 Although this case does not relate to priestly garb and appears in a tangent, it is still quite related to these cases, as it refers to atonement through the High Priest.

49 It is not immediately clear whether the Yerushalmi (leaving out the insertion beginning ההורג נפש לא היתה לו כפרה), LevRab 10:6, or SoS 4 passages are first; however, they are close enough that this question can be set aside for the purposes of the analysis here.

50 One might argue on the basis of this that there were two stages to the composition, first that four priestly garments, those worn by all priests, atone, and later that not just those four but all eight atone, with sins provided to correlate to each category. R. Simon, a second generation Palestinian Amora, is cited twice, first at the beginning of the teaching and a second time (citing R. Yonatan) to note the two cases of atonement that were not originally clear. A possible reconstruction is that R. Simon was originally responsible only for a kernel of the text (possibly the teaching about the coat [and death of the High Priest], or possibly the first four garments), and a later version of this teaching filled in some of the details and may have used R. Simon’s name to present the teaching overall, as well. However, this is more likely a textual oddity, or maybe even the accidental inclusion of these words at a later stage.

51 yPes 7:5.

52 The mechanism of this atonement is almost as vague as its source. Do these garments atone on their own, as some sort of talisman? Do they assist the priests in the processes of atonement attending the bringing of sacrifices? Need they be worn by priests in order to atone or do they possess this power even in the proverbial closet? And what atones for these sins in post-Temple times? This teaching offers no clues on these questions.

53 The text below represents the Vilna edition of bArak 16a, with significant differences in bZev 88b noted in endnotes.

54 bZev 88b cites an earlier part of this verse (Gen 37:31): וישחטו שער עזים.

55 This word does not appear in bZev 88b in the Vilna (and other) printed editions (or in the Munich and Vatican 118–119 manuscripts), although it does appear in the Columbia 294–295, 147 כ”ה, and Vatican 120–121 manuscripts.

56 There are some complications regarding the proper text of the Bavli regarding the proof for the priest’s belt atoning for thoughts of the heart. The versions of the relevant passage are presented below, along with a short analysis:



Arakhin 16b		Zevahim 88b
London	אבנט מכפר על הירחור הלב	
Vatican (118–119)	והיה על לב אהרן 'אבנט מכפר על הירחור אהיכא דאיתיה דכת	אבנט מכפר על הירחור הלב אהיכא דאיתיה
Vatican (120–121)	אהיכא דאיתיה 'אבנט מכפר על הירחור הלב א	אבנט מכפר על הירחור הלב אהיכא דאיתיה
Munich 95	אבנט מכפר על הירחור הלב על היכא דאיתיה	אבנט מכפר על הירחור הלב אהיכא דאיתיה
Columbia	אבנט מכפר על הירחור הלב היכא דאיתיה	
Vilna printed edition	דכתיב והיה על לב אהרן) אהיכא דאיתיה, אבנט מכפרת על הירחור הלב	אבנט מכפר על הירחור הלב היכא דאיתיה
Venice printed edition	דאיתיה דכתב והיה על לב אהרן 'אבנט מכפרת על הירחור הלב אהיכ	'אבנט מכפר על הירחור הלב היכא דאיתיה

The eight manuscripts representing the two Bavli passages and the four Vilna and Venice printed editions regarding atonement through the priest's belt feature a total of three distinct versions of the reason given: A. The London version of bArak 16b presents no reason at all; B. Vatican 119 to bArak 16b gives both reasons, noting both the location of the belt and the verse at Exod 28:30; C. Vatican 120–21 and Munich 95, each consistently at both bArak 16b and bZev 88b, as well as Vatican 118–119 and Columbia to bZev 88b, note the location but not the verse. The Vilna printed edition is not fully consistent, following C at bZev 88b while the Vilna text at bArak 16a includes both the location as well as the cited verse, (following B,) but places the latter in parentheses. Version A (the London version of bArak 16b), shorter than any other version of this passage in the Yerushalmi or Bavli, is likely a shortened form.

Instead of *והיה על לב אהרן* bZev 88b has *ר חנינא* "מנין א", attributing this teaching to Rabbi Hanina instead of to God.

Instead of *מעשה הקול* bZev 88b has *קול הרע*, "the evil voice," more directly invoking *לשון הרע*, "evil speech." Some versions have *מעשה שבו*, which have basically the same overall meaning.

bZev 88b has *מעשה עזי פנים*, "brazeness," rather than *מעשה עזי פנים*, "action of the brazen." Additionally, most manuscripts of bArak 16a have either *עזי פנים* (British Library, Oxford 370, Vatican 120–121) or *עזי פנים* (Vatican 118–119).

For the question of whether the Bavli possessed the Yerushalmi and/or something similar to it, see (Gray 2005). Even though in this case the parallel is between two different tractates of Bavli and Yerushalmi, the parallel seems close enough to establish a likelihood of dependence.

In doing so, the Bavli leaves out the prospect of the priestly garments atoning for robbers, wearing mixed wool and linen, and blasphemers.

It is possible that the Bavli had access to a version of Leviticus Rabbah or Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah as well. As noted above, however, it seems to be drawing particularly from the version in the Yerushalmi, or something very similar to it.

This is especially true in the Leiden manuscript version. See nn. 28 above. The version in Leviticus Rabbah 10:6 also does this for most but not all cases. Note one difference, appearing in n. 27 above.

One obvious question: are these the only two cases lacking atonement in sacrifice but finding it elsewhere? If not, what leads these two cases to be specified?

It is possible that this is referring to Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, *vayyassa* 6, which explicates Num. 17:12 as demonstrating to the people that incense can atone.

As noted above, it does seem clear that the Bavli had access to the Yerushalmi's responses in those cases.

The passage with this teaching and the questions and answers is reprised below (citation from bArak 16a-b):

והא"ר סימון אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי שני דברים לא מצינו להם בקרבנות כפרה בדבר אחר מצינו להם כפרה שפיכות דמים ולשון הרע שפיכות דמים בעגלה ערופה ולשון הרע בקטרת דתניא ר' חנינא למדנו לקטרת שמכפרת דכתיב ויתן את הקטרת ויכפר על העם ותנא דבי רבי ישמעאל על מה קטרת מכפרת על לשון הרע אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא יבא דבר שבחשאי ויכפר על מעשה חשאי קשיא שפיכות דמים אשפיכות דמים קשיא לשון הרע אלשון הרע שפיכות דמים לא קשיא הא ידיע מאן קטליה הא דלא ידיע מאן קטליה ידיע מאן קטליה בר קטלא הוא במזיד ולא אתרו ביה לשון הרע אלשון הרע ל"ק הא בצינעא הא בפרהסיא

But R. Simon said R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: Two things we find regarding atoning sacrifices, where we find atonement for them elsewhere—spilling of blood and evil speech. Spilling of blood [is atoned by] the broken-necked heifer, and evil speech [is atoned by] incense, as it was taught: R. Hanina: We learned about incense that it atones, as it is said "and he placed the incense and he atoned for the nation" (Num 17:12). And the House of Rabbi Ishmael taught: For what does incense atone? For evil speech. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Let a private matter atone for a private action. There is a contradiction between teachings regarding spilling of blood and regarding teachings of evil speech [in the two passages just cited—what atones for each, the tunic and coat or the broken-necked heifer and incense?] The contradiction regarding the spilling of blood is not a problem—one [mode of atonement—tunic] is where it is known who killed and one [mode of atonement—broken-necked heifer] is where it is not known who killed him. If it is known who killed him, he receives the death penalty? [Rather, it is a case] of intentional killing where they did not warn him [that he receives atonement through the tunic]. The contradiction regarding evil speech is not a problem—this is in private and this is in public.

- <sup>68</sup> *Tzara'at* also resolves false oaths, robbery, and miserliness (lit. narrow-eyedness), and the priestly garments also resolve improper thoughts of the heart, improper judgements, idolatry, and improper brazen actions. See my treatment of this topic at (Zuckier 2022).
- <sup>69</sup> It is worth seeing the treatment of the priestly garments, including a discussion of their atoning role in rabbinic literature, in (Swartz 2012, esp. at pp. 46–50). In addition to an analysis of the Talmudic passage, the article points to interesting parallels outside the scope of this study, in the Azkir Gevurot and Az be'En Kol piyyutim for the Day of Atonement.
- <sup>70</sup> In this context, it is worth noting that these discussions were not of immediate practical import for the rabbis, as sacrifice was not regularly practiced following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE. In light of the non-practicality of these laws for the rabbis, their interpretive moves can be seen as reflecting rabbinic ideology and culture. This point has been argued, often in conjunction with a Foucauldian argument that the rabbis use these discussions to assert greater power in Temple matters, in a variety of works on rabbinic literature over the past two decades. See, e.g., (Rosen-Zvi 2012; Berkowitz 2006; and Cohn 2013, esp. at p. 13).
- <sup>71</sup> Semiotics of the Priestly Vestments (Swartz 2012, p. 36).
- <sup>72</sup> It has been noted that this formulation is close to that of Hebrews 9:22, “according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.” See, e.g., (Gilders 2004, p. 1).
- <sup>73</sup> See the relevant entry on כפרה (atonement) in *Kelalei ha-Mitzvot* of R. Joseph b. Avraham Ghikatilla, a Spanish scholar of the 13th century.
- <sup>74</sup> See a more extensive analysis of the expansion of atonement in Amoraic literature at (Zuckier forthcoming), chp. 5.
- <sup>75</sup> See also The Bounds of Non-Priestly Purity: A Reassessment (Noam 2007).

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