

The Color White in Judaism: Oh No! I've got Chocolate on My White Robe and I Need it for Yom Kippur by Rabbi Arnold Saltzman

Preface:

Throughout the Torah, there are many references made to color, which is used to symbolize important principles.

White (Lavan) is used to symbolize purity and innocence as it is the true color of light without any change. White can also symbolize life and/or death. In the Talmud salt (white) symbolizes the Torah, for as the world can not exist without salt, so it can not endure without the Torah.

White is the color most often associated with goodness, honesty, cleanliness, the new.

Pope Francis, recently visited this hemisphere much to delight of millions of followers, and he wore white. The Popes have worn white since 1566, as a symbol of purity and sacrifice, but this is a borrowed custom from the ancient Temple in Jerusalem.

White which symbolizes purity explains its use during weddings. It is also felt to signify the beginning of a new life together.

Text:

In the play, *Art*, two people sitting in a living room are debating the merit of a \$100,000 purchase of a painting which is an all 'white' painted canvas. One actor stands up, and with a marker draws a diagonal black line on the canvas and adds a stick figure of a skier heading down the slope. The audience gasps in disbelief, then laughs.

There are two color theories - one being the light spectrum in which the color white is the composite of all colors. That is science.

The second theory is that of mixing colors, as in painting, where white is the absence of color and black is the composite of all colors.

Color theory 3, by Rabbi Saltzman, 'white' is the symbol of purity as in Bride, Sabbath Table, priest, Cohen, Pope Francis. Also it is the color of the season - Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Passover and Shavuot.

The white Torah mantle, the Robes of the Rabbi and Hazzan, are formal, and elevate the occasion. On the West Coast, a white suit and hat might be seen instead of the robe. I always wore a red or blue tie which you could see from a distance with the white robe, the red a reminder of the ancient sacrifice, the blue a reminder of the land of Israel and the colors of blue and white.

When an artist looks at a blank canvas, what is it that they see?

When a musician looks at the blank staff of music paper, what is it that they hear or think will fill the unlimited possibilities of musical combinations?

Similarly, a writer looks at a blank page or a blank document on a computer and begins to realize the potential this space offers.

The painters William Turner and John Constable made special use of white. Turner discovered the power of white in an explosive manner as an abstract subject. William Constable, the great English landscape artist, discovered that white could be used to outline and highlight in a manner which could bring freshness and a sense of joy to his pastoral settings and landscapes.

On Rosh Hashanah in Calvert County, Maryland we have a wonderful custom of an elaborate kiddush and sit down luncheon. People come from a distance to services, then stay a while longer to socialize, thanks to volunteers who practice the mitzvah of hospitality.

Ed Apple was given a birthday cake as he shared the day with the holiday. There was a delicious chocolate cake. I sat down still wearing my white robe, and when I finished enjoying the meal, noticed that all along the sleeve of my robe was a long area covered in chocolate.

This was a problem since I needed the robe for Yom Kippur. Two days later Carol and I went to the cleaners who in turn wanted \$128 to clean the white robe. I refused to pay that and left. Carol turned to Angie's List and found a recommended cleaner who would do the same thing for \$24. As a mitzvah for me, a gesture of love, she brought the robe to them so it would be ready in time for Yom Kippur.

When I went to pick up the robe, there was a short, blond woman at the register who was jovial and smiling. She circulated the clothing device until the robe appeared and then placed it on another clothing rack. She stared, and looked and looked. Finally I said "Yes, I am a rabbi." She answered "I thought so." She added I'm Jewish, originally from Turkey.

Looking at the robe she said "I lost a dear brother in a bombing of a synagogue in Turkey. He went to pray and was killed for being a Jew. I miss him every day." She was smiling while remembering.

The White robe on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur represents the Kingship of God, the sounding of the Shofar to return to God by changing

your life, your way of doing things. Lastly, the importance of Remembrance and Yizkor, of all that has happened, and that was done for us, and all that we experience as a people.

A white robe with chocolate going to the cleaners is a metaphor for the spiritual cleansing which takes place during the holydays. A symbol of purity, that we begin the New Year with a blank canvas which can have the overlay of our lives, or a line across it racing downhill. A white robe can highlight our lives, bringing us together, as we said on Yom Kippur: Ohr Zarua La'tza'dik - A Light is Sown for the Righteous and Joy for the Upright in Heart.

Shabbat Shalom!