

Rabbi Akiva Males is the rabbi of Keshet Israel
Congregation in Harrisburg, PA.

UNMASKING AN ODD-SOUNDING PURIM CUSTOM: A THEORY

I – Ramo and Purim Costumes

The following little-known story is related about the famed R. Moshe Isserles (Ramo).¹

Ramo passed away on the thirty-third day of the counting of the *Omer* (*Lag Ba'Omer*) in Cracow, Poland. As such, one of his eulogizers thought it fitting to share thirty three praises of Ramo with those in attendance. After listing thirty two of his meritorious attributes, Ramo's eulogizer struggled to think of one last appropriate accolade. Finally, an elderly member of Cracow's Jewish community came forward to offer one final praiseworthy custom of their beloved rabbi: Each year on Purim afternoon, Ramo would disguise himself in a costume and go from house to house summoning everyone to return to the synagogue for evening services.²

It is unlikely we will ever know for certain whether it really was Ramo's custom to wear a Purim costume each year.³ However, Ramo himself records an enigmatic ruling regarding Purim costumes that is far more surprising than the custom attributed to him above.

In his second to last gloss to the *Shulhan Arukh's* first section, Ramo writes:

I thank my father - Mr. U. H. Males - for his assistance in preparing this article.

¹ c. 1525-1572

² R. Akiva Yosef Shlesinger, *Lev Ha-Ivri* (Jerusalem, 1920), 2b, n. 1.

³ The veracity of the above-mentioned report is questionable, as the same source claims Ramo lived for only thirty-three years. We know, however, Ramo was around fifty when he passed away.

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. . . and regarding the customs of people wearing masks on Purim⁴, as well as a man wearing a woman's garments, and a woman a man's garment – there is no prohibition in the matter since their intentions are for mere rejoicing. This is also true regarding the wearing of garments containing Rabbinically prohibited mixtures of wool and linen.⁵ There are some authorities who forbid this, but the practice is according to the first theory. Similarly, people who snatch items from one another while rejoicing do not transgress the prohibition of "Thou shall not steal." This is what has become the custom – providing that one does nothing which has been deemed improper according to the community's leaders.⁶

Ramo attributes these eyebrow-raising Purim allowances to R. Yehuda ben Eliezer ha-Levi Minz,⁷ who had migrated from Mainz, Germany to Padua, Italy in 1462. R. Minz's responsum, cited by Ramo, is the first to deal with – and sanction – the custom of people wearing costumes and clothing associated with the opposite gender on Purim.⁸ These behaviors certainly needed halakhic sanction, as the Torah seems to explicitly prohibit such practices⁹ in Deuteronomy 22:5 where the verse states:

A woman shall not wear garments of a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination unto the Lord your G-d.

⁴ For simplicity's sake, I translated the term *partsuf* as "mask". However, upon seeing how the term *partsuf* is used in a number of different sources in this matter, it becomes clear that *partsuf* is best translated as a full identity concealing costume – and not simply a mask. I was glad to see that on page 226 of Herman Pollack's article entitled "An Historical Inquiry Concerning Purim Masquerade Attire," *Proceedings of the World Congress on Jewish Studies* 7 (1981), 217-235, he translates *partsufim* as "masked dress." Dr. Zohar Henegbi also understands the term *partsuf* in this manner. See his article on Purim customs included in R. Dr. Daniel Sperber's *Minhagei Yisrael*, vol. VI (Jerusalem, 1998), 195.

⁵ The Torah prohibits the wearing of clothing consisting of both wool and linen in Leviticus 19:19 and Deuteronomy 22:11. This mixture is known as either *shaatnez* or *kilayim*. The differences between mixtures that are Biblically forbidden, and those which are only Rabbinically forbidden will be discussed in section III.

⁶ Ramo's gloss on *Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim* 696:8. See also the nearly identical comments of the Levush (*ibid*).

⁷ Also known as Mahari Minz - c. 1405-1508.

⁸ R. Minz also states that this was a common form of entertaining a bride and groom at their wedding.

⁹ From R. Minz's response, it seems that the wearing of *any* costume by a man needed to be explained in light of the Torah's prohibition of *lo yilbash ge'ever simlat isha*.

R. Minz's responsum is certainly one of the most fundamental sources in any discussion over the halakhic appropriateness of one gender wearing the attire of the other.¹⁰ However, nowhere in that responsum does one find mention of the other clothing-related Purim custom mentioned by Ramo – i.e. allowing for the wearing of Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* as part of one's rejoicing on Purim.¹¹

II – Ramo's *Darkei Moshe*

Thankfully, Ramo's glosses to the *Shulhan Arukh* are not the only place where he writes about this odd-sounding Purim custom. In his *Darkei Moshe* to the *Tur Shulhan Arukh*,¹² Ramo sheds much more light on allowing the wearing of clothing containing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* on Purim.

Ramo explains that, in the above mentioned responsum, R. Minz justified the practice of one gender wearing garments of the other on Purim partly based on an earlier ruling of R. Isaac ben Asher.¹³ In a relaxed attitude, R. Isaac had also allowed young people to snatch food items from one another while celebrating Purim.

According to R. Isaac, such behavior, “from the time of the reading of the *megillah* until the conclusion of the festive Purim meal – which is two nights and one day – cannot be deemed as theft, and those who behaved in this manner should not be called before a Rabbinical court, so long as the communal leaders do not disapprove of their actions.”

Ramo pointed out that it was (in part) R. Isaac's liberal ruling regarding the snatching of food items on Purim that R. Minz had built his ruling upon. After all, if behavior which would normally be Biblically prohibited based on the prohibition of “thou shall not steal”¹⁴ can be tolerated so long as it was carried out in the “spirit of Purim,” the Biblical prohibition on one gender wearing the garments of the other could similarly be suspended – so long as these actions were joyfully carried out in the “spirit of Purim.”

Ramo then saw an opportunity to explain a widespread Purim custom which had seemed obviously strange to him.

¹⁰ For a modern-day example, see R. Ovadia Yosef's *Yehaveh Da'at* 5:50.

¹¹ See section five paragraph 614 of *Sefer Mateh Moshe* (by R. Moshe ben Avraham, d. 1606) who also records the custom of allowing for the wearing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* on Purim – based on R. Minz's response.

¹² See *Darkei Moshe*'s closing remarks to *Tur Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim*, 696.

¹³ Also known as Riva – a twelfth century Tosafist who lived in Speyer, Germany.

¹⁴ Leviticus 19:13.

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... Perhaps this is how the custom of wearing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* in the course of one's Purim celebrations ended up spreading. For we see that even Biblical prohibitions are overlooked – so long as one does not act for the sake of violating them. That being the case, we can certainly overlook the issue of Rabbinically prohibited mixtures of wool and linen . . .

After noting an effective rebuttal to his initial theory, Ramo noted just how popular the practice of wearing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* had become. Feeling compelled to defend such a widespread – and unchallenged – Jewish custom, Ramo offered what he felt was a more grounded halakhic justification:

Ramo explains that the *Mishna*¹⁵ and the *Talmud*¹⁶ show it is permissible for a Jew to wear clothing made from forbidden mixtures of wool and linen in order to avoid paying an unjust tax.¹⁷ From this we can deduce that donning *shaatnez* garments for reasons other than wearing them as ordinary clothing is permissible. Ramo notes that some commentators explain that only Jews were charged with this unjust tax, and, by wearing *shaatnez* garments, a Jew was able to conceal his identity and avoid paying it.¹⁸ Therefore, we see that wearing *shaatnez* garments to conceal one's identity – as opposed to wearing them as ordinary clothing – is permissible. If so, according to Ramo, one could likewise halakhically justify the wearing of *shaatnez* garments worn as costumes and not as regular clothing on Purim.¹⁹

III – Biblically Prohibited *Shaatnez* vs. Rabbinically Prohibited *Shaatnez*

With Ramo allowing for the wearing of a Purim costume containing *shaatnez* that was only Rabbinically prohibited, now would be a good

¹⁵ *Kilayim* 9:2

¹⁶ BT *Bava Kama* 113a

¹⁷ This tax is described as unjust because it was either A) a “shake down” by a self-appointed non-governmental toll collector, or B) an oppressive governmental tax without limit. See *Tur Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah* 301 as well as the *Shulhan Arukh Yoreh Deah* 301:6 and the accompanying commentaries.

¹⁸ Others explain that this was a tax being charged on clothing and not a head-tax. Only clothing being carried was subject to this unjust tax, and not garments that were worn. Thus, wearing the *shaatnez* clothing one was transporting was not meant to hide a Jew's identity, but a means of avoiding paying the unjust tax on those articles of clothing.

¹⁹ It is important to note that it is clear from the *Darkei Moshe* that only Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* garments worn as a costume could be justifiably worn on Purim according to Ramo. This halakhic rationale would not help for the wearing of Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* garments as ordinary articles of clothing on Purim.

time to pause and clarify the difference between Biblically prohibited *shaatnez* and Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*.

In two places, the Torah prohibits the wearing of garments consisting of both wool and linen (those mixtures are known as *shaatnez* or *kilayim*):

You shall observe My decrees: You shall not mate your animal with another species, you shall not plant your field with mixed seed; and a garment that is a mixture of combined fibers shall not come upon you. (Leviticus 19:19)

You shall not wear combined fibers, wool and linen together.²⁰
(Deuteronomy 22:11)

The *mishna* (*Kilayim* 9:8) teaches us that the Hebrew word *shaatnez* is a contraction of three other Hebrew words: *shu'a*, *tavui*, and *nuz* – combed, spun, and woven. Rashi²¹ understands this in what appears to be the most straightforward manner: In order for fabric containing wool and linen to be considered Biblically prohibited *shaatnez*, its fibers must have gone through all three of those stages together. Meaning, the wool and linen fibers must first be combed together, then spun together, and finally woven into one fabric. Only such a fabric would be considered *shaatnez* on a Biblical level. According to Rashi, then, Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* would be defined as any fabric containing wool and linen whose fibers did not go through all three of the above mentioned stages together.²²

IV – The Opposition

Many are not familiar with Ramo's permissive ruling regarding the wearing of Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* on Purim for one of two reasons:

- A) His ruling is hidden away at the end of the first section of the *Shulhan Arukh* where it is not likely to be noticed.
- B) Many great halakhic sources strongly opposed Ramo's lenient ruling.²³

²⁰ *The Stone Edition Chumash*, (New York: Artscroll/Mesorah, 1993) was used for the translation of both verses.

²¹ BT *Nidda*, 61b.

²² Not all Rishonim agree with Rashi. See *Tiferet Yisrael* and other commentaries to *Kilayim* 9:8. R. Hai Gaon seems to have been of the same opinion as Rashi. See *Teshuvot ha-Geonim / Sha'arei Teshuva* (published by R. Zev Wolf Leiter), responsum 63. For other examples of rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*, see *Shulhan Arukh Yoreh Deah* 300.

²³ As noted in n. 6, though, Ramo's permissive ruling is nearly echoed in the *Levush*.

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After noting the custom some had of wearing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* on Purim in his *Shenei Lubot ha-Berit* (*Shelah*),²⁴ R. Isaiah Horowitz²⁵ writes:

*However, I say this is not the conduct of the pious. He who guards his soul will distance himself from wearing even Rabbinically prohibited shaatnez . . .*²⁶

R. Shmuel Aboab²⁷ was astounded by Ramo's permissive attitude towards this custom.²⁸ In his *Sefer ha-Zikbronot*,²⁹ he raises the following objections:

- 1) On what basis can one so flippantly do away with a Rabbinic prohibition?
- 2) One who intends to wear a costume containing only Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* can easily end up wearing Biblically prohibited *shaatnez* instead. As such, this custom allows too much room for error.

In his *Keneset ha-Gedolah*,³⁰ R. Chaim Benvineste³¹ raises the same basic objections as R. Aboab, and notes that he saw these issues raised in the *Sefer ha-Zikbronot*, as well.³²

²⁴ *Shenei Lubot ha-Berit, Massekhet Megillah, Perek Ner Mitzvah*, 17.

²⁵ Born in Prague c. 1565 – died in Tiberias, Israel 1630.

²⁶ This comment of the *Shelah* is cited by the *Ba'er Hetev* to *Shulhan Arukh Orach Hayyim* 696:13 and the *Mishna Berura* to 696:30.

²⁷ Venice, Italy, 1610-1694.

²⁸ See chapter 30 of R. Moshe Leib Lyetsch Rosenbaum's *Hemdut Aryeh* (Pressburg, 1869), where he is greatly puzzled by Ramo's permissive ruling. In an effort to make sense of Ramo's position, R. Rosenbaum suggested the following theory: From the Talmud's case of a Jew being allowed to wear *shaatnez* garments to avoid paying an unfair tax, we see that certain allowances can be made if the wearing of *shaatnez* can save one from a monetary loss. As such, perhaps Ramo's ruling was intended to provide poor Jews – who may have been too proud to ask for charity – an opportunity to do so on Purim. Perhaps by allowing them to disguise themselves with costumes containing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*, Ramo hoped to enable them to maintain their dignity while collecting charity on Purim. R. Rosenbaum immediately abandons that theory, though. He notes that the poor could just as easily have found non-*shaatnez* costumes with which to disguise themselves. As such, he writes that he can find no way to account for Ramo's permissive ruling on the matter.

²⁹ Chapter two, 14b-15a.

³⁰ Last paragraph of *Keneset ha-Gedola* to *Tur Shulhan Arukh*, 695. This comment is also referred to by the *Mishna Berura* to 696:30.

³¹ Turkey, 1603-1673

³² R. Aboab and R. Beniviste may very likely only have seen Ramo's comments on the *Shulhan Arukh* and not his comments in the *Darkei Moshe*. First of all, neither mentions Ramo's comments in his *Darkei Moshe*. Second, it seems they would not

Lastly, it is important to note that, after proposing a *halakbic* justification for what he saw as a widespread custom, Ramo concluded his own remarks in his *Darkei Moshe* by stating:

*However, it is better to be stringent and serve G-d in happiness while trembling with fear.*³³

Thus, it is little wonder that the custom of allowing for the wearing of Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* on Purim has faded into oblivion.³⁴ No one would argue with the *Arukh ha-Shulhan*³⁵ who states:³⁶

and the practice of earlier generations to allow for the wearing of costumes made from shaatnez materials... nowadays, we do not conduct ourselves in this fashion...

V – The Need for Further Clarity

Ramo's comments in his *Darkei Moshe* certainly shed more light on the strange-sounding practice of allowing for the wearing of Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* on Purim. However, I believe there is still more work to be done if one wishes to fully understand this once-popular custom.

In his *Darkei Moshe*, Ramo presented us with a classic *limmud zekhut* – an effort to provide post-facto justification – for a common practice which appeared to be incompatible with Halakhah. Living in the 1500's, Ramo took stock of what had become the popular custom of wearing Purim costumes containing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*. Ramo clearly recognized how problematic this custom seemed to be. However, he knew

have been so fearful of one ending up wearing a Purim costume containing Biblically prohibited *shaatnez* had they seen Ramo's comments in his *Darkei Moshe*. After all, by the logic put forth there by Ramo, even a Purim costume containing Biblically prohibited *shaatnez* could be justifiably worn, as will be discussed later.

³³ It is interesting that Ramo offers no such words of caution in his glosses to the *Shulhan Arukh*, where he comes off as fully endorsing the custom under discussion. Even in his *Darkei Moshe*, where he does offer words of caution, he stops short of trying to abolish the practice. See the *Eliyahu Rabba* 696: 15, who follows a very similar pattern to Ramo's comments in *Darkei Moshe*.

³⁴ In fact, in the days leading up to Purim, it has become routine to see notices in various media outlets serving the Orthodox Jewish community which caution of the likelihood of rental costumes containing *shaatnez*. See, for example, <http://www.theyeshivaworld.com/article.php?p=5419>.

³⁵ Authored by R. Yehiel Mikhel Epstein (1829-1908).

³⁶ *Orah Hayyim* 696:12.

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full well that this custom must have viable halakhic basis to it – otherwise it surely would have been outlawed by the Rabbinic giants of the previous generations. Realizing that no recorded halakhic justification had been preserved regarding this custom, Ramo saw it as his sacred duty to try his best to construct one.

In order to fully understand the permissive custom which Ramo recorded, there seem to be two important points in need of further clarification:

- A) How did a custom allowing for the wearing of a Purim costume containing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* develop in the first place? While Ramo provided us with the potential halakhic justification for what had already become a popular practice, he did not tell us what had inspired anyone to originate this custom.³⁷
- B) Ramo worked hard to provide a *limmud zekhut* for a popular custom which clearly seemed at odds with Halakhah. However, Ramo's proposed halakhic justification of this custom would seem to allow even for the wearing of a Purim costume containing Biblically prohibited *shaatnez*. After all, the case of the Jew being allowed to wear *shaatnez* garments to avoid paying an unjust tax taught us that one can dress in *shaatnez* clothing – as long as those garments are being worn for a purpose other than just covering oneself like ordinary clothing. That being the case, why does Ramo extend his *limmud zekhut* to only allow for the wearing of Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* on Purim? Why does Ramo not take his *limmud zekhut* to its logical conclusion and allow for the wearing of even Biblically prohibited *Shaatez* on Purim?

My goal is to suggest a theory (a missing link, if you will,) that will help explain the development of this once popular Purim custom for which Ramo felt the need to offer a halakhic justification. I hope that this theory will also help explain why, despite his powerful *limmud zekhut*, Ramo was only comfortable allowing for the wearing of a Purim costume containing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*, and not Biblically prohibited *shaatnez*.

³⁷ One can easily imagine the origins of the other odd-sounding Purim customs cited by Ramo (i.e., people obviously found dressing in the garments of the opposite gender amusing. As Mahari Minz stated in his responsa, this was also the practice at many wedding celebrations of his day. One can also understand how a person caught up in his rejoicing found the urge to snatch another person's Purim treats, etc.). But what could have motivated anyone to go out and wear Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* garments on Purim? See n. 28 for an important related point.

VI – *Shaatnez* in *Megillas Esther*

Surprisingly, a careful reading of the Book of Esther indicates two apparent instances of *shaatnez* within the miraculous Purim story.

The first *shaatnez*-related reference can be found in Esther 1:6. In describing the cords used to fasten King Ahashveirosh's decorative tapestries at his royal feast, the *Megillah* states:

[There were hangings of] white, green, and sky-blue, held fast by cords of linen and purple wool to silver rods and marble pillars...

The second apparent reference to *shaatnez* in the Book of Esther can be found in Esther 8:15. In describing the royal garments which Mordecai wore after assuming a high-ranking position in King Ahashverosh's cabinet, the *Megillah* states:

*Mordecai left the king's presence dressed in royal attire of sky-blue and white, with a large crown of gold and a cloak of fine linen and purple wool. And the city of Shushan rejoiced and was happy.*³⁸

From a plain reading of the text, it seems that one garment in Mordecai's newly issued royal uniform was made from a mixture of wool and linen.³⁹ Thus, as the *Megillah's* account of the Purim story winds down, we learn that Mordecai left the King's presence after having been dressed in a new set of royal clothing – including a cloak⁴⁰ that apparently contained *shaatnez*.⁴¹

³⁸ The English translations of both verses above were taken from *The Living Nach* (New York and Jerusalem: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1998). Interestingly, while researching this topic, I had access to three different popular translations of *Tanakh*: Moznayim (1998), Koren (2000), and Artscroll/Mesorah (1996). Of the three translations, Moznaim was the only one to consistently translate the word *argaman* as “purple wool” in both Esther 1:6 and Esther 8:15, presenting the halakhic problem under discussion. Koren consistently translated *argaman* in both verses as just “purple.” In Esther 1:6, Artscroll/Mesorah translates *argaman* as “purple wool”, but as just “purple” in Esther 8:15.

³⁹ This fact never struck me until I read R. Yehuda Landy's recently published *Purim and the Persian Empire: A Historical and Archeological Perspective*, (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 2010), 96-97.

⁴⁰ Interestingly, in his commentary to the *Megillah*, Ralbag (Gersonides) translates *takhrikh* as a wrapped head covering of sorts, possibly a turban.

⁴¹ According to R. Dovid Luria (Lithuania, 1798-1855), this was not a one time event – this wardrobe is what Mordechai wore from then on. See *Biur Radal* n. 147 to *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, chapter 50.

VII – Mordecai’s Halakhic Basis for Wearing His Cloak

If Mordecai’s new wardrobe included one item containing both wool and linen, we must find the halakhic justification he had for wearing that garment. In order to properly address this matter, it is crucial that we first determine whether the mixture of wool and linen in Mordecai’s cloak constituted Biblically prohibited *shaatnez*, Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*, or no issue of *shaatnez* at all.

If Mordecai’s new cloak contained Biblically prohibited *shaatnez* – considering his circumstances – it would appear that he would have been permitted to wear that garment according to the *Beit Yosef*.⁴²

In Leviticus 18:3, the Torah teaches us:

The behaviors of the land of Egypt - where you dwelt, you shall not follow; and the behaviors of the land of Canaan - where I am bringing you, you shall not follow; and in their statutes you shall not walk.

The Biblical prohibition of “*and in their statutes you shall not walk*” governs many aspects of a Jew’s conduct, grooming habits, and dress.⁴³

Nonetheless, based on a Talmudic account,⁴⁴ both the *Tur*⁴⁵ and the *Shulhan Arukh*⁴⁶ state:

*a Jew who is closely connected with a [non-Jewish] King’s government, and needs to dress in the same manner as they do, and closely resemble them, all [which is normally forbidden] is permitted.*⁴⁷

In his *Beit Yosef* commentary to the *Tur*,⁴⁸ R. Yosef Caro raises a crucial question on this ruling: How could our Sages permit that which is Biblically prohibited under “*and in their statutes you shall not walk*”? What gives our Sages the right to allow one who is closely connected

⁴² Among the works authored by R. Yosef Caro (1488-1575) was the *Shulhan Arukh*, the *Kesef Mishneh*, and the *Beit Yosef*. He is often simply referred to as “the *Beit Yosef*.”

⁴³ See Rambam, *Hilkhot Avoda Zara*, ch. 11, as well as *Tur* and *Shulhan Arukh Yoreh Deah* 178.

⁴⁴ BT *Bava Kamma* 83a and BT *Sotah* 49b.

⁴⁵ *Yoreh Deah* 178.

⁴⁶ *Yoreh Deah* 178:2 – While I do not know if this makes a difference or not, unlike the *Tur* and Rambam, who wrote *ke-malbusheihem*, the *Shulhan Arukh* writes *be-malbusheihem*.

⁴⁷ See also Rambam *Hilkhot Avoda Zara* 11:3.

⁴⁸ R. Caro raises this very question – and provides the same answers – in his *Kesef Mishneh* commentary to Rambam’s ruling cited above.

to a king to conduct himself any differently than the rest of the Jewish people?

The *Beit Yosef* offers two answers:

- 1) When it comes to matters as great as *hatsalat yisrael*, saving the Jewish people from harm, the Sages do in fact have the ability to permit that which the Torah prohibits. An individual closely connected to a King has the ability to save the Jewish people by working to annul harmful decrees. As such, the Sages have the power to remove Biblical prohibitions which might hamper that Jew's ability to effectively work on behalf of his people.
- 2) The Torah never specified much about the general prohibition of "*and in their statutes you shall not walk.*" It was left entirely up to the Sages to establish the parameters of that prohibition. As such, the Sages decided that, while the limitations on one's conduct, grooming, and dress would apply to the entire Jewish people, those individuals who were close to a King could conduct themselves in whatever manner would best guarantee the efficacy of their roles.⁴⁹

Thus, it seems that according to the *Beit Yosef*, Mordecai would have had no halakhic problems wearing his new royal cloak – even if it did in fact contain Biblically prohibited *shaatnez*. After all, in his new position in King Ahashverosh's cabinet, Mordecai would certainly have been considered *karov la-malkhut*, one who was closely connected with a King. If such a person would have a license to wear clothing which under normal circumstances would be Biblically prohibited as a result of "*and in their statutes you shall not walk,*" it would follow that he would also have license to wear garments which under normal circumstances would be Biblically prohibited because of *shaatnez*.⁵⁰

Not everyone agreed with the *Beit Yosef's* approach to explaining how in this case, the Sages seemed to permit that which the Torah prohibited. In his commentary to the *Tur*,⁵¹ after quoting the *Beit Yosef's* question, the *Bah*⁵² offers a completely different answer to this question:

⁴⁹ It is interesting that the *Taz in Shulhan Arukh* 178:5 only quotes the second answer of the *Beit Yosef* and not the first.

⁵⁰ It seems safe to assume that Mordechai would be most effective working on behalf of the Jewish people if he wore the royal garments which were given to him by the King in accordance with his new position.

⁵¹ *Yoreh Deah* 178:7.

⁵² *Bah* is the acronym for *Bayit Hadash* – a commentary to the *Tur Shulhan Arukh* written by R. Yoel Sirkes (1561-1640).

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The words “and in their statutes you shall not walk” imply that a prohibition exists if one tries to look identical to and act like them – for this would appear as if he is validating their religion. This fits well with the language of the Sifrei which states, “Since they go out wearing purple wool, I too will go out wearing purple wool, etc.” However, one who is not intent on looking identical to them, but needs to dress in their clothing and look like them so he is not disgraced by not looking alike, such a matter was never forbidden by the Torah, and such a person has violated no prohibitions. This understanding is implied in the wording of Rambam who wrote... I have no doubt that we have an oral tradition that taught us to explain the prohibition of “and in their statutes you shall not walk” in this matter.

According to the *Bah*, the concept of *karov la-malkhut* is one factor that clarifies whether or not the Biblical prohibition of “and in their statutes you shall not walk” has been violated. Being closely connected to a king is not a *carte blanche* to wear clothing that is Biblically forbidden. According to the *Bah*, whether or not one transgresses the prohibition of “and in their statutes you shall not walk” is completely based on the intentions of the wearer of the distinctly gentile garments. If they were worn by someone who is genuinely *karov la-malkhut* as a way of enabling him to be the most effective advocate for his people that he can, he has not violated the Torah’s prohibition of *u-viHukkoteihem lo telekhu*. (i.e. *karov la-malkhut* only addresses whether or not one can wear distinctly non-Jewish clothing which the Torah normally prohibits. It does not address the question of wearing Biblically prohibited *shaatnez*.)

Thus, according to the *Bah*, the concept of *karov la-malkhut* could not have been used by Mordecai as the halakhic basis for wearing Biblically prohibited *shaatnez*. Unlike the *Beit Yosef*, the *Bah* could only justify Mordecai’s wearing a cloak containing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*. After all, if the *shaatnez* in Mordecai’s new garment was of the variety which was only prohibited by the Sages, those same Sages could allow Mordecai to wear that cloak using the Rabbinic concept of *karov la-malkhut*.

In summary, from a plain reading of the *Megillah*, the new cloak that Mordecai wore in Esther 8:15 may very well have contained *shaatnez*. According to the *Beit Yosef*, Mordecai would have had halakhic justification for wearing *shaatnez* that was Biblically prohibited. According to the *Bah*, however, Mordecai could have only been halakhically justified in wearing a cloak containing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*⁵³. Thus,

⁵³ Truthfully, we do not know at what point in history the Rabbis expanded upon the Torah’s *shaatnez* prohibitions. If the Sages did not expand the Torah’s

both the *Beit Yosef* and the *Bah* could justify Mordecai's wearing of a cloak containing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*. However, only the *Beit Yosef* could justify his wearing of that garment if it contained Biblically prohibited *shaatnez*.

VIII – Ramo's View on Mordecai's Cloak

As noted above, there is a third possibility on the *shaatnez* status of Mordecai's new cloak which contained both wool and linen: it may not have even been considered Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*. Interestingly, though I searched through a great number of early and later commentaries to Esther 8:15 hoping to find someone who addressed the *shaatnez* status of Mordecai's new cloak, the only one I found who did so was R. Moshe Isserles (Ramo) himself.

In 1556, Ramo – together with many other members of Cracow's Jewish community – fled from the plague that had wreaked havoc on their city. Although Ramo found refuge in a nearby town, he was absolutely destitute there. In order to find some degree of solace, Ramo occupied himself by authoring a work on the Book of Esther named *Mehir Yayin*.⁵⁴ In commenting on Mordechai's cloak in Esther 8:15 Ramo writes:

... and see how wonderful it is that the Megillah records Mordecai's garment as a cloak consisting of fine linen and purple wool, and it did not describe it as being a garment that was joined of fine linen and purple wool – the language used earlier in the Megillah.⁵⁵ For it is known that the saintly Mordecai would never have worn kilayim or shaatnez – which a conjoined mixture of fine linen and purple wool would have been considered. Instead, the Megillah merely states that Mordecai wore a cloak – an item that would not be considered shaatnez without its being tied . . .

Although Ramo's comment to Esther 8:15 is somewhat vague, the following point seem to be quite clear: Although Mordecai's cloak contained both linen and wool, it was manufactured in such a way that it was not considered *shaatnez* so long as it was not tied.

prohibitions until the period of the Second Temple era, there would have been no halakhic problem at all with Mordecai (who lived prior to that period) wearing any item of clothing containing wool and linen that could not be considered Biblically prohibited *shaatnez*. Such a garment would have been permitted even without Mordecai being considered *karov la-malkhut*.

⁵⁴ From the introduction to *Mehir Yayin*.

⁵⁵ Referring to Esther 1:16 – mentioned above in part VI.

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Just what sort of cloak could fit this bill? I believe the *Hokhmat Adam*⁵⁶ describes the very type of garment which Ramo may have been referring to. Based on a *mishna* in *Kilayim* (9:9), and the *Shulhan Arukh* (*Yoreh Deah* 300:5), the *Hokhmat Adam* writes:

The prevalent custom is to attach a wool garment to a linen one – so long as there is a third garment of silk or leather in between them. (According to Rambam, however, this would still be considered Biblically prohibited shaatnez.) However, when it comes to wearing a belt wherein one end is linen and the other is wool – even though there may be a piece of leather in between them – since one would tie both ends together when fastening the belt, all agree that this would nonetheless be Rabbinically prohibited.

I believe this ruling of the *Hokhmat Adam* may be the key to understanding Ramo's remarks to Esther 8:15. According to the *Hokhmat Adam*, if one were to wear a cloak consisting of fine linen and purple wool – wherein the linen and wool were each attached to opposite sides of a strip of a third material – he would have violated absolutely no *shaatnez* prohibitions⁵⁷. However, if one were to tie the two ends of that same cloak together, he would then be wearing a garment that was considered Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*.

If we assume that this is how Ramo understood the composition of Mordecai's new royal cloak, Ramo's understanding of Esther 8:15 would make perfect sense. While the saintly Mordecai would absolutely not have worn a garment containing full-blown Biblically prohibited *shaatnez*,⁵⁸ he would have had no problem wearing a cloak containing a permissible mixture of linen and wool. He would have just been careful to avoid tying the cloak's ends together, thereby avoiding any and all *shaatnez* prohibitions⁵⁹. Ramo wrote that if the cloak was tied, a *shaatnez* problem would

⁵⁶ By R. Avraham Danzig (1748-1820); see *Hokhmat Adam* 106:19.

⁵⁷ The *Hokhmat Adam* obviously does not ascribe to the view of Rambam which he mentioned.

⁵⁸ What about the fact that Mordecai was a *karov la-Malkhut* – thereby making the wearing of full-blown *shaatnez* halakhically justifiable according to the *Beit Yosef*? Either, Ramo held like the *Bah* and disagreed with the *Beit Yosef*, or Ramo felt that, even though this would have been halakhically justifiable, someone on Mordecai's saintly level would still not have been spiritually comfortable wearing *shaatnez*.

⁵⁹ In suggesting this understanding of Esther 8:15, I would have to say that the *Megillah's* description of the contents of Mordecai's cloak was not exact. The text only listed the main components – fine linen and purple wool. In truth, however, there was some amount of a third material (i.e., silk, leather, etc.) used to separate the two main ingredients. I do not think this is a problem, as the text was just listing the main components of the cloak and not the lesser parts.

exist. If we understand *shaatnez* as Rashi did (see section III) this could only be Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*, and never Biblically prohibited *shaatnez*.

Thus, according to Ramo and the *Hokhmat Adam*, one could make the case that, while the cloak as described in Esther 8:15 certainly contained linen and wool, by wearing it without tying its ends together Mordecai would have violated absolutely no *shaatnez* prohibitions at all. Tying the ends of such a cloak together, however, would have resulted in violating a Rabbinic prohibition of *shaatnez*.⁶⁰

IX – Wearing *Shabbat* Clothing on Purim

Now that we have discussed what Mordecai wore in the Book of Esther, let us see what the halakhic sources write about what we ought to wear on Purim – the day established to celebrate the miraculous events recorded in the *Megillah*.

In his glosses to the *Shulhan Arukh*, basing himself on Maharil⁶¹, Ramo states:⁶²

There are those who are accustomed to wear their Shabbat and festival clothing on Purim. This is commendable.

This custom of Maharil's is originally recorded as follows:⁶³

On Purim, Maharil would wear his robe and hat⁶⁴ which he normally wore on Shabbat.

This commendable custom – with one additional detail added – is quoted by the *Mishna Berura* as well.⁶⁵

The later halakhic authorities write that it is proper for one to wear Shabbat clothing starting from Purim evening.

⁶⁰ See n. 53.

⁶¹ R. Yaakov Moelin of Mainz, Germany (c. 1365-1427).

⁶² *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim*, 695:2. See also Ramo's *Darkei Moshe* to *Tur Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim*, 695:1, and *Arukh ha-Shulhan to Orah Hayyim* 695:7.

⁶³ *Sefer Maharil, Hilkhhot Purim*, ch. 9.

⁶⁴ These two items of clothing are also mentioned in *Sefer Maharil, Hilkhhot Hol ha-Moed*, ch. 14. The footnotes to the *Mekhon Yerushalayim* edition (1989) there identify those two clothing articles as a robe (*me'il*), and a hat (*kova*), respectively.

⁶⁵ *Mishna Berura*, 695:3.

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Though the *Mishna Berura* does not identify which authorities he is referring to, one of them may have been R. Haim Palachi (1788-1869).⁶⁶ In his work entitled *Moed le-Kol Hai*,⁶⁷ while discussing how one should prepare for Purim, R. Palachi writes:

. . . and one should wear his festive clothing – like Maharil writes . . . and they should be worn starting from the night of Purim – and not like those who are accustomed to first wear their festive clothing on Purim morning . . . for if wearing such finery is in order to remember the miraculous accounts of “and Esther put on her royal clothes,”⁶⁸ and “Mordecai left [the king’s presence] dressed in royal attire,”⁶⁹ how can one read those verses from the Megillah while dressed in his weekday clothing? . . .

Thus, the earliest source for the custom of wearing festive attire on Purim is Maharil. Building on Maharil’s teaching, R. Palachi urged one to follow Maharil’s custom from the start of Purim. Thus, R. Palachi clearly understood Maharil’s custom of wearing his festive finery on Purim as a way of remembering the miraculous accounts related in the Book of Esther.

There is at least one earlier halakhic source which connects the custom of wearing one’s finest clothing on Purim to the Megillah’s account of the royal attire that Mordechai wore in Esther 8:15. In his *Eliyahu Rabba* commentary to the *Shulhan Arukh*, R. Eliyahu Shapira⁷⁰ writes:⁷¹

The Keneset ha-Gedola⁷² offers a reason / indication for our custom to change into our finest clothing [for Purim]. Perhaps it is to remind us of Mordecai who left [the king’s presence] dressed in royal attire.

Thus, it seems clear that the custom of wearing one’s finest clothing on Purim is based (at least in part) on Esther 8:15, wherein the royal garments worn by Mordecai are described in great detail.⁷³ This custom might be explained as follows: the ultimate turnabout which signified the

⁶⁶ Another may have been R. Alexander Ziskind of Horodna’s (d. 1794) *Yesod ve-Shoresh ha-Avoda* (12:3).

⁶⁷ Chapter 31:18. This source is quoted by the *Kaf ha-Hayyim* 695:13.

⁶⁸ Esther 5:1.

⁶⁹ Esther 8:15.

⁷⁰ R. Shapira (1660-1712) served the Jewish communities of Tiktin and Prague.

⁷¹ *Eliyahu Rabba* 696:15.

⁷² I could not locate the statement of the *Keneset ha-Gedolah* referred to by the *Eliyahu Rabba*.

⁷³ Both R. Palachi and R. Shapira base this custom on Esther 8:15, though R. Palachi does posit that the custom may also be based on Esther’s donning her royal garments in Esther 5:1.

miracle of Purim occurred when Mordecai left the king's presence wearing his new royal clothing. Upon seeing Haman hanging on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai, while his intended victim – Mordecai – wore new royal garments befitting a member of the king's court, the Jewish people fully understood how the tables had been absolutely turned. At that point they recognized the extent of God's miracle which they had merited. Thus, the verse that follows the sight of Mordecai leaving the king's presence in his new royal garments states:⁷⁴

The Jewish people experienced light and happiness, and joy and honor.

In order to celebrate that great turnabout which became fully apparent with Mordechai's wearing his royal garments (*levush malkhut*) on Purim, it is proper to wear our own *levush malkhut*. What clothing do we own which can be considered "royal garments"? Our finest items of clothing which are normally reserved for Shabbat and the festivals.

X – A Theory

I would like to suggest the following theory: Maharil chose to celebrate the miraculous turnabout of Purim by wearing the finest clothing he had – his own royal garments – which were ordinarily reserved for Shabbat and festivals. Perhaps there were others who followed a custom based on a more literal understanding of the *levush malkhut* which Mordecai wore. Unlike Maharil, these Jews did not commemorate Mordecai's wearing of his new royal garments by wearing their Shabbat and festival finery. Instead, they celebrated the miraculous events of Purim by trying their best to don the very same royal garments which were worn by Mordecai upon assuming his new position in the King's cabinet. As we have seen, that royal outfit included a cloak made of linen and wool. As we have also seen above (in sections VII and VIII), this cloak containing fine linen and purple wool may theoretically have:

- A) Contained Biblically prohibited *shaatnez* (*Beit Yosef*)
- B) Contained Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* (*Bab*)
- C) Contained no *shaatnez* at all – only the potential to become Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* (*Ramo*)

What might have motivated some to dress as similar to Mordecai as possible on Purim? One possible motivation might be gleaned from the

⁷⁴ Esther 8:16.

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teachings of R. Alexander Ziskind of Horodna (d. 1794). In his *Yesod ve-Shoresh ha-Avoda* (12:5), he writes:

It is recorded that it is proper for every Jewish man to discuss at great lengths the miracles and wonders [of Purim] with the members of his house and his children in order to embellish the miracle in their ears. Through telling over the [Purim] miracle with great joy, one causes unfathomable happiness and joy in the spiritual realms, and the Creator – blessed be He and blessed be His name – grows increasingly exalted and sanctified throughout all of the realms. God becomes glorified by such an individual throughout His entire kingdom. This concept is further explained in the holy Zohar – in the passage I referred to earlier when discussing the Haggada of Pesach.⁷⁵

Thus, Jewish tradition maintained that there was much to be gained by telling over the great miracle of Purim to one's family, in as joyous a manner as possible. That being the case, it would seem logical to suggest that people would have looked to make use of any and all means through which they could increase the joy in their retelling of the Purim story.

I would like to posit that, at some point prior to Ramo, a new method in telling over the Purim miracle that elicited great joy became popular: repeating or dramatizing the Purim story while dressed in the same manner in which Mordecai is described in Esther 8:15 – royal garments and all. As stated above, the ultimate turnabout which signified the miracle of Purim occurred when Mordecai left the king's presence wearing his new royal clothing. The sight of Mordecai in those clothes elicited great joy from the Jewish people at the time of the original Purim events.⁷⁶ If those royal garments caused such heartfelt joy when first worn by Mordecai, it makes sense that they would be a great aid in eliciting a joy-filled response in later generations, as well.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ See *Yesod ve-Shoresh ha-Avoda* chapter 9, quoting the *Zohar* from *Parshat Bo*, 40b.

⁷⁶ See Esther 8:16.

⁷⁷ Although I labored to find a source to back up this theory, I could not find anything written about a specific custom of dressing up in Mordecai's royal garments to retell the Purim story. However, the following three sources do indicate that there were some long-standing customs to do all that was possible to joyfully retell and/or re-enact aspects of the Purim miracle: 1) R. Nathan ben Yehiel (Italy, 1035-1106) provides a vivid description in his *Sefer ha-Arukh* (under *shavur*) of the widespread Babylonian custom wherein young men would hang an effigy of Haman several days before Purim, and then burn it amidst great song and fanfare during the festival, 2) In discussing the Purim customs of Worms, Germany in his *Minhagei Vermaiza* (pp. 280-281 in the *Mekhon Yerushalayim* edition), Yuspa Shamash (1604-1678) goes

In support of this theory, it is important to note R. Moshe Leib Lytsch Rosenbaum's comment from the 1800's.⁷⁸ R. Rosenbaum stated that, in the time of Ramo (or earlier), people could easily have found Purim costumes containing no *shaatnez* at all. Apparently, such costumes were not that hard to obtain. This detail suggests that, for some reason, people specifically chose to wear costumes containing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* on Purim. The theory I posit would help explain why such an odd-sounding custom may have originated – and spread – while remaining unchallenged by Ramo's great Rabbinic predecessors.

As mentioned above, Mordecai's royal garments – as described in the *Megillah* – could theoretically have contained Biblically prohibited *shaatnez*, Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*, or no *shaatnez* at all. I would propose that no one went so far as to suggest that, based on Esther 8:15, Mordecai actually wore Biblically prohibited *shaatnez*. After all, no commentaries to Esther make that claim, and Ramo adamantly states that could not have been a possibility.

As such, we are left with two options regarding Mordecai's cloak:

- A) It was a garment which contained Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*⁷⁹
- B) While the cloak was not *shaatnez* at all, it had the possibility of becoming Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*⁸⁰ if its ends would be tied together.

Thus, when the custom of people dressing up in the royal garments of Mordecai when retelling the Purim story to their families began, the costume of royal garments which they wore consisted of either Rabbinically

into great detail about how on Purim night the young women of the Worms Jewish community would dance while dressed in their holiday finery and wearing masks. One young woman would be chosen to dress as a bride. This "bride" was called the Queen – because of Queen Esther (no parallel custom is mentioned for the young men, though), and 3) In his 1979 book *Mahazot Mikra'iyyim be-Yidish: 1697-1750* (pp. 30-35 and 41-43), and again in his Encyclopedia Judaica entry on "*Purim-Shpil*," (vol. 16, 744-46) renowned Yiddish authority Chone Shmeruk (1921-1997) describes the evolution of the *Purim-Shpil* (Purim play). According to Shmeruk, this custom began as early as the 15th century, where a performer would deliver a crafted monologue which paraphrased the Megillah of Esther to entertain people at Purim feasts held in private homes. Shmeruk's describes how the story that was told over was embellished with the inclusion of many Midrashic explanations and interpretations, and the performer sometimes appeared in costume (no mention is made of anyone dressing in Mordechai's royal garments, though).

⁷⁸ See n. 28.

⁷⁹ See n. 53.

⁸⁰ See n. 53.

prohibited *shaatnez*, or a garment which had the potential to become Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*.

I would suggest that with time – and no written record of this custom’s origins – people eventually expanded upon this custom and began wearing any and all Purim costumes which contained Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*.

While it would have been halakhically justifiable for Mordecai to wear a cloak made of Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* – as he would have been considered a *karov la-malkhut*, one who was closely connected with a King (see section VII) – what possible halakhic basis could there have been for those in later generations to wear costumes containing Rabbinically prohibited *Shaatznez*?

No written record providing such a halakhic rationale was left by the originators of this custom. That is exactly why Ramo felt the need (in his *Darkei Moshe*) to create a *limmud zekbut*, a post-facto halakhic justification for this eyebrow-raising Purim custom.

Although Ramo’s *limmud zekbut* was strong enough to allow even for the wearing of costumes containing Biblically prohibited *shaatnez* on Purim, he never went that far. As is clear from his *Darkei Moshe*, Ramo only defended the custom of wearing Purim costumes containing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*.

Why did Ramo not take his justification to its full logical limits and allow for the wearing of costumes containing full-fledged Biblically prohibited *shaatnez* on Purim? I would suggest the following theory: Ramo was aware of the origins of this strange-sounding custom. He knew that it had begun in effort to joyously celebrate the Purim miracle by wearing the very same royal attire which Mordecai had worn. As he wrote in *Mehir Yayin*, Ramo felt that the cloak which Mordecai wore did not contain actual *shaatnez* – yet it had the potential to become Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*. As such, none of the earlier generations had celebrated the Purim miracle by wearing clothing containing a more serious form of *shaatnez* than Mordecai himself could have ended up wearing. Therefore, when Ramo sought to provide a halakhic justification for this earlier practice – despite the fact that the justification he provided was theoretically strong enough to allow for the wearing of costumes containing Biblically prohibited *shaatnez* on Purim -- he limited its application to the wearing of costumes which only contained Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* – as that was the extent of the *shaatnez* which Mordecai could have ended up wearing.⁸¹

⁸¹ According to this theory, it would oddly appear that, while Mordecai may have only found halakhic justification for wearing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*

XI – Summary

- 1) In his comments to the *Shulhan Arukh*, Ramo informs us of an odd-sounding – but permissible – custom which allowed for the wearing of Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* costumes⁸² on Purim in the spirit of celebrating that festive day.
- 2) In his *Darkei Moshe*, Ramo provides a very strong *limmud zekhut* in order to explain just how such a custom could be halakhically justified.
- 3) In order to make full sense of this custom, two questions need to be answered:
 - A) How did such an odd-sounding custom develop?
 - B) If Ramo’s *limmud zekhut* (post-facto halakhic Justification) could allow for the wearing of Purim costumes containing Biblically prohibited *shaatnez*, why does Ramo himself limit this practice to the wearing of Purim costumes which only contained Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*?
- 4) The culmination of the Purim miracle occurred when Mordecai was appointed to a royal position and given a new set of royal clothing to wear.
- 5) The cloak in those new royal garments contained both linen and wool
- 6) Mordecai could halakhically justify wearing his royal cloak. It either was not *shaatnez* at all (although it had the potential to become Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*), or it was Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* – which he would have been allowed to wear as a *karov la-malkhut* (someone who was close to a King’s government).
- 7) In order to celebrate the miracle of the Purim turnabout, the custom took hold for Jews to wear their own “royal clothing” on Purim.
- 8) Some (most notably Maharil) wore their *Shabbat* and festive finery as their “royal clothing.”
- 9) I am suggesting that others – who left no written record – joyously commemorated the Purim miracle by dressing in costume as Mordecai, and wearing the very royal clothing described by the *Megillah* in Esther 8:15.

clothing (according to the *Bab*), those who sought to mimic Mordecai’s wardrobe as a Purim costume may have been able to justify wearing Biblically prohibited *shaatnez* (according to Ramo). However, no one pushed the envelope that far, since Mordecai himself never would have worn *shaatnez* of that degree.

⁸² Although Ramo does not limit this custom to costumes in his glosses to the *Shulhan Arukh*, he clearly does just that in his *Darkei Moshe*.

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- 10) Such a costume would have included a cloak which either contained Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* or had the potential to become Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*.
- 11) With time, Jews began to wear other costumes containing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* on Purim.
- 12) Unlike Mordecai – who certainly qualified as a *karov la-malkhut* – what possible justification could there have been for Jews to wear such costumes on Purim? Ramo provided just such a halakhic justification in his *Darkei Moshe*.
- 13) If Ramo's *limmud zekhut* could allow for the wearing of Purim costumes containing Biblically prohibited *shaatnez*, why did he limit the practice to the wearing of Purim costumes that only contained Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*?
- 14) Ramo limited his *limmud zekhut* to the wearing of costumes which only contained Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez* – as that was the extent of the level of *shaatnez* that Mordechai himself wore (or could have ended up wearing) in the Book of Esther.

XII – Conclusion

The goal of this article was to try to clarify an odd-sounding Purim custom mentioned – and defended – by Ramo. Though I have absolutely no aspirations of resurrecting the custom of wearing Purim costumes containing Rabbinically prohibited *shaatnez*, I do hope that I have shed some light on a custom which has pulled the wool – and linen – over our eyes for so many years.