The curtain was made of twenty-four strands—white, sky-blue, purple, and scarlet. Each of these was a six-fold thread, yielding a count of twenty-four strands all together (Rambam Sefer Avoda, Hilkhot Kelei HaMikdash 7:6).

Each thread of the breastplate and ephod was made of twenty-eight strands—white, sky-blue, purple, scarlet, and white, plus a gold thread, yielding a count of twenty-eight threads (Rambam Sefer Avoda, Hilkhot Kelei HaMikdash 9:5).

There would be eight—white and yellow. The Gemara does not explain why a thread of eight may not be made. Perhaps Rav Ashi accepts Rav Aha bar Yakov's interpretation of "cord," which teaches there are at least four strands. As a rule, it is always assumed that the smallest quantity possible is indicated. Were one willing to accept the possibility that a multiple of four is included, there is no reason to make a distinction between eight, twelve, or even one hundred. Therefore, in this case, one should limit it to four strands (see Tosafot and Maharsha).

HALAKHA

ןֵלֶל הָכָלִית - נְלֵי הָכָלִית חַלָּה

The Gemara suggests: Let us derive the number of strands in the robe from its hem and pomegranates: Just as there, each thread is spun from eight strands, so too here, the threads should be spun from eight strands. The Gemara rejects this. It is preferable to derive the halakhot of a utensil, i.e., the robe, from the halakhot of another utensil, i.e., the curtain, and one should not derive the halakhot of a utensil from the halakhot of something that is merely an ornament of a utensil, i.e., the pomegranates of the robe.

The Gemara asks: On the contrary, it is preferable to derive the halakhot of an object from that object itself, i.e., to assume that the halakhot of the robe and its pomegranates are similar; and one should not derive the halakhot of an object from elsewhere. The Gemara explains: This is precisely what we said in the baraita: One of the five mentions of "shesh" in the verse is to teach that the requirement that threads be made from six strands applies also to other garments about which "shesh" is not explicitly stated, such as the robe.

The baraita further states: Each thread of the curtain was made of twenty-four strands. The Gemara explains: With regard to each thread being composed of four colored threads: White, purple, scarlet, and sky-blue, and each one of them being composed of six strands, there is neither judgment nor judge, i.e., it is absolutely clear that this is how the threads of the curtain are produced.

The baraita further states: Each thread of the breastplate and ephod was made of twenty-eight strands. From where do we derive this? As it is written: "And you shall make a breastplate of judgment, the work of the skilled craftsman; like the work of the ephod you shall make it: Of gold, sky-blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen." And we are four colored threads, each composed of six strands, which makes twenty-four. In addition, gold is spun together with each of the four colors, giving the total of twenty-eight.

The baraita further states: Each thread of the breastplate and ephod was made of twenty-eight strands. From where do we derive this? As it is written: "And you shall make a breastplate of judgment, the work of the skilled craftsman; like the work of the ephod you shall make it: Of gold, sky-blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen." And we are four colored threads, each composed of six strands, which makes twenty-four. In addition, gold is spun together with each of the four colors, giving the total of twenty-eight.

But couldn't one say the gold should be made as a thread of six strands, like the other colors? Rav Aha bar Yaakov said that the verse states: "And they beat the gold into thin plates, and cut it into cords, to work it into the sky-blue, and into the purple, and into the scarlet, and into the fine linen, the work of a skilled craftsman." "Cord" implies a thread that is doubled over and can be twisted into a cord; "cords" is in the plural, meaning at least two of these. Accordingly, there are four strands here.

Rav Ashi said: This can be seen from that fact that the verse states with regard to the gold strands: "To work it into the sky-blue, and into the purple." Indicating that the gold strands should be combined with the other colors. What should we do? If we make four gold threads of two strands each and combine each one with each of the colors, then there would be eight. If we make two gold threads of two strands each, and two gold threads of one strand each, it says: "And you shall make," indicating that all its makings should be the same. Perforce, one strand of gold should be combined with each of the colors, producing a total of twenty-eight strands.
The Gemara discusses various halakhot concerning the priestly vestments and other sacred vessels: Ṭḥava said that Rav Yehuda said: One who intentionally tears any of the priestly vestments
transgresses a prohibition and is flogged, as it is stated concerning
the robe: “It shall have a hem of woven work around the opening of
it, like the opening of a coat of mail, and it shall not be torn” (Exodus
28:32). Just as it is prohibited to tear the opening of the robe, so too
it is prohibited to tear any of the priestly vestments. 

Rav Aha bar Ya’akov strongly objects to this: But perhaps this is what the
Merciful One is saying in the Torah: An opening should be made in
in order that it not tear. In other words, the Torah was giving an explana-
tion, not a prohibition. The Gemara rejects this: Is it written: In
order that it not be torn? Clearly, the intention of the verse is to
state a prohibition.

Rabbi Elazar said: One who detaches the breastplate from upon
the ephod or one who removes the staves of the Ark from their
rings transgresses a Torah prohibition and is flogged, as it is stated:
“And the breastplate shall not be detached from the ephod” (Exodus
28:18), and it is also stated: “The staves shall be in the rings of
the Ark; they shall not be removed from it” (Exodus 25:15). Rav
Aha bar Ya’akov strongly objects to this: But perhaps when the
Merciful One said this in the Torah, the intention was to strength-
en them and make them fast so that the breastplate not become
detached from the ephod and the staves not be removed. He sug-
gests that the Torah was giving an explanation, not a prohibition.
The Gemara rejects this: Is it written: In order that it not become
detached, and: In order that they not be removed? Clearly, the
intention of the verse is to state a prohibition.

Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Hanina, raised a contradiction. In one
verse it is written: “The staves shall be in the rings of the Ark; they
shall not be removed from it” (Exodus 25:15), implying the staves
should remain there permanently. But in another verse it is written:
“And its staves shall be put into the rings” (Exodus 27:7), implying
that when the Ark is used the staves are inserted, which suggests that
they do not remain there permanently. How is this contradiction
resolved? The staves could be removed from their position, i.e., they
were loosened, but did not come out. The staves were wider at their
ends and thinner in the middle. Therefore, once they had been
forced into the rings, although they could be shifted, they would not
be removed entirely. That was also taught in a baraita. The verse states: “The staves
shall be in the rings of the Ark; they shall not be removed from it”
(Exodus 25:15). One might have thought that they should not move
from their place at all; therefore, the verse states: “And its staves
shall be put into the rings” (Exodus 27:7). If it had stated: And its
staves shall be put, one might have thought that they are inserted
and removed entirely; therefore, the verse states: “The staves
shall be in the rings of the Ark; they shall not be removed from it”
(Exodus 25:15). How is this? They could be removed from their
position, but did not come out.

Notes

One who tears priestly vestments – Ṭḥava. In
order for people to treat the priestly vestments with due care
and honor, the Torah prohibited tearing them (Sefer Haḥinukh).

According to some halakhic authorities, there is a distinction
between the robe and the other garments. One who tears the
opening of the robe violates the prohibition even if he tears
for constructive purposes, whereas one is liable to tearing the
other garments only if he does so in a destructive manner (see
Yad David, Mishne LaMekkhah, and Minḥat Hinukh).

Is it written: In order that it not be torn – יִּישָׁר אֶל בְּהוֹק מְזַיִּים.
The author of the Korban Haγiga notes that normally the Ge-
mera does not explain explanatory clauses in the Torah as a
distinct commandment. For example, the phrase: “And his heart
shall not be led astray” (Deuteronomy 17:17) is understood as an
explanation for the halakha restricting a king from marrying
numerous wives. Why, then, is this case different? Some com-
mentaries suggest that since the details of the Temple vessels
and priestly vestments appear twice in the Torah, once when
commanding how to construct them and once when describ-
ing their actual construction, and the explanatory clauses ap-
pear both times, it is therefore unlikely that these clauses come
only to explain and not to add a new halakha (Beli Avraham).

Prohibition of detaching the breastplate – הַמְקָרֵﬠ The glory and beauty of the Temple was that each item
had its specific place within the Temple. This was also true of the
priestly vestments. The prohibition to detach the breastplate is
an expression of this idea (Sefer Haḥinukh).

Prohibition of removing the staves – יִזַּח. Some
suggest that the reason the staves had to remain in position was
for times when it was necessary to transport the Ark quickly to a
different location. Were the staves not permanently in place,
in the rush to move the Ark, the staves might not be inserted
properly and the Ark might fall. Another explanation claims that
the staves were not merely functional but part of structure of
the Ark itself. As such, they had to remain as part of the
Ark (Sefer Haḥinukh).

They could be removed but did not come out – לֵיהֶם. According to Rashi, the staves were made in such a
way that they could be removed only with great effort. Tosafot
maintain that the staves’ design allowed them to be removed
with ease; nevertheless, the Levites were cautioned to move
them only to transport the Ark, but never to remove them.
The latter are later sewn to the body of the tunic (Rambam, Avoda, Hilkhot Kelei HaMikdash).

Length of the sleeve – מַאי מְשָׂרְדִין: This means that nails were not needed to hold the gold plating to the boards. Rashi, however, explains that the serad garments were not priestly vestments at all; rather, they were the coverings for the Temple utensils. Rashi, however, explains that the serad garments were priestly vestments, explaining which sin is atoned for by which garments. Rashi, however, explains that the serad garments were not priestly vestments at all; rather, they were the coverings for the Temple utensils.

The Gemara cites other statements concerning the ark. Rabbi Ḥama, son of Rabbi Ḥanina, said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “And you shall make the boards for the Tabernacle of acacia wood, three standing” (Exodus 26:15)? This verse teaches that the boards of wood used for the Tabernacle should stand in the same direction in which they grew from the ground as a tree. Alternatively, “standing” means that they supported their gold plating and prevented it from falling. Alternatively, “standing” is written to hint at the following: Perhaps you will say that now that the Tabernacle is no longer in use, their hope is lost and their chance is abandoned, and after being stored away the boards will no longer return to use. Therefore, the verse states “standing” to indicate that they stand forever and ever.

The Gemara returns to its discussion of the priestly vestments: Rabbi Ḥama bar Ḥanina said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “The plaited [serad] garments, for serving in the Sanctuary” (Exodus 35:19)? Why does the verse refer to the priestly vestments as “serad garments”?

He offers a homiletic interpretation: Were it not for the priestly vestments, which provide atonement for the Jewish people, there would not remain a remnant [sarid] or survivor from the haters of the Jewish people, a euphemism used to refer to the Jewish people themselves. Due to the atonement provided by the priestly vestments, a remnant [sarid] of the Jewish people does survive.

Another interpretation: Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥmani said that the school of Rabbi Shimon taught: The priestly vestments are referred to as “serad garments” because they are garments that are woven in their completed form upon the loom, as opposed to weaving the material and then cutting and sewing pieces of the material together to create the required form, and then just a small part of them remains [nasridin] which is not completed upon the loom. What is the remnant, the part that was not woven? Reish Lakish said: This is the needle-work required to complete the garment.

The Gemara raises an objection to this from a baraita: Priestly vestments should not be made through needle-work but though woven, it is as stated: “Woven work” (Exodus 38:32). The Gemara answers that Abaye said: Reish Lakish’s statement is necessary only for, i.e., refers only to, the sleeves. As it was taught in a baraita: A sleeve made for the priestly vestments is woven separately and then attached to the garment by sewing, and the sleeve is made to reach as far as the palm of the hand. However, the main body of the garment must indeed be made exclusively though weaving.
The Gemara cites statements concerning other Temple vessels: Rav Yehuda said: The Torah states that the Ark should be made of wood with gold plating inside and out (Exodus 25:10–11). In order to achieve this Bezalel made three arks: A middle one made of wood, whose height was nine handbreadths; an inner one made of gold, whose height was eight handbreadths; and an outer one made of gold, whose height was ten handbreadths and a bit. These arks were nested.

The Gemara asks: But wasn’t it taught in a baraita that the outer ark was eleven handbreadths and a bit? The Gemara explains: This is not difficult: This statement in the baraita is in accordance with the one who said that the thickness of the gold plating was one handbreadth. According to this opinion, the outer ark’s base took up one handbreadth of its height, ten handbreadths were then needed to contain the middle ark within it, and then a bit more was needed so it could also contain the Ark’s cover. That statement of Rav Yehuda is in accordance with the one who said that the thickness of the gold plating was not one handbreadth but was a plate of gold of negligible thickness. According to this opinion, the outer ark needed to be only ten handbreadths and a bit and could still contain the outer ark and have room for the cover. And what is this additional bit? It is the ornamental crown on the edge of the outer ark.

The Gemara presents a number of statements based on the idea that the Ark symbolizes the Torah: Rabbi Yohanan raised a contradiction: According to the way the word crown is written in the Torah (Exodus 25:11), without vowels, it should be pronounced zar, meaning strange, but according to the traditional vocalization we read it as zeir, meaning crown. These two ways of understanding the word appear to contradict each other. Rabbi Yohanan explains: The two understandings apply to two different situations: If one is deserving by performing mitzvot, it becomes a crown [zeir] for him; but if one is not deserving, the Torah will be a stranger [zar] to him and he will forget his studies.

Rabbi Yohanan raised a contradiction: It is written: “And you shall make for yourself a wooden Ark” (Deuteronomy 10:1), implying that Moses alone was commanded to construct the Ark; and it is written: “And they shall make an Ark of acacia wood” (Exodus 25:10), implying that the Jewish people were all commanded to be involved in its construction. The apparent resolution to this contradiction is that although only Moses actually constructed the Ark, everyone was required to support the endeavor. So too, from here it is derived with regard to a Torah scholar that the members of his town should perform his work for him to support him and allow him to focus on his studies, since it is also the town’s responsibility to enable him to study.
Drinks iniquity like water – The metaphor of drinking water illustrates well the image of a Torah scholar who learns Torah without his studies being discernible in his actions. In the same way, when a person has drunk water, there is still no change in his external appearance (Rabbi Elyakim).

Gehenna twice – Others explain that a Torah scholar who does not fulfill the commandments is punished more severely than others. Additionally, he is punished for the Torah he learned without the associated fear of Heaven; it would have been better had he not studied, as indicated by the verse: “God says to the wicked: Who are you to recite My laws?” (Psalms 50:16). Therefore, in the World-to-Come he receives punishment in Gehenna that is twice as severe (Rav Yaakov Emden).

50:16). Therefore, in the World-to-Come he receives punishment in Gehenna that is twice as severe (Rav Yaakov Emden).

To testify about those who study it – Some explain this as a reference to the ultimate day of judgment, when the Torah itself will act as a witness to testify on behalf of those who were faithful to it. Others suggest that this means that the Torah will publicize the righteousness of those who were faithful to it (Ritva).

The verse states concerning the Ark: “From within and from without you shall cover it” (Exodus 25:11). Rava said: This alludes to the idea that any Torah scholar whose inside is not like his outside, i.e., whose outward expression of righteousness is insincere, is not to be considered a Torah scholar.

Abaye said, and some say it was Rabba bar Ulla who said: Not only is such a person not to be considered a Torah scholar, but he is called loathsome, as it is stated: “What then of one loathsome and foul, man who drinks iniquity like water” (Job 15:16)? Although he drinks the Torah like water, since he sins, his Torah is considered iniquitous and this makes him loathsome and foul.

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said that Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said that Rabbi Yonatan said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “Why is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom, as he has no heart?” (Proverbs 17:16)? This expresses the following sentiment: Woe to them, haters of Torah scholars, a euphemism for the Torah scholars themselves, who immerse themselves in Torah and have no fear of Heaven. They are fools; they try to acquire the wisdom of Torah, but since they have no fear of Heaven in their hearts they lack the ability to do so.

Rabbi Yannai declared that the situation may be expressed by the following sentiment: Pity him who has no courtyard but senselessly makes a gate for his courtyard. Fear of Heaven is like the courtyard, and the study of Torah is the gate that provides entrance to the courtyard. The study of Torah is purposeful only if it leads to fear of Heaven.

Rava said to the Sages in the study hall: I beg of you, do not inherit Gehenna twice. By studying Torah without the accompanying fear of Heaven, not only are you undeserving of the World-to-Come, but even in this world you experience Gehenna, as you spend all your time in study and fail to benefit from worldly pleasure.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “And this is the Torah which Moses put [same] before the children of Israel” (Deuteronomy 4:44)? The word same is written with the letter sin and means put; it is phonetically similar to the word same written with the letter samekh, meaning a drug. This use of this word therefore alludes to the following: If one is deserving, the Torah becomes a potion [same] of life for him. If one is not deserving, the Torah becomes a potion of death for him. And this idea is what Rabbi Rava said: For one who is skillful in his study of Torah and immerses himself in it with love, it is a potion of life; but for one who is not skillful in his studies, it is a potion of death.

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said that Rabbi Yonatan raised a contradiction: It was written: “The precepts of the Lord are upright, gladdening the heart” (Psalms 19:9), but it is also written: “The word of the Lord is refining” (Psalms 18:31), which implies that the study of Torah can be a distressing process by which a person is refined like metal smelted in a smith’s fire. He reconciles these verses as follows: For one who is deserving, the Torah gladdens him; for one who is not deserving, it refines him. Reish Lakish said: This lesson emerges from that second verse itself: For one who is deserving, the Torah refines him for life; for one who is not deserving, it refines him for death.

The verse states: “Fear of the Lord is pure, it stands forever” (Psalms 19:10). Rabbi Hanina said: This is referring to one who studies Torah in purity; for such a person the Torah will remain with him forever. What is this; what does it mean to study in purity? One first marries a woman and afterward studies Torah. Since he is married, his heart will not be occupied with thoughts of sin, which could lead him to become impure.

In the same Psalm the verse states: “The testimony of God is faithful” (Psalms 19:8). Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba said: This alludes to the fact that the Torah is faithful to testify about those who study it and those who do not.
The Gemara returns to its discussion concerning the sacred vessels: The verse states with regard to the covers for the Tabernacle that they are “work of an embroiderer” (Exodus 26:36), and it also states they are “work of a designer” (Exodus 26:31). How can both descriptions be reconciled? Rabbi Elazar said: They embroidered the place where they had designed. They first marked a design on the material in paint, and then they embroidered it.

A Sage taught in the name of Rabbi Nehemya: “Work of an embroiderer” refers to needlework, which therefore produces only one face. The design is made with a needle passing back and forth from both sides of the curtain, and consequently an identical parallel image, or one face, is formed on both sides. “Work of a designer” refers to woven work, which therefore produces two faces. Although formed together, the two sides of the material were not identical; for example, sometimes an eagle appeared on one side while a lion was on the other side.

It was taught in the mishna: When dressed in these eight garments, the High Priest may be consulted for the decision of the Urim VeTummim. When Rav Dimi came from Eretz Yisrael to Babylonia, he said: The garments in which the High Priest serves are also worn when the priest anointed for war serves. This priest is appointed to recite words of encouragement to the nation before it goes out to war (see Deuteronomy 20:2). As it is stated: “And the sacred garments of Aaron shall be for his sons after him” (Exodus 29:29), which is taken to refer to the one who comes after him in greatness, meaning the priest whose rank is one lower than the High Priest, i.e., the priest anointed for war.

Rav Adda bar Ahava raised an objection, and some say it unattributed: It is taught in a baraita: One might have thought that the son of the priest anointed for war serves in his place, i.e., he inherits the position, in the same way that the son of a High Priest serves in his place if he is fit for the job.

The Gemara raises an objection to Rav Dimi’s claim: It was taught in a baraita that the priest anointed for war serves neither in four garments, like a common priest, nor in eight garments, like a High Priest.