**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT TETZAVE**

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Motzaei Shabbat

One of the special garments worn by the *kohen gadol* was the robe – *me’il* – which was lined with bells along its bottom, such that the *kohen gadol* produced a ringing sound as he walked. The Gemara (Zevachim 88b, Arakhin 16a) comments that the *kohen gadol*’s robe served as a source of atonement for the sin of *lashon ha-ra* – negative speech about other people. The sound produced by the *me’il* signified the rectification of the forbidden “sounds” made by people who spoke negatively about their fellowmen.

It has been suggested that the color of the *me’il* may also be understood on the basis of this association between the *me’il* and *lashon ha-ra*. The Torah requires that the *me’il* in its entirety be dyed *tekhelet*, a color which the Gemara in a different context (Sota 17a) says resembles the blue of the ocean and the blue of the heavens. The way we rectify the sin of *lashon ha-ra* is through *tekhelet* – by seeing the world from the perspective of the “heavens,” from a bird’s-eye view. If we look closely enough at any person, any group of people, any institution, or any event or experience, we will find what to criticize. If we dig deep enough, we will find something negative to disseminate and protest. So much of the *lashon ha-ra* that is spoken results from the natural tendency to scrupulously examine and judge, to run a magnifying glass over the people around us in search of a blemish that we can then condescendingly trumpet. The symbolism of the *me’il*, as understood by our Sages, involves, in part, the message of *tekhelet*, of stepping back and viewing people from a distance, rather than delving into their characters to identify their flaws.

And thus the *me’il* provides atonement for *lashon ha-ra*, by alluding to us the way to avoid it – by ensuring the perceive people from afar, in their totality, seeing the entirety of their characters rather than nitpicking to find their deficiencies.

Sunday

Yesterday, we noted the Gemara’s remark (Zevachim 88b, Arakhin 16a) that the *me’il* – the robe worn by the *kohen gadol* – serves as atonement for *lashon ha-ra*, negative speech about other people. The Gemara establishes the connection between the *me’il* and the particular violation of *lashon ha-ra* on the basis of the bells which lined the bottom rim of the robe. The sound produced by the *kohen gadol* as he walked atoned for the forbidden sounds of *lashon ha-ra* that people had spoken.

It is perhaps significant that the *me’il* is the only one of the priestly vestments which is described by the Torah as having a “*peh*” (“mouth”). The Torah uses this term in reference to the opening through which the *kohen gadol*’s head protruded as he wore the robe (28:32). Interestingly enough, the “mouth” of the *me’il* was at the opposite end from where the sound of the *me’il* was produced. The “mouth” was situated on the top of the *me’il*, but the sound was produced by the bells which lined the bottom rim. The “mouth” and the source of the sound were located at opposite ends of the *me’il* – the mouth was near the *kohen gadol*’s head, and the sound emanated from near the *kohen gadol*’s feet.

We might suggest (“*al derekh derush*”) viewing this arrangement as part of the association between the *me’il* and *lashon ha-ra*. The bells of the *me’il* perhaps teach us that the majority of the “sound” we produce should come not from our mouths, but from our feet – from our actions. If we want to be “heard” and have an impact, then we need to act, to work, to engage in the kind of behavior and activities that will positively influence the people around us. Speech, of course, can be a very valuable asset, but the primary “sounds” we should produce should emanate from the way we conduct ourselves, not from the words we speak.

*Lashon ha-ra*, oftentimes, is an impulsive and small-minded reaction to things we find disturbing. We disapprove of something that somebody has done, and so we feel a need to speak about it. The *me’il* perhaps reminds us that the more correct approach is “*emor me’at va-asei harbeh*” – trying to do our share to improve the world primarily through action, though personal example, rather than through the mouth, through verbal condemnation. Just as the *kohen gadol*’s sound was produced very far from his mouth, from near his feet, we, too, should produce more “sound” from the way we conduct ourselves than from our mouths.

Monday

The Torah in Parashat Tetzaveh (28:32) instructs that a binding must be woven around the opening of the *me’il* – the *kohen gadol*’s robe – to ensure that the material will not rip. But while this appears to be the meaning of the verse, the Gemara, in Masekhet Yoma (72a), explains it differently, establishing that the Torah here introduces a prohibition against tearing any of the priestly garments. According to the Gemara’s reading, the words “*lo yikarei’a*” (“it shall not be torn”) is not the reason for the binding woven onto the opening of the *me’il*, but rather an imperative, forbidding tearing the priestly garments.

As many writers have noted, the Gemara applies this prohibition to all the *bigdei kehuna*, and not merely to the *me’il*, despite the fact that the command of “*lo yikarei’a*” appears specifically in reference to this garment. The question thus arises as to why the Torah issued this prohibition specifically in this context, if it in fact applies to all the priestly vestments.

Rav Chaim Kanievsky, in his [*Ta’ama Di-kra*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=49911&st=&pgnum=76&hilite=), offers a simple answer, suggesting that extra care was needed to avoid tearing the *me’il*. The *me’il*, as the Rambam describes in Hilkhot Kelei Ha-mikdash (chapter 9), was simply a piece of material with a hole in the middle through which the *kohen gadol* placed his head. The two sides of the *me’il* were not connected at any point – not even under the arms – except at the shoulders. Rav Kanievsky suggests that the *me’il* was therefore especially delicate, and thus particular care was needed not to ruin it, more so than the other *bigdei kehuna*. For this reason, perhaps, the Torah chose the *me’il* as the context in which to introduce this prohibition, to emphasize the special caution that was required when handling the *me’il*.

Alternatively, Rav Kanievsky suggests, the Torah introduced this prohibition in the context of the *me’il* because one might have otherwise assumed that it applies only to the other priestly vestments. Since the *me’il* is already “torn,” in the sense that it is completely open on either side, tearing it further would not have any considerable impact. Any additional tear might appear negligible, and so intuitively, it would not fall under the prohibition of tearing the *bigdei kehuna*. Perhaps for this reason, Rav Kanievsky writes, the Torah chose specifically this context to introduce the law of “*lo yikarei’a*,” to emphasize that this prohibition applies even to the *me’il*, despite the fact that an additional tear might not outwardly seem significant.

Tuesday

The Torah in Parashat Tetzaveh discusses the *tzitz* – the golden headplate worn by the *kohen gadol* – stating that by wearing the *tzitz*, the *kohen gadol* brought atonement for “the iniquity of the sacred offerings which the Israelites offer” (28:38). The Gemara (Yoma 7a) explains that the *tzitz* provided atonement for situations where sacrifices became *tamei* (ritually impure) and were thus disqualified. The Torah forbids offering upon the altar sacrifices that had become *tamei*, and the *tzitz* served to bring atonement for violations of this nature.

Elsewhere (Zevachim 88a, Arakhin 16a), however, the Gemara points to a different function of the *tzitz* – to atone for *azut panim*, or brazen behavior, a lack of a sense of shame. Brazenness is often referred to as “*azut meitzach*” – a characteristic that expresses itself on one’s forehead – and thus the *tzitz*, which was worn on the forehead, atoned for the transgression.

The question naturally arises as to the connection between *azut panim* and violations of *tum’at kodashim* (the defilement of sacrifices through impurity). The Torah states explicitly that the *tzitz* serves to atone for the mishandling of sacrifices. How, then, can the Gemara comment that it atones for brazenness?

Rav Baruch Yitzchak Yissakhar Leventhal, in his [*Birkat Yitzchak*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=5594&st=&pgnum=165), suggests that *Chazal* perhaps refer here to a particular kind of *azut panim*, which indeed resembles, on some level, violations of *tum’at kodashim*. Namely, they speak of the misuse of religious matters for sinful goals. Few things are as “brazen” as defiling *kodashim* – our sacred values, principles, objects and institutions – by using them for forbidden purposes, such as for unlawful financial gain, to create conflict, or to assert control. Misappropriating Torah and sanctity for sinful defiles them, and is thus symbolically comparable to the defilement of sacrifices through contact with *tum’a*.

We might add that the atonement comes specifically through the *tzitz*, the *kohen gadol*’s headplate, which bears the inscription “*kodesh le-Hashem*” – “sacred to God” – and thus represents his status of exclusive designation for sanctity. We must recognize that when we work in the “*Mikdash*,” when we involve ourselves in “sacred” affairs, we act as the *kohen gadol* in the Temple, exclusively designated for the lofty purpose of *avodat Hashem*. We cannot perform sacred work with our personal interests in mind, with the objective of fulfilling our own selfish ambitions. When we enter the “*Mikdash*,” whenever we undertake any sacred endeavor, we must remember that we are “*kodesh le-Hashem*,” just a servant of our Creator, faithfully devoted to His will, rather than utilize His sacred *mitzvot* to fulfill our own personal wishes.

Wednesday

Parashat Tetzaveh begins with the *mitzva* of kindling the *menorah* in the *Mishkan* each evening (and, according to the controversial view of the Rambam, each morning). Ibn Ezra, commenting to the beginning of Parashat Behaalotekha (Bamidbar 8:2), advances the theory that the lights of the *menorah* are what enabled Moshe to receive prophecy at night. Before the *Mishkan* was built and began operating, God would speak to Moshe only by day. But once the *Mishkan* was built and was illuminated by the light of the *menorah*, God spoke to Moshe even during the nighttime hours.

Rav Meir Simcha Ha’kohen of Dvinsk, here in Parashat Tetzaveh, suggests that this might be the meaning of God’s command in the opening verse of this *parasha*, instructing Moshe that *Benei Yisrael* should bring “to you” (“*eilekha*”) oil for the kindling of the *menorah*. The word “*eilekha*,” Rav Meir Simcha writes, could mean “for you,” and thus indicates that the oil would be donated for Moshe, for his purposes. The kindling of the *menorah* facilitated Moshe’s nocturnal prophecy, and thus this donation, more so than any other, was made for Moshe, to enhance his stature as God’s prophet who receives the divine word to convey it to the people.

Symbolically, the darkness of night represents periods of confusion, fear and anxiety, when we feel uncertain about ourselves and our course in life, and this lack of security causes us distress. Such feelings create an emotional distance between us and God, as we see ourselves as vulnerable and exposed, and not under the care and protection of the Almighty. The nocturnal illumination of the *Mishkan* perhaps symbolizes the notion that in the Sanctuary, in the presence of the Almighty, there is no “darkness.” We can overcome our fears, our anxieties and our unhappiness by residing in the “*Mishkan*,” by viewing ourselves at all times as *kohanim* serving the Almighty in His presence. The joy and satisfaction we are to receive from *avodat Hashem* should, ideally, lift us above the worries and frustrations that would otherwise afflict us, enabling us to feel joyful, content and fulfilled even during the “dark of night,” during life’s difficult moments.

In truth, however, this is only partially correct. As the *Meshekh Chokhma* proceeds to note, the opening verse of Parashat Tetzaveh concludes by describing the kindling of the *menorah* as “*chukat olam le-doroteikhem*” – an “eternal statute for all your generations.” The *Meshekh Chokhma* explains that in the generations after Moshe’s death, the kindling of the *menorah* is a “*chok*” – a law whose reasoning eludes our comprehension. During Moshe’s lifetime, the *menorah* facilitated his nocturnal prophecy, but after his passing, we do not know the reason why God commands us to illuminate His Sanctuary.

Only Moshe Rabbenu was capable of equating day and night in the *Mishkan*, of experiencing joy and contentment during periods of “darkness” through his devotion and service to God. After his passing, the kindling of the *menorah* is a “*chok*,” because nobody else can feel the “light” and joy of “daytime” during life’s dark periods. Only somebody of Moshe’s unique spiritual stature could fully appreciate the significance of serving the Almighty and thus avoid all feelings of fear, anguish and distress with the knowledge that he is in God’s presence and under His care.

Nevertheless, the example set by Moshe should inspire us to, at very least, appreciate the privilege we have to serve our Creator, that regardless of what happens to us, we are always in His presence. The light of the *menorah* should remind us that even when life turns “dark” and we feel anxious and frightened, we can experience some degree of “light,” of comfort and solace, knowing that we are in the service, and hence under the loving care, of our Father in heaven.

Thursday

In the latter part of Parashat Tetzaveh (29:1-37), we read of the procedure by which Aharon and his sons were formally consecrated as *kohanim*. This procedure entailed the offering of three sacrifices, and the placement of blood and anointing oil on Aharon and his sons. We read that after the blood of the final sacrifice – the *eil ha-miluim* – was sprinkled on the altar, some of the blood was taken from the altar and sprinkled on the *kohanim* and their garments, along with anointing oil (29:21). Afterward, the fats of this sacrifice, as well as a portion of the bread that accompanied it, were placed on the altar, and the meat was then eaten by the *kohanim* (except the chest, which was eaten by Moshe).

The *Panei’ach Raza* notes that this does not appear to be the sequence followed by Moshe when the time came to consecrate Aharon and his sons. Towards the end of Parashat Tzav, we read of how the commands issued here in Parashat Tetzaveh were executed, but with one difference. Here, God commands Moshe to sprinkle the sacrificial blood and anointing oil on the *kohanim* and their garments immediately after sprinkling the blood of the *eil ha-miluim* on the altar. In Parashat Tzav, however, this is done only after the fats of the sacrifice were waved and then placed on the altar. The question thus arises as to why Moshe deviated from God’s instructions and changed the sequence, offering the sacrificial fats on the altar before sprinkling the blood and oil on the *kohanim*.

The *Panei’ach Raza* answers that Moshe understood from God’s command that the sprinkling of the blood and oil on the *kohanim* should be the final stage of the process. After issuing the command to sprinkle the blood and oil, God concludes, “he [Aharon] and his garments shall be made sacred, along with his sons and his sons’ garments.” This conclusion indicates that the sprinkling on the *kohanim* marked the final stage, whereupon the consecration process would be completed. Moshe therefore understood that he should perform this sprinkling only after he finishes tending to the sacrifice.

The question that remains, of course, is why God issued the command at that point. If His intention was for the sprinkling to be done after the offering of the *eil ha-miluim* sacrifice was completed, then why did he mention the sprinkling earlier, before instructing that the fats of the sacrifice be burned?

The *Panei’ach Raza* suggests, quite simply, that the command to sprinkle the sacrificial blood on Aharon and his sons affected the previously mentioned stage – the sprinkling of the sacrificial blood on the altar. Since Moshe would have to later take some of the blood from the altar to sprinkle on the *kohanim*, he needed to sprinkle enough blood on the altar to ensure that some would remain by the time he was ready to sprinkle the blood on the *kohanim*. Therefore, immediately after instructing Moshe with regard to the sprinkling on the altar, God mentioned that he would have to later take some blood from the altar to sprinkle on the *kohanim*, so Moshe understood that he needed to sprinkle a significant portion of blood on the altar.

Friday

We read in Parashat Tetzaveh of the *me’il*, the special robe worn by the *kohen gadol*, which was lined on the bottom by bells and decorations shaped as pomegranates. Rashi (28:33-34) explains that the bells and pomegranates were affixed along the bottom of the *me’il* in alternating fashion, with a bell in between every pair of pomegranates. When the Torah speaks of bells being positioned “in the midst” of the pomegranates (“*be-tokham*” – 28:33), it means, according to Rashi, that each bell was positioned in between each pair of pomegranates.

The Ramban (28:31) disagrees, claiming that the bells were placed inside the pomegranates. In his view, the Torah required placing the bells “within” the pomegranates in the literal sense, as the pomegranates were decorative coverings around the bells.

Rav Yaakov Mecklenberg, in *Ha-ketav Ve’ha’kabbala*, noted that this debate has significant implications with regard to the volume of the sound produced by the bells as the *kohen gadol* walked. According to the Ramban, this sound was muffled, and therefore not very loud, whereas according to Rashi, the bells produced a loud noise that could be heard from a distance.

Rav Mecklenberg draws upon the Ramban’s view in advancing his theory concerning the function of the bells of the *me’il*. The conventional understanding is that the bells were needed to symbolically announce the *kohen gadol*’s entry into the *Mishkan*. It would be disrespectful for the *kohen gadol* to enter God’s private chamber, as it were, without “knocking” and announcing his arrival in advance, and thus the bells served to symbolically announce that he was entering. Rav Mecklenberg, however, explained the function of the bells differently, claiming that the sound was for the *kohen gadol* himself. While other members of the nation wear *tzitzit* as a constant reminder of their obligations to God, Rav Mecklenberg writes, the *kohen gadol* required not only this visual reminder, but also the auditory reminder of the bells. As he represented the spiritual ideal to which we should all strive, the *kohen gadol* serving in the *Mikdash* had to conduct himself with an especially intense level of spiritual awareness. As such, while the rest of us just wear *tzitzit*, the *kohen gadol* also wore bells to remind him of his obligations to the Almighty. Therefore, Rav Mecklenberg writes, the bells were covered by material – the decorative pomegranates – that muffled its sound, as the sound needed to be heard only by the *kohen gadol* himself, and not by others.