**SALT – PARASHAT TETZAVEH 5783 / 2023**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

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Dedicated in memory of Zvi Kassel z"l,   
whose yahrzeit is the 10th of Adar  
by Patrice and Danielle Rueff and Family Kassel

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Motzaei Shabbat

One of the *bigdei kehuna* (priestly vestments) described in Parashat Tetzaveh is the *me’il* (robe) worn by the *kohen gadol*, which was made entirely of wool colored with the *tekhelet* dye. Bells were affixed to the bottom hem of the *me’il*, and they would ring as the *kohen gadol* walked into the *Mishkan* to perform the service (“*ve-nishma kolo be-vo’o el ha-kodesh*” – 28:35).

The Gemara in Masekhet Zevachim (88b) comments that this garment served to atone for the particular sin of *lashon ha-ra*, gossiping and disseminating negative information about other people. The point of connection between the *me’il* and *lashon ha-ra*, the Gemara explains, is the concept of sound. In the Gemara’s words: “Something involving a sound shall come and atone for the evil sound [of *lashon ha-ra*].”

Rav Shraga Pollack, in his work *Tishbi*, develops this connection between the *me’il* and *lashon ha-ra* further. Often, *lashon ha-ra* is instigated by ostentatiousness. People who make a point of publicizing their wealth, their successes or their accomplishments naturally evoke jealousy and invite resentment. These feelings are then expressed through *lashon ha-ra*, as envious peers try to pacify their egos by looking down at their fellow and spreading unflattering information about him. They do this in a vain effort to console themselves over not having or achieving that which their fellow has or achieved. Therefore, Rav Pollack explains, one of the ways to counteract and prevent the scourge of *lashon ha-ra* is through the “*me’il*,” a beautiful, lavish garment, colored with the royal *tekheilet* dye, with bells through which the *kohen gadol* publicized himself – but specifically “*be-vo’o el ha-kodesh*,” when entering the sanctuary. Instead of seeking to broadcast ourselves to the public, and appearing impressive, we should focus our efforts on “entering the sanctuary,” on serving God, and this should be our source of pride and satisfaction. The “sounds” we should be making, the only publicity which should interest us, is the natural impact and influence of our sincere devotion to God. If we want to avoid having *lashon ha-ra* spoken about us, we must refrain from drawing attention to ourselves. We should wear a “*me’il*,” ensure to appear impressive, only when we come before God, and not when we engage with other people, and the only “sounds” we produce should be the “sounds” of *avodat Hashem*, not the sounds of self-promotion and attention-seeking. This is a critical step we all can and must take in order to eliminate the destructive ill of gossip and *lashon ha-ra* and create the peaceful, harmonious society that we are to build.

Sunday

We read in Parashat Tetzaveh’s God’s instructions for the formal consecration of Aharon and his sons as the *kohanim* who would minister in the *Mishkan*. This procedure including the pouring of the special *shemen ha-mishcha* – anointing oil – on Aharon’s head (29:7), marking his consecration as *kohen gadol*. This oil was also sprinkled together with the blood of the special *eil ha-miluim* sacrifice on Aharon, his sons, and their garments (29:21).

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 3:6) describes Aharon’s reaction when Moshe poured the *shemen ha-mishcha* on his head. Aharon “shuddered and fell backwards,” the Midrash relates, because he was worried “*shema ma’alti be-shemen ha-mishcha*” – that he might have “misappropriated” the sacred oil, deriving personal benefit from it. The sacred property of the *Mishkan* is forbidden for any sort of enjoyment or benefit, and Aharon feared that he might have benefitted from the pouring of the sacred oil on his head. God reassured Aharon, the Midrash continues, by citing the verses in Tehillim (133:1-3), “How good and pleasant it is when brothers sit together; like the good oil upon the head, descending upon the beard, the beard of Aharon…like the dew of [Mount] Chermon descending upon the mountains of Zion…” These verses liken the anointing oil poured on Aharon to dew, the Midrash explains, to indicate that just as dew is not subject to the prohibition of *me’ila* – misusing sacred property – so is the anointing oil not subject to this prohibition. Aharon therefore had no reason to be concerned about having committed this violation.

What might be the meaning of this description of Aharon’s fear, and why does the Midrash suggest comparing the anointing oil specifically to dew?

Rav Shraga Pollack, in his work *Tishbi*, explains the Midrash as symbolically referring to Aharon’s concern that he was enjoying the pride associated with the distinguished position to which he was named. His concern was not that he might have transgressed the technical prohibition of *me’ila* – but rather that he might have wrongly relished the spotlight into which he had now been placed, the honor and prestige of the high priesthood. And for this reason, the Midrash points to the example of dew, which forms on the ground silently, in the dark of night, without being noticed. As opposed to rainfall, which produces a great deal of noise and makes itself very noticeable to all, dew arrives without any publicity, in private, with nobody watching or hearing. God compared Aharon’s appointment as *kohen gadol* to dew to affirm his humility, his having accepted this appointment without relishing the fame and grandeur, without inappropriate feelings of pride and self-adulation, and without any interest in publicity or renown. Just as dew falls inconspicuously, without drawing attention to itself, so should our acts of public service be performed quietly, in private, without fanfare, for the sincere purpose of contributing, and not for own self-aggrandizement.

Monday

We read in Parashat Tetzaveh God’s command that special garments be made for the *kohanim* to wear as they served in the *Mishkan*. God commanded Moshe to summon the gifted artisans who were qualified to perform this work, and to convey to them the instructions regarding these special garments. God then said about the artisans, “They shall take the gold, the blue-dyed wool and the purple-dyed wool, the crimson string, and the linen” (28:5). Rashi interprets this verse to mean that the artisans should take these materials from the donors in order to make the priestly garments.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe (*Ha-ma’or She-ba-Torah* – Shemot, p. 506) explains that this verse, as understood by Rashi, contrasts this process – the collection of materials for the priestly garments – with the process of collecting materials for the *Mishkan*. We read in Parashat Vayakhel (36:3) that after the people donated materials for the *Mishkan*, the artisans “took from before Moshe all the donations which the Israelites brought…” The implication of this verse is that the donors brought the materials to Moshe, and the artisans then took them from Moshe to begin the work. But when it came to the materials for the priestly vestments, the Rebbe explained, the donations were given directly to the artisans, without first being collected by Moshe.

The reason for this difference, the Rebbe suggests, relates to the purpose of the construction of the *Mishkan*. According to one opinion among the Midrashim and commentators, the *Mishkan* was built to atone for the sin of the golden calf. The Rebbe thus explains that as the people were coming forward to achieve atonement for their collective guilt, the donations were given all to Moshe, the nation’s leader, such that they all became public property before the artisans took them. No component of the *Mishkan* could be identified with its particular donor, as the donations all merged together into a collective, national treasury, from which the *Mishkan* was constructed. The priestly garments, however, were not intended for this purpose, and there was thus no need for the materials from which they were made to lose their association with their donors. The materials were given directly to the artisans, without first losing their identification with their original owners, such that they remained associated with the people who donated them.

This contrast perhaps reflects the duality of our religious observance, which occurs on both the collective and individual levels. On the one hand, we serve God collectively, as a nation, each of us “donating” a portion which then becomes part of the nation’s collective effort, losing its distinction and connection with the “donor.” But at the same time, we serve God as individuals, each charting his unique path and forging a distinctive spiritual identity. A familiar example of this duality is the experience of prayer, which we approach on both levels. The silent *shemona esrei* that we recite individually is a personal act of service, devotion and communion; even though we recite the same text, no two people’s prayers are identical, as each person invests his or her unique thoughts, feeling and emotions that differ from those of every other worshipper. But thereafter, the *shaliach tzibur* repeats the *shemona esrei* on behalf of the entire congregation, which joins together communally, blending together into a single, organic entity that stands before God in prayer. We serve the Almighty both as a single collective, merging together into one group bound by a joint commitment to God, and also as distinct individuals, each making our unique contribution to the “*Mishkan*” that we are called upon to build together.

Tuesday

One of the special garments described by the Torah in Parashat Tetzaveh is the *me’il*, the woolen robe worn by the *kohen gadol*. This robe featured a “*safa*” – an extra layer of material around the opening for the neck, which resembled “*pi tachra*” (28:32). *Targum Onkelos*, Rashi and others explain this term as referring to armor worn by soldiers, which included an extra layer around the area of the neck for protection.

The Chafetz Chaim, in *Shemirat Ha-lashon* (vol. 2, chapter 15), offers an explanation for the symbolic significance of this comparison between the *kohen gadol*’s robe and protective armor. He notes the Gemara’s comment in Masekhet Arakhin (16a) that the *me’il* served to atone for the transgression of *lashon ha-ra* – the dissemination of rumors and negative information about other people. The *me’il* featured a series of bells along its bottom hem that rang as the *kohen gadol* walked about (28:35), and the Gemara thus teaches that the *me’il*, which produced a sound, atoned for the sin involving “sound” – speaking *lashon ha-ra* about one’s fellow. Drawing upon this association between the *kohen gadol*’s robe and the transgression of *lashon ha-ra*, the Chafetz Chaim suggests an explanation for why the robe is likened to armor:

Just as armor which a person wears serves for him as a shield and source of protection against being harmed by arrows fired at him, the same is true of one who restrains his mouth – this serves for him as a shield against the one fighting with him, because in the end, the fight will be silenced, since he does not respond to him at all. Whereas, if he responds to him – the fight will intensify, and will result in violent confrontations.

The Chafetz Chaim here offers a new perspective on the destructive consequences of *lashon ha-ra*, which we normally view as affecting the subject, the person about whom one speaks. While the evil of *lashon ha-ra* lies primarily in the damage caused to the reputation of the person about whom unflattering information has been relayed, the Chafetz Chaim here points to the potential harm that the speaker himself could suffer, by perpetuating hostility. Even when we feel justified in responding to a perceived wrong or injustice, remaining silent often serves our own best interests far better than a response. Speaking negatively about people invites further resentment and hostility, which could more effectively be quelled through silence. Refraining from verbal attacks and from spreading negative information serves as “armor,” protecting ourselves from unnecessarily prolonged conflicts and avoidable feelings of tension. The association drawn between the *me’il* and the prohibition of *lashon ha-ra* teaches that observing this prohibition serves to protect not only others who will be harmed by what we say about them, but also ourselves, by sparing ourselves unnecessary conflict and resentment.

Wednesday

One of the garments worn by the *kohen gadol*, as we read in Parashat Tetzaveh, is the *efod* (apron), which featured two precious stones – called “*avnei shoham*” – that were embedded within its shoulder straps, one stone on each strap. The Torah commands engraving the names of the twelve tribes on the two stones, six names on each stone (25:9-10).

The Rishonim debate the question as to which six names appeared on each stone. The Torah (28:10) commands engraving the names “*ke-toledotam*,” according to the sequence of birth. Accordingly, Rashi explains that the names were engraved in age order. The names of the six older sons of Yaakov – Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yehuda, Dan and Naftali – were engraved on the first stone, in that order, and the names of the younger six sons – Gad, Asher, Yissakhar, Zevulun, Yosef and Binyamin – were engraved in this sequence on the second stone. The Rambam, however, in *Hilkhot Kelei Ha-kodesh* (9:9), and in his commentary to the Mishna (Yoma 7:5), disagrees, and rules that the names were arranged according to mother. The sons of each of Yaakov’s four wives were listed in age order, but altogether, the sequence did not follow the sequence of the birth of the twelve sons. According to the Rambam, the first stone contained the names of the six sons of Leah – Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yehuda, Yissakhar and Zevulun – and the second stone contained the names of the sons of the other wives: first the sons of Bilha (Dan and Naftali), followed by the sons of Zilpa (Gad and Asher), and then the sons of Rachel (Yosef and Binyamin). Although Leah’s two youngest sons – Yissakhar and Zevulun – were born after Dan, Naftali, Gad and Asher, they are engraved on the first stone, together with the older sons of Leah.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe (*Ha-ma’or She-ba-Torah*, vol. 2, pp. 510-512) suggests an explanation for the significance of these two opinions. He writes that the engraving of the names of the tribes on the *kohen gadol*’s shoulders symbolizes our nation’s unity, the love and harmony that we must strive to maintain. This sense of unity, the Rebbe explains, has two dimensions. First, it stems from the very reality that we are all brothers and sisters, members of the same family. We are each other’s kin, sharing the same background, and this requires us to build and maintain close bonds of love and friendship. Secondly, the goal of unity requires us to commit ourselves to one another in the sense of respecting our differences. The need for *achdut* (unity) stems from our shared background and our familial bond, and challenges us to acknowledge and accept the distinctive qualities and characteristics of the many different groups that comprise *Am Yisrael*.

Rashi’s view, that the names on the stones of the *efod* were arranged according to the sequence of birth, reflects our common background, that we are bound to one another because we share the same ancestry and belong to the same family, as descendants of Yaakov Avinu. The Rambam’s view, however, that the names were arranged by group, underscores the challenge of accepting and respecting each other’s differences. This sequence draws our attention to the division of *Am Yisrael* into distinct groups, and the need to transcend our differences in order to form bonds of love, friendship and mutual devotion. Together, these two opinions show us the two aspects of the *achdut* that we must strive to maintain among our nation – a recognition of all that we share in common, and respect for the many differences that exist between us.

Thursday

Earlier this week, we noted the Gemara’s teaching in Masekhet Arakhin (16a) that the *me’il* – the robe worn by the *kohen gadol* – served to atone for the sin of *lashon ha-ra*, sharing negative information about one’s fellow for no constructive purpose. The *me’il* featured a series of bells along the bottom hem, as we read in Parashat Tetzaveh (28:33-34), and the Gemara comments that the sound produced by the *kohen gadol* as he walked about atoned for the “sound” of gossip and negative speech about other people.

The Gemara notes that this teaching seems to contradict the well-known principle that the sin of *lashon ha-ra* was punished with *negaim* – leprous skin infections that brought upon a person an especially severe form of *tum’a* (ritual impurity). Why, the Gemara asks, would *negaim* be necessary to atone for *lashon ha-ra*, if this offense is atoned through the *me’il* worn by the *kohen gadol*?

The Gemara answers by distinguishing between a situation where “*ahanu ma’asav*” – the negative speech had an effect – and “*lo ahanu ma’asav*” – nothing resulted from the *lashon ha-ra* which one spoke. Rashi explains “*ahanu ma’asav*” to mean that the person to whom the information was shared fought with the person who was spoken about, as a result of the information that he heard. If the speaking of *lashon ha-ra* had this kind of adverse effect, ruining the relationship between the subject and the listener, then the offense is not atoned through the *mei’il*, and the speaker will be punished with *negaim*. If, however, the shared information did not cause a strain in the relationship, then the speaker’s wrongdoing is atoned through the *me’il*.

This distinction might perhaps be understood based on the Gemara’s comment later (Arakhin 16b) regarding the Torah’s requirement that a person stricken with *tzara’at* reside in isolation outside his city (“*badad yeishev*” – Vayikra 13:46). The Gemara explains that the Torah imposed this requirement because the individual had “separated a man from his wife and a man from his fellow” by sharing negative information about people. He ruined relationships by spreading gossip and unflattering information, thereby causing loneliness, and he is therefore condemned to live in solitude. Understandably, this punishment is brought upon a person only if “*ahanu ma’asav*,” his speech about people indeed had the effect of ruining their relationships and thus causing loneliness. If his speech did not have this effect, then *negaim* are not necessary, and he earns atonement through the sound produced by the *me’il*. The noise created by the *me’il* as the *kohen gadol* entered the Sanctuary symbolizes the fact that the “sounds” we are to produce are sounds of service to God. Even when *lashon ha-ra* does not result in any actual harm, it has the effect of polluting the environment, of creating an atmosphere of negativity. The *kohen gadol*’s robe teaches us that we are to create pleasing “sounds,” the sounds of holiness and sincere religious devotion. The atonement for *lashon ha-ra* which does not ruin relationships, then, is the sound of the *me’il* – a commitment to discontinue the dissemination of negativity, and to instead fill the air with the beautiful sounds of *avodat Hashem*.

Friday

Parashat Tetzaveh begins with the command that *Benei Yisrael* provide “*shemen zayit zakh katit*” – especially pure, fine olive oil – for the kindling of the *menorah* in the *Mishkan*. As Rashi explains, the *menorah* required the purest oil, the first drops extracted from the olive. Rashi notes that the Torah emphasizes “*katit la-ma’or*” – that this strict standard is required specifically for the kindling of the *menorah*. The *menachot* (flour offerings), which included olive oil, did not demand the same standard, and even the later, less pure drops extracted from the olive were suitable for use with the *menachot*.

A number of writers found subtle allusions in Rashi’s comments to broader concepts, attempting to unearth the deeper significance of this contrast between the *menorah* and *menachot* with respect to the requirement of “*katit*.” One such theory was advanced by Rav Menachem Mendel of Vorka (cited in *Siach Sarfei Kodesh*). He sees within the word “*katit*” – which literally means “crushed” – an allusion to criticism, which has the effect of “crushing” the spirits of one’s fellow. Whenever we criticize somebody, we must acknowledge that our words will inflict some degree of pain and discomfort; it is never pleasant to hear somebody point out one’s faults and mistakes. Rav Menachem Mendel of Vorka suggests that the Torah authorizes “*katit*,” inflicting this emotional pain, for the purpose of “*ma’or*” – “illumination,” to “kindle” our fellow’s soul, and help him improve. If we truly believe that our words will be effective in bringing about a positive change, then we are allowed, and urged, to offer criticism in a constructive manner that will yield the desired results. However, “*katit*” is not appropriate for “*menachot*” – a term which resembles the word for “low.” If the effect of a critical remark will be nothing more than offending the person, and making him feel lowly, thus causing defensiveness and resentment, then “*katit*” is not allowed. The discomfort of criticism is acceptable only “*la-maor*,” in the process of “illuminating” our fellow Jew, as part of a genuine effort to help him or her grow and improve. But causing this discomfort is entirely inappropriate, and forbidden, if it will only “crush” our fellow without contributing to his growth and enabling him to shine.