

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Hadassah Malka bas Zecharia. "May her Neshama have an Aliya."

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS TETZAVEH

The Attraction of *Lashon Hora*

...and they shall make holy garments for Aharon your brother, and his sons... (28:4)



The Talmud (*Zevachim* 88b) explains that the Torah juxtaposes (in *Parshas Tzav*) the subjects of the sacrifices next to the priestly garments to teach us that just as the sacrifices brought atonement to the Jewish people, so too did the priestly garments bring atonement. The Talmud then goes on to identify which garments brought atonement for which type of sin.

The *me'il* (robe) atoned for the sin of *lashon hora*. The reason, explains the Talmud, is "let the sound atone for the sin of sound." This refers to the fact that the robe made noise as it was trimmed on the bottom edge with thirty six individual bells. Every time the *kohen gadol* walked the ringing bells announced his impending arrival; hence, the sound of the robe atoning for the sin of sound (*lashon hora*).

Though it is true that *lashon hora* is generally transmitted by sound waves, it hardly seems like a significant enough component of the sin to make the characterization of *lashon hora* a "sin of sound." Why would the Talmud reduce *lashon hora* to being a violation of a noise ordinance? In fact, the opposite is usually true; no matter how softly *lashon hora* is whispered someone is surely straining to hear every word. It brings to mind the old

E.F. Hutton commercials; when they speak everyone listens. So, why is *lashon hora* described primarily as a sin of sound that needs to be atoned for by another sound?

In order to properly understand this we need to explore the motivation behind speaking *lashon hora*. Its first occurrence was by the snake in the Garden of Eden. The snake was very dissatisfied with his role (he wanted to be with Chava) and therefore he tried to elevate his status in the eyes of Chava by speaking *lashon hora* on Hashem — hoping to eliminate Adam at the same time. This personal dissatisfaction is still today what drives most people to say *lashon hora*. Simply put, by pushing others down I elevate myself to look pretty good by comparison.

Ever notice what happens when a crowd suddenly hears a large noise? Everyone instinctively turns around to look for the source of the sound. Sound has a way of attracting attention. The Gemara is telling us that *lashon hora* is exactly the same. The person speaking *lashon hora* is looking to attract attention to himself and be compared favorably to the person who is the subject of the *lashon hora*. Essentially the offender is

saying "look at me!" It is precisely a sin of the principle of sound.

How then does the robe offer an atonement? The robe also serves to call attention to the wearer. The difference is that by the robe the sound is there to pay respect to the presence of Hashem. In fact, we learn from here that even when entering one's own home you're supposed to announce your presence prior to entering. In other words, you are calling attention to yourself to pay respect to others and not just barge into their space.

Did You Know...

Most people believe that only the names of the twelve tribes were inscribed on the precious stones of the *choshen*. Here are some facts that you may not be aware of:

The twelve precious stones with which the breastplate was decorated contained the names of the twelve tribes. According to the Gemara in *Sotah* (48b), no chisel was allowed to touch the stones, nor was it permitted to mark the names of the twelve patriarchs on

Knowing When Not To Speak

And you shall make the breastplate... And the fourth row an emerald, and an onyx, and a jasper; (28:15-20)

Hashem commanded Moshe to make the *choshen* (breastplate) with settings for twelve stones. These stones contained the names of the twelve tribes (see Did You Know column for an expanded discussion on this). The twelfth stone, which is *yeshpeh* in Hebrew (phonetically very similar to jasper), is represented on the *choshen* by the tribe of Binyamin.

There is a fascinating Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 71:5) that explains that Binyamin's mother, Rachel, was a paragon of the virtue of silence and discretion. Rachel exhibited this quality when she didn't reveal to her husband-to-be Yaakov that her father was planning on deceiving him by putting her older sister Leah in her place at the wedding ceremony. In fact, she aided her father by giving her sister the secret code with which Yaakov had entrusted her.

The Midrash continues that this trait of discretion transferred on to her descendants; her son Binyamin knew full well that the brothers had sold his brother Yosef, yet he kept silent and didn't reveal to his father what they had done. Rachel's descendant Shaul, upon being anointed the first king of Israel quietly returned home to his father's house and said nothing of the matter to anyone. Esther, another descendant of the tribe of Binyamin, after being chosen to become part of King Achashveirosh's household was very discreet as to her origins and shared them with no one.

The Midrash explains that the reason Binyamin was chosen for the stone "*yeshpeh*" is because the name of the stone is a contraction of the words

"*yesh*" and "*peh*," which means "has a mouth" meaning he has what to say. Binyamin was fully aware of the circumstances surrounding Yosef's disappearance, yet Binyamin kept his silence. Binyamin's conduct here seems very difficult to understand. He must have seen how much pain Yaakov Avinu was in over losing his son Yosef; how could he have kept his silence?

We know that Binyamin was extremely fond of Yosef and of course had no part in the selling of him. Still, there is no doubt he must have felt that Yosef was gone forever, in fact he named ALL ten of his children after Yosef. There is only one possible reason as to why Binyamin didn't reveal to his father the circumstances behind Yosef's disappearance: telling his father what his brothers had done would only bring Yaakov an immeasurable amount of pain knowing that his own children had acted in such a cruel and wicked manner. In addition, it would also bring Yaakov to the crushing realization that he himself may have been the source of the enmity between Yosef and the brothers and therefore the ultimate cause of Yosef's apparent death.

The Midrash uses Rachel's example of discretion to show that it ultimately led to descendants that were worthy of royal lineage – Saul became the first king of Israel and Esther became a queen to Achashveirosh. All of them (Rachel, Binyamin, Esther, Shaul) could have improved their own personal situation by just simply stating the truth. The lesson here is that leadership begins with one who is willing to forego their own advancement for the sake of a higher truth.

Did You Know Continued

the stones by means of paint or ink. The engraving was therefore done by means of the *Shamir*, which was placed on the stone, and had the marvelous power of cutting it along the lines of the letters of the proper names. In addition to the names of the twelve tribes, the stones also contained the names Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov and the words: "[all these are] the tribes of Yeshurun" (*Yoma* 73b). These words could not be omitted since the whole Hebrew alphabet had to be included, in order that, on consulting the *Urim* and *Tumim*, the high priest might be enabled to form words from the individual letters on the stones which would then light up to deliver a message.

There is much discussion in the commentaries as to exactly which stones contained which letters and in what order. A proper treatment of the subject is beyond the scope of this column. However, it is interesting to note that there is a view that each stone had six letters on it which means in total there were seventy two letters on the *choshen*, corresponding to the *Shem Hameforash*.

While we are on the subject of the *choshen*: There is a well known story of a non-Jew Dama Ben Nesina who is offered a large sum of money for a replacement stone for the *choshen*. He declines to sell it as obtaining it would involve waking his father up. According to the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Peah* 3a) the stone they are trying to replace is the *yeshpeh* (the stone of *shevet* Binyamin). See accompanying article on discretion to understand how appropriately this non-Jew's behavior aligned with the character trait of Binyamin.



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