

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of HaRav Yeshaya Meir ben Yitzchak Isaac, HaRav Yeshaya Greenberg. "May his 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 loud noise? Everyone instinctively turns around



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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 your 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 (such as your spouse) and not just barge into their space.

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. 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.

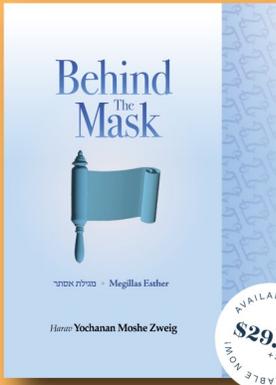
The Midrash uses Rachel's example of discretion to show that it ultimately led to descendants who were worthy of royal lineage: Saul became the first king of Israel and Esther became a queen to Achashveirosh. All of them (Rachel, Binyamin, Esther, Shaul) could have improved their own personal situation 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.

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