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Parshat HaShavua sheet

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Parshat Tezaveh / Zachor

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INCONSPICUOUS ASSUMPTION

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

In this week's portion Moshe is charged to prepare every detail of the priesthood for his brother Aharon and his descendants. In intricate detail, the sartorial traits of every one of the priestly vestments are explicated, down to the last intertwined threads.

And though Moshe is in charge of setting up the administration and establishing the entire order of service while training his brother and nephews, his name is conspicuously missing from this portion. Our sages explain the reason for the omission. When Hashem threatened to destroy His nation, Moshe pleaded with Him: "And now if You would but forgive their sin! — but if not, erase me now from Your book that You have written"(Exodus 32:32) As we all know, Moshe's plea were accepted. The nation was spared. But Moshe was not left unscathed. His request of written eradication was fulfilled in one aspect. He was left out of one portion of the Torah Tezaveh. Thus the words of the tzadik were fulfilled in one aspect. But why this portion?

Though this English-language publication is not wont to discuss Hebrew etymological derivations, it is noteworthy to mention a thought I once heard in the name of Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef. Moshe's plea "erase me now from Your book," bears an explanation. The word sifr'chah, "your book" can be broken down to two words sefer chaf — which means the twentieth book. Thus Moshe was removed from this portion of Tezaveh, the twentieth portion of the Torah.

But why would Moshe intone such omission in this, of all the portions of the Torah? Why not omit his name in the portions that declare the tragic outcome of sin or the calamities of insurrection? Wouldn't that be a better choice for omission? Why did Moshe allude to having his name omitted in the week he charges Aharon with all the honor and glory that is afforded the High Priest?

Rav Yitzchak Blaser was once seated at a gathering of the most prominent sages of his generation that was held in his city of St. Petersburg. Among the Talmudic sages present was Rabbi Yosef Dov HaLevi Soleveitchik of Brisk, world renown for his Talmudic genius. Rabbi Soloveitchik presented a Talmudic question that his young son, Reb Chaim, had asked. After posing the question, a flurry of discussion ensued, each of the rabbis offering his own answer to the riddle, while other rabbis refuted them with powerful rebuttals. During the entire repartee, Rabbi Blaser, who had a reputation as a Talmudic genius, sat silently. He did not offer an answer, nor did he voice approval to any of the answers given by the Rabbis. When Rabbi Soloveitchik ultimately offered his son's own solution, Rabbi Blaser sat quietly, neither nodding in approval nor shaking his head in disagreement. It seemed as if he did not comprehend the depth of the insightful discourse. It was as if he was not even there! Bewildered, Reb Yosef Dov began having second thoughts about the renowned Rabbi Blaser. "Was he truly the remarkable scholar that the world had made him out to be?" he wondered. Later that evening, Rabbi Soloveitchik was in the main synagogue where he got hold of the book "Pri Yitzchok," a volume filled with Talmudic exegesis authored by none other than Rabbi Blaser himself. After leafing through the large volume he saw that the afternoon's entire discourse, his son's question, the offered and reputed responses, and the final resolution, were all part of a dissertation that Rabbi Blaser had himself published years earlier! "Now I realize," thought Rabbi Soloveitchik, "Rabbi Blaser is as much a genius in humility as he is in Talmudic law!"

Our sages tell us that actually Moshe was to have been chosen as the Kohen Gadol in addition to the leader of the Jewish nation. It was his unwavering refusal to accept any of those positions that lost him the opportunity to serve as Kohen Gadol. Instead, Hashem took it from him and gave it to Aharon.

Many of us would have always harped on the fact. How often do I hear the claims "I got him that job!" "I could have been in his position!" "I started that company! Had I stayed, I would be the one with the stock options!" "That was really my idea!"

Moshe, too, could have injected himself as the one who propelled and engineered Aharon's thrust to glory — especially after a seemingly tainting experience with the Golden Calf. In his great humility, Moshe did just the opposite. Moshe did not want to diminish Aharon's glory in any way. He wanted the entire spotlight to shine on Aharon and his great service to Klal Yisrael. Therefore, in the portion in which Moshe charges, guides, and directs the entire process of the priesthood, his name is conspicuously omitted.

One of the greatest attributes of true humility is to let others shine in their own achievement without interfering or announcing your role in their success. The greatest educators, the wisest parents, and most understanding colleagues know when to share the spotlight and when to let another friend, colleague, sibling, or child shine in their success or accomplishment. They know exactly when to be conspicuously or inconspicuously “missing from the book.”

Oily Preparation

By Rabbi Berel Wein

In the Torah reading of this week, a great deal of emphasis is placed on the preparation of the oil that will be the fuel for the flames of the great Candelabra that existed in the Tabernacle and, later, in the Temple in Jerusalem. The Torah emphasizes that the oil to be used must be of the purest kind, refined to produce only illumination. Through this verse, the commentators attempt to explain why such a special emphasis is to be placed on the oil.

Perhaps it would be sufficient for the Torah to simply command that the flames that emanated from the Menorah should be of the highest quality and have the greatest power of illumination. We would then understand that to produce flames of such a nature and quality, only the finest oil possible would have to be produced for the Candelabra to possess that proper fuel and extraordinarily fine flames. Thus, we see that the Torah emphasizes the preparation of the oil in more detail and with greater urgency than it does the description of the flame of the Candelabra that results.

In a strange way, it is as though the oil itself, which after all is only the fuel in the cup of the lamp of the Candelabra, somehow receives more prominence and detailed instruction than the flame itself. Not only that, but the great Candelabra has miraculous powers, and one of its lamps burned continuously, according to many commentaries, without having any added oil to the cup of that lamp. As such, if we are relying on that miracle, then why should the production of the oil for the Candelabra be deemed important at all?

Judaism places great weight not only on the fulfillment and actualization of commandments, but also regarding the preparation that precedes the actual fulfillment of the wishes of Heaven. Holiness and holy acts require preparation and forethought. They are not random acts that rarely occur because of the spontaneity of the moment.

All the holy days of the Jewish calendar require periods of planning – thirty days before the holiday itself, as well as physical, mental, and emotional preparation. One must enter the performance of commandments prepared. They are not to be performed haphazardly and without proper forethought and cognitive intent.

This is also true for the Sabbath day that occurs every week as well as all the daily commandments that we are privileged to perform on a regular basis. The Talmud teaches us that preparation is an important aspect of life – many times as important as actualizing the commandment.

Without proper preparation, performance of the commandments is likened to a body to which no soul is attached. Therefore, if we understand and appreciate this attitude towards life and commandments, we can readily appreciate why the Torah is so emphatic regarding the necessary methods of production of the oil to be used to light the lamps of the holy Tabernacle and Temple.

Clothes Make the Man Think

by Rabbi Benji Levy

How significant is the way one presents oneself? On the one hand we are instructed to look beyond superficial exteriors and to focus on the essence of a person: 'do not look at the container, but rather at what it contains.' And yet on the other hand, the Torah places heavy emphasis upon the attire of the priests. It stipulates that their holy garments were for 'honour and glory' and the Talmud states that the donning of these garments is a prerequisite for service in the Sanctuary.

This presents a somewhat perplexing contradiction with the usual approach of the Torah that calls upon each of us to look beyond externality.

Rather than imparting automatic sanctity on the priest, the clothes serve to inspire and instill sanctity within their bearer. This is most clearly illustrated through exploring the details of the bottom and top most adornments.

The robe worn by the high priest was decorated along the hem with delicately placed bells which could be 'heard when he entered the sanctuary before God and when he exited...' The bells achieve a number of practical purposes for all involved. For those around, the bells announce the time of service so that people can act appropriately and distinguish the high priest. For God, the bells serve as a respectful announcement of entry and elicit His favour towards prayer. Perhaps the most vital reason for the constant sound of the bells, however, is for the high-priest himself, enabling him to realise and remember his constant and immense responsibility.

This message of self-awareness should ring beyond the bells, and should resonate beyond the high priest. The bells remind the priest that every move he makes has an indelible impact. We too should strive for this constancy of mindfulness, to remind not just others of what we represent, but to remind ourselves of the impact of our actions.

The meaning behind the highest garment that the priest wears complements these ideas. The Torah obligates a gold plate which extends around the forehead from ear to ear called a *tzitz*: when getting dressed, this is the final item that the high priest puts on. Of all the garments, this is perhaps the most overt in the message it portrays: 'sanctified to God.' Why did this tiara have to be the final piece of clothing?

There are many people that wave the banner of public piety before they develop the more basic, personal private character traits. The priest could only exhibit his explicit 'crown of sanctity' once he had first taken care of the less visible, yet just as necessary items of clothing. One can only proclaim one's public holiness to God once one has taken care of one's personal and private behaviour vis-à-vis oneself and others. Prior to publicly claiming God's seal of approval, one must first work on oneself and refine one's own practices.

If the entire dressing process is a metaphor for the priest's gradual development in his service of God, it begins first with the inner garments, those that can perhaps reflect his own personal thoughts and feelings. Moving gradually outwards, he dons the external garments that represent his behaviour towards his fellow and once they have all been donned, he can finally place the holy *tzitz* on his head, portraying his absolute dedication to the public service of God. Here it becomes clear not that 'the clothes maketh the man' but rather that they are there to make us think.

In that context, we can now understand that there is indeed no real contradiction between the intricate detailing of the external garments of the priests and the instruction we have of focusing on the essence. These two approaches represent parallel elements of our relationships with ourselves, those around us and even God. With this in mind, we should hear the ringing of the silent bells below so that we can project a message of holiness above.

In a stark contrast to what one would normally expect, the Torah goes into immense detail when describing the clothing of the high priest. Does every thread, bell and colour really matter that much? And does that not go completely against the grain of the famous teaching not to look at the container, but rather what it contains? Woven throughout the threads of the priestly garments are underlying messages for us that hint to the priorities we should be setting within our relationships.

“You shall make holy garments for your brother Aaron, for honor and glory” (28:2)

Why are so many pesukim devoted to the bigdei kehuna? Yalkut Maamarim says that the reason for this is related to the teaching of Chazal that each of the garments atoned for a certain aveira. There is nothing that Hashem wants more than for us to renew our relationship with Him by earning atonement for our sins. The Torah delves into great detail when it comes to things that are beloved to Hashem, so it makes sense that the bigdei kehuna are described at length. Today, in the absence of these special garments, we still have the ability to earn atonement by doing teshuva. We should cherish the opportunity to take advantage of it because it is beloved to Hashem.

“They shall take the gold, the blue, purple, and crimson wool, and the linen” (28:5)

Rashi comments that the craftsmen were to take the materials directly from the donors. Why did it have to be done this way? R' Moshe Feinstein, in his sefer Kol Rom, says that one who spreads Torah must also take care of the mundane aspects of the job like fundraising. He must do all that is necessary to support Torah, both the religious and mundane parts, rather than assign individualized roles to different people. The designers of the bigdei kehuna also had to take the lead in collecting the materials for their projects. Even if the craftsmen were not the ones to actually go out to collect the donations, they were on hand to accept the gifts as they came in. This was done for the donor's benefit because it established a relationship in the designer's mind; When the craftsmen saw who donated the materials, the construction became more personal. They were able to put a face on the goal of the project, which would inspire him to do an even better job.

“And you shall put the two stones upon the shoulder straps of the ephod as stones of remembrance for the Children of Israel, and Aharon shall carry their names before Hashem upon his two shoulders as a remembrance” (28:12)

The Abarbanel comments that the Kohen Gadol wore the stones with the names of the tribes on his shoulders to symbolize the fact that he was carrying the people on his shoulders bore the responsibility of representing the entire nation in the Mishkan. But the names of the shevatim were also engraved on the stones of the choshen, which was worn on his heart. This is because the Kohen Gadol can only effectively shoulder the responsibility of representing the nation if they are close to his heart, if he has feelings of love for all his fellow Jews. That is the key to carrying the burden of the Jewish people. Parents are able to carry the responsibility for the needs of their children and do difficult things for them, such as getting up late at night and giving extra attention to them when necessary, because of their love for their children. It is not so difficult to do something for a person that one loves, even if it is a big challenge. The heart and the shoulders were both important. Through this dual placement, the Kohen Gadol would remember that he needed to develop warm feelings and also take concrete action to serve the people well.

“And they shall fasten the choshen by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, so that it may be upon the band of the ephod, and the choshen will not move off the ephod” (28:28)

Why was it forbidden to separate the choshen and the ephod? Chazal (Zevachim 88b) teach that the ephod served as atonement while the choshen atoned for the perversion of justice. Based on this, R' Moshe Feinstein explains that these two concepts are closely related. When a person is dishonest in his business practices, he indicates that his belief in Hashem is deficient. After all, if he truly believed in Hashem, he would rest assured that Hashem would give him all the money that he needed and would not resort to deceit. By requiring the connection of the ephod and the choshen, the Torah teaches us that the underlying errant beliefs that lead to idol worship and dishonesty are identical. When a person is dishonest, he must realize that it says something about his trust in Hashem.

“They will know that I, Hashem, am their G-d, Who brought them out of the land of Egypt in order that I may dwell in their midst; I am Hashem their G-d” (29:46)

The Mishkan enabled Hashem's presence among the Jewish people. Today, even without a Mishkan or Mikdash, we can still connect to the Divine Presence by attending a minyan in a shul, by studying Torah, and by building homes dedicated to serving Hashem together with our spouses. Chazal connect all of these with Hashem's presence. The connection of the Mishkan to leaving Mitzrayim is as follows: Slaves cannot focus on their religious goals because they have no time to themselves. Now that the Jewish people were independent, they were free to focus on Hashem. Hashem says that He will “dwell in their midst,” in the plural, because Hashem's is present in the life of each individual. We all have the ability to connect with Hashem, each of us in our own way.

A Complete Unknown

By Sheldon Stern

Football has supplanted baseball as America's favorite sport. It's universally accepted that for a team to have sustained success it must have a great combination of coach and quarterback. The Chiefs with Coach Reid and star quarterback Patrick Mahomes support this axiom. Before them, it was the legendary tandem of Belichick and Brady, who ran roughshod over the league. This said it's hard to understand why Betzalel got nary a mention in either Trumah or Tetzaveh. He was the ideal "quarterback to implement "Coach" Moshe's game plan sent down by the perfect "Owner." Parshas Terumah properly began with Hashem instructing Moshe to appeal for the materials needed to build the Mishkan and its accouterments. Still, we should have been told that Betzalel, a mere stripling of a lad, would be the chief architect. The answer, I believe, is found in the Megillah and perhaps this is "a" reason that Parshas Tetzaveh, can, as it does this year, precede Purim.

The most heart-rending moment in the narrative comes when Mordechai tells his niece/wife that she must solicit an audience with the king. They both know that this will end their relationship. Mordechai is resigned to this fate. He decided that the future of the Jewish people superseded any personal considerations. Therefore, he closed his Seforim despite the ire that was raised among some of his colleagues. But for Esther, this was a bitter pill to swallow, to borrow from the Bard, "the unkindest cut of all." We know about the Yiddishe Mama, but the Jewish wife is no less devoted. It was our maternal ancestors in Egypt who ensured our survival by raising their husbands' flagging spirits. Moreover, what makes the Biblical stories so moving is that the characters are real. Yaakov is afraid when he confronts Eisav, Yosef is enticed by Potifar's wife and Saul is jealous of Dovid. Throughout the Scriptures, our icons are faced with unimaginable challenges and it's riveting to see how they deal with them. So how did Mordechai get through to Hadassah? He explained that the Jewish people are immortal and therefore they will be saved from this predicament. He then told his beloved that she had an opportunity to be the vehicle through which salvation is wrought, and if she "pass"es"over" this chance she'll be relegated to the dustbins of history. As the American bard wrote you'll end up, "A Complete Unknown." And Mordechai had a precedent at his disposal. We all know that Boaz married Rus and became a link on the chain to Moshiach, but another person had first dibs, and he's known for perpetuity as Ploni Almoni, again "A Complete Unknown."

Boruch Hashem, we know what ensued, but what does this have to do with our original question? Let's imagine that Betzalel had been introduced at the start of the process. What would the people have thought? This wunderkind showed up, incredibly skilled in carpentry, weaving, and metalwork. A natural leader who won the respect of his artisans because he treated them all with respect. But that's not what the Torah wanted to convey. By relegating Betzalel to the sidelines until Parshas Vayakhel, Hashem was making a dramatic statement. The Mishkan must be built because it's an integral part of the "Master Plan of Creation." So it doesn't depend on any individual, rather whoever makes the effort to be involved will receive the Siyata Dishmaya he needs to flourish.

Now let's develop this point. The Jews were standing at the Yam Suf. The mighty Egyptian Army was bearing down on them and they were very much Michavin to the slogan, "From the River to the Sea." But Nachshon Ben Aminadav tapped into his inner Admiral Farragut and said, "Damn the water, full speed ahead." And the rest is history. And when Zimri consorted with Cozbi it was a public Chillul Hashem. But only one man rose to the occasion and stemmed G-d's anger by killing them. I'm certain that Ploni Almoni had good reasons for deferring but the bottom line is that there are times when Hashem puts things out for us. Maybe only a select few are given the chance maybe it's more than a few. Sometimes He communicates telepathically, other times it's through a Shliach like Mordechai. Those special individuals who grab the bull by the horns earn their place in the pantheon. It feels like we're in Yemos Hamoshiach. I'm reasonably certain that the Ultimate Redeemer will start as "A Complete Unknown." But when he begins his campaign he won't let anything stand in his way and with Divine Assistance he'll complete the mission.

Let me share the bridge of a song I wrote in 2010:

Now we're scattered all around
Bruised and battered
Lost and found
Tired and lonely, on the run
This endless journey
Has only just begun
Two thousand years of history have passed
Our enemies have gone
But we are standing fast.

And now some classic borscht belt humor. "They compare him to Dylan. Really? Yeah, they say a Dylan he isn't."

The Battle Continues

By Rabbi Yaakov Menken

The Sabbath prior to the holiday of Purim is called *Parshas Zachor*, the portion of remembrance. There is a Biblical command to remember what Amalek did, and to blot out the remembrance of Amalek. There is even a prohibition against forgetting. The Torah portion that gives us these commandments, Deuteronomy 28:17-19, is the special reading this week, the Maftir following the regular reading.

What did Amalek do that was so evil? As described in Exodus 17, Amalek came to wage war against Israel in the desert. The Medrash says that Amalek found the weak, the stragglers, unprotected by the clouds of the Divine Presence, and attacked them.

Usually, war is waged for one of two reasons: conquest or defense. Kings and dictators make war to expand their empire, and those attacked are forced to fight to keep what is theirs. Even when the attackers commit horrific crimes, it is part of them taking the property and resources of their victims. Except here.

Where was Israel? In the middle of an uninhabitable desert; only through open miracles did they have food and water. They were wanderers, living in tents. No one could enter the clouds of protection around the camp of the Jews, much less reach the Tabernacle where the golden vessels were. So why would anyone want to attack them?

Amalek was waging war on Torah, on G-dliness, because that is what set the Jews apart. That was what Amalek could not abide in this world. There was literally no other reason to make war against them. Furthermore, due to the miraculous nature of the Exodus, the Children of Israel were regarded as untouchable, like hot coals. Who would mess with a nation obviously under Divine protection? Although Amalek lost the battle, they still showed others it could be done. The Medrash compares Amalek attacking Israel to a person entering a pool of hot water—although he is burned, he cools the water enough for others to enter.

Purim, of course, celebrates the rescue of the Jewish People from the genocidal plot of the evil Haman, during the Persian kingdom that ruled over the Jews during the First Exile. Parshas Zachor is read before Purim, because Haman's hateful ideology was one and the same. Haman was called HaAgagi, the Agagite, because he was a descendant of Agag, king of Amalek.

From Haman, to Hitler, to Hamas, the school of Amalek exists with one overarching goal: to exterminate the Jewish Nation, due to its message of morality and human conscience, following in the path of G-d. They are literally waging war against G-d, and that is why, in the end, all their efforts fail. *Am Yisrael Chai*, the nation of Israel lives, and we seek the day when the very remembrance of Amalek, with its message of hate and destruction, will be lost from the world.