

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Tetzaveh

Exodus 27:20-30:10

Torah Reading for Week of February 9-15, 2003

"And **you**," says G-d to Moses,

Shall command the children of Israel, that they bring to you pure olive oil crushed for the light, to raise an everlasting flame.

In the Tent of Meeting, outside the Parochet which is before the Testimony, Aaron and his sons shall order it from evening to morning before G-d

For Dignity and for Beauty

The next 43 verses—about half of the Parshah's total—consist of G-d's instructions to Moses regarding the making of the priestly garments for Aaron and his sons, who will perform the service in the Sanctuary.

And you, take Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may

minister to Me: Aaron, and Nadav, Avihu, Elazar and Itamar, the sons of Aaron.

*And you shall make holy **garments** for Aaron your brother, for dignity and for beauty.*

A total of eight types of garments should be made. All Kohanim (priests) should wear the *ketonet* (tunic), *mich-nasayim* (breeches), *mitznefet* or *migba'at* (hat or turban); and *avnet* (sash). In addition, the Kohen Gadol (high priest) should wear a *me'il* (cloak), *efod* (apron), *choshen* (breastplate) and *tzitz* (crown).

The Efod

And they shall make the efod of gold [thread], blue, purple and scarlet [wool], and fine twined linen, artistic work.

The Efod **resembled** an apron worn backwards, so that it covered the back of the wearer from above the waist down to the ankles and overlapped in the front. A sash tied in the front beneath the heart, and two bands extended up the wearer's back to his shoulders.

On the ends of these bands (which rested on the shoulders of the wearer) G-d tells Moses to place two *shoham* (onyx?) stones in gold settings. The stones should be

Commentary

AND YOU SHALL COMMAND... (27:20)

Tetzaveh is the only Parshah in the Torah since Moses' birth in which Moses' name does not appear (with the exception of the book of Deuteronomy, which consists wholly of a first-person narrative spoken by Moses). The reason for this is that, [when the people of Israel sinned with the Golden Calf,] Moses said to G-d: "If You do not [forgive them,] erase me from the book that You have written" (Exodus 32:31). This was realized in the Parshah of Tetzaveh, since the censure of a righteous person, even if made conditional on an unfulfilled stipulation, always has some effect.

(Baal HaTurim)

While Moses' *name* does not appear in the Parshah of Tetzaveh, Moses himself is very much present: the entire Parshah consists of G-d's words to Moses! Indeed, the Parshah's first word is *ve'attah*, "and you"—the "you" being the person of Moses..

Indeed, the word "you" connotes its subject's very self, while a person's name is a more superficial "handle" on his personality. This means that Moses is *more* present in our Parshah—that is, present in a deeper, more essential way—than any mention of his name could possibly express.

This is fully in keeping with the Baal HaTurim's explanation (cited above). Because Moses was prepared to forgo mention of his name in the Torah for the sake of his people, he merited that his quintessential self—the level of self that cannot be captured by any name or designation—be eternalized by the Torah. It is this level of Moses' self that is expressed by his "nameless"

presence in the Parshah of Tetzaveh.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AND YOU SHALL COMMAND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL (27:20)

The word *tetzaveh*, "to command," also means "to connect" and "to bond." Thus the verse can also be read as G-d saying to Moses: "And you shall bond with the Children of Israel." For every Jewish soul has at its core a spark of the soul of Moses.

(Ohr HaChaim)

AND THAT THEY BRING TO YOU PURE OLIVE OIL... TO RAISE AN EVERLASTING LAMP... FROM EVENING TO MORNING (27:20-21)

These verses contain a paradox: "everlasting flame" implies a state of perpetuity and changelessness; "from evening to morning" implies fluctuating conditions of lesser and greater luminance.

For such is our mission in life: to impart the eternity and perfection of the Divine to a temporal world, and to do so not by annihilating or overwhelming the world's temporality and diversity, but by illuminating its every state and condition—from "evening" to "morning"—with the divine light.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

PURE OLIVE OIL, CRUSHED FOR THE LIGHT (27:20)

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engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel: "six of their names on one stone, and the other six names on the other stone, according to their birth."

The Breastplate

The second garment that Moses is instructed to make is "the breastplate of judgment." A rectangular piece of fabric (woven of the same materials as the Efod) should be folded in half to make a square pouch measuring half a cubit by half a cubit (approximately 10 inches x 10 inches). Upon its front, in gold settings, twelve **gemstones** should be arranged in four rows:

A row of a ruby, a chrysolithe, and a beryl: this shall be the first row.

And the second row: a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond.

And the third row: a ligure, an agate, and a jasper.

And the fourth row: an emerald, and a shoham, and a jade...

And the stones shall be with the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names, like the engravings of a signet.

Within the folded cloth under the gems should be inserted the "**Urim and Tumim**."

The Breastplate should hang upon the High Priest's chest, **firmly bound** to the Efod by means of gold chains extending from the Breastplate's upper corners to the fittings of the Efod's shoulder stones, and ribbons of blue wool binding golden rings on the Breastplate's lower corners to corresponding rings attached to the Efod's sash—this to ensure that "the Breastplate shall not budge from the Efod

The twelve stones were each inscribed with the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel:

Commentary

Just as the olive yields light only when it is pounded, so are man's greatest potentials realized only under the pressure of adversity.

(The Talmud)

CRUSHED FOR THE LIGHT (27:20)

When one speaks crushing words of rebuke, it must be with the sole purpose of enlightening, illuminating and uplifting one's fellow. Never, G-d forbid, to humiliate and break him.

(Chassidic saying)

AND THEY SHALL MAKE THE EFOD... IT SHALL HAVE ITS TWO SHOULDER-PIECES JOINED AT ITS TWO EDGES... AND THE FINELY WROUGHT GIRDLE OF THE EFOD, WHICH IS UPON IT, SHALL BE OF THE SAME (28:6-8)

I haven't heard nor have I found in the Talmud an explanation of [the Efod's] form. My heart tells me that it is tied on the back, its width the width of a person's back, its form like the apron worn by princesses when they ride horses...

(Rashi)

"My heart tells me" is an uncharacteristic phrase for Rashi, who usually relates the simple meaning of the verse without citing sources or telling us

how he arrived at a particular meaning. The Lubavitcher Rebbe offers the following explanation, based on Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov's famed dictum, "Everything that a person sees or hears should serve him as a lesson in His service of G-d." Perhaps, says the Rebbe, Rashi one day happened to come across a party of noblewomen on horseback, and wondered as to what purpose divine providence had shown him this apparently meaningless scene. Then, when he was struggling to describe the form of the Efod, he realized that this was the model that fit its biblical description.

RUBY, CHRYSOLITHE, BERYL... TURQUOISE, SAPPHIRE, DIAMOND... LIGURE, AGATE, JASPER.... EMERALD, SHOHAM, JADE (28:17-20)

This English rendition is but one of several possible translations of the Hebrew "odem, pitedah, bareket, nofech, sapir, yahalom, leshem, shvo, achlamah, tarshish, shoham, yashpei." For a comprehensive anthology of renditions, see "The Living Torah" by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (Moznaim 1985).

According to the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 2:7), the colorings of the stones were as follows: Reuben's stone, *odem*, was red; Simeon's stone, *pitedah*, was green; Levi's stone, *bareket*, was white, black and red; Judah's stone, *nofech*, was sky-colored; Issachar's stone, *sapir*, was dark blue; Zebulun's stone, *yahalom*, was white (*lavan*, which can also mean clear); Dan's stone, *leshem*, was of a similar hue as that of the *sapir*; Gad's stone, *shvo*, was gray; Naphtali's stone, *achlamah*, was the color of clear wine; Asher's stone, *tarshish*, was "the color of the precious stone with which women decorate themselves"; Joseph's stone, *shoham*, was black; Benjamin's stone *yashpei*, had the colors of all twelve stones.

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And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel on the Breastplate of Judgment upon his heart, when he goes in to the holy place, for a perpetual remembrance before G-d.

The Cloak and the Crown

And you shall make the cloak of the Efod all of blue [wool].

*There shall be a hole for the head in the middle... Beneath, upon the hem of it, you shall make pomegranates of blue, purple and scarlet, round about its hem; and **bells** of gold between them round about. A golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a*

pomegranate, upon the hem of the Mantle round about.

It shall be upon Aaron when he comes to minister; and **its sound shall be heard** when he goes in to the holy place before G-d...

The fourth priestly garment commanded to Moses is the *Tzitz* ("crown")—a gold plate inscribed with the words "Holy to G-d" that was affixed to the forehead of the Kohen Gadol.

The Other Four Garments

These four garments—Efod, Breastplate, Cloak and Crown—are exclusive to the High Priest. The other four should be worn by all Kohanim. These are:

The *Ketonet*: A tunic made of pure linen, covering the entire body from the neck to the feet, with sleeves reaching to the wrists.

The *Mitznefet* or *Migba'at*: A long band of linen cloth that was wound around the head as a head covering. On the

Commentary

In addition to the names of the tribes, the stones also contained the words, "Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, *Shivtei Yeshurun* ("righteous tribes")," so the Breastplate should contain all 22 letters of the Holy Tongue (Talmud).

AND THE BREASTPLATE SHALL NOT BUDGE FROM THE EFOD (28:28)

The Efod was worn in back and below the waist; the Breastplate, on the front and upper part of the wearer. Thus, the deeper significance of the commandment "And the Breastplate shall not budge from the Efod" (which ranks as one of the 365 prohibitions of the Torah) is that there must be no "gap" between the upper and lower aspects of life, or between its forward and backward elements. True, the human being consists of both the sensitive heart and the functional foot; true, life is composed of sublimely spiritual moments as well as the daily tending to one's material needs. But the "Efod" must be securely bound to the "Choshen". The upper must permeate the lower, and the external must never lose sight of its inner essence and purpose.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AND YOU SHALL PUT IN THE BREASTPLATE OF JUDGMENT THE URIM AND THE TUMIM (28:30)

The *Urim* and *Tumim* ("illuminator and verifier") was an inscription of the Name of G-d. Inserted in the folds of the Breastplate, it caused the letters inscribed on its stones to light up in response to queries posed by the com-

munity leaders, as it is written (Number 27:21): "And [Joshua] shall stand before Elazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of the *Urim* before G-d: by this word shall they go out, and by this word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him." This is why it was called the "breastplate of judgement," since it decided and determined things for the people.

(Rashi; Talmud)

AND AARON SHALL BEAR THE JUDGMENT OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL UPON HIS HEART BEFORE G-D CONTINUALLY (28:30)

Why are the sections on sacrifices and the priestly vestments written next to each other? To teach you: as sacrifices make atonement, so do the priestly vestments make atonement.

The Tonic atoned for bloodshed, for it is said, "And they killed a he-goat, and dipped the tunic in the blood" (Genesis 37:31).

The Breeches atoned for lewdness, as it is said, "And you shall make them linen breeches to cover the flesh of their nakedness" (Exodus 28:42).

The Turban made atonement for arrogance—let an article placed high up come and atone for an offence of hauteur.

The Sash atoned for [impure] meditations of the heart, beneath which it was placed.

The Breastplate atoned for neglect of civil laws, as it is said, "And you shall make a breastplate of judgment" (Exodus 28:15).

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ordinary Kohen's head it was wound as a cone-shaped hat (*migbahat*), while the Kohen Gadol wore it as a broad, flat-topped turban (*mitznefet*).

The *Avnet*: A **long** cloth sash that was wound many times around the waist. The Kohen Gadol had two types of sashes: one of linen and multi-colored wool with "embroidered work" for use throughout the year, and one of pure linen for the Yom Kippur service. (The Torah does not specify how the ordinary Kohen's sash should be made; some say it was like the Kohen Gadol's year-round sash, while others say that it was like the one he wore on Yom Kippur).

The *Michnasayim*: "And you shall make them linen breeches to cover their nakedness; from the waist to the knees they shall reach."

And you shall put these upon Aaron your brother, and his sons with him; and you shall anoint them, and consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister to Me.

The priestly garments were worn as follows: The ordinary Kohen put on the Breeches, over which he wore the Tunic, and wound the Turban upon his head and the Sash around his waist. (His feet remained bare under the floor-length tunic).

The Kohen Gadol first put on these four garments as worn by the ordinary Kohen (except that he wound his head-covering differently, as per above). Then, over the Tunic and Sash he draped the Cloak of blue wool—basically a long piece of cloth with a hole in the middle for the

Commentary

The Eford atoned for idolatry, as it is said, "Without *efod* or *teraphim*" (Hoseah 3:4).

The Cloak atoned for slander—let an article of sound (i.e., the bells on the Cloak's hem) atone for an offence of sound.

The Crown, worn on the forehead, atoned for brazenness... as it is written, "Yet you have a harlot's forehead" (Jeremiah 3:3).

(Talmud, Zevachim 88b)

ON THE HEM [OF THE CLOAK] YOU SHALL MAKE... BELLS OF GOLD... AND ITS SOUND SHALL BE HEARD WHEN HE GOES IN TO THE HOLY (28:33-35)

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said: There are four things which the Holy One, blessed be He, hates, and I too dislike them... [the fourth thing is,] one who enters his house suddenly—much more so his neighbor's house...

When Rabbi Yochanan went to inquire after the welfare of Rabbi Chanina, he would knock at the door, in conformity with the verse, "And its sound shall be heard when he goes in..."

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND YOU SHALL MAKE THE SASH, EMBROIDERED WORK (28:39)

The Sash was 32 cubits (approximately 48 feet) long (Midrash; Maimonides). It was wound 32 times around the waist (Tosafot). Other say that it was 36 cubits long (Midrash). It was 2, 3 or 4 fingers wide (Maimonides; Kadmoniyot).

AND [THE PRIESTLY GARMENTS] SHALL BE UPON AARON, AND UPON HIS SONS, WHEN THEY COME IN THE TENT OF MEETING, OR WHEN THEY COME NEAR TO THE ALTAR TO MINISTER IN THE HOLY PLACE, THAT THEY BEAR NOT INIQUITY AND DIE (28:43)

There was once a prince whose tutor would enter into the presence of the king on behalf of the prince; but the tutor was afraid of those who stood by the king lest one of them should attack him. What did the king do? He clothed him in his royal purple cloak, so that all who saw him might be afraid of him.

Similarly, Aaron used to enter [into the Divine Presence]... and had it not been for the many merits which entered with him and aided him, he would have been unable to go in, on account of the angels that were there. For this reason did G-d provide him garments after the pattern of the divine garments... as it says (Isaiah 59:17): "And [G-d] donned righteousness as a coat of mail, and a helmet of salvation upon His head, and He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a mantle."

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND YOU SHALL MAKE AN ALTAR FOR THE BURNING OF INCENSE; OF SHITTIM WOOD SHALL YOU MAKE IT.... AND YOU SHALL OVERLAY IT WITH PURE GOLD (30:1-3)

Resh Lakish stated: The fires of hell have no power over the transgressors in Israel, as may be inferred from the Golden Altar: If the Golden Altar, on which [the layer of gold over the wood] was only of the thickness of a *dinar*, lasted for many years and the fire had no power over it, how much more would that be the case with the transgressors in Israel who are as full of good deeds as a pomegranate [is full with seed].

(Talmud, Erubin 19a)

among them; I am the L-rd their G-d.

The Golden Altar

The last ten verses of Tetzaveh describe the Golden Altar (which was not included in the description of the other "vessels" of the Tabernacle in the previous Parshah):

And you shall make an altar for the burning of incense; of shittim wood shall you make it. A cubit shall be the length of it and a cubit its breadth, foursquare shall it be, and two cubits shall be its height; the horns thereof shall be of the same.

And you shall overlay it with pure gold, its top, and its sides round about, and its horns; and you shall make for it a rim of gold round about...

Like the other Vessels, the Golden Altar should have rings and carrying poles to transport it. It should be placed in the center of the outer chamber of the Sanctuary, "before the Veil (*Parochet*) that is by the Ark of the Testimony." The Golden Altar should be used only for the twice-daily burning of the *Ketoret*:

And Aaron shall burn upon it sweet incense every morning: when he dresses the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at evening, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before G-d throughout your generations.

Once a day each year, however, the Golden Altar served an additional function: On Yom Kippur, the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the day's special offerings on its "horns." "Once in the year shall he make atonement upon it throughout your generations: it is most holy to G-d."

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head, which hung down in front and in the back. The "Cloak" all but covered the Tunic, leaving only a narrow band exposed beneath its bell-trimmed hem.

Over the Cloak were tied the Efad (which left a portion of the Cloak exposed beneath it) and the Breastplate. The Crown was placed on Kohen Gadol's forehead, and fastened in place by means of blue wool ribbons extending over his Turban and around his temples to be tied behind the head.

And they shall be upon Aaron, and upon his sons, when they come in the Tent of Meeting, or when they come near to the Altar to minister in the holy place, that they bear not iniquity and die. It shall be an everlasting statute to him and his seed after him.

Seven Days of Preparation

Moses is then instructed to initiate Aaron and his sons into the priesthood.

Before the Tabernacle is to be "officially" erected, there should first come a seven-day training period. On these days, Moses himself is to assume the role of the Kohen, offering a series of sacrifices (an ox, two rams, and several types of unleavened bread prepared with olive oil) which Aaron and his sons are to bring on each of the seven days.

This, in addition to the Daily Offerings—which are to be brought every morning and afternoon upon the Altar: a yearling lamb, a tenth of an *efah* of fine flour, a quarter-*hin* of finely-crushed olive oil and a quarter-*hin* of wine.

This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the Tent of Meeting before G-d; where I will meet you, to speak there to you.

There I will meet with the children of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory...

I will dwell among the children of Israel... And they shall know that I am the L-rd their G-d who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell

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FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

AARON

Moses is true and his Torah is true (Talmud, Bava Batra 74a)

Be of the disciples of Aaron: one who loves peace, pursues peace, loves G-d's creatures and draws them close to Torah (Ethics of the Fathers 1:12)

The story of the formative generation of Jewish nationhood portrays Moses as the epitomical leader of Israel. It is he who takes the Children of Israel out of Egypt. It is he who receives the Torah from G-d and teaches it to the people. It is to Moses that G-d addresses His instructions regarding the making of the Tabernacle which is to house the Divine Presence in the Israelite camp, and Moses is also described as the one who “made” it (although the actual construction was done by others). It is Moses who feeds, nurtures and guides the people of Israel (and bears the brunt of their complaints and rebelliousness) as he leads them in their volatile 40-year journey from Sinai to the Promised Land.

But a closer reading of the Torah's account reveals the leadership of Israel to have been a team effort: ever-present at Moses' side is his older brother, Aaron. At times Aaron's role is strongly pronounced, at times it is scarcely discernable, but he is always there.

When Moses confronts Pharaoh, it is together with Aaron, who plays a major role in performing the miracles and bringing on the plagues that force the release of the Israelites. When G-d commands His first mitzvah to the Jewish people, it is addressed “to Moses and to Aaron”—a phrase that often appears in the Torah amidst the many “And G-d spoke to Moses” introductions to its laws. When the people complain, it is “to Moses and to Aaron” that they address their grievances; when Korach challenged Moses' leadership, it was a rebellion also (indeed, primarily) against Aaron's place in the leadership.

What is striking about the Moses/Aaron dyad is that Aaron does not fit the familiar molds of the “right-hand-man” or “second-in-command.” Nor is there a clear-cut division of tasks between the two brothers. While Moses is certainly the more dominant figure in the narrative, Aaron is always a full, integral partner in the events and undertakings that forge a clan of liberated slaves into G-d's people. It is as if Moses cannot accomplish anything without Aaron, and Aaron, in turn, is likewise dependent upon Moses in the fulfillment of his role.

[Indeed, there is a Midrash that reveals that, originally, Moses was destined to be the Kohen and Aaron the Levite, and that G-d reversed their roles when Moses refused his commission at the Burning Bush. According to this, the brothers' roles are not only interdependent, but also interchangeable!]

The construction of, and the service in, the Tabernacle is a case in point. In the Parshah of Tetzaveh we read how G-d assigns to Aaron and his sons the responsibility of conducting the service in the Tabernacle: they are to represent the people in the endeavor to approach and interact with G-d by offering sacrifices to Him and performing the other services in the Sanctuary. This would seem to designate the Tabernacle as Aaron's “domain.” Yet, as mentioned above, it is *Moses* who must construct the Tabernacle. And it is Moses who must initiate Aaron into the priesthood. For seven days, Moses is to serve as a Kohen (in effect, assuming Aaron's role), offering the sacrifices brought by Aaron and his sons. The Tabernacle is indeed Aaron's domain—after the seven-day initiation period, only he and his sons can perform the service there—but it is a domain he can attain only in conjunction with Moses.

The Kiss

The opening verses of Tetzaveh offer a striking example of the interwovenness of Moses and Aaron's roles:

And you, [says G-d to Moses,] shall command the children of Israel, that they bring you to pure olive oil crushed for the light, to raise the ever-burning lamp.

In the Tent of Meeting, outside the Parochet which is before the Testimony, Aaron and his sons shall order it from evening to morning before G-d.

Aaron and his sons are entrusted with the task of lighting the Menorah; yet the oil for this lighting must be brought to Moses.

Indeed, in these two verses lies the key to understanding the partnership of Moses and Aaron in the leadership of Israel.

In Exodus 4:27, the Torah describes a dramatic reunion between the two brothers at the foot of Mount Sinai. Sixty years earlier, as a young man of twenty, Moses had fled Egypt; now the 80-year old shepherd is on they way back to Egypt, having been commissioned by G-d to redeem His people from slavery:

And G-d said to Aaron: “Go to the wilderness to meet Moses.” And he went, and met him at the mountain of G-d, and kissed him.

The Midrash describes the brothers' kiss in cosmic terms:

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This is what the verse (Psalms 85:11) refers to when it says, "Benevolence and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed." "Benevolence"—this is Aaron; "truth"—this is Moses. "Righteousness" is Moses; "peace" is Aaron.

Moses and Aaron were commissioned to create a people who would serve as G-d's "light unto the nations"—as the disseminators of G-d's wisdom and will to His creation. This is a task that is, by definition, impossible: G-d is infinite, perfect and absolute; the world He created is finite, ever wanting, and notoriously unstable. Yet the Jew must, can and does straddle this paradox, his daily life a paradigm of divine absolutes acted upon a temporal world.

The two sides of this paradox are expressed in the above-quoted verses from the beginning of Tetzaveh: the people of Israel are called upon to "raise an *ever-burning* lamp"—a lamp that is eternal and unvarying; yet this lamp must burn and shed its light "from evening to morning"—within the ever-changing conditions of a temporal world, in which darkness and light alternate, intermix and supplant each other.

Here are delineated the respective functions of Moses and Aaron: Moses is the source of the "pure oil" that fuels the "everlasting lamp"; Aaron is the one who introduces this light into the "from evening to morning" reality

To forge the nation that will straddle this paradox required "representatives" of the different divine forces at play: on the one hand, the divine attributes of "truth" and "righteousness" from which stem the absolutism and immutability of G-d's Torah; on the other, the equally divine attributes of "peace" and "benevolence" from which stem the diversity and subjectivity of G-d's creation.

Moses—teacher of the Torah and conveyer of the divine wisdom and will—is the very embodiment of perfection and truth. Aaron, who spearheads the human effort to serve G-d by uplifting to Him the materials of His creation, is the vehicle of benevolence and peace. Together, they make and lead Israel—the bridge between Creator and creation.

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
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NOISE

A rich man once invited a beggar to share his meal.

The host settled quietly into his seat and tucked his linen napkin beneath his chin. The guest, finding himself supported by silken cushions instead of the usual hard bench, sighed in surprised pleasure; with much creaking and squeaking he burrowed into the chair, determined to savor its opulence to the utmost.

The soup arrived and proceeded to make its casual way down the rich man's gullet. Across the table, a frontal attack was being launched against the delicate china bowl; the heavy silver spoon clanged and swooped, carrying every precious drop of steaming gold to an audibly eager mouth. The subsequent assault on the steak platter was no less enthused. As the wealthy man silently ingested bite-sized pieces of meat, his dinner partner, a maelstrom of clattering knives and chomping jaws, ooh'd and ah'd his delighted way through the feast.

In the kitchen, the cook remarked to the butler: "At last, a man who appreciates fine cuisine! The master may be indifferent to the finer things in life, but his guest! What passion! How involved he is, how worshipful of quality. Now, here is a man with a sense of the sublime...."

"You are mistaken," countered the butler. "The very opposite is true. The rich man's tranquility indicates the depth of his involvement with his dinner, while the pauper's noisy excitement only underscores how alien all this is to him. To the rich man, luxury is the very essence of life; so he no more exclaims over it than you jump for joy upon finding yourself alive in the morning. But for the poor man, life is a boiled potato, and *this* is an other-worldly experience. All that noise you hear is the friction between his habitual self and the luxuriating self he is attempting to assume."

The Hem

Noise is the mark of resistance. Consider the sounds emitted by a log fire, a pile of burning straw, and an oil lamp. In each case, matter is succumbing to the energy locked within it. The log offers the most resistance, voicing its reluctance to part with its outer form with a noisy crackle and sudden explosions. The straw, not quite as physical as the log, protests with a whispering sizzle. And the oil in the lamp, the finest substance of the three, burns silently, freely yielding to the essence within.

Thus, Elijah the Prophet experienced G-d's immanence as "a small still voice." In his refined self, the material of the body did not resist the spirituality of the soul. Thus, he perceived the divine reality not in a norm-shattering storm, but in the same tranquil manner in

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which a person is aware of the life within him.

And yet, Aaron the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest), the epitome of refinement and spirituality, is commanded to wear a robe with bells sewn onto its hem, so that “its sound shall be heard when he enters into the Holy before G-d.” For the *Kohen Gadol* represents the entirety of Israel in his service of the Almighty, including those for whom connection to G-d is still a noisy struggle—the struggle to transcend their external, earth-bound selves and bring to light their true, inner identity.

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov was once asked: Why do some of your disciples make such a ruckus while praying? They shout, they wave their arms, they virtually throw themselves about the room. Is this the appropriate way to commune with the Almighty?

The founder of Chassidism replied: Have you ever seen a drowning man? He shouts, he thrashes his arms, he struggles with the waves that threaten to claim him. Throughout the day, a person is swamped by the demands of his material existence; prayer is the attempt to break free of the engulfing waters that threaten to extinguish his spiritual life.

True, a noisy service of G-d is an indication that the person has not yet fully “arrived.” Had he succeeded in transcending the mundane, his endeavor to draw close to the Almighty would be a tranquil one—his soul would strive upwards with a silent, frictionless flame. His tumultuous struggle reflects the fact that his spiritual self has not yet become the seat of his identity—that his “natural” self still lies with the material externalities of life. Nevertheless, this is a healthy sign: he has not succumbed. He is straining to free himself of the confining envelope of his material being, straining to rise above his presently defined self.

So the bells on the hem of the *Kohen Gadol*'s robe are an indispensable part of his divine service. “Its sound shall be heard when he enters into the holy before G-d,” commands the Torah, “lest he die.” Were he to disclaim the lowly “hem” of the nation he represents, he would be violating the very essence of his mission. Were his service of the Almighty not to embody the struggles of his imperfect brethren, it would have no place in G-d's inner sanctum.

Apples and Pomegranates

In light of the above, we can understand the deeper significance of the debate between two of our sages

regarding the bells and pomegranates on the *Kohen Gadol*'s robe.

The debate addresses the question of how to interpret the word *b'tocham*, which translates either as “between them” or, in a more literal rendering, “within them.” Does the Torah command to “make upon its hem pomegranates... and bells of gold *between* them” or to fix the “bells of gold *within* them”?

Rashi, in his commentary on the verse, maintains that the bells were “between them... between each two pomegranates a bell was attached and hanging on the hem of the robe.” Nachmanides disagrees. “I don't know why the master [Rashi] made the bells separate, a bell between two pomegranates,” he writes. “According to this, the pomegranates served no function. And if they were there for beauty, then why were they made as hollow pomegranates? They should have been made as golden apples.... Rather, [the bells] were literally *within* them, for the pomegranates were hollow-like small, unopened pomegranates—and the bells were contained within them....”

The later commentaries enter into the debate. “Why does [Nachmanides] favor apples over pomegranates?” wonders Rabbi Elijah Mizrahi. Other commentaries explain that Nachmanides' difficulty with Rashi's interpretation is that the hollow form of the pomegranate (Rashi himself also says that they were “round and hollow”) indicates that they served a functional rather than decorative purpose; but what does Nachmanides mean when he says that “if they were there for beauty... they should have been made as golden apples”?

Indeed, the *menorah* was decorated with spheres resembling apples whose sole purpose was for beauty. Perhaps Nachmanides derives from this that in the making of the Sanctuary and its accessories, the decorative fruit of choice was the apple. But this itself requires explanation. Why apples? And why, according to Rashi, was the *menorah* beautified with apples and the *Kohen Gadol*'s robe with pomegranates?

Insulated Deeds

Both the apple and the pomegranate are representative of the Jewish people. The Torah likens Israel to an “apple” (“Like an apple among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved”—Song of Songs 2:2) as well as to a “pomegranate” (“Your lips are like a thread of scarlet, and your mouth is comely; your temple is like a piece of pomegranate within your locks”—*ibid.*, 4:3). But while the apple represents Israel in a virtuous state, the pomegranate refers to the “hollow” or “empty ones amongst you.” As interpreted by the Talmud, the verse “your temple is like a piece of pomegranate” comes to say that

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“even the empty ones amongst you are full of good deeds as a pomegranate [is full of seeds].” (*Raka*, the Hebrew word used by the verse for “temple” is related to the word *reik*, “empty.” Thus “your temple” is homiletically rendered “the empty ones amongst you.”)

The pomegranate is more than a model of something that contains many particulars. On a deeper level, this metaphor also addresses the paradox of how an individual may be “empty” and, at the same time, be “full of good deeds as a pomegranate.”

The pomegranate is a highly “compartmentalized” fruit. Each of its hundreds of seeds is wrapped in its own sack of flesh and is separated from its fellows by a tough membrane. In the same way, it is possible for a person to do good deeds—many good deeds—and yet, they remain isolated acts, with little or no effect on his nature and character. So unlike the “apple,” whose deliciousness is from core to skin, the “pomegranate” *contains* many virtues, but they do not become him. He may be full of good deeds, yet he remains morally and spiritually hollow.

This explains the connection between the pomegranates and the bells on the hem of the priestly robe. As explained above, the noisy bells represent the imperfect individual who is striving to transcend his deficient state. Although he is still a spiritual pauper, he refuses to act like one—hence the noisy friction that characterizes his life.

Beautiful Noise

To become an apple one must first be a pomegranate. One must act unlike himself, like a poor man feasting at a rich man’s table; a clumsy spectacle, perhaps, but an inevitable one if a person is to transcend the animalistic, egocentric self into which every man is born. The first step to becoming perfect is to behave as if perfect. Indeed, before Elijah experienced G-d in a “small, still voice,” he first beheld the wind, the storm and the fire.

Thus, Nachmanides sees the pomegranate-encased bells on Aaron’s hem as a preliminary phase of one’s divine service, rather than as the service itself. Beauty, however, is to be found in the apple-perfection of the *menorah*—seven lamps of pure olive-oil, representing the soul’s silent, tranquil flame. If the pomegranates on the priestly robe

were for beauty, argues Nachmanides, they would not be pomegranates, but apples. These hollow fruits are purely functional, a preparatory stage in the soul’s quest for perfection and union with her source in G-d.

According to Rashi, however, the beauty of Israel lies also in its pomegranates. In fact, in a certain sense, the struggle of the imperfect soul is even more beautiful than the serene perfection of her more virtuous fellow. For the perfectly righteous individual serves G-d by being what he is, while every positive deed of the “empty ones amongst you” is an act of sacrifice and self-transcendence. So even before a person attains perfection—even if his entire life is spent in the quest for perfection—the clamor of his efforts is music to G-d’s ear.

A Contemporary Application

There are those who claim that the Torah and its mitzvot are a private matter between the Jew and his G-d, not something to be paraded in the streets. *Tefillin*, Shabbat, the sanctity of family life, “esoteric” concepts such as “divine reality” or “Moshiach,” are not to be hawked on a downtown sidewalk or catchphrased on a slick billboard. Never, in our history as a nation, has anything like this been done, they say. You are vulgarizing the soul of Judaism, they accuse.

But this is the hem of history, the lowliest and most superficial generation yet. To this generation, the small, still voice of G-d sounds like alien noise. Should this voice be hushed, to be whispered only among the apples? Or should its call be sounded, noisy be it, until it is heard above the din?

Speaking to this generation in its own language—the language of the sound-bite, of incessant compartmentalization and hollow packaging—ever further raises the noise level. But fighting fire with fire is not only effective—it also brings to light facets of one’s own potential that would otherwise remain unrealized. The bells and pomegranates that broadcast the divine truth are more than the means toward a tranquil end—they are themselves things of beauty.

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
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