

# Ding-Dong the Sin is Dead

PARSHA INSIGHTS - TETZAVEH (5758)

## AN AUDIBLE ROBE ATONES FOR AUDIBLE LOSHON HORA

Today we will examine one of the eight special garments the *Kohen Gadol* [High Priest] wore when he performed his service in the *Mishkan* [Tabernacle] and *Bais Hamikdosh* [Temple]. This study of the *ME'IL* [the robe], will provide us with some valuable knowledge. Although numerous components make up the *me'il*, our first mission will be to give a general description of this garment. Afterward, we will engage in a more in-depth study of the bells found on its bottom portion. The other aspects of the *me'il's* makeup are quite involved and not within the scope of this *d'var Torah* [lesson].

In 28:31, there is a command to create a *me'il*, a sort of robe, for the *Kohen Gadol*. It is called the “*me'il ha'aifod*” because the *aifod* [apron with a belt or sash] was wrapped around the *Kohen Gadol's* body over this robe. In short, the *aifod* (apron) was worn over the *me'il*. How do *Chazal* [our Sages] describe this *me'il*? Let us consult the *Gemara Zevachim* 88B, near the top of the page.

The *me'il* was entirely of *tichailes* [turquoise wool]. *Rashi* on our *pasuk* [verse] explains that no other material was combined with it. The bottom hem, however, had its own personality. Blue, purple, and red yarn were brought and made into the likeness of pomegranates. *Rashi* explains the *Gemara's* terminology that these were shaped like “pomegranates whose mouths had not (yet) opened”. It is the way of pomegranates to open up if they remain on the tree after having ripened. The form of the three-colored pomegranates on the hem of the *me'il* was that of pomegranates which never opened. The *Gemara* does discuss the pomegranates more, but this is not our topic now.

Bells of gold were brought, as *psukim* [verses] 28:33 and 34 mention. Our *Gemara* states that there were seventy-two bells, and they all had clappers inside them. In other words, bell-shaped ORNAMENTS or imitations of bells were not used. Rather, they were actual bells that created a ringing sound. Thirty-six of them were hung on the bottom edge of each of the two sections of the robe, namely the front and back parts. A differing opinion in the *Gemara Zevachim* 88 (which we have been following for the last two paragraphs) holds that the bells totaled thirty-six; there were eighteen on each section of the *me'il*. So, there were either seventy-two divided in half, or thirty-six divided in half.

How were the pomegranates and bells positioned on the edge of the *me'il*? There is a difference of opinion in the *rishonim* [early commentators] how to interpret the last four words of 28:33. “...And bells of gold IN THEIR MIDST (in the midst of the pomegranates) all around.” What does it mean that the bells were in the midst of the pomegranates? The last piece of *Rashi* on the *pasuk* explains that the word “*b'socham*” [in their midst] - means “between them”. The golden bells were really between the pomegranates. Between every two pomegranates, there was one bell suspended from the hem of the *me'il*. But the *Ramban* learns the *pasuk* differently. In his comments on 28:31, he explains the *pasuk* literally: The bells were actually INSIDE the pomegranates! The pomegranates were hollow, and they contained the bells in them. That is the meaning of the word “*b'socham*” (golden bells inside them). “A golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, on the edges of the *me'il* around” (28:34). *Rashi* explains that NEXT TO each golden bell there was a pomegranate. *Ramban* would explain that each golden bell was INSIDE a pomegranate.

Thus far, we have looked into the structure of the hem of the *me'il* - the bells and pomegranates which were suspended from the bottom. The *Gemara Zevachim* 88B, which has been the basis for our words, contains another amazing remark about the *bigdai kehuna* [priestly garments]. This piece is also found toward the bottom of *Erchin* 16A. Why does the Torah write *halachos* [laws] of *korbonos* [sacrifices], next to the laws of creating the clothes for the *kohen* [priest]? It is to teach that just like *korbonos* are brought to atone for certain sins, each garment worn by the *Kohen Gadol* came to atone for a specific sin. The eight garments atoned for eight iniquities. We will continue to focus only on the *me'il*. **The *me'il* was designed to atone for the transgression of *loshon hora* [evil gossip].** How is this logical? Rabbi Chanina says that something which creates a SOUND - the bells at the bottom of the *me'il* - should compensate for an evil voice, the SOUND of *loshon hora*.

The conclusion of the *Gemara* is that since there are two main types of *loshon hora*, TWO items in the *Mishkan* atoned for damaging words. For malicious gossip said in private, the *ketores* [incense] was a *kapara* [atonement]. Since this incense was offered on the golden altar in a private chamber, the *Kodesh* [holy room], it compensated for *loshon hora* said in secret. On the other hand, *loshon hora* said publicly needed a different form of atonement. The bells on the edges of the *me'il*, whose sound reverberated throughout the area where the *Kohen Gadol* walked, were a *kapara* for public *loshon hora*.

Let us quote the words of Rabbi Moshe Alshich as he interprets this *Gemara*. This is found on page 312 of the “*Lev Samaiach*” version of the *Alshich*, in the *Sefer Shmos* [Book of Exodus] volume. Eight garments atoned for eight transgressions, as the *Gemara* explains. Although we are only delving into the *me'il* and its significance, it is worthwhile to hear some remarks about this entire group of sinful actions. The *Alshich* comments that the eight sins listed by *Chazal* all have something in common. Hashem foresaw that these would be committed during the time of the first *Bais Hamikdosh*. He cites *psukim* [verses] from *Tanach* [Scripture] to prove that each one was prevalent. This includes *loshon hora*. Consequently, *Bnai Yisroel* [the Children of Israel] were commanded to create garments representing these weaknesses, so the spiritual remedy would be ready to atone for each type of sin. Performing a *mitzvah* [commandment/good deed], wearing a garment for sacred purposes, which resembled each of these transgressions, could help us obtain forgiveness for the wrongdoings.

*Parshas* [the Torah portion of] *Titzaveh* is another reminder to avoid *loshon hora*. The ringing noise created by the bells on the bottom edge of the *me'il* was there to help atone for *loshon hora*. Rather than the destructive sound of negative speech and useless condemnation, let us cause the splendid noise of *divrai* [words of] Torah and spirituality to resound throughout our homes. Whether there were seventy-two or thirty-six, whether the bells were inside the pomegranates or alongside them, the hem of the *me'il* contained profound lessons for *Klal Yisroel* [the Jewish people]. If we allow its echo to permeate our homes and *Shabbos* [Sabbath] tables, we will experience the genuine beauty of an environment free of *loshon hora*.

*By Rabbi Moshe Heigh*

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