

KOHEN GADOL

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Tetzaveh

Tetzaveh

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Today's Learning:
Shevi'it 2:7-8
O.C. 321:4-6
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Nidah 63
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Bava Metzia 26

At the end of each parashah, many chumashim state the number of verses in that parashah and what word or phrase can be used to remember that number. The mnemonic device traditionally used to remember that this parashah has 101 verses is the name of the angel "Micha'el." (The gematria of Micha'el equals 101.) Why?

R' Heschel of Krakow (16th century) explains as follows: We will read in next week's parashah that, after the sin of the golden calf, Hashem wanted to send an angel - according to the midrash, it was Micha'el - to accompany Bnei Yisrael through the desert. Moshe demanded, however, that Hashem lead Bnei Yisrael Himself, without an intermediary.

After Moshe's death, we read that this same angel appeared to Yehoshua, saying that he had been sent to lead Bnei Yisrael in battle. We find, therefore, that wherever Moshe was, the angel could not be, but when the former was gone, the latter reappeared. This is why the angel Micha'el is alluded to by our parashah, for it is the only one in the three middle books of the Torah in which Moshe's name is not mentioned. (Chanukat Hatorah)

R' David Feinstein shlita offers another answer: Most of this parashah relates to the garments of the Kohen Gadol. Micha'el, Chazal teach, is the Kohen Gadol among the angels serving in the heavenly Bet Hamikdash.

"You shall make vestments of sanctity for Aharon your brother, for glory and splendor." (28:2)

What "glory and splendor" was demonstrated by the bigdei kehunah / the uniforms of the kohanim? R' Yehonatan Eyebchutz z"l (Germany; died 1764) explains:

Halachah requires the garments of the Kohen Gadol to fit him exactly. How was this possible? The Torah (Vayikra 21:10) refers to the Kohen Gadol as "the kohen who is gadol [literally "bigger"] than his brethren." Our Sages say that when a kohen was anointed to be High Priest, he actually grew until he was taller than the other kohanim. If so, how could the Kohen Gadol's clothing fit him exactly? After all, he had to be fitted for his new "uniform" before he was anointed, and after he was anointed, he grew taller!

The answer, says R' Eyebchutz, is that the Kohen Gadol's garments grew with him. This was the "glory and splendor" of the bigdei kehunah.

Why did Hashem arrange things such that this miracle became necessary? Was there not enough "glory and splendor" in the fact that the Kohen Gadol grew taller?

R' Eyebchutz answers: We read in Mishlei (15:30), "Enlightened eyes will gladden the heart; good news will fatten the bone." Thus, if only the body of the Kohen Gadol grew, we might have thought that it was a natural consequence of his promotion. Therefore, to make clear that a miracle had occurred, the Kohen Gadol's clothes grew with him.

(Tiferet Yehonatan)

"These are the vestments that they shall make: a Breastplate, an Ephod . . ." (28:4)

Rashi writes: "The Ephod - I have not learned what this is, nor have I found in the Talmud a description of its construction. However, my heart tells me that it is tied in back and is as wide as a person's back, like the aprons that noblewomen wear when they ride horses."

What does Rashi mean by, "My heart tells me"? R' Pinchas Menachem Alter z"l (the Gerrer Rebbe; died 1996) suggests: Undoubtedly, Rashi was very careful to observe the law (Bemidbar 15:39), "You shall not stray after you heart and after your eyes." He used to guard his eyes not to see anything inappropriate, and he certainly did not look at women unnecessarily. Yet, he once noticed a French noblewoman riding her horse, and he was troubled; why had G-d caused him to see such a thing? When it was time to write his commentary on this week's parashah, he understood. "My heart tells me," he concluded, that he had noticed that particular woman so that he could interpret the verses properly.

(Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

"The work of a stone engraver, pituchai chotam / engraved like a signet ring." (28:11)

Rashi explains that the first half of this pasuk refers to the work of a craftsman, an expert at working with stones. However, R' Yisrael Taub z"l (1849-1920; the first Modzhitzer Rebbe) observes that Rashi made a subtle change in quoting the verse. While the pasuk refers to "stone" in the singular, Rashi speaks of "stones" in the plural. Why?

R' Taub explains that Rashi was hinting at a subtle lesson in the verse. The words "pituchai chotam," besides meaning, "engraved like a signet ring," also can mean, "opening what is sealed." We find that the Torah is called "Stone," as in the Tablets of Stone ("luchot even"). The Yetzer Hara / Evil Inclination also is called a "stone," as in "a heart of stone" ("laiv even"). Rashi is telling us that one must be an expert craftsman, a master stoneworker, to work on these two stones.

Specifically, the master artisan is someone who understands how and when to open what is closed, and how to close that which is open. When it comes to Torah, the "artisan" must open closed hearts, as we pray every day in the U'va Le'tzion prayer, "He [G-d] will open our hearts with His Torah." On the other hand, the "master stoneworker" also needs to close what should not be open. For example, he must close his eyes and not see improper sights. The Yetzer Hara is hard at work trying to drag us down into the depths of sin and despair. One's heart should be open, full of Torah thoughts and feelings, but the Yetzer Hara tries hard to close it, turning it into a heart of stone. The Yetzer Hara also tries to open what should be closed, trying to attract man to sights he should not see.

(Divrei Yisrael)

"A gold bell and a pomegranate, a gold bell and a pomegranate on the hem of the robe all around. It must be on Aharon in order to minister. Its sound shall be heard when he enters the Sanctuary and when he leaves, so that he not die." (28:34-35)

The Talmud Yerushalmi relates: "The sage Shmuel used to count little chickens during prayer / davening. The sage Rabbi Bun ben Chiya used to count the beams of the house during davening." Why did they do that? Certainly they were not so distracted as to be looking at chickens or beams!

R' Yissachar Dov Rokeach z"l (the Belzer Rebbe; died 1927) explained: It is related that the Rebbe R' Elimelech (great chassidic leader; died 1787) used to hold a watch in his hand during the Shabbat mussaf (known as "Kedushat Ketter" in the Sephardic liturgy which chassidim follow). R' Elimelech said that he felt so uplifted during that particular prayer that he was afraid his soul would leave him. Therefore, he held a reminder of this temporal world in his hand in order to bring him back to earth.

If a relatively contemporary sage (R' Elimelech) prayed thus, certainly the sages of old did, explained the Belzer Rebbe. That is why Shmuel counted chickens in the middle of davening and Rabbi Bun counted the beams of the house. They needed to do so in order to remain attached to this world.

In this light we can understand the purpose of the bells attached to the Kohen Gadol's robe. If the sages of the Talmud could lose their connections to this world during moments of spiritual ascent, certainly Aharon was at such risk when he entered the Holy of Holies. Therefore, "Its sound shall be heard when he enters the Sanctuary and when he leaves, so that he not die." The sound of the bells brought him back to earth.

(Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

R' Avraham Bornstein z"l

Born 5599 (1839) - died 11 Adar I 5670 (1910)

R' Avraham Bornstein was the chassidic rebbe of Sochatchov (Sochaczew, near Warsaw), and was also a rosh yeshiva and one of the leading halachic authorities of the turn of the last century. R' Bornstein's works - his seven volumes of responsa, She'eilot U'teshuvot Avnei Nezer, and his encyclopedia of the laws of Shabbat, Eglei Tal - are popular classics.

R' Bornstein was the son-in-law of R' Menachem Mendel, the legendary "Kotzker Rebbe," and he followed in his father-in-law's ways. This included allowing only a small number of chassidim to become close to him and constantly pushing his chassidim to greater levels of commitment to Torah study. Chassidim who called upon R' Bornstein were expected to share their Torah thoughts with him, and he insisted on personally heading a yeshiva despite the objections of his followers (who presumably wanted him to devote his full time to them).

R' Avraham's style in learning - directed towards ascertaining the practical halachic conclusions of the subject - was also learned from his father-in-law. His lectures in the yeshiva lasted six to eight hours, often starting at midnight and continuing until morning, except for a 15-minute break when he napped.

One of R' Avraham's best known teachings is found in his introduction to Eglei Tal. There he asserts that not only is learning Torah a mitzvah, but also enjoying that learning is a mitzvah. (Some other sages contend that if one enjoys learning, it is considered learning shelo lishmah / not with a pure motivation.)

Some of R' Avraham's teachings on Chumash and chassidic thought have been gathered from manuscripts and the works of others, and are published under the title Neot Desheh. Also, R' Bornstein is frequently quoted in his son's classic work Shem Mishmuel.

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