**Tetzaveh 5776: Bells, Bells, Bells**

By Rabbi Joshua (noisily known as The Hoffer) Hoffman

Among the four special garments to be worn by the Kohen Gadol, in addition to the four garments worn by all kohanim, is included the “meil ha’ephod,” a kind of cape-like garment, according to the Rambam, which is tied by the ephod. On the bottom of the meil, around its perimeter, are a series of pomegranates made of material colored by various dyes, and a series of golden bells, to be placed among them. The function of the affixtures, the Torah teaches, is the make noise as the Kohen Gadol enters to do his service, as we read “its sound shall be heard when he enters the holy and when he leaves, and he will not die” (Shemos 28:35). Two questions need to be asked about this verse. First, who is to hear this sound, and second, why is that person in danger of death?

The Rashbam explains that it is other people standing nearby who need to hear the sound, because of what is stated in Parshas Acharei Mos, in connection with the Yom Kippur service, that no one should be in the ohel moed when the Kohen Gadol enters to do his service (Vayikra 16:17). By hearing the sound, they will know that the Kohen is about to enter, and they will distance themselves.

Rashi does not explain who needs to hear them, but he says that the Kohen Gadol will die if he performs the service without the attachments on the meil, and, similarly, if he fails to don any of the other garments. The Ramban disputes this explanation, saying, among other things, that the attachments are not really part of the garment, and a Kohen gadol who wears the meil without the attachments is not considered as lacking one of the priestly garments. Rather, the attachments are there as a kind of request by the Kohen from G-d for permission to enter his palace, just as one makes such a request from an earthly king. It is the Kohen Gadol himself, says the Ramban, who needs to arouse himself to the majestic holy nature of the service he is about to perform, to avoid death that could come about through ignoring this truth.

Rav Yisroel Belsky, zt”l, explained that someone who comes to the Beis HaMikdash only on rare occasions, such as on Yom Kippur, is certainly awestruck by its holiness. The Kohen Gadol, however, was in the Beis HaMikdash all the time and he is in danger of becoming used to its holiness, even while wearing the priestly garments. The Talmud tells us that although there were many Kohanim Gedolim in the time of the second Temple, who did not treat the position properly, there was one who served faithfully for seventy years, and in the end became a Sadducee. By extension, Rav Belsky zt”l said, this danger confronts anyone who is constantly involved in holy activity. No matter how holy the work, complacency can set in, and one must be aware of the possibility and arouse himself to avoid it.

Perhaps we can add an additional function of the sound created by the pomegranate and bells on the meil. The Talmud (Sotah 29) says that the meil atones for the sin of lashon hara, evil talk. Let something that makes a noise, says the Talmud homiletically, come and atone for a wrongful kind of noise. The noise created when the Kohen Gadol enters the holy may serve as well those within earshot, that man’s gift of speech helps define him as a human being, and should be used with great caution, informed by holiness, just as the attachments to the meil create noise within a holy place.