**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT VAYAKHEL – PEKUDEI**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

One of the special garments worn by the *kohen gadol* was the *tzitz* – a gold strip worn on the *kohen gadol*’s forehead. The Torah requires engraving upon the *tzitz* the inscription, “*Kodesh le-Hashem*” – “Sacred to the Lord.” The *kohen gadol*, it seems, wore this strip on his forehead to express his designation as God’s special servant devoted entirely to tending to the *Beit Ha-mikdash*.

The Gemara (Shabbat 63b, Sukka 5a) comments that the words “*Kodesh le-Hashem*” were written in an unusual manner. They were written on separate lines, the Gemara states, with “*kodesh*” and the letter *lamed* of “*le-Hashem*”written “down” and “*Hashem*” written “up.” The straightforward reading of the Gemara’s comment is that the text was written bottom-up, with the word “*kodesh*” and the first letter of “*le-Hashem*”written on the bottom line, and “*Hashem*” written above it, on the top line. This is, indeed, the view of Rashi, who, in his commentary to Masekhet Shabbat, accepts the straightforward reading of the Gemara’s comment. As it would be disrespectful to have a word on top of God’s Name, the phrase “*kodesh le-Hashem*” is written in reverse.

However, Tosafot cite Rabbenu Tam as disputing this view, arguing that the Torah would not require writing text that needs to be read in reverse, from the bottom up. Rabbenu Tam therefore explains that the word “*kodesh*” and the letter *lamed* were written at the beginning of the bottom line, and God’s Name was written at the end of the top line. The phrase “*Kodesh le-Hashem*” could thus be read normally, from right to left, albeit in somewhat of an upwards diagonal, and the Name would still be on top.

The Ran in Masekhet Shabbat (and the *Tosefot Ha-Rosh* in Masekhet Sukka) advances a third view. He notes that Rabbenu Tam’s view does not seem to solve the problem that Rabbenu Tam himself observed in Rashi’s view, as text is not normally written in an upward diagonal. The Ran therefore suggests that “*Kodesh Le-*” was written at the end of the top line, and the divine Name was written in the beginning of the bottom line. Thus, the text could be read normally, starting from the end of the top line. When the Gemara uses the terms “*le-maala*” (“up”) and “*le-mata*” (“down”), the Ran suggests, it actually refers to, respectively, the beginning of the line and the end of the line. In order not to have any text above the divine Name, the Name was written at the beginning (“*le-ma’ala*”) of the second line, and the first part of the text was written at the end (“*le-mata*”) of the top line, so it could be read first.

Sunday

Yesterday, we noted the Gemara’s comment (Shabbat 63b, Sukka 5a) concerning the phrase “*kodesh le-Hashem*” which the Torah (Shemot 28:36, 39:30) requires engraving upon the *tzitz* – the gold strip worn on the *kohen gadol*’s forehead. According to the straightforward reading of the Gemara, as Rashi (in Masekhet Shabbat) explains, the words are written in reverse. The word “*kodesh*,” as well as the first letter of the word “*le-Hashem*,” were written on the bottom line of the *tzitz*, while the Name of God was written on the top line. This was done, presumably, so as not to disrespect the divine Name by having text preceding it. Other *Rishonim*, however, challenged this notion, questioning why the Torah would require writing text in the opposite way from which text is normally written and read. Likewise, the Maharsha raises the question of why there should be any concern with writing text before the Name of God. The Torah itself mentions God’s Name on many occasions, with text before and after it. Why should this be a problem specifically on the *kohen gadol*’s *tzitz*?

To answer these questions, Rav Yitzchak Zev Diskin proposes in his [*Zivchei Tzedek* commentary to Masekhet Sukka](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=46467&st=&pgnum=26) that Rashi followed a different understanding of the phrase “*Kodesh Le-Hashem*,” which is commonly understood as announcing that the *kohen gadol* was “sacred unto the Lord,” consecrated exclusively for the service of the Almighty in the Temple. The Talmud Yerushalmi (cited by the Ritva in his commentary to Masekhet Shabbat) compares the arrangement of the text of the *tzitz* to a king sitting on his throne. In other words, the Name of God, representing God Himself, appears on top, as though “sitting” on the “throne” – the words “*kodesh le-.*” This imagery clearly reflects Rashi’s view, and seems to imply that the text depicts the *kohen gadol* as the “throne” upon which God rests. The Name of God depicts God, and the words “*kodesh le*-” depicts the *kohen gadol* who is devoted to God’s service and designated for the purposing of bringing honor to God, like a throne is designated for a king’s honor. Accordingly, the text is not written in reverse, with the first words underneath the last, but is rather arranged in an illustrative manner, using imagery to depict the exalted role of the *kohen gadol*.

Monday

It is commonly understood that the *tzitz* – the gold strip worn by the *kohen gadol* – was positioned on his forehead. This is the straightforward implication of the Torah’s command in Sefer Shemot (28:38), which instructs that the *tzitz* be worn “*al meitzach Aharon*” – “on Aharon’s forehead.” Indeed, *Targum Onkelos* translates this phrase to mean that the *tzitz* was placed “between the eyes.”

Interestingly, however, Tosefot in Masekhet Sukka (5a) cite a different opinion in the name of the Riva, who claimed that the *tzitz* was worn on the front part of the top of the head. The Riva advances this theory to explain why the Torah uses different terms in reference to the turban worn by ordinary *kohanim* and that worn by the *kohen gadol*. The turbans of the ordinary *kohanim* are called “*migba’ot*” (Shemot 28:40), whereas the *kohen gadol*’s turban is called a “*mitznefet*” (Shemot 28:39). The reason, the Riva explains, is because unlike the ordinary *kohanim*, the *kohen gadol* wore the *tzitz*, which occupied part of the head, thus necessitating a different, smaller kind of turban. If the *tzitz* was worn on the forehead, the Riva notes, then it would not affect the size of the *kohen gadol*’s turban. Therefore, it stands to reason that the *tzitz* was worn on the front of the head, thus requiring the *kohen gadol* to wear a smaller turban.

The Riva draws further proof from the Gemara’s comment in Masekhet Zevachim (19a), “The *kohen gadol*’s hair was visible between the *tzitz* and the turban, and it was there where he placed his *tefillin*.” The clear implication of the Gemara’s remark is that the *tzitz* occupied space on the head that could otherwise have been suitable for the *tefillin*, leaving only a small area of space on the head where the *tefillin* was worn. If the *tzitz* was worn on the forehead, then the *kohen gadol*’s head with respect to *tefillin* was no different from that of other *kohanim*, in that the *tefillin* simply needed to be placed in front of the turban. The fact that the presence of the *tzitz* created an especially small space for the *tefillin* would certainly seem to suggest that it was worn on top of the head, and not on the forehead.

As for the Torah’s requiring that the *tzitz* be worn on the “forehead,” the Riva draws a comparison to the Torah’s command in several places to wear *tefillin* “between your eyes” (“*bein einekha*”). Just as this phrase is understood to mean that the *tefillin* should be worn on the head, parallel to the space between the eyes, the command to wear the *tzitz* on the forehead likewise means that it should be worn above and parallel to the forehead, and not actually on the forehead.

Tosefot question this final point, noting that the Gemara in Masekhet Menachot (37b) establishes the placement of the *tefillin* on the head based on a different verse. The Torah in Sefer Devarim (14:1) forbids removing the hair “between your eyes,” and this clearly refers to the hair in the middle of the top of the head. Accordingly, the phrase “between your eyes” in reference to *tefillin*, too, refers not to the area between the eyes, but rather to the middle part of the top of the head, and this is where the *tefillin* is worn. This suggests that the placement of *tefillin* on the head is determined based on the specific phrase “*bein eineikhem*,” and thus we cannot extend this inference to the *tzitz*, which the Torah requires placing on the “*meitzach*.”

Tuesday

The Torah lists the dimensions of the *aron* as 2.5 cubits long, 1.5 cubits wide, and 1.5 cubits tall (Shemot 25:10, 37:1). The *kaporet*, the gold covering over the ark, is listed as having the same width and length as the *aron*, as we would expect, but the Torah makes no mention of its height. This issue is addressed by the Gemara in Masekhet Sukka (5a), where it asserts that the *kaporet* was a *tefach* (handbreadth) high, thus bringing the entire height of the *aron* to a total of ten *tefachim* (as a cubit consists of six *tefachim*).

The Gemara reaches this conclusion by invoking the principle of “*tafasta mu’at tafasta*,” which means that absent a clear indication of an amount (or, in this case, a measurement), we assume the smallest amount we can. In this instance, the Gemara reasons, we should assume that if the Torah did not specify the height of the *kaporet*, it must have been the same height as the smallest item in the *Mishkan* described in the Torah. This is the *misgeret*, the frame that surrounded the *shulchan*, which extended one *tefach* from the *shulchan* (25:25, 37:12). As the height of the *misgeret* – the smallest dimension of any of the *Mishkan*’s furnishings – is listed as one *tefach*, the Gemara concluded that the *kaporet*, too, must have been one *tefach* tall.

The Gemara then notes that there was another item mentioned in the Torah in this context with dimensions even smaller than those of the *misgeret*. The *tzitz*, the gold plate worn by the *kohen gadol* on his forehead, is described in a *berayta* as having been very narrow – just two finger-widths. This is smaller than a *tefach*, and so perhaps we should conclude that the *kaporet* was only this height. The Gemara dismisses this argument, noting that the Torah never specified the dimensions of the *tzitz*. In looking for a model of the *kaporet*’s height, the Gemara asserts, we should look to an item whose dimensions are specified by the Torah, and thus the *tzitz* does not provide an instructive precedent.

Tosefot explain the Gemara to mean that the measurement of two finger-widths was stated by *Chazal*, and does not constitute a Torah requirement. *Chazal* arrived at this conclusion based on the Torah’s description of the *tzitz* as being worn on the *kohen gadol*’s forehead. Since the average size of a forehead is two finger-widths, Tosefot write, it was determined that this should be the size of the *tzitz*. (Tosefot then proceed to cite the view of the Riva, who disagreed and maintained that the *tzitz* was worn on the head, and not on the forehead, as we discussed yesterday.)

Tosefot’s comment can be understood in three different ways. One possibility is to explain that when they speak of this required measurement as applying on the level of *mi-de’rabbanan* (rabbinic enactment), they mean that it was derived through the process of rabbinic exegesis. After all, as Tosefot immediately proceed to explain, *Chazal* arrived at this measurement based on their interpretation of the verse. Seemingly, then, this measurement is actually required on the level of Torah obligation, and Tosefot mean to say that it was derived through the process of the *Tora she-be’al peh* (the Oral Tradition), as opposed to being explicated in the verse.

Another possibility, suggested by the Mabit in his *Kiryat Sefer* commentary to the Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah* (Hilkhot Kelei Ha-mikdash, chapter 9), is that Tosefot here indeed distinguish between two different levels of obligation. On the level of Torah law, the *tzitz*’s required measurement is the size needed to cover the *kohen gadol*’s forehead; when the Torah required the *kohen gadol* to wear the *tzitz*, it established that the *tzitz* must be the size of the forehead of the *kohen* who wore it. *Chazal*, however, established a uniform size – two finger-widths, a measurement which they assessed was the average size of a forehead.

One might argue, however, that neither of these two readings account for the Gemara’s formulation that “the Torah gave no measurement at all” for the *tzitz* (“*lo natena Torah…mida kelal*”). According to both readings, the Torah did, in fact, assign a measurement for the *tzitz*, contrary to the straightforward implication of the Gemara. Therefore, Rav Yitzchak Zev Diskin suggests in his [*Zivchei Tzedek*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=46467&st=&pgnum=27)a subtle distinction between a formal required measurement and the obligation cast upon the *kohen*. According to Tosafot, Torah law does not assign a particular measurement, but requires the *kohen* to cover his forehead with the *tzitz*. This requirement relates to the *kohen*, not to the validity of the *tzitz* as a priestly garment. And thus the literal meaning of the Gemara’s comment is correct – the Torah did not give any particular measurement for the *tzitz*, and thus it cannot serve as a model for the *kaporet*. The *tzitz* inherently does not require any particular measurement, though the *kohen* is required to wear a *tzitz* that covers his forehead.

Wednesday

Rashi, commenting to Parashat Vayakhel (35:27), cites the well-known remark of the Midrash regarding the participation of the *nesi’im* – the leaders of the tribes – in the donation of materials for the *Mishkan*. The Torah tells that the *nesi’im* donated the precious stones that were affixed to the *kohen gadol*’s apron and breastplate, as well as materials for the kindling of the *menorah*, the *ketoret* (incense), and the anointing oil. Citing the Midrash, Rashi writes that after Moshe instructed the people to donate materials for the *Mishkan*, the *nesi’im* decided to wait until after all the people made their donations, planning that they would then supply what was still needed. To their surprise, the people donated everything that was needed for the *Mishkan* itself, and thus the *nesi’im* donated only the aforementioned materials. The Midrash is critical of the *nesi’im*’s conduct in this regard, and comments, as cited by Rashi, “Since they were initially lazy, a letter was taken from their name – it is written ‘*nesi’im*’ [without the letter *yod*].”

Many writers addressed the question of why the *nesi’im* are accused of “laziness” for initially abstaining from the donation of materials. They made this decision not out of “laziness,” but rather due to their mistaken assumption that the people would not donate all that was needed. The *nesi’im*, from the Midrash’s description, were fully committed to ensuring the success of the project to build a *Mishkan*, and generously pledged to bring all that was needed after the rest of the nation made their donations. Why are they criticized for being “lazy”?

Rav Simcha Zissel Brody (as cited and discussed by [Rav Yissachar Frand](http://torah.org/torah-portion/ravfrand-5771-vayakhel/)) suggests that the Midrash seeks to teach that when we delay an opportunity to perform a good deed, even when we think we do so for noble reasons, this is often a product of laziness. He notes as an example the introduction to *Chovot Ha-levavot*, where the author, Rabbenu Bachya Ibn Pekuda, writes that after he conceived of the idea to compose this work, he quickly decided against it, feeling he was unworthy of such a lofty undertaking. This decision, he writes, brought him a sense of relief, which ultimately led him to realize, later, that he had reached this decision out of laziness. Although he thought his motivation for scratching the idea was noble, borne out of genuine humility, it was in truth the product of laziness, his preference not to bear the burden of this responsibility. Similarly, Rav Simcha Zissel explained, the *nesi’im* thought they abstained from donating with noble intentions, but in truth, as *Chazal* tell us, it was due to a degree of laziness.

Certainly, there are occasions when we have legitimate reasons to delay or abstain from performing a good deed. Sometimes we are justifiably burdened by other responsibilities that indeed deserve priority, and sometimes it is true that we are not worthy to assume lofty challenges. However, Rav Simcha Zissel here urges us to scrutinize our decisions with strict honesty, to determine whether our reasons for assuming ambitious responsibilities are truly valid, and not just excuses.

Thursday

The Torah in Parashat Vayakhel (35:3) issues the prohibition against kindling a flame on Shabbat, and the Gemara (Yevamot 6b), surprisingly, interprets this verse as referring to execution. Namely, the Torah here forbids *Beit Din* from killing on Shabbat an offender convicted of a violation punishable by *sereifa* (burning), thus establishing that no punishment may be administered on Shabbat. The *Sefer Ha-chinukh* (114) explains that God designated Shabbat as a day of rest for all, even for sinners, and so the Torah forbids punishing sinners on this day.

We might also suggest a slightly different approach. One of the primary themes of Shabbat is contentment. Creative work and pursuing a livelihood are forbidden on Shabbat because we are to feel on Shabbat as though we have everything we need, and that we do not need to work to obtain or produce more. For the same reason, we are required to indulge and enjoy our blessings, to engender a feeling of joy and satisfaction so that we recognize and appreciate all what we have, and affirm that the Almighty has given us all that we need. Just as *Benei Yisrael* were not to leave their camp in the wilderness to search for manna on Shabbat, and had to rest assured that they had already received all that they needed, we, too, are to feel secure and content on Shabbat, confident that God has provided us with everything we require.

The prohibition against punishing criminals should perhaps be understood along similar lines. On Shabbat, we are to recognize only the good in the world, and not the evil. On this day, when we are to engender within ourselves feelings of contentment and appreciation, *Beit Din* does not concern itself with the sinners and evildoers. Shabbat is the time to celebrate goodness, without worrying about the evil that needs to be eliminated. Just as on Shabbat we must feel no need to work to earn more money, we must similarly feel no need to work to eliminate evil, and should instead feel content and satisfied with the current state of the world.

Numerous sources cite an interpretation explaining this verse – “Do not kindle fire on the day of Shabbat” – as a reference to the “fire” of anger, requiring special care on Shabbat to avoid anger. In light of what we have seen, this requirement flows naturally from the law forbidding administering punishment on Shabbat. On Shabbat, we are to feel perfectly content and satisfied with our lives, such that we have no need to become angry. Anger is the product of dissatisfaction, the way we instinctively respond to undesirable circumstances. On Shabbat, then, the day when we are to feel as though God had granted us everything we need, and that the world and our lives are precisely as they should be, there is no room for anger. We should not feel angry on Shabbat because we should experience genuine happiness and contentment, such that no adversity can rattle us or disturb our sense of inner peace and serenity

Friday

Parashat Vayakhel begins with the account of Moshe assembling *Benei Yisrael* to convey to them the commands regarding the construction of the *Mishkan* (which he introduced by relaying the command to observe Shabbat). Rashi comments that this assembly took place the day after Yom Kippur, when God announced His forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf. The incident of the golden calf had occurred some three months earlier, on the 17th of Tammuz, and it was only on Yom Kippur that God assured Moshe that the sin was forgiven. The next day, Moshe assembled the people and presented to them God’s instructions concerning the *Mishkan*.

Rav Shlomo Efrayim Luntshitz, in his *Keli Yakar*, insightfully notes that this is not the only event which Rashi tells of having occurred on the day after Yom Kippur that year. Earlier, in Parashat Yitro (18:13), Rashi writes that it was on this day that Yitro observed Moshe judging the people, and suggested that he appoint other judges so he would not have to shoulder this responsibility alone. It turns out, then, that according to Rashi, two events transpired on this day: Moshe judged the people to settle their disputes, and he assembled the nation to relay God’s commands regarding the *Mishkan*.

*Keli Yakar* explains that settling financial disputes was a necessary prerequisite for the construction of the *Mishkan*. Firstly, the people would be called upon to donate large sums of materials with which to build the *Mishkan*, and it was therefore vitally important to ensure that all the riches in each person’s possession were truly his legally-owned property. The *Mishkan* could not possibly be built with stolen or improperly-obtained goods, and thus Moshe needed to first settle all legal disputes before the people could begin bringing materials for the *Mishkan*. Additionally, *Keli Yakar* adds, the *Mishkan* was to serve as a place where the entire nation would assemble in peaceful, harmonious devotion to God, a goal which could not be achieved as long as there were lingering feelings of friction and resentment. Moshe judged the people in order to create an aura of peace and harmony, untainted by ill-will and bitterness, so that *Benei Yisrael* would be worthy of God’s presence.

*Keli Yakar*’s insight reminds us of the vital need to maintain priorities in religious life, and to address the more basic problems in our communities before striving for loftier spiritual goals. Before *Benei Yisrael* could begin undertaking the exalted task of constructing a *Mishkan* where the divine presence would reside, they needed to first eliminate, to whatever extent possible, friction and animosity among themselves. They could not proceed to involve themselves in the construction of a Sanctuary before ridding themselves of petty disputes and conflicts. In our religious lives, too, we must give priority to our basic moral obligations, to overcoming pettiness and selfishness, and to living in peace with, and with sensitivity to, our fellowman. Only once an aura of peace and goodwill prevails can we then lift ourselves to the next level of working to bring the *Shekhina* into our midst.

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