

Parschas Tetzaveh 5771

THE MATHEMATICS AND MECHANICS OF THE ME'IL

A particularly unique feature of the *Me'il* (one of the priestly garments worn by the High Priest, usually rendered as “robe”) was its spectacular bottom. The Torah in this week’s *parshah* tells us that the hem of this garment was festooned with an arrangement of interesting ornaments:

וְעָשִׂיתָ... רַמְנֵי תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי עַל שׁוּלְיֵי סָבִיב וּפְעֻמָּנֵי זָהָב בְּתוֹכָם סָבִיב.

“And you shall fashion... pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet thread on its bottom, all around; and golden bells *in their midst*, all around” (*Shemos 28:33*).

The operative word here is *בְּתוֹכָם* (*in their midst*). Were the bells supposed to be arranged among the pomegranates, in simple, alternating fashion, or were the bells supposed to reside literally *within* their fruit-shaped associates? The issue is the subject of a dispute between Rashi and the Ramban, with Rashi understanding that the bells were to alternate between the pomegranates (i.e., one bell in between every two pomegranates), while the Ramban contends that the bells were to be placed *inside* of the pomegranates.

A TARGUM TEASER

An issue that arises is that this seems to be the subject of a dispute involving the Targum Onkelos – and himself. As we know, the sections concerning the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and the *bigdei kehunah* (priestly garments) are recorded in the Torah in two “installments,” so to speak. The directives are the subject of the *parshiyos* of Terumah and Tetzaveh, while the actual production of these items

is listed in Vayakhel and Pekudei. When translating the *Me'il* section in parshas Tetzaveh, the Targum renders the aforementioned term *בְּתוֹכָם* as *בֵּינֵיהוֹן* – *between* them. This appears to concur with Rashi’s approach that the bells were laid out between the pomegranates. However, in parshas Pekudei, when the *passuk* speaks of the actual fashioning of the *Me'il*, the Targum employs a different word: *בְּגוּ*, which means “within.” This rendering seems to follow the Ramban’s opinion that the bells were contained *inside* the pomegranates. The apparent contradiction begs for resolution, obviously: Why did the Targum follow Rashi’s explanation by the instructions to make the *Me'il*, but chose the Ramban’s approach when the directives were carried out?

The plot only thickens if we turn to another classic Aramaic commentary – the Targum Yonasan. In parshas Tetzaveh, he provides a tally of the bells employed in the *Me'il*: seventy-one in total. But in parshas Pekudei, the total given in the Targum Yonasan comes out to seventy-two! Seemingly, something just doesn’t add up.

As periodically occurs in the course of Torah analysis, one query serves to answer the other. Such is the case here, as well, as we shall soon see.

BETTER LEFT FORGOTTEN

The *Bad Kodesh* (*parshas Tetzaveh*) reminds us of a principle that can prove quite helpful in clarifying our issues. The principle emerges from a *halachah* mentioned in a Mishnah in Rosh Hashanah (3:2):

כָּל הַשּׁוֹפָרוֹת כְּשֶׁרִין חוץ מִשָּׁל פָּרָה.

“All *shofars* are kosher (i.e., the horn of any animal can be used to fulfill the mitzvah of blowing *shofar* on Rosh

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Hashanah), except for (that) of a cow.”

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah 26a*) discusses various reasons why a cow's horn is disqualified for *shofar* use. The sage Ula declares that such a horn hearkens back to a particular dark time in our history, bringing certain unwanted memories into focus:

עולא אָמר : הַיְינוּ טַעְמָא... לְפִי שְׂאִין קְטִיגּוֹר נַעֲשֶׂה סְנִיגּוֹר.

“Ula said: This is the reason... because the ‘accuser’ should not serve as the ‘defender.’”

Rosh Hashanah is a time where we beseech Hashem to look to our merits and remember us favorably. The last thing we would want is to conjure up images of one of the most heinous of crimes. A cow's horn would do just that, for it was the form of a cow that held center stage in the *cheit ha'eigel* (sin of the golden calf). The *shofar* is supposed to act in our defense; one that would be a

liability and a source of accusation should not be used!

This idea of *אֵין קְטִיגּוֹר נַעֲשֶׂה סְנִיגּוֹר* manifests itself in our issue, as well. It can help to account for the apparent discrepancies in the Targumim. We had been perplexed as to why the Targum Onkelos seemed to indicate in parshas Tetzaveh that the bells were supposed to be next to the pomegranates, while in Pekudei it seems that they were placed *inside* of them. However, something major transpired in between these two *parshiyos* – namely, the sin of the golden calf. Now, the gold of the bells – which are supposed to act as a “defender,” “reminding” Hashem to look favorably on His people – has become an “accuser.” When issuing the command to fashion the *Me'il* in parshas Tetzaveh, the bells were to be placed in the open, between the pomegranates. Once the gold has become a liability, it becomes necessary to “hide” them *inside* the pomegranates – an adjustment reflected by the Targum's change of terminology in parshas Pekudei.

The seeming inconsistency in the Targum Yonasan's totals can likewise be attributed to this progression of events. In parshas Tetzaveh, *prior* to the sin of the golden calf, the bells were supposed to be displayed *externally*, as explained above. As Rashi had described, this entailed one gold bell in between every two pomegranates. Simple math will render the intended total. Let us say, for example, that we were arranging apples and oranges in this manner, with an apple on either side of one orange. Suppose there were three apples; that would give us a total of two oranges among the three apples (apple, orange, apple, orange, apple). There were a total of seventy-two pomegranates. If there was one bell in between every two pomegranates, that would produce a total of seventy-one bells.

But by the time we come to Pekudei, the landscape has changed. Due to the golden calf, the bells must now go *inside* the pomegranates, not in between them. This now necessitates exactly one bell for every pomegranate. Seeing as there were a total of seventy-two pomegranates, this would obviously produce a total of seventy-two corresponding bells.