

## A gold bell and a pomegranate, a gold bell and a pomegranate on the hem of the Robe, all around. (28:34)

There is a debate between *Rashi* and *Ramban* concerning how the *Paamonim* and *Rimonim*, pomegranates and bells, were placed at the hem of the *Meil*. There were seventy-two pomegranates and seventy-two bells, which allude to the seventy-two possible shades of white which could render someone a *metzora*, spiritual leper. The **Baal HaTurim** explains that since the *Meil*, Robe, atoned for the sin of speaking *lashon hora*, slanderous speech, the number was appropriate, in that it reminded people of the evils of, and the penalty for gossiping. *Rashi* posits that each bell was followed by a pomegranate next to it. *Ramban* contends that the bells were actually sewn into the pomegranate. The above *pasuk*, *Paamon zahav, paamon zahav v'rimon*, "A gold bell and a pomegranate, a gold bell and a pomegranate," implies that the sequence follow *Rashi's* position. However, in *Parashas Pekudei* (*Shemos* 39:25) the Torah writes, *Va'yitnu es ha'paamonim b'soch ha'rimonim*, "And they placed the bells amid the pomegranates" that seems to support *Ramban's* position. How do we reconcile these two descriptions of the hem of the *Meil*?

In his commentary to the Torah, the **Chasam Sofer** suggests that perhaps both *Rashi* and *Ramban* are correct in their understanding of the *pesukim* and the way the pomegranates and bells were stitched to the *Meil*. He explains that there was a *paamon*, bell, without a pomegranate in it, followed by a pomegranate with a bell in it, then followed by a single bell, followed by a pomegranate with a bell inside, etc. Thus, *Rashi's* commentary which posits that the bells followed pomegranates, and *Ramban's* position that the bells had within them a pomegranate, is also realistic. They are both correct; the *Meil's* hem had both: filled bells and empty bells. There was however, no individual pomegranate. They were either embedded with a bell, or not there. Every *rimon*, pomegranate, had a bell embedded within it. Accordingly, the number of pomegranates was less than the number of bells. Thus, the number seventy-two must apply to the amount of bells that were at the hem of the Robe.

The *Chasam Sofer* suggests a profound lesson to be implied from the bells and pomegranates. One should not think that *lashon hora* applies only with regard to the negative speech one speaks about another person. One who speaks positively about himself, aggrandizing and expounding his many good deeds, is also subject to the exhortation of *lashon hora*. By publicly lauding his good deeds, he is insinuating the faults of others – for not acting accordingly!

We are being taught a new dimension to the sin of *lashon hora*. Unknowingly, by promulgating our own positive traits, our good deeds, our *mitzvah* performance, we are intimating the faults of others whose track record of performance is less than glowing. We do not realize how every action that we perform has an impact on those around us. This is especially true if one is blessed with a distinguished position. People look up to him and follow his every word. Without thinking, one can hurt others. It goes without saying that when one speaks about himself, his exploits, the successes of his children and grandchildren, he might unwittingly be hurting someone in his proximity – who is

not as fortunate as he is.

Our lives are public. The *Steipler Gaon*, **Horav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, zl**, went out to purchase a *Lulav* and *esrog* for *Succos*. He was escorted by one of his close students, who had often accompanied his revered *Rebbe* in the past. The various dealers were acutely aware of the students' ability to steer the *Steipler* in their direction. He understood the business and did not want to waste his *Rebbe's* time. Aware of his power, each dealer vied for him to visit their establishment. Obviously, whoever had the good fortune to sell a *Lulav* and *Esrog* to the *Steipler* would be besieged with customers seeking to buy his product. There was no greater endorsement than the *Steipler* buying his *Lulav* and *Esrog* from a specific vendor. The young man chose a certain dealer whom he knew was meticulous in selecting the finest quality *Esrogim*. This would shorten the time the *Rav* spent searching for the right *esrog*.

As soon as the *Steipler* entered the shop, everything seemed to come to a halt. All eyes were on him. The shop was filled with customers, so the *Steipler* was immediately ushered into a back room where he could inspect the merchandise in peace. The nervous proprietor had selected a group of *Esrogim* which he felt were the finest in his possession. This would hopefully hasten the *Steipler's* choice. Time was a very special commodity for the *Steipler*.

The *Steipler* began the process of inspection, picking up the first *Esrog*, inspecting it, and then putting it down. It seemed that it was not up to his standards. He then went to the second *Esrog* and did the same thing, putting it down after inspecting it. He went through quite a number of *Esrogim* – the same way: picking it up; inspecting it; then placing it back in the box. He then returned to the very first *esrog* that he had inspected, and asked the proprietor to “wrap it up.” He would purchase the first *Esrog* that he had inspected. This was the *Esrog* that he had originally, quickly dismissed. The proprietor was perplexed, but, he was not asking questions. He had made a sale – and that was all that counted to him.

The student, however, was not so dismissive: he wanted to understand what his *Rebbe* had just done – and why. If this *Esrog* was not “top drawer” he could have easily gone to another store in search of the perfect *Erog*. The *Steipler* was not one to acquiesce when it concerned *mitzvah* observance. Why had he seemingly settled now?

The *Steipler's* reply taught the young man an important lesson concerning a Jew's service to Hashem and to what limits one should go in performing a *mitzvah*. “You are correct,” the *Steipler* began, “I could go to any number of shops and quite possibly find a *Lulav* and *Esrog* that will be out of this world. But, at what price? I do not mean money. Let me explain. Had I left the shop without purchasing an *Esrog*, word would have immediately spread throughout the street that I had left the store without purchasing an *Esrog*. Can you imagine how this would have affected his bottom line? Indeed, perspective buyers would have begun not to frequent this establishment. To cause another Jew to lose customers is a high price to pay for an *Esrog* – one that I refuse to pay. A *mitzvah* at the expense of someone else's livelihood is not my idea of the *mitzvah* of *Lulav* and *Esrog*.”