



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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Jewish ringtones

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In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman אה ז"ל ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
who loved and supported Torah learning.

Tetzavei

Jewish ringtones

Have you ever been in shul, or out in public somewhere, when you hear “Hava Nagilah” coming from someone’s pocket?

It was a bit comical hearing “Hava Nagilah” coming from the pocket of a man in the middle of services. The rabbi consoled himself, thinking, “Well, at least he’s a proud Jew and doesn’t hide his Jewishness—every time his phone rings, everyone knows that there goes a Jew.”

But recently, I read that the ringtone tells you a lot about the cell phone’s owner.

Someone with an upbeat ringtone, it said, is probably an optimistic, happy person. On the other hand, a serious, somber ringtone probably denotes a slightly depressed person who needs a hug. (I wouldn’t recommend hugging a stranger with a serious ringtone, though.)

If the ringtone is loud, it’s a sign that its carrier is blessed with a lot of self-confidence—that he or she is more than happy to have a conversation with everyone around him or her. Conversely, if the ringtone is low-key or even normal, the person behind it is likely discreet.

A person who changes his ringtone too often is probably lacking a bit in direction and stability in his life. He is the kind of person who starts another project every week. On the other hand, you have people who never change their ringtones once. Such people tend to be boring and dry.

And finally, people whose ringtones are not sounds but the voices of various family members are obviously very devoted family people.

So ringtones are very much a part of our modern lives. Even our weekly Torah portion teaches us about ringtones.

This week, we read about the building of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, in all its details.

Now the first question is this: How is the Mishkan, a temporary building built thousands of years ago, relevant to our lives today, here in 2011? There's no Mishkan or Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple, today. We don't bring sacrifices today.

So along comes Chasidic philosophy and explains that even today, when we do not have the physical Temple, we can still fulfill the command we read in this week's Torah portion: "And you shall make for me a temple, and I shall dwell within them."

That verse, simply interpreted, means that G-d wanted our ancestors in the desert to build the Mishkan, and when they would, G-d's Presence would rest among them.

But Chasidic philosophy explains that the verse is symbolic—when the verse states "within them," it means that when the Jews build a temple, G-d will dwell within each and every individual Jew and that every Jew must build a symbolic temple in his own physical home.

Now, in the ancient Temple of old, there were several key objects.

For starters, there was the Menorah, the seven-branched candelabrum that was lit every night. The Midrash tells us, "These candles are never canceled out"—even after the physical destruction of the Temple, when a Jewish woman lights the Shabbos candles in her home, she is essentially continuing the tradition of lighting the Menorah in the Temple.

Another object in the Temple was the Shulchan, the Table. This golden table, with racks mounted above it, is where the Kohanim, the priests, would regularly place the Lechem HaPanim, the Showbread.

Today, the Shulchan is symbolized in our homes and lives by our Shabbos tables. When we sit around our Shabbos tables surrounded by our entire families, and on top of that we invite guests with whom to share our Shabbos meals, we continue the same idea of the Shulchan that existed in the Temple.

But the single most important object in the Temple was the Aron, the Holy Ark.

The Ark contained the Luchos, the Two Tablets, that G-d gave to Moses. The Luchos are the essence of the Torah—they contain the Ten Commandments.

Today, when a Jew has a bookcase filled with Jewish books in his or her house, containing a Chumash (Bible), siddur (prayerbook) and other fundamental books, he or she thus has a symbol of the Holy Ark from the Temple, right in their own living room. Those very same Ten Commandments that were written on the Luchos are also contained in the Chumash on the shelf.

Now, in the Beis Hamikdash, the Temple, the Korban Tamid, the Constant Sacrifice, was brought two times a day—once in the morning and once in the afternoon. When the Temple actually stood, the priests in Jerusalem would bring the sacrifices in the name of the entire Nation of Israel. Today, after the Temple has been destroyed, it has all been transferred to our domain.

We've already discussed some things that symbolize the various parts of the Temple. But what about the sacrifices?

Our Sages taught us, "The prayers were established to correspond to the sacrifices." Today, when every Jewish home must symbolize the Temple, every Jew must symbolize a Kohain, a priest in the Temple. That's why we all recite the Shachris prayer in the morning—to correspond to the Tamid, the Constant Sacrifice, brought in the Temple in the morning. The same thing goes for the Minchah prayer—it corresponds to the Tamid brought in the afternoon. And just like the Musaf, or Supplemental, Sacrifice was brought each Shabbos and holiday in the Temple, so to do we recite the Musaf prayer each Shabbos and holiday.

Additionally, the Kohain would need to engage in various preparations before he entered the Temple. Firstly, he would wash his hands and feet at the Kiyor, the washbasin, that stood at the entrance to the Temple. For the same reason, Halachah (Jewish law) today states that before prayers, "We must make ourselves holy with His holiness by washing our hands of everything so that we can serve Him like a Kohain who would wash his hands with the Kiyor every day before he began his service."

On top of that, a regular priest in the Temple wore four standard garments. His uniform consisted of four pieces. The Kohain Gadol, the High Priest, however, would wear eight garments in the uniform he had to be wearing before he entered the Temple.

Now, how does this symbolically translate to our "Temples" today?

Since prayer symbolizes the sacrifices, therefore Halachah states that a person should have special clothing just for his prayers: "Prayer is in place of a sacrifice... and it is fitting that one have fine clothing designated for prayer, like the Kohain's uniform."

For that reason, the Chasidic custom has always been to wear special clothing for prayer just like the Kohain Gadol would wear a hat, a coat and a sash.

And now, we finally get back to our parshah—and the ringtone.

In this week's parshah, we read how the hem of the Kohain Gadol's coat was lined with little bells. Why? So that, as the Torah tells us, "his sound shall be heard when he enters the holy area."

When the Kohain Gadol would arrive at the entrance to the Kodesh area of the Temple—the Temple consisted of several zones including the Kodesh, or the Holy, and the Kodesh HaKodoshim, or Holy of Holies—the bells on his uniform would jingle as he walks.

So there you have it. Even the Kohain Gadol had a ringtone: his jingling uniform.

Now, why did the Kohain Gadol really need those bells? The Ramban explains that just like a person knocks on the door and asks for permission to enter before entering a king's throne room, so too did the Kohain Gadol make his voice heard upon entering the Kodesh area in the Temple.

But how do we symbolize the Kohain Gadol's bells in our daily lives? How can we, too, "make our sound be heard"? When it comes to serving G-d, what symbolizes a ringtone?

The Rebbe comments on the verse, "a coat of charity shall enwrap me," saying that the bells on the coat of the Kohain Gadols are symbolized by the mitzvah of tzedakah, charity.

Halachah tells us that a Jew should give charity before prayer.

Why? Because since the entire concept of prayer is asking G-d for your needs, and everyone knows that we really aren't entitled to anything and we stand before G-d like poor people in the door asking for tzedakah, the best way to get this tzedakah from G-d is when we give tzedakah to someone else. Then we can approach G-d and ask him to give to us in equal measure.

Thus, when a Jew tosses a few coins into the charity box before prayers, and the coins rattle and jingle and make noise, it's like the bells of the Kohain Gadol's uniform.

This, my friends, is our ringtone—this is our knock on G-d's door asking for permission to enter.

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