

# DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

## Parshas Tetzaveh

### Stones, Light and Perfection

#### The Avnei Miluim and the Urim ve'Tumim

וַעֲשִׂיתָ חֹשֶׁן מִשְׁפָּט... וּמִלֵּאתָ בּוֹ... אַרְבַּעַת טוּרִים אָבֹן

*You shall make a Breastplate of Judgment... You shall fill it with... four rows of stones<sup>1</sup>*

#### INTRODUCTION: TWELVE PRECIOUS STONES

One of the fascinating elements among the Priestly Garments discussed in this week's parsha are the twelve Miluim stones that were attached to the Choshen (Breastplate), worn by the Kohen Gadol (High Priest). Each stone bore the name of one of the twelve tribes, so that the Kohen Gadol bore their remembrance with him wherever he went during his service in the Beis Hamikdash.

R' Levi Yitzchak of Bereditchev<sup>2</sup> explains the special significance of this idea in terms of understanding the true role of the Kohanim in general, and the Kohen Gadol in particular. Although the Kohanim had been separated from the other tribes in order to perform the Avodah, this was not in the interests of *detaching* themselves from the Jewish people, but of *representing* them. The avodah is something that only Kohanim can do, but it is done on behalf of the entire people and with their ultimate blessing in mind. In order to keep this crucial idea in mind, the most distinct and distinguished among the Kohanim – the Kohen Gadol – could not be allowed to perform his avodah without having the names of all twelve tribes constantly before him.

#### HOW WERE THE NAMES ENGRAVED ON THE STONES?

Verse 21 states that each of the twelve Miluim stones had the name of one of the tribes engraved on it:

וְהָאֲבָנִים תְּהִיֶּינָן עַל שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁתֵּים עָשָׂרָה עַל שְׁמֹתָם פְּתוּחֵי חוֹתָם אִישׁ עַל שְׁמוֹ

*The stones shall be according to the names of the sons of Yisrael, twelve according to their names, engraved like a signet ring, each according to [that tribe's] name.*

Some commentators have observed that the analogy to a signet ring does not appear to be accurate in

<sup>1</sup> Shemos 28:15-17.

<sup>2</sup> Kedushas Levi.

every respect. For while it is true that a name on a signet ring is engraved, it is actually engraved *backwards*, so that when the ring is applied to make a seal, the letters in the seal read forwards. Presumably, this was not the case with the engraving on the *Miluim Stones*.

However, R' Yehoshua Leib Diskin says that, in reality, the verse's analogy is a full one. To explain how, he draws our attention to the beginning of our verse, "וְהָאֲבָנִים תְּהִינּוּ עַל שְׁמֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל". The literal translation of these words is that "the stones shall be on the names of Bnei Yisrael." Naturally, this does not sound right – for it was not the stones that were on the names, but rather the names that were on the stones! For this reason, the translation given for the word "עַל" is "according", so that the stones were not "on the names," but "according to the names".

Rav Diskin, however, says that the word "עַל" should be translated as "on", for the stones were in fact "on the names of Bnei Yisrael"! How so? The names of the tribes were not engraved on the side of the stones that faced outwards. Rather, they were engraved on the part of the stone that was attached to the *Choshen*; and seeing as the stones were translucent, the names could be read through the stones by anyone who looked at the *Choshen*. Thus, the verse says that the stones were indeed "on the names of Bnei Yisrael," for the stones actually lay on the names!

There is just one problem, however. If the side of the stones with the names engraved was attached to the *Choshen*, with the name being read through the stone, it would then be read backwards! This, says Rav Diskin, is why the verse instructed the original engraving to be "like that of signet ring," i.e. backwards. In other words, the names were engraved backwards onto the stones, so that they would subsequently be read forward when seen through the stones.

A Chiddush in pshuto shel mikra!

### **THE CHOSHEN AND THE TZITZ – READING UP ON THE JEWISH PEOPLE**

An additional into the names engraved on the *Choshen* comes when considering it in conjunction with another of the Kohen Gadol's garments – the golden *Tzitz* worn across his forehead. Verse 36 informs us that the *Tzitz* had the two words "קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה" – *Holy for Hashem* engraved on it. The Gemara Succah 5a cites the opinion of the Sages that "קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה" was engraved below and Hashem's name was engraved above it. The commentators wonder why these words would be written in this way, and not in a straight line as words are normally written.

There is an additional question to be considered here: What exactly is being referred to with the words "Holy to Hashem"? The Torah has already informed us that *all* the priestly garments are holy! Why, then, would one of them need to be marked especially as such?

The Rashash<sup>3</sup> explains that the words "*holy to Hashem*" are not to be read by themselves, and they do not refer to the *Tzitz*. Rather, they are referring to the twelve tribes whose names are engraved below on the *Choshen*! It is the Jewish people who are holy to Hashem, with the *Choshen* and the *Tzitz* combining to communicate that message. Therefore, says the Rashash, since the flow of reading goes upwards from the *Choshen* to the *Tzitz*, the descriptive phrase on the *Tzitz* itself likewise goes from down to up, with "קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה" below and Hashem's name above.

It is worthwhile noting, in this regard, that the names of the tribes of Israel are engraved on two sets of stones worn by the Kohen Gadol; for in addition to the twelve *Miluim Stones*, there are also two *Shoham Stones* on the shoulders of the Ephod, which have the names of six tribes engraved on each stone.<sup>4</sup> These two engravings represent the two capacities in which the twelve tribes of Israel exist:

---

3 Comments to Maseches Succah ibid.

4 See verses 9-10.

- ▷ On the one hand, they are all part of the nation of Israel. In this regard, their names are all listed together on the two identical *Shoham* stones.
- ▷ At the same time, each tribe has its individual character and mission within the Jewish people. This is reflected by the twelve *Miluim* stones, all of different colors, which are then embedded within the framework of the Choshen.




---

### The Urim ve'Tumim

---

An additional element within the Choshen is mentioned in verse 30:

וַנִּתֵּן אֶל חֹשֶׁן הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֶת הָאוּרִים וְאֶת הַתְּמִים

*And you shall place in the Breastplate of Judgement the Urim and the Tumim.*

The *Urim ve'Tumim* allowed for messages to be received from heaven in answer to questions that were of national or communal concern. The Gemara<sup>5</sup> explains the background to this name:

- ▷ **אוּרִים** – *their words illuminated*,<sup>6</sup> signifying the illumination they brought to the questions that were posed through them.
- ▷ **תְּמִים** – *their words completed*,<sup>7</sup> reflection the idea that an answer received through them was final and irrevocable.

As the Gemara proceeds to describe, when a question was addressed via the *Urim ve'Tumim*, the answer would be transmitted by the relevant letters on the *Miluim* Stones either protruding or illuminating.<sup>8</sup> What emerges is that in addition to the institution of prophecy, which existed primarily as a means through which Hashem communicated His will to the Jewish people via the prophet, the *Urim ve'Tumim* existed as a vehicle through which the people could ask certain vital questions of Hashem and receive His answer. In this regard, the Gemara<sup>9</sup> lists the *Urim ve'Tumim* as one of the five things that were absent during the period of the Second Beis Hamikdash, where the Divine Presence resided to a lesser degree than it did in the First Beis Hamikdash.

---

5 Yoma 73b.

6 From the word **אור** – light.

7 From the word **תמים** – complete.

8 How did the Kohen know in which order to arrange the letters that formed the answer? Some commentators explain that the letters lit up in the order the words were to be spelled (Rav Saadiah Gaon). The Ramban explains that the *Urim and Tumim* were two separate names of Hashem (see below), with the first enabling the letters to light up ("*Urim*" – illumination), and the second allowing the Kohen to understand how they were to be arranged ("*Tumim*" – completion).

9 Yoma 21b.

## WHAT WERE THE URIM VE'TUMIM?

The Torah does not specify exactly what the Urim ve'Tumim were. Indeed, more intriguing still, it does not even mention a command to make them; the only instruction concerning them is the one mentioned in our verse to place them in the Choshen. Of further interest is that the Torah refers to them as “the Urim and the Tumim,” apparently denoting a prior known entity, even though this is the first time they are being mentioned.

Rashi states that the Urim ve'Tumim was a small scroll of parchment with Hashem's Ineffable Name (Shem Hameforash) written on it. This approach is endorsed and elaborated upon by the Ramban.<sup>10</sup>

The Rambam does not specify what the Urim ve'Tumim were. However, in Hilchos Beis Habechirah,<sup>11</sup> he writes that they were still worn during the time of the Second Beis Hamikdash. He explains that even though the Gemara lists them among the items that were absent during that era, this means that they did not perform their prophetic function; however, they still needed to be worn, otherwise the Kohen Gadol would be lacking the required number of special garments needed to perform the avodah.

There are certain commentators who understand that the Rambam concurs that the Urim ve'Tumim were Hashem's names written on parchment, and moreover maintains that their presence within the folds of the Choshen was critical to its status as one of the priestly garments. Hence, the Rambam says that even when they no longer functioned as the Urim ve'Tumim, they still needed to be in the Choshen.<sup>12</sup> However, other commentators explain that the Urim ve'Tumim were in fact the Miluim stones themselves, not an additional item that was added to the Choshen. The name Urim ve'Tumim, according to this approach does not indicate a separate entity, but rather an additional quality of the stones – of transmitting prophetic messages.<sup>13</sup>

## A GOOD HEART

It is fascinating to consider this unusual aspect of the *Choshen* – one that is certainly very different from the general function of the priestly garments, which is focused on the Avodah in the Mishkan. Indeed, according to one of the Rishonim, the Ran,<sup>14</sup> this point is addressed by our sages in the Talmud. When Moshe is first told to go and act as the redeemer for Bnei Yisrael, Hashem informs him that on his return to Egypt he will be met by Aharon, who will be glad in his

10 Basis for this approach can found in Targum Yonasan ben Uziel to our verse, and in Zohar 2:234.

11 4:1.

12 Maharash Algazi, Ratzuf Ahava. See also commentary of Radvaz to Hilchos Klei Hamikdash 9:6. This would also appear to the Raavad's understanding of the Rambam (Hasagos to Hilchos Beis Habechirah loc. cit.), who questions why the absence of the *Urim ve'Tumim* would render the number of garments incomplete.

13 Rabbeinu Avraham, the son of the Rambam, cites this approach as “*the words of our sages.*” This is also the opinion of Rav Sherira Gaon and Rav Hai Gaon, as found in a responsa cited by Rav Menachem Kasher in his endnotes to Parshas Tetzaveh sec. 11. Tosafos in Yoma 21b (s.v. Urim) likewise concur with this approach, see notes of Rashash ibid. Later commentators point out that Rashi's approach would seem to be borne out by the simple reading of our verse (see also Vayikra 8:8), which implies that that *Urim ve'Tumim* were something that was added to the *Choshen* after the stones had been attached, see Hakesav veHakabbalah for a discussion of this question.

14 Derashos HaRan, drush 3.

heart to see him.<sup>15</sup> Commenting on these words, the Gemara says:

בשכר ״וראך ושמח בלב״ זכה אהרן ל״ונשא אהרן את משפט בני ישראל על לב״.

*In reward for fulfilling "he will see you and be glad in his heart," He [Aharon] merited "And Aharon shall carry the judgment of the Bnei Yisrael on his heart."<sup>16</sup>*

The Ran asks: What does the Gemara mean to say? If it is that Aharon merited to be the Kohen Gadol in reward for being glad on Moshe's behalf, why is the Choshen mentioned specifically as his reward? Rather, he explains, Aharon's heartfelt joy for Moshe reflected an extremely lofty quality. After all, Moshe was coming to Egypt as Hashem's prophet to redeem the people from there exile there. Aharon had already been a prophet for the people there for many years. In effect, he was stepping aside for Moshe to assume the role that had been his until this point!

The graciousness and magnanimity of this gesture, as well as what Hashem Himself testified to as heartfelt joy for Moshe, is truly worthy of our profound contemplation and appreciation. In fact, it could be said to be one of the most beautiful elements within the entire Exodus story. And it did not go unrewarded.

Aharon's role as Kohen Gadol only needed to be focused on matters of avodah. However, Hashem awarded him with the *Urim ve'Tumim*, a vehicle for prophecy that he carried on his heart, in recognition of the role of prophet that he allowed Moshe to assume during the Exodus.

---

15 Shemos 4:14.

16 Shabbos 139b.