

ALSHICH

INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר שמות

פרשת תצוה

SERIES 1: ISSUE 20

THE DEEPER MEANING OF THE EPHOD

Chapter 28

6) They shall make the Ephod out of gold [thread], turquoise, deep red, and crimson wool and twisted linen with a woven design.

9) You shall take two shoham stones and engrave on them the names of Bnei Yisrael.

12) You shall place the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the Ephod; they shall be remembrance stones for Bnei Yisrael. Aharon shall bear their names on his two shoulders as a remembrance before Hashem.

ו) וַעֲשׂוּ אֶת הָאֶפֹּד זָהָב תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן תּוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ
מְשֻׁזָּר מֵעֵשֶׂה חֹשֶׁב.

ט) וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת שְׁתֵּי אֲבְנֵי שֹהַם וּפְתַחְתָּ עֲלֵיהֶם שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל.

יב) וְשָׂמְתָּ אֶת־שְׁתֵּי הָאֲבָנִים עַל כְּתֹפֶת הָאֶפֹּד אֲבְנֵי זָכָרֹן
לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִשְׂא אֶהְרֹן אֶת שְׁמוֹתָם לְפָנָי ה' עַל שְׁתֵּי כְּתֹפָיו
לְזָכָרוֹן.

Our Sages (*Zevachim* 88b) tell us that the *Ephod* (the linen apron upon which the *Urim VeTumim* rested) atoned for the sin of *avodah zarah*. They learned this from *Hoshea* 3:4, *If there is no Ephod, there are teraphim* (meaning that the sin of *avodah zarah* is manifest). This implies that when there **is** an *Ephod*, there are no *teraphim*. Why does the *Ephod* have this power? Because the external realm, represented by *avodah zarah*, is related to division and discord, while unity is able to destroy it. Using the *mispar katan* method of calculation, the *gematria* of אָפֹד equals that of אֶחָד, which represents unity.¹

Since the *Ephod* is the first garment of the Kohen Gadol that the Torah describes, the materials from which it is made serve to hint at some important elements of his position. For example, the *gold* thread hints to the mitzvah that the Kohanim must ensure that the Kohen Gadol is wealthy if he is not (*Yoma* 18a).

However, being wealthy might make him haughty, and then how would his Divine service attain atonement for the Jewish people? Thus the next type of thread in the *Ephod* was turquoise-colored wool (*techeiles*). This is to remind him that he is destined to give an accounting before Hashem's throne, which is compared to the color of *techeiles*, as the Sages said (*Sotah* 17a): *Techeiles* is similar [in color] to the sky, and the sky to the Throne of Glory.

Nevertheless, *techeiles* represents only a milder form of Divine judgment. The following thread in the *Ephod* is deep red wool (*argaman*), a color that represents the stricter aspect of Divine judgment. If the Kohen Gadol is not deterred by the thought of the milder judgment, the *argaman* should remind him to humble himself before it is too late. He should also reflect on the advice in *Avos* 3:1, that one should always remember that his final destination is "a place of dust and worms." This means that if a person is righteous his body will directly become

¹ According to the *mispar katan* (lit., small number) method, all multiples of ten are ignored. The *gematria* of אָפֹד is thus 13 (4 = ט, 8 = פ, 1 = א), like that of אֶחָד (4 = ט, 8 = ח, 1 = א).

dust in the ground, but if not, he will first undergo the suffering of being consumed by worms. This is hinted at in the name of the next- mentioned thread, *crimson wool*, תולעת שני. The literal meaning of תולעת is “worm,” implying what his end will be if he is not worthy, and שני (*crimson*) hints at the destined change (שנוי) in even the most righteous person, whose body will eventually turn to dust.

The verse then notes וְשֵׁשׁ (מְשֻׁזָּר) and (*twisted*) linen. This hints at the Kohen Gadol’s obligation to fully accept the 613 mitzvos: שש also means six, and the *gematria* of the vav in וְשֵׁשׁ equals six, while each *shin* equals 300, totaling 612. By adding one more for the word itself, we arrive at 613. If in addition he accepts upon himself to think the right thoughts when performing the mitzvos, it is considered as if he has doubled his mitzvos. This is hinted at in the final words of the verse, מְשֻׁזָּר מְעֵשָׂה חָשָׁב: The word מְשֻׁזָּר means “twisted,” referring to the doubling over of the various threads. This hints at the doubling of the value of the mitzvos that comes through מְעֵשָׂה חָשָׁב – having the correct thoughts (חָשָׁב – lit., thinker or thinking) when he is doing the מְעֵשָׂה (action of) each mitzvah.

Verse 9 mentions the two precious *shoham* stones that were placed on the *Ephod*’s shoulder-pieces. They represent the two Tablets of the Ten Commandments and serve to symbolize that it was in the merit of the Torah that the Kohen Gadol was able to enter the Mishkan. The verse states that the letters of the names of the Tribes were to be engraved on the *shoham* stones to represent the fact that without the Jewish people in the world there would be no Torah (and thus, no reason for the world to exist).

We mentioned above that the *Ephod* atones for idolatry. Yet *Yoma* 9b states that the first Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because of *avodah zarah*! To answer this, verse 12 says, *You shall place the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the Ephod*. In *Yerushalmi, Chagigah* 1:7, it says regarding the destruction that “Hashem **overlooked** the sin of idolatry ... but He did not overlook the sin of *bitul Torah*.” Since the *shoham* stones represented the Ten Commandments, which in turn represent the entire Torah, the Kohen Gadol carrying them on his shoulders signifies the acceptance of the yoke of Torah. As long as the words of Torah *shall be remembrance stones for Bnei Yisrael* – that is, as long as they learn Torah and make it into something that all will remember by expressing it out loud, even if they do not fulfill every mitzvah – then *Aharon shall bear their names on his two shoulders as a remembrance before Hashem, and the Ephod will atone for the sin of avodah zarah*.

THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508–1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title “HaKadosh” (the holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*. The Alshich is most noted for his monumental Tanach commentary.

The Alshich uses his creative insight and encyclopaedic knowledge of Tanach, Talmud, and Midrash to weave together his profound interpretations. He simultaneously focuses on the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all with one or two concepts.

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