



## Parades's Parsha Discussion with Rabbi Alex Israel

TORAH TO DISCUSS WITH TEENS AND ADULTS AROUND YOUR SHABBAT TABLE

### Tetzaveh. Head and Heart



This week we read about the sacred garments of the High Priest. They are seen as rich with spiritual symbolism. Interestingly, some have writing, text, emblazoned upon them. We shall speak about two garments this week:

1. **The Tzitz** – made of pure Gold. It sits on the High Priest's forehead. It is engraved with the phrase: "Holy to the Lord!"
2. **The Hoshen** – the priestly breastplate. It is a knit of gold, blue, crimson and purple thread. Inset into the breastplate are twelve semi-precious stones, each stone engraved with a name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. This is worn on the High Priest's heart. The fabric of the breastplate is doubled over, and inside the "pocket" are the Urim veTumim, an oracle that allow Israel to ask questions of and receive answers from God.

The distinction between these two garments has aroused the attention of scholars throughout the ages:

"The Tzitz is placed upon Aaron's forehead, corresponding to the centre of intelligence and wisdom.

The Hoshen was on Aaron's heart, the centre of love and affection for Israel. All the names of the Tribes were engraved upon it, and the Torah calls it the Hoshen Mishpat – the breastplate of Justice/Judgement – the judging of Bnei Yisrael was entrusted to the Hoshen.

The Tzitz ruled questions of ritual law, the impure and the pure, obligations and prohibitions ... the Hoshen would rule on very different questions: Shall we go to war or not? Do I protest against a government that has fallen short of the values of Israel or not?" (Rav Soloveitchik – The bearers of the Tzitz and the Hoshen. In Divrei Hagut VeHaaracha pg 191-2)

Here Rav Soloveitchik suggests that these two pieces of apparel represent contrasting religious functions.

The Tzitz, pure gold, is dedicated to God. It is on the forehead, the mind, seat of the intellect, representing an intellectual, theoretical approach to religion. The Tzitz represents purity. But if we can view the Tzitz in its relationship to Torah, Rav Soloveitchik sees the Tzitz as the study of pure Torah in an almost theoretical manner. Detached from the realities of everyday living, hidden from the turbulence of the pressures of life, family, statehood, conflict, Torah remains pristine.

The Hoshen is a contrast to all this. A weave of different colours, the Hoshen represents variety and diversity. And that is reflected in the engraving of the tribes of Israel on the stones. Not a single stone with twelve names, but a different stone with its unique colour and texture for each of the Tribes of Israel. It is this garment that represents the Mishpat – the judgment, guidance, and direction – of the nation. It is this garment that holds the collective identity of the people in all its frenetic difference.

The Tzitz remains above time and space. The Hoshen is an oracle, offering answers to worldly questions in the here and now. It was placed upon the heart, the seat of passionate emotion, not the seat of intellect. The Ephod represented the trials and tribulations of the nations of Judaism.

Both contain God's name. For the Tzitz, it is visible, clear, coherent. In contrast the Hoshen contained, within its folds, a plate engraved with the name of God (Rashi 28:30). But this Divine name was hidden, obscured, and its spiritual power, enveloped deeply in the weave. It is filtered, refracted differently for Reuven than for Shimon, for Issachar and Asher. twelve very different channels, each tribe with its special character, temperament, needs, dreams, and shortcomings.

Two opposites:

- Theoretical Torah and applied Torah;
- The purity of intellect and the tensions and variety of twelve tribes;
- The brain versus the heart.

All these tensions lie in the dichotomy between the Tzitz and Hoshen.

The Message: There are many avenues to God; sometimes it is the head, and at others it is the heart. Judaism, the light of God, must be perceived at times through the medium of the Tzitz – intellect, pure theoretical thinking, unadulterated by practical concerns; the ivory tower, the Yeshiva, removed from life. But at other moments, the relationship with God takes place in the marketplace, in the battlefield, in the stormy heart, and the pressure of the rat-race, in the imperfect, messy tensions we call life.

**Please Discuss:**

- Does Torah belong in the Yeshiva or in life?
- How would Torah differ in the Yeshiva than in life?
- Do you connect more to Judaism of the head or of the heart?

- Is it possible for different “tribes” or sub-groups in Judaism to have different expressions of Judaism or is there only a single way of living Jewish practice? Should all groups practice the same Judaism? Would we expect a person to pray the same length of time if he is a college student as compared to if he is a combat soldier in Tzahal?
- Some people think that Torah scholars should weigh in on issues of morality and public policy. Do you see our topic as relevant to this question?

Lastly, The Sefer Hachinuch suggests that Tefillin mirror the Tzitz and Hoshen. How might the Tefillin of the and the head mirror these two garments?

Shabbat Shalom!