

DEBAR TORAH *by* RABBI ROHDE

Wearable Judgment, Sin, Forbearance and Grace

The “oracle” to be consulted by the Israelites through priestly communion with God was integrated among the priestly “garments,” something which is rather unique, I believe, among nations of the ancient world which practiced divination and prophecy through such priestly or prophetic oracles. Several different clothing pieces were fashioned alongside this “Hoshen HaMishpat” or “Breastplate of Judgment” which contained this Urim veThummim “oracle.” Among them was an Ephod vest or apron along with its shoulder-pieces, decorated band, girdles, cords and the metal rings via which these were tied. There was also a “robe of the Ephod with its binding of woven work like the opening of a coat of mail (v. 32).” The many pieces seem necessitated in order to hold the Breastplate of Judgment in place, as verse 28 states: “The breastplate shall be held in place from its rings...so that the breastplate rests on the decorated band and does not come loose from the ephod.” The Breastplate and Urim veThummim with its metal and precious stones must have indeed been heavy, necessitating several tied garments to hold it in place.

Was it really necessary for the High Priest’s oracle to be a “wearable” garment such as this? Verse 30 answers in the affirmative: It must be placed “...over Aaron’s heart when he comes before the LORD, that Aaron shall bear the judgment of Israel upon his heart before the LORD always.” The oracle of Israel must be placed upon the very heart of the High Priest; our oracle must stem from the very heart. And the LORD’s judgments which the oracles render must be taken to heart. If these judgments are vindicating, they will shield our heart like a plate of armor or a coat of mail; if vindictive, their weight must be borne valiantly upon our heart to suffer the consequences and eventually purify the heart in true repentance.

The companion-piece to the Breastplate Oracle, also emphasized as being worn upon a special part of the High Priest’s body, is the “Tzitz,” the “Frontlet” plate of pure gold. Although it is not explicitly considered oracular, like the Breastplate the Frontlet it is inscribed, in this case with the two words “Holy unto the LORD.” Our passage specifically states that this special Frontlet must be worn upon the High Priest’s forehead for symbolic reasons: for bearing the burden of sin, asking God’s Forbearance and seeking His Grace and Favor. The brain in the forehead together with the heart in the breast were known as the two seats of the living and conscious soul. Like the Breastplate’s attachments to the Ephod, the Holy Frontlet was suspended by a cord of blue to the front of a “Headdress (Mitznepheth).” All animals are most vulnerable at the head, having our blood supply to the brain cut off, or at the heart, where a blow to the life-giving pump and central organ of the body is lethal. In man, with his consciousness and emotions, this is even more true. Our heads can either bow down under the burden of sin or, if our iniquity is forborne and we are vindicated, we may first lower our heads in worship and then look up to seek God’s Grace and Favor shielding us under His helmet.

Some Jewish rationalistic commentators have used the placing of Israel’s oracles upon the heart and brain to emphasize that ultimately Israel’s real oracles are order, reason and rationality. That interpretation goes too far: The heart and mind are the seats of both orderly and rational faculties as well as emotional, imaginative irrational faculties and faculties of conduct and behavior. Also, the Torah’s placing Israel’s oracle among textiles corresponds to its wistful idealization of the pristine nomadic desert life in general, where people and even God live in fabric tents and all of life is made simple and portable, including its most sacred aspects. This nostalgia for the simple truths of nomadism was embellished with the precious materials of civilization, but still retained a pristine character and simplicity: The truest of oracles are those which we take heed to wear constantly upon the heart and the mind. Only when judgment is worn and borne continually upon heart and mind and purification of the subservient but stout heart and uplift of the humbled head towards Heavenly Grace is sought continually will we see the simple Light of Truth, the Urim veThummim (Lux et Veritas).



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL

The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Tetsavveh

February 11-12, 2022 | 11 Adar I, 5782

SCHEDULE

Candle Lighting | 5:08 pm

Friday Evening Services | 5:15 pm

Friday Night Lights | Rabbi Soloveichik | Following services | *2021-22 season sponsored by the Julis-Rabinowitz family*

Zemiroth | 8:30 am

Shahrit | 9:00 am

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Levy | Led by teen leaders and Mrs. Lisa Rohde

Kiddush | Outdoors | following services | *Sponsored by Raquel & Steve Herz, in memory of Barbara Herlands Smith, and by Howard & Martin Koenig, in memory of their parents, Yaakov Yoseph b. Nisan Z"l (Julius J. Koenig) & Chaya bat Shalom Tzvi (Adele C. Koenig)*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | Rabbi Soloveichik | 4:20 pm | *Session sponsored by Cindy Trop & Stuart Ellman, in memory Cindy’s father, Melekh ben Zion*

Shabbat Afternoon Services | 5:05 pm

Habdala | 5:57 pm

Virtual Habdala | 6:15 pm | Rev. Z. Edinger

Weekday Service Times

Morning Services

Sunday: 8:05 am | Monday-Thursday: 7:05 am

Evening Services

Sunday-Thursday (Minha/Arbit): **5:15 pm**

COVID-19 UPDATE: MOVING FORWARD

See inside for details.

NEW! We ask ALL congregants to submit our new Vaccine/Booster Status form, available at: shearithisrael.shulcloud.com/form/vaccine-status.

Congregation Shearith Israel | 2 West 70th Street | 212-873-0300 | www.shearithisrael.org

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

COVID-19 Update: Moving Forward

We are delighted to announce the return of **IN PERSON** *Friday Night Lights* and Rabbi Soloveichik's Shabbat Afternoon Class, starting this week.

In light of Governor Hochul's decision to end the NYS mask mandate:

- We are now back to **Mask-Optional for Friday Night Lights and the Shabbat Afternoon Class.**
- For now, we are still **Mask-Required at prayer services.**
- **Up-to-date vaccination/boosters are required for all - visit shearithisrael.shulcloud.com/form/vaccine-status to submit your latest information to help us maintain our database.**

Mazal tob to **Elizabeth Uretsky & Samuel Neumark**, upon the birth of a baby girl. Congratulations as well to grandparents **Susan & Avery Neumark**, to great-grandfather **Mel Neumark**, and to the entire family.

Condolences to **Karyn Bogart**, upon the passing of her uncle, Jack Robert Braka.

With blood donations still in short supply, join Shearith Israel in conjunction with Lincoln Square Synagogue, Obab Zedek, & Or Zarua for another:

Blood Drive for the NY Blood Center

February 27 | Held at Lincoln Square Synagogue (180 Amsterdam Ave)

Saving a life takes just an hour of your time!

There has been a chronic gap in blood donations since the start of the pandemic. At the same time, the need for blood from patients in our local hospitals has increased by 10-15% from pre-pandemic levels, from pent up demand for treatment and surgeries postponed during the pandemic.

We're encouraging folks to give blood and/or help amplify the message on the need for blood in our community. You can visit nybc.org to learn more. Use that link to schedule your donation for February 27th.

THIS SUNDAY

SOLD OUT

Youth Trip to the Tenement Museum: *At Home in 1911*
Sunday, February 13

COMING UP

Parent-Child Learning - Torah & S'mores!

Led by our Parnas, Louis Solomon

Saturday Night, March 12 | 7:00 pm

For elementary school children and their parents or grandparents

To register, visit shearithisrael.org/csiyouth5782.

MISHLOAH MANOT

Sisterhood Mishloah Manot Project

Place your order by: Midnight on Saturday, February 24

Once again the Sisterhood is offering members an opportunity to send Mishloah Manot to other members of our congregation. Your friends can receive either a card or a package* of Purim treats (their choice of which they want), letting them know you included them on your list.

All you have to do is log in to your ShulCloud member account, fill out the online form, and pay by credit card. (You MUST be logged in to be able to view the form.)

Proceeds from this program will fund the Sisterhood's many other projects.

To select recipients, visit shearithisrael.org/sisterhoodmanot.

**Note that packages are only available for pickup at the Synagogue; there will be no package delivery.*