

Message 2025-03-08

שלום החברים והמשפחה שלי

Shalom, khaverim v'mishpokhah sheli.

Shalom, my family and friends.

This week I decided to simply focus on the weekly parasha for my message. I make a habit of reading the parasha each week. I read it in Hebrew and English, and I dig more deeply into whatever my brain or heart connects to in the weekly portion.

I do this because I want to meditate on God's word, but I follow the order of the parashot principally because I feel it binds me together with the Jewish community. Life is difficult and divided enough as it is, and this is one way to be, quite literally, on the same page with those who are on this journey with me.

What is a Parasha? פְּרָשָׁה

The parashot are the longest running structured Bible study. The tradition of reading the Torah out loud dates back to the time of Moses, who would read the Torah publicly on Shabbat, festivals, and Rosh Chodesh.

According to the Talmud, it was Ezra who established the practice of dividing the Torah readings in the 6th century BCE following the Babylonian captivity. We see this in the Book of Nehemiah, where Ezra writes about wanting to find a way to ensure the Israelites would not go astray again. This led to the creation of a weekly system to read the portions of the Torah at synagogues.

Many of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which date from 300CE to 100BCE, contain the parasha divisions. This indicates that it was common practice during the time of Yeshua.

It was Maimonides in the 12th century who codified the schedule we follow today.

I feel that entering into the Torah reading cycle connects you to all of those who have come before you and will come after you.

Parasha Tetzaveh

Today we are in Parasha Tetzaveh which is found in Sh'mot (Exodus) 27:20-30:10.

The word of God is important because it sustains and protects us. When Yeshua was hungry in the wilderness and tempted by the enemy, he responded with a quote from Devarim (Deuteronomy)

He humbled you, allowing you to become hungry, and then fed you with man, which neither you nor your ancestors had ever known, to make you understand that a person does not live on food alone but on everything that comes from the mouth of Adonai.

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 8:3, CJB

So, let's dig into some of what comes from the mouth of Adonai. That was my commercial encouraging you to read the weekly portion.

Pure Oil

The opening sentences of the parashah are focused on the command for the people to bring the refined olive oil for the ner tamid, the lamp that was to burn continually. This command to all of the people of Israel is why the olive tree is a symbol of the Jewish people.

Adonai once called you an olive tree, beautiful, full of leaves and good fruit.

Yermeyahu (Jeremiah 11:16), CJB

This verse in (יִרְמְיָהוּ) Jeremiah is from a Passage where the prophet is chastising and warning Israel to repent for their ways. It is similar to the passage in Romans where Israel is the cultivated olive tree whose branches are bent back in order to graft in the wild olive branches.

Olive oil was also used for anointing; an important part of Messiah's identity. Messiah means "anointed one."

I think this is a fair picture of our messiah, the Or haOlam (אור העולם). He is the ner tamid, and the oil which burns comes from the refined oil of this cultivated olive tree; whose branches are both native and wild but brought together in messiah. The light of the world continues to illuminate the world through his disciples.

Arise, shine [Yerushalayim], for your light has come, the glory of ADONAI* has risen over you. For although darkness covers the earth and thick darkness the peoples; on you ADONAI* will rise; over you will be seen his glory. Nations will go toward your light and kings toward your shining splendor.*

Isaiah 60:1-3 (CJB)

This vision of the future world to come is echoed in the apocalypse of John.

The city has no need for the sun or the moon to shine on it, because God's Sh'khinah gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.*

Revelation 21:23-24 (CJB)

The perpetual light of the menorah represented the heavenly light that emanates before the Holy One, blessed be He, in His eternal Sanctuary above. In the Messianic Era and the World to Come, that light will dwell upon earth, and all the world will be illuminated with it.

The oil is also used for the anointing the high priest. The anointing ritual seems to symbolize an investment of God's Spirit. It physically dramatized consecration and spiritual investiture for a particular office. By anointing Aaron with oil, Moses set him apart for the office of high priest and acted out the endowment of the Holy Spirit. After the anointing, Aaron was referred to as the "anointed priest," that is haKohen haMashiach (nAn 1121). The messianic associations should be self-evident.

The Armor of Adonai

The parashah for this week focuses on the clothing of the priests, and it concludes with the sacrifices required for the sanctification and atonement of the priests.

The garments they are to make are these: a breastplate, a ritual vest, a robe, a checkered tunic, a turban and a sash. They are to make holy garments for your brother Aharon and his sons, so that he can serve me in the office of cohen.

Sh'mot (Exodus 28:4), CJB

When I read this parasha I cannot help but make the connection to the armor of God described by Shaul, Paul, in Ephesians.

Have the belt of truth buckled around your waist, put on righteousness for a breastplate, and wear on your feet the readiness that comes from the Good News of shalom. Always carry the shield of trust, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. And take the helmet of deliverance; along with the sword given by the Spirit, that is, the Word of God; as you pray at all times, with all kinds of prayers and requests, in the Spirit, vigilantly and persistently, for all God's people.

Ephesians 6:14-18, CJB

Many commentaries compare the armor of God with the armor of the Roman soldiers. But the problem is this: I don't think Shaul was referring to the armor of unholy, violent and merciless Roman soldiers who tortured and killed the Jewish people. People like our Messiah. Why would Paul utilize the image of a Roman soldier to teach about gearing up with righteousness? To first century believers that would be like using imagery of Hamas or Nazis to teach righteousness to us.

I believe he was referencing an ancient Jewish armor, a heavenly armor, the garments of the high priest.

I think this because Sha'ul did not develop the idea of the armor of God on his own. He drew his wisdom and understanding from the Tanakh. Isaiah is quoted more than any other book from the Tanakh: 85 times in the Brit Chadasha, 36 times by Sha'ul alone. Here are two examples from Isaiah where the priestly garments are eluded to as armor for battle.

He will not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear, but he will judge the impoverished justly. He will decide fairly for the humble of the land. He will strike the land with a rod from his mouth and slay the wicked with a breath from his lips. Justice will be the belt around his waist, faithfulness the sash around his hips.

Yesha'yahu (Isaiah) 11:3–5, CJB

He put on righteousness as his breastplate, salvation as a helmet on his head; He clothed himself with garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in a mantle of zeal.

Yesha'yahu (Isaiah) 59:17, CJB

Utilizing this sort of language and imagery would have been common to Sha'ul. While this passage specifically addresses the garments of the high priest and the family of Aaron, I think there is still much to learn from this passage. After all, Adonai desired that Israel be a kingdom of priests.

Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you will be a kingdom of cohanim for me, a nation set apart.

Sh'mot (Exodus) 19:5–6, CJB

And Shimon Kefa, Peter, extends this concept to all believers in Yeshua.

But you are a chosen people, the King's cohanim, a holy nation, a people for God to possess!

1 Kefa (1 Peter) 2:9, CJB

So, although the p'shat, the plain meaning of this parasha from Sh'mot, only applies to the family line of Aaron; we can apply what we learn from this study to our lives. Let's remind ourselves of why Paul tells us to put on the full armor of God.

For we are not struggling against human beings, but against the rulers, authorities and cosmic powers governing this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm. So take up every piece of war equipment God provides; so that when the evil day comes, you will be able to resist; and when the battle is won, you will still be standing. Therefore, stand!

Ephesians 6:12–14, CJB

With that understanding of the armor of God, let's look at one piece in a little bit of detail. We only have so much time, and I just spent a lot of it on the set up.

Breastplate and Ephod תִּפְסֵי וְעֹפֹד

The garments they are to make are these: a breastplate, a ritual vest, a robe, a checkered tunic, a turban and a sash.

Sh'mot (Exodus 28:4), CJB

The most important garment worn by the High Priest is the ephod. Its appearance can be likened to an apron; it was worn in back, on top of his other garments, and was fastened by a long belt in the front, opposite his heart. This belt was woven into the entire length of the ephod's upper hem. There were also had two shoulder-straps that were sewn onto the belt. These straps went behind, up and slightly over the upper corners of the garment, over the priest's shoulders. The settings for the two sardonyx stones were attached at the ends of these straps, on the shoulders.

The stones were inscribed with the 12 tribes of Israel, so that when the High Priest entered into the holy place dressed in the ephod, the Holy One saw all the tribes of Israel inscribed before Him and He was moved to have mercy on His people.

Unlike a kitchen apron, it was tied in the front, and attached to it was the Khoshen Mishpat, the breastplate of judgement.

Khoshen Mishpat

According to Torah instructions and rabbinical traditions, the breastplate is a patterned brocade like the ephod. The threads of its fabric are gold, sky-blue, dark red and crimson wool, and twisted linen. The garment itself is set with four rows of small square stones, in settings of knitted or braided gold. Each row contained three stones-totaling twelve stones, one stone representing each of the twelve tribes of Israel. The name of the corresponding tribe was engraved on each stone.

Like the two sardonyx shoulder stones, the Torah states that the purpose of the twelve stones is "to be a perpetual remembrance before HaShem" (Ex. 28:29). When the High Priest bore the breastplate into the holy place, Israel was remembered for peace. The sages taught that the ephod served to invoke the cause of Israel's sustenance and material welfare, and the breastplate - her salvation, and deliverance from her enemies.

Khoshen Mishpat or Khoshen Tzedaka חֹשֶׁן מִשְׁפָּט אוֹ חֹשֶׁן צְדָקָה Breastplate of Righteousness or Breastplate of Judgement

What is the relationship between righteousness and judgement?

Is judgement inherently a punishment?

*Adonai, who dispenses judgment to the peoples,
judge me, Adonai, according to my righteousness
and as my integrity deserves.*

*Let the evil of the wicked come to an end,
and establish the righteous;
since you, righteous God,
test hearts and minds.*

*My shield is God,
who saves the upright in heart.
God is a righteous judge*

T'hillim (Psalms) 7:9–12, CJB

God is a righteous judge.

The role of judges in our society has been polluted by special interests, with judges often taking it on themselves to be the law rather than interpret it. However, in the kingdom of God, Adonai is the law, and Adonai is a righteous judge full of khesed v'emet, full of grace and truth.

The khoshen mishpat and the koshen tzedaka are the same thing.

I think this is why we are supposed to 'put on' the khoshen mishpat, to protect our hearts with God's righteous judgement. We need to leave the testing of our hearts and minds, and others' hearts and minds, to Adonai, the righteous judge.

Don't judge, so that you won't be judged. 2 For the way you judge others is how you will be judged—the measure with which you measure out will be used to measure to you.

Matityahu (Matthew) 7:1–2, CJB

Our job is to love Adonai and to love each other. Little children, love one another.

Urim and Tummim אורים ותמים

The breastplate was a rectangular piece folded in half to make a pocket. In this pocket were placed the Urim and Tummim.

Lights and perfections. These were used to consult God and for God to give direction.

The specifics of exactly what these were and how they functioned is a little mysterious. There are a lot of opinions. Two Jews, ten views.

According to the sages, Moses was to insert a slip of parchment containing the Ineffable Name [according to Ramban, there was more than one Name]. This Name was called Urim, from the word Ur, light, because it would cause individual letters of the tribal names on the Breastplate to light up; and it was called Tumim, from the word Tum, completeness, because, if read in the proper order, these luminous letters presented complete and true judgement of Adonai.

The Urim and Thummim teach us that God wants to have input into our lives and our decisions. Therefore, we need to seek Him in prayer and ask for His direction in our decisions. We may not always get a clear answer, but sometimes we will. If we are listening, God might speak directly to our hearts, or speak to us through our teachers, or our brothers and sisters in the LORD, or by other means. The key is to seek His will and direction for our lives.

No believer should ever undertake a major decision without first consulting God in prayer:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Matityahu (Matthew) 7:7, CJB

The Urim and the Thummim teach that God expects His people to bring their concerns, their questions, and their uncertainties to Him. We lay them at His feet in prayer, and through the efficacy of the priesthood of Messiah, we anticipate clear answers and clear direction for our lives.

Yeshua is the unblemished Light of the World and the channel through which divine communication enters the world. He speaks the Word of His Father. When we seek to know the Father's will, we turn to Yeshua for direction. His divine light illuminates the path we should take. His perfect, unblemished life exemplifies the direction God would have us pursue. He is the light, and He is the perfection.

Final Words

I will leave you today with the words of Yeshua, the or ha olam.

...seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Don't worry about tomorrow—tomorrow will worry about itself! Today has enough tsuris already!

Matityahu (Matthew) 6:33–34), CJB

References:

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- Reading the Torah: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/reading-the-torah>
- ISAIAH. QUOTATIONS AND ALLUSIONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: <https://therain.org/appendixes/app80.html>

Parsa Tetzaveh Outline

- Mikvot
- Dressing
- Anointing
- Sacrifice
- Sanctification and Atonement
- Meet with G-d