

Parashat Tetzaveh 5782, 2022:

The Choshen Mishpat

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, Shayndel bat Mordechai Yehudah, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The *Choshen Mishpat*, worn by the *Kohane Gadol*, is one of the more fascinating *bigdei kahuna* (garments of the *kohanim*) that is described in our *parasha*: “And you [Moshe] shall make a decision breastplate (*Choshen Mishpat*). It shall be a patterned brocade like the ephod. Make it out of gold [thread], sky-blue, dark red and crimson wool, and twined linen.” This translation of, “decision breastplate,” derives from the placement of the *Urim* and *Thumim* therein, special stones from which prophetic communications were revealed to the *Kohane Gadol*: “Place the *Urim* and *Thumim* in the decision breastplate, and they shall be over Aharon’s heart when he comes before G-d. Aharon will then carry the decision-making device for the Jewish people before G-d at all times.” (*Sefer Shemot* 28:15, 30, translation, *The Living Torah*, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, with my emendations)

In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rashi (1040-1105) cites an opinion found in *Talmud Bavli*, *Arachin* 16a and *Zevachin* 88b, that suggests the purpose of the *Choshen Mishpat* is to procure atonement for error in legal decisions. (28:15) Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (Netziv, 1816-1893) takes issue with Rashi’s approach, since “[these Talmudic sources suggest this explanation of the *Choshen Mishpat*] solely as an allusion and an intimation (*remez v’asmachata*), and as a

statement that by no means represents its essential purpose.” (*Ha’amek Davar, Sefer Shemot 28:15*, this and the following translation and brackets my own) As such, the Netziv offers his own analysis of the inherent meaning of the *Choshen Mishpat*:

Rather, the primary explanation of the word, “*mishpat*,” is to seek redress for insults against the Jewish people. [So, too, do we find] that the *Targum Yonatan* on *Malachim I:8:49*, translates “*v’asita mishpatam* (and You will maintain their cause),” as, “*v’tit’p’rah ulbanhon* (and You will seek compensation for their humiliation).” ...and, therefore, the [focus on] the *Choshen* comes to invoke the salvation of the Jewish people and seek revenge against those who pursue them.

In sum, the Netziv maintains that the role of the *Choshen Mishpat* is to “invoke the salvation of the Jewish people and seek revenge against those who pursue them.” In my view, this concept is evocative of the *tefilah* we recite each morning immediately before the recitation of the *Shemoneh Esrai*, wherein we beseech Hashem to bring forth the redemption of our people: “Rock of Israel, arise to the aid of Israel and liberate, as You pledged, Judah and Israel. Our Redeemer—Hashem, Master of Legions, is His Name—the Holy One of Israel. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who redeemed Israel.” (Translation, *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*, page 97.) May this time come soon and, in our days, *v’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav](#)