YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

**parashat tetzaveh**

**Sicha of HarAV Mosheh Lichtenstein**

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Dedicated in memory of Zvi Kassel *z"l*,   
whose *yahrzeit* is the 10th of Adar  
by Patrice and Danielle Rueff and Family Kassel

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In memory of Rabbi Dr. Joseph I. Singer *z"l*, Rabbi Emeritus of Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, and son-in-law of Dr. Chaim Heller *z"l*, whose *yahrzeit* falls on 12 Adar, by his daughter, Vivian Singer

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**The *Tzitz* [Headband], the *Choshen* [Breastplate], and the *Efod* [Apron]**

Summarized by Aviad Lipstadt

Translated by David Strauss

**Introduction**

*Parashat Tetzaveh* contains instructions for creating the priestly garments:

And bring near to you Aharon your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that they may minister to Me in the priest's office, even Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, Elazar and Itamar, Aharon's sons… And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastplate [*choshen*], and an apron [*efod*], and a robe, and a tunic of checker work, a miter, and a girdle; and they shall make holy garments for Aharon your brother, and his sons, that he may minister to Me in the priest's office. (*Shemot* 28:1-4)

And you shall make a headband [*tzitz*] of pure gold, and engrave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, “holy to the Lord.” … And it shall be on Aharon’s forehead, and Aharon will bear the iniquity of the holy things that the children of Israel will consecrate, in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord.” (Ibid. 36-38)

I would like to focus on three of the garments commanded here. Their natures and symbolisms are highlighted when we consider them in pairs: the contrast between the *tzitz* and the *choshen*, and the way the *ephod* builds on the message of the *choshen*.

**The Difference Between Reason and Emotion: The *Tzitz* and the *Choshen***

The *tzitz* has a very clear role and message: it expresses the idea that the High Priest himself, on whose head the *tzitz* rests, is "holy to the Lord.” The Gemara in *Gittin* (20a) says the letters on the *tzitz* were hollowed out. This is clear writing, on bright gold, which leaves little room for the imagination.

The various details of the *tzitz* indicate that it symbolizes service of God through reason. It is placed on the High Priest's head, near his brain. Its message is cold, clear, and unequivocal: The intellect does not leave a lot of room for creativity or personal expression, and so too the service of God symbolized by the *tzitz*: just as an equation has one clear solution, so too there is a clearly paved path to the service of God.

Another element in the High Priest's garments, which expresses a different type of service of God, is represented by the *choshen*. The *choshen* is made up of different stones, each of a different color, and each stone carries the name of the tribe it represents. Moreover, the light that hits these gems is refracted in every direction. In contrast to the *tzitz*, which reflects the light beam in a straight line, the *choshen* looks different to each person. Reuven's *choshen* is not the same as Shimon's *choshen.* While the *tzitz* is placed on Aharon's forehead and represents the cold and intellectual service of God, the service of God of the *choshen* is service with emotion; it is personal and individual.

It turns out that our service of God should include both the service of the intellect of the *tzitz* and also the service of the heart of the *choshen*; complete service of God cannot be based on only one of these two elements.

**The Service of God as a Relationship: The *Choshen* and the *Efod***

However, the *choshen* does not only express personal service through emotion; it embraces another element as well. The Gemara in *Yoma* (73b) asserts that on the *choshen* were also engraved the names of the three patriarchs and the words "*shivtei yeshurun*," "the tribes of Yeshurun." Not only did the *choshen* give expression to each and every individual, but it also presented the chain of generations beginning from the birth of the nation.

Indeed, the concept of that heritage occupies a place of honor in our religious experience. We pray three times a day to the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. When we stand before God, we do not stand alone, but with the entire people of Israel – across the generations.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The engraving of the names of the patriarchs on the *choshen* teaches us another important aspect of our tradition: that our service of God is based not only on what was given directly at Mount Sinai, but also on what has been done throughout the generations until our own day, because the Torah expresses a relationship between the people of Israel and God. Like any relationship, the service of God is a two-sided system, and we too can influence how it will look.[[2]](#footnote-2)

There is another expression of the Torah reflecting the relationship between Israel and the Creator of the world. We are not supposed to worship God as individuals, but as a whole people, the people who received the Torah. This is reflected in the special stones attached to "the shoulder pieces of the *efod*" (*Shemot* 28:12):

And you shall take two onyx stones, and grave on them the names of the children of Israel: six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the six that remain on the other stone, according to their birth. (*Shemot* 28:9-10)

When the High Priest enters the inner sanctum, he does so not only with the *tzitz* and the *choshen*, but also with the memorial stones on the *efod*, which hold the names of all twelve tribes. The High Priest does not stand in the sanctuary alone, but as the representative of the entire nation.

This idea is true for our time as well: we too must recognize that we are part of a whole, and not turn a blind eye to Israel's troubles. True service of God should be attentive to all the people, and should try to form from them a cohesive unit that worships God. A person who tries to make a *choshen* and worship God alone, individually, will find that without the memorial stones of the *efod*, the *choshen* will fall off, God forbid.

The *tzitz*, the *choshen*, and the *efod* teach us about the importance of intellect and emotion in the service of God, and about the deep meaning of the tradition as maintaining a relationship between God and the entire nation of Israel. May we all merit to serve God in the appropriate manner.

[This *sicha* was delivered on Shabbat *Parashat Tetzaveh-Zakhor* 5780.]

1. Therefore, for example, we mention the binding of Yitzchak in our prayers, even though we ourselves were not a part of it. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Therefore, great importance is attached to customs, and in general to everything that "a distinguished scholar will teach." [↑](#footnote-ref-2)