



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת היום

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

A project of CHEVRAH LOMDEI MISHNAH • Parshas Tetzaveh 5768

Among the priestly vestments discussed in this week's *parsha*, we find a most unique article known as the *urim v'tumim*: a fragment of parchment containing Holy Names of Hashem, which was inserted into the priestly breastplate (*Ramban on Shemos, 28:30*). The *urim v'tumim* performed a most remarkable function: upon request, it would dispense advice and information concerning future events.

Sounds like a great way to tell the future! Why not take advantage of such an instrument and use it, say, to play the stock market? Well, for starters, restrictions applied. As stated in the Mishnah in Yoma (7:5):

כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל מְשַׁמֵּשׁ בְּשֵׂמוֹנֶה כְּלִים....בְּאֵלוֹ נִשְׁאָלִין
בְּאוֹרִים וְתַמִּים, וְאֵין נִשְׁאָלִין אֶלָּא לְמַלְךְ וּלְבֵית
דִּין וּלְמִי שֶׁהֶצְבּוֹר צָרִיךְ בוֹ.

“The *Kohen Gadol* officiates with eight (priestly) garments.....Only while (the *Kohen Gadol* is) wearing these garments may the *urim v'tumim* be consulted. Furthermore, a query may be posed to the *urim v'tumim* only on behalf of the king, the High Court, or someone who performs a necessary function for the community.”

It is apparent from the Mishnah that utilization of the *urim v'tumim* is no simple matter. Any old yokel who wants to strike it rich can't just saunter over to the *urim v'tumim* and use it as his personal financial advisor; rather, all requests must be funneled through the *Kohen Gadol*. Furthermore, only an extremely important personage or body could enjoin the *Kohen Gadol* to apply for the *urim v'tumim*'s prophetic services.

What are the parameters of the *Kohen Gadol*'s usage of the *urim v'tumim*? Are there limitations to his access of this remarkable implement, or may he use it even for his personal affairs? R' Chaim Kanievsky explains (*Derech Sichah, Parshas Tetzaveh*) that surprisingly, the *Kohen Gadol* is allowed to benefit from the *urim v'tumim*'s guidance for his personal queries.

The proof for this fact is illustrated by the Vilna Gaon's rendering of the well-known incident in *Shmuel Alef (ch.1)*. The *navi* depicts how the childless Chanah supplicates before Hashem, petitioning Him to grant her offspring. Upon observing her silent prayer, the *Kohen Gadol* Eili decides that she must be inebriated. He tells Chanah to become sober and dispose of her beverages. In response to this reprimand, Chanah declares that she is not drunk; she is merely broken-hearted, and her murmuring is her *tefillah* to Hashem.

Rashi adds a little twist to this dialogue. To Chanah's statement—"I am a broken-hearted woman"—Rashi adds, "Like Sarah (our matriarch)."

The entire interaction begs explanation. Eili was a great and holy individual; why would he immediately assume that Chanah was intoxicated? Couldn't he figure out that a forlorn figure crying and mumbling in a sanctuary was probably *davening* in some way, even if he was unaccustomed to the method of prayer? Furthermore, one would think that Chanah's behavior would evoke pity and words of appeasement, rather than Eili's seemingly harsh reprimand.

לזכר נשמת חיים צבי בן אברהם יצחק ע"ה

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יעקב משה בן חיים ע"ה

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his Neshamah.



**MISHNAS
CHAYIM**

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Rashi's comment renders Chanah's response puzzling as well. Why was it necessary to bring Sarah *Imeinu* into the conversation; what did she have to do with anything?

The Vilna Gaon (*Kol Eliyahu se'if 153*) provides a most insightful explanation of the entire incident. The Gaon states that in fact, Eili regarded Chanah and her behavior quite positively—at least initially. Chanah was one of the seven prophetesses of Jewish history. As such, when Eili witnessed her acting in such a manner, he immediately assumed that she must be engaging in some type of wondrous, lofty activity, and yearned to know exactly what it was. What did Eili do to unravel this mystery? He consulted with the *urim v'tumim*, an action that indicates that apparently, the *Kohen Gadol* is authorized to use the *urim v'tumim* for personal edification.

However, the *urim v'tumim*'s method of dispensing answers was not so simple. In describing the process, the Ramban (*ibid.*) explains that upon the *choshen* (breastplate which contained the *urim v'tumim*) were inscribed all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. When the *Kohen Gadol* would pose a question to the *urim v'tumim*, the *urim v'tumim* spelled out the answer by illuminating the letters on the *choshen* that formed the desired answer. There was a catch, though: the necessary letters were merely illuminated, in no particular order. It was up to the questioner to figure out how to arrange the letters in the proper order, forming the (correct) response.

The Vilna Gaon explains that this is where the complications arose in our story. In response to Eili's query, the *urim v'tumim* lit up the following letters: 'הכשר'. Given these letters, Eili read the message as: 'שכרה' '*shikorah*', which means 'drunk'. Although he had initially regarded Chanah in a sympathetic, even praiseworthy light, Eili's demeanor towards her

changed when he thought that the *urim v'tumim* had informed him that Chanah was intoxicated.

Chanah responded that she was perfectly sober, and that his initial instincts regarding her behavior were actually correct; she had been engaged in silent prayer. Yet, how could she explain the indictment of the *urim v'tumim*? The Vilna Gaon writes that Chanah pointed out the correct alignment of the letters: not 'שכרה' '*shikorah*'; but rather, --'נשרה' '*keSarah*', 'like Sarah (*Imeinu*)'. Chanah was telling Eili that her predicament was the same as the one shared by our matriarch Sarah, who yearned for offspring despite years of barrenness.

May we be *zocheh* to behold the rebuilding of the *Bais HaMikdosh*, the reinstating of the *Kohen Gadol*, and the return of the *urim v'tumim* and all the priestly garments, speedily in our days.

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