

MANY CAN HAVE 'URIM' BUT FEW HAVE 'TUMIM'

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 229, Purim Issues II. Good Shabbos!

Many Can Have "Urim" - Power; But Few Have "Tumim" - Power

A large part of Parshas Tetzaveh is devoted to the Bigdai Kehunah [Priestly Garments]. One of the Bigdai Kehunah was the "Choshen Mishpat." The Choshen Mishpat, or Choshen as it is commonly called, was a Breastplate that contained the names of the shevatim [Tribes] of Israel, engraved on twelve stones.

The Urim V'Tumim was a writing of the Shaim HaMif'or'ash [Explicit Name] of G-d, that was placed into the Choshen. The Urim V'Tumim gave the Choshen the ability to convey communications from HaShem [G-d].

The Choshen, which the Kohen Gadol [High Priest] wore, served an invaluable role. Whenever the Jewish nation was faced with a critical issue affecting their national welfare (for example, a question of whether to go to war or not), the Kohen Gadol would seek the advice from HaShem and the answer would appear on the Choshen.

I remember as a child, thinking that this was the greatest thing in the world. "If only I had my own Urim V'Tumim, I'd pass all my tests and I'd know if the Yankees would win" - it was a wonderful dream. Of course, the Urim V'Tumim was not used for such frivolous matters. It was used for matters of the utmost importance.

The Ramba"n gives us an insight into the workings of the Choshen and the Urim V'Tumim: The word Urim means 'lights'. Whenever the Kohen Gadol needed to receive an answer, the letters (of the names of the Tribes, inscribed on the twelve stones of the Breastplate) would illuminate. That was the 'Urim' part. But the letters would be scrambled. It was not as simple as reading out: G-O T-O W-A-R. One needed to break the code -- what were the lights of the letters of the Breastplate saying? The Ramba"n explains that there were secondary holy names called the 'Tumim'. These 'Tumim' gave the Kohen Gadol the ability to interpret the 'Urim'. The ability to use the 'Tumim' to interpret the

lights of the 'Urim' was a form of Ruach HaKodesh [Divine Inspiration].

The Talmud says [Berachos 31a] that, in fact, there were times when the Kohen could not figure out what the letters were saying. There is a famous Gemara about the High Priest Eli, who misread the letters of the Urim v'Tumim regarding Chana. Eli read the letters appearing on the Breastplate to be Shin-Cof-Reish-Hay (Shikorah -- drunken one) when in fact the correct reading was Cof-Shin-Reish-Hay (Kesheira -- worthy one). At that precise moment, Eli lacked the power of 'Tumim'.

The sefer Bais Av mentions that nowadays there are people who are blessed with the power of 'Urim'. What is the power of 'Urim' nowadays? Orach [Light] -- This refers to Torah. There are people who are steeped in Torah, have knowledge of Torah and can bring proofs from Torah. But not everyone who has the power of 'Urim' -- who looks at the Torah and sees the light of the Torah -- has the power of 'Tumim'. It does not immediately follow that most anyone has the power to interpret what the Torah is in fact saying. The people who have the power of the 'Tumim' are a few treasured individuals in each generation.

That is a special ability. Many people have Urim. They see the Torah and can proclaim something is HaShem's will and this is "the opinion of Torah" (Da'as Torah). But that is not always the case. To truly perceive Da'as Torah, one needs the power of 'Tumim'. Many times people sincerely and honestly say "This is the 'Urim' -- this is what the Torah wants" but sometimes these people do not have the power of 'Tumim'.

A profound example of this is found in the Haftorah from Parshas Zachor [Samuel I; Chapter 15]. We see an unbelievable thing in this Haftorah. Shmuel HaNovi [Shmuel the Prophet] told Shaul HaMelech [King Shaul] to go and eradicate Amalek. Shmuel HaNovi was extremely explicit. Shaul was instructed to have no mercy. He was to kill man, woman, and child. He was to kill out all the animals -- camels to donkeys!

Shaul HaMelech went to war and smote Amalek, but he had mercy on the King of Amalek and on the animals. HaShem became angry with Shaul and ordered Shmuel HaNovi to strip the monarchy from him. When Shmuel came to deliver this message to Shaul, the King came out to greet the prophet. Shaul HaMelech's first words to Shmuel HaNovi were "I have fulfilled the word of HaShem."

How is this possible? Shaul HaMelech could not bring himself to kill them all. He had mercy. So the first words out of his mouth should have been, "Shmuel, I am sorry. Shmuel, I blew it -- I have a soft heart." However, that is not what Shaul said. Shaul HaMelech bragged about fulfilling the letter of the law!

HaShem made a clear inventory of what he wanted accomplished. Shaul was supposed to kill all the animals. He did not kill all the animals. How could he claim he fulfilled the word of HaShem?

There can only be one answer. Shaul HaMelech believed that this was the Will of HaShem. He believed that by saving the animals and eventually sacrificing them, that would be a sanctification of

HaShem's Name. Shaul believed that this is what HaShem _really_ intended. This was Shaul's understanding - based on the power of the 'Urim'.

This is a classic example of having the power of 'Urim' but not the power of 'Tumim'. A person can sometimes be blinded. Whether it is for reasons of personal motive or out of fear of people or for any other reason. For some reason, Shaul HaMelech misinterpreted the 'Urim'. He looked at the words of the Torah and said, 'This is what HaShem means; this is what HaShem wants' - - and yet was completely wrong.

The power of 'Tumim' is reserved for the select few. That is why we need a leader, a Gadol [a Great Torah personality]; that is why we need a Rav; that is why we need a Rosh Yeshiva [Dean of a Yeshiva]. As much as we think we may be able to figure out the 'Urim' on our own, we still need guidance -- because we do not always know the 'Tumim'.

We can be well intended and think we have textual proofs, but if we do not have the guidance of a person who is gifted with the insight of 'Tumim', we can make tragic errors.

The end of the book of Shoftim contains one of the most sordid incidents in Jewish history, that of the Concubine in Givah. The aftermath of that incident was that the other shevatim gathered against Benjamin. They were justifiably outraged. They wanted to fulfill the will of HaShem ensure that justice was served.

However, after the fact, they realized that they had gone too far. They repented, they offered sacrifices, and they tried to make amends to preserve the Tribe of Benjamin. If their intentions had been noble, how did it happen that they became so carried away with their actions?

The last pasuk [verse] of the book of Shoftim provides an answer. "In those days there was no king in Israel, every man did as he saw fit in his own eyes." That is the bottom line. One can be well intended. He can act for the sake of Heaven. He can prove that "this is what it says to do in the Torah". He can see the lights of the 'Urim' as clear as day. But if he does not have the 'Tumim', he will not know how to interpret the 'Urim'. He will not know how far to go and what to do. He will not know when to stop and when to go.

When do such things happen? When there is no 'king' in Israel. Unless we have a bona fide leader, the worst of things can happen.

The power of the 'Urim' combined with the 'Tumim' is reserved for the few of a generation. HaShem should have Mercy upon us and direct us to the guidance of the people who not only have the power of the 'Urim' but also the power of the 'Tumim'.

This week's class is dedicated for the refuah sheleima, the complete healing, of Perel Leiba bas Malka and Tzipporah bas Sarah by the Benjamin family of Potomac, Maryland.

Sources and Personalities

Ramba"n -- Rabbi Moshe Ben Nachman (1194-1270); Gerona, Spain; Eretz Yisroel; one of the major commentaries on Chumash.

Rav Elyakim Schlesinger -- Author of Sefer Bais Av, Rosh Yeshiva in London.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Tetzaveh are provided below:

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