



Shoulder-Stones & Breastplate-Stones: Which are Heavier?

Which was “heavier,” the “Ephod,” the “Epaulette,” the top outer part of the priestly “jacket” or “tunic,” which contained two onyx-stones, one for each shoulder-piece or epaulet, each stone inscribed with six names, or was it the “Hoshen haMishpat,” the “Breastplate of Judgment” which the High Priest wore in front, containing twelve separate gemstones, which seem to have had the same inscriptions, although arranged differently? It seems confusingly redundant, but inscriptions signifying each of the Twelve Tribes’ names (probably excluding the Levites) appear carved in stone *twice* on the High Priest’s garments, with twelve inscriptions upon the shoulder-pieces, and then *again* a similar set of twelve inscriptions carved upon the stones of the breastplate! That means there were twenty-four stone inscriptions in all, with each tribe’s name inscribed twice. The arrangement of the inscriptions on the breastplate is described as being in four “columns” of three. The Breastplate had twelve different varieties (one of them being an onyx) of gemstones set in gold sockets, each of which seems to have been inscribed with a tribal name or sign. Each shoulder-piece, on the other hand, seems to have consisted of a solid chunk (some commentators describe it being two “tablets”) of pure onyx-stone, upon each one of which was engraved a “column” of six names. The name-inscriptions on each are described as having served a similar function: as a “remembrance” or “reminder.” And yet it is only the “Breastplate” which is described as serving as a remembrance “before God.” Furthermore, we are told that in wearing the Breastplate the High Priest bears the “Judgment of Israel” upon his heart before God. This is described as related to the detail that the Urim ve-Tummim oracle is incorporated in this Breastplate. But the significance of mentioning the same Tribal Names in Inscriptions upon the Ephod’s Shoulder Pieces is much less clear, and this highlights the seeming redundancy.

I might imagine that the solid onyx-stones of the Shoulder-Pieces would be heavier than stones used as gems. However, gemstones are usually set in precious metal, as they are here, which would have made the Breastplate quite weighty as a whole. And even the onyx-stones of the Ephod were set in gold-pieces. The two-stone Inscriptions of the Ephod are in two columns of six Tribal Names on each, bearing a comparison to the two Tablets of the Ten Commandments. “Onyx” is “שֹׁהַם” in Hebrew, which has the same letters as the name “מֹשֶׁה” “Moshe.” This is seen as bearing out this comparison, perhaps further alluding to the Second Set of Tablets inscribed by Moshe (rather than the First Set inscribed “by the Finger of God”). Indeed, perhaps one could say that the doubling of the Tribal Inscription on both Breastplate and Shoulders alludes to the two Sets of Tablets.

In any case, the Tablets were indeed weighty. It’s no wonder that the onyx stones were to be worn upon the shoulders, which bear weight and responsibility, if they signify the Ten Commandments and the Torah. Some identify the six names on each onyx with the six words of the Shema and Barukh Shem Kevod. There are similar numbers of letters in each of these as well as in the Tribal Name list on each onyx. Hence the Epaulettes signify Israel’s acceptance of responsibility for bearing the weighty Yoke of God’s Torah-Law. The Breastplate worn over the Heart, on the other hand, could be seen as signifying God’s and Israel’s Love, and particularly God’s Love for the Tribes - signifying the diverse entirety - of Israel.

The problem with this interpretation is that it is the Breastplate which is associated with “judgment.” And it is through the Oracle of the Breastplate that decisions of justice are often rendered. It’s just as possible that the interpretation is the reverse, that the Shoulder Piece inscriptions are to evoke Remembrance of Israel and that the Breastplate evokes God’s Stern Judgment. You could say that perhaps the Priest wants to invoke God’s Mercy upon Israel in His Judgment, but in general the Breastplate with its flashing gemstones seems far more eerie and scary. The weights placed upon the Heart can indeed be just as heavy if not heavier than the practical yoke of burdens which we have the responsibility to shoulder. Like the High Priest, we must be broad of shoulder and stout of heart in order to bear our burdens and at the same time remain brave and open-hearted towards God’s Love and Blessing.

Shabbat Tetsavveh

February 23-24, 2024 | 15 Adar I, 5784

SCHEDULE

Kaplan: p. 414 | Haftarah: p. 1124

Hertz: p. 339 | Haftarah: p. 350

Candle Lighting | 5:22 pm

Evening Services | 5:30 pm

Friday Night Lights | following services | Rabbi Soloveichik

Young Professionals Dinner | *for registered guests* | following Friday Night Lights | Elias Room

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Year of Hope Lecture #5 | At Morning Services | Rabbi Soloveichik

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Youth Groups | 10:00 am | Elias Room

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

Kiddush | following services | *Kiddush supporter and wine sponsor: Rima Raynes, in memory of her father Simeon (Simcha) Chudnovsky, on the occasion of his nahala*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 4:35 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik | Main Sanctuary

Teen Class | 4:35 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman | Elias Room

Evening Services | 5:20 pm

Habdala | 6:12 pm

Weekday Service Times

Sunday & Monday Mornings: 8:05 am

Tuesday-Friday Mornings: 7:05 am

Sunday-Thursday Evenings (Arbit Only): 6:30 pm

THIS SHABBAT

Young Professionals Shabbat Dinner with the ZOA
featuring Shearith Israel members Dov Zigler and Elijah Kochin
in conversation with ZOA member Akiba Covitz
THIS Friday night, February 23 | Ages 21-35 | for registered guests

COMING UP

Shabbat Adar Community Dinner

From Singapore to Savile Row to Bespoke in Brooklyn:
Hasidic London-Trained Tailor, Yosel Tiefenbrun,
In Conversation With Rabbi Meir Soloveichik
Friday Evening, March 8 | Following Evening Services & Friday Night Lights
For details & registration, visit shearithisrael.org.

Women Unite To Show Love & Support to Am Yisrael
THIS Tuesday, Feb 27 | 7:30 pm | The Jewish Center, 131 W 86 St

Lyaliza Soloveichik is on the event committee for this important evening of solidarity and hope. Bring baby items and hear words of inspiration from Lori Palatnik, Founding Director of Momentum: "Rebuilding Together: The Opportunity of Our Historic Times."

Optional donations will go directly to help pregnant women widowed by the war, young couples married during the war, and children orphaned by the war

CSI WOMEN & GIRLS – BECOME A READER!

First Rehearsal: This Sunday!

Women's Megillat Esther Reading

Prepare to read on Purim morning, Sunday, March 24 | 8:30 am
Ages 12-120 | Rehearsals: Sundays, Feb 25 & Mar 10 | 7 pm
Contact Mrs Lisa Rohde at lrohde-csi@yahoo.com to participate.

Teen Girls & Young Women's Shir HaShirim Reading

Shabbat, Hol HaMoed Pesah, April 27

The young women (post-Bat Mitzvah through 20s) of our congregation recite the Song of Songs on Pesah. Preparation and training provided. Newcomers welcome!
For information and to participate, please contact lrohde-csi@yahoo.com.

2024 YEAR OF HOPE

Rabbi Soloveichik's *Year of Hope* Lecture Series
"Judaica and Us: The Story of the Jewish People in Ten Objects"
Lecture #5: THIS Shabbat, February 24 | At Morning Services
The Astonishing Torah Shield of
the Sassoon Collection

Year of Hope Capital Campaign

Replacing our Sanctuary Carpet & Other Vital Repairs

Our Sanctuary is a prayer space of profound beauty, dignity, and serenity that has stood the test of time. While to the casual eye, the majesty of the space endures, there's an undeniable truth beneath our feet—our carpet is torn and tattered, bearing witness to the countless footsteps of generations within these walls.

Among other infrastructure repairs, it's time to replace the carpet, in both the men's and women's sections, so that our sacred space reflects the reverence it deserves.

We're almost there! Join our growing list of donors, and help us reach our goals of \$500,000 and 100% participation by March 31!
Donate at shearithisrael.org/giving/year-of-hope.

PURIM AT SHEARITH ISRAEL

Sisterhood Mishloah Manot

Order Deadline: 11:00 pm THIS Thursday, February 29

This year's packages will be filled with Israeli products. Support the Israeli economy while sending Mishloah Manot to your fellow congregants!
Check your email for information on how to participate.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

In a Wall Street Journal article published on Presidents' Day Weekend, Rabbi Soloveichik deconstructed the iconic painting "Washington Crossing the Delaware," encouraging us to celebrate the best aspects of our history, notwithstanding its imperfections, in order to inspire us as we face the future.

Read it on our Press page at shearithisrael.org/resources/press.