

DEBAR TORAH *by* RABBI ROHDE

The Weight of Decision Resting Upon the High-Priest's Heart

Inside the breastpiece of decision you shall place the Urim and Thummim, so that they are over Aaron's heart when he comes before GOD. Thus Aaron shall carry the instrument of decision for the Israelites over his heart before GOD at all times. (Ex. 28:30)

But he shall present himself to Eleazar the priest, who shall on his behalf seek the decision of the Urim before GOD. By such instruction they shall go out and by such instruction they shall come in, he and all the Israelites, and the whole community. (Num. 27:21)

It is clearly symbolic that of all the pieces of Aaron's gear it was the breastplate in which the Urim veThummim oracle was placed: a piece of a heavily-jeweled precious-metal "shield" worn and carried upon Aaron's upper chest and heart. J.H. Hertz quotes R. Benno Jacob that 'the stones on his heart are Aaron's silent prayer to God on behalf of his entire people,' and it is true that prayer is identified with the heart. But the text actually seems to call the breastplate the "breastplate of decision." or just "decision-maker." It seems to represent the "weight" of decision-making which Aaron the High Priest as leader of his people must bear. The weight of decision-making is indeed a heavy burden for the leader of his people. It is not clear from the text how the Urim veTumim in the breastplate is supposed to work, but from Numbers 27:21 it seems that it is supposed to function as a kind of oracle. And the fact that it is most explained there with regard to the appointment of Joshua as Moses' successor, saying that "by [the Urim veThummim] they shall go out and come in" seems to indicate that it was used as part of the process for making the weightiest decision of all which a leader has to make: the decision whether to lead his people into war. Perhaps this is why it is placed in what seems to be shaped like a shield or a piece of armor over the High Priest's heart. Of course, a measure of blessing is very much implied. For indeed, no one would go to war based upon some configuration of stones or lots alone, but rather the very step of seeking to consult the oracle would only have been taken when realities dictated that warfare ought to be waged. Therefore a consultation of the oracle would largely be a seeking of God's blessing for a predetermined venture; perhaps a positive omen and reassurance from God that it might be undertaken successfully.

Today more than ever we are aware of how heavy this decision as whether or not to wage war weighs upon leaders' hearts. The costs of warfare are great for any polity to bear, and the outcomes are never definitively known. On this Shabbat Zakhor we recall that battle even against Amalek, against the evilest adversary, is not always justified nor can its success be taken for granted. Israel's worst rout in defeat was against Amalek, a war which was clearly justifiable, because "God was not in their midst." Only when Moses' hands were constantly raised was God's blessing of success in battle upon them. Because of the tremendous risks which warfare entails, many societies have mechanisms which justifiably are geared to limit a leader's ability to lead his people into war. Final decisions, however, often have to be made in secret, in the chambers of the Tabernacle, rather than through consultations in councils of the elders. Hence Joshua, though he is a prophet himself, seems to be told that before going to war he must seek the positive and weighty judgment of the Oracle of the High Priest, someone known for bearing the responsibility for the welfare of his people heavily upon his heart, someone not likely to let such decisions be taken lightly. If the weighty breastplate of the High Priest concurs that the heavy burden of warfare is worthy of being undertaken, only then may the commander lead the troops.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue Shabbat Tetsavveh-Zakhor

February 27-28, 2026 | 11 Adar, 5786

SCHEDULE

Hertz: Parasha: 339 Zakhor: 856 Haftarah: 995
Kaplan: Parasha: 414 Zakhor: 988 Haftarah: 1274

Candle Lighting | 5:27 pm

Evening Services | 5:30 pm | Main Sanctuary

Friday Night Lights will return next week.

Zemirot | 8:10 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

Kiddush | following services

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 4:40 pm | Rev. Z. Edinger

Teen Shiur will not meet this week.

Evening Services | 5:25 pm

Habdala | 6:18 pm

Shabbat Zakhor/Mi Khamokha is the Sabbath preceding Purim. Judah HaLevy's poem, "Mi Khamokha" is read on Shabbat morning at 9:00 am, and Debarim 25:17-19, beginning "Zakhor - Remember [Amalek]," is added to the regular Parasha reading. Haman was presumed a descendant of the tribe of Amalek, the first "annihilators" of Israel.

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am

Wednesday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evenings:

Sunday: 5:40 pm

Wednesday-Thursday (Arbit only): 6:30 pm

See inside for the Purim schedule.

PURIM 5786

This Monday, March 2-Tuesday, March 3

Fast of Esther/Purim Eve – Monday, March 2

Dawn (Fast Begins) | 5:20 am
Morning Service (Shahrit) | 7:05 am
Minha (men wear tefillin) | 5:30 pm
Arbit | 6:00 pm

Youth Purim Palooza | Fidanque Youth Room | dropoff at 6:00 pm

Reading of Megillah | 6:10 pm
End of Fast | 6:09 pm
Community Dinner | following Megillah
Late Reading of Megillah | 8:00 pm

Purim Day – Tuesday, March 3

Shahrit | 7:30 am
Morning Reading of Megillah | 8:00 am
Women's Megillah Reading | 8:00 am
Community Breakfast | following Megillah
Late Morning Reading of Megillah | 11:00 am
Minha & Arbit Services | 5:30 pm

Faith for Food – On Purim!

Masbia UWS Food Annex at Shearith Israel

Purim Day, Tuesday, March 3 | 12:30 pm-2:00 pm Paved Paradise
Youth and young at heart - come in costume & help out!

This Purim, we have a special opportunity for our youth and young at heart. Because Purim is on a Tuesday - the day of the week that our Faith For Food partners at Masbia distribute food on Paved Paradise - Masbia is seeking volunteers to come in costume and help out. We expect some media coverage, which is so helpful to this effort and Masbia's broader hunger alleviation efforts. So if you or your kids are available on Purim afternoon, come in your Purim regalia and have fun doing a mitzvah!

THIS SUNDAY

Register at shearithisrael.org

Youth Hamentaschen Bake-Off

Sunday, March 1 | 3:00 pm | with Dalya & Jake

All ages welcome. Sign up or sponsor at shearithisrael.org/purim5786.

AUTHOR EVENT: Naomi Kehati Bronner

in conversation with Baruch-Lev Kelman

Author of *On the Wings of Eagles: From Yemen to Zion - A Family Memoir*

Featuring a reading, Q&A with the author, and book signing

Sun, March 1 | Doors open 3:45 pm | Event begins 4 pm

KIDS KORNER

To win a raffle ticket at kiddush, find Dalya & Jake with the answer to this riddle:

*With breastplate shining on his chest,
And holy garments, richly dressed,
He lights the lamps and brings the offering then—
Who serves in the Mishkan?*

Purim Palooza!

Purim night, Monday, March 2 | 6:00 pm, during Megillah reading

Crafts, prizes, Purim story, and more! Come dressed in your best costume for a Purim Costume Contest! Sign up or sponsor at shearithisrael.org/purim5786.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Lu Steinberg & Michael Schuldner**, upon the birth of a granddaughter, born to their children, Ilana & Daniel Ross.

Condolences to **Amb. David (Caroline) Adelman**, upon the passing of David's father, Nelson Adelman.

Congratulations to **Josh Kramer** on his important and timely article, "Jewish New Yorkers Are Changing How They Live - That Should Alarm All of Us" that was published in the February 19 edition of AMNY. You can read it on our website at shearithisrael.org/press.

Baruch-Lev Kelman will be spending this Shabbat at Touro Synagogue with our friends at Congregation Ahavath Israel. He will be giving these two talks:

"Portable Judaism: The Tabernacle and the Nomadic Ideal"

which will focus on the Torah portion and its descriptions of the Tabernacle's vessels,
and

"Effortless Torah U'madda—Lessons from the Italian Experience"
on his research into modern Italian Jewish history.