

## The stones shall be according to the names of Bnei Yisrael, twelve according to their names. (28:21)

The *Choshen Mishpat* was the Breastplate that the *Kohen Gadol* wore on his chest. It was a special addition to his “wardrobe”, in that the front of it contained twelve precious stones, each engraved with the name of a different *Shevet*, Tribe. It is most noteworthy that the stones were engraved with the names of the “children,” rather than that of the “forefathers,” the *Avos*, Patriarchs. Indeed, the *Kedushas Levi* wonders why the names of the *shevatim* are engraved, as opposed to the names of the *Avos*, in whose merit we always pray and seek salvation and atonement.

Actually, the *Choshen Mishpat* did contain the names of the *Avos*. The *Choshen Mishpat* provided a vital service, in that it was a medium through which Hashem would communicate with *Klal Yisrael* through the *Kohen Gadol*, who was the only one who could decipher the message. When an urgent question facing the nation was presented to the *Choshen Mishpat*, the answer would come via the illumination of the necessary letters which would spell out the answer. The answer was understood by the *Kohen Gadol*, who knew how to “read” the letters. In order for this mode of communication to work, it was necessary that the *Choshen* contained all the letters of the alphabet. None of the names of the *shevatim* contains certain letters: *kuf*, *tzaddik*, *ches*, *tes*. To resolve this problem, the names of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, our *Avos*, were also engraved on the *Choshen*, as well as the words *Shivtei Yeshurun*. Thus, all of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet were included. Each stone contained six letters; all were equal in number. Nonetheless, while the names of the *Avos* were also engraved, it was only to supplement the names of the *shevatim*, in whose merit the *Choshen* functioned. We return to our original query: Why choose the merit of the children instead of the fathers?

The *Kedushas Levi* says that Aharon *HaKohen*, *Klal Yisrael*'s first designated *Kohen Gadol*, had the distinction of being the first to wear the *Choshen* over his chest. This is attributed to a *pasuk* (*Devarim* 18:5), which teaches, “For him has Hashem chosen from among all your tribes, to stand and minister in the Name of Hashem, him and his sons, all of the days.” The *Kohanim* were selected from among *Klal Yisrael* for the express purpose of ministering before Hashem. As *Kohen Gadol* and thus Patriarch of his large family of *Kohanim*, Aharon was selected as *Kohen Gadol*. (There are other reasons, but, for our purposes, we will focus on this reason.)

As a result of the selection of Aharon to be the progenitor of the family of *Kohanim*, the other tribes might feel that Hashem has greater love for the *Kohanim* than He does for the rest of the Jewish nation. To countervail this erroneous assumption, the name of each of the *shevatim* was engraved on the *Choshen*. All were included – each was equal – no preference of one over the other. No one has preferential treatments no one has an exclusive on Hashem's love. We are all the same before Him. The *Kohanim* were merely the intermediaries, the go-betweens, between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*. The *Kohanim*'s positions and support came from the people whose trust

they must constantly earn. This is symbolized by the engraved names of the *shevatim* on the *Choshen*.

In *Messages from Rav Pam*, Rabbi Sholom Smith quotes the *Rosh Yeshivah*, *zl*, deriving from this concept that regardless of a Jew's station in life, background, family pedigree, financial portfolio – every Jew is beloved by Hashem. We are all equal. No Jew should feel inadequate, worthless, before His Creator. Nor should he think that Hashem does not take an active interest in his existence and achievements.

How sad it is that so many people judge themselves through the eyes of others. If I am not prominent enough to be honored by an organization, or if my name is unworthy of a spread in the paper; if I lack the funds to garner my worthiness, or if my family name does not ring a bell in anyone's mind – this is not a reason for me to devalue myself. One's value is not determined by the false and shameful criteria established by contemporary society and its enablers. Perhaps the following analogy will serve as a means for buttressing the self-esteem of those who are victims of society's disingenuousness.

A well-known speaker commenced his seminar by holding up a twenty - dollar bill. To the audience of two hundred, he asked, "Who would like this twenty - dollar bill?" Hands began to rise throughout the room. "I am going to give this twenty dollar bill to one of you, but first, let me do this."

He proceeded to crumple up the bill and then asked, "Who still wants it?" Still the hands were up in the air. "Well," he mused, "what if I do this?" He dropped the bill to the floor, stepped on it in such a manner that he seemed to grind it into the floor. He picked it up – all crumpled and filthy and asked, "Now, who still wants the bill?" The hands that had originally been raised continued to remain in their prone position. The condition of the bill did not affect their willingness to make an easy "twenty."

"My friends, you have all learned a valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the bill, you still wanted it, because its value did not diminish. It was still worth twenty dollars. Many times in the course of our lives we are dropped, crumpled and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and by the various adverse circumstances that come our way. There are times when we feel worthless, but we must remember that regardless, of what has happened or what will happen, we never lose our value in Hashem's eyes.

To Hashem, crumpled or finely creased, dirty or clean, we still remain priceless to Him. The value of our lives is not determined by who we are or what we do, but by Whose we are! We belong to Hashem. This is the source of our value.