

TZAV (LEVITICUS 6:1-8:36)

The Breastbone's Connected to the ...

2005 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

(I had hoped to have a light-hearted, up-beat message, consistent with the Purim theme. However, like everyone else, I am subject to whatever is going on in the world. It is good, though, to keep in mind that Purim is the season of "Turn-Around" (see Esther, 9:22) where events appearing one way find themselves being reversed. It is, after all, G-d, not we, Who has the final say in determining world events.)

We recently discussed the "Urim and Tumim" , the piece of parchment inscribed with G-d's Name, that was inserted into the High Priest's Breastplate. This parchment caused the stones of the breastplate to light up, and to prophetically inspire the High Priest to know G-d's will.

This week we read of Aaron's installation as High Priest. The Torah describes, step-by-step, how Moses dressed his older brother in his priestly vestments:

He dressed him with the tunic, belted him with the sash, put the robe on him, and placed the Ephod (a type of apron) over it...He placed the Breastplate on him and placed the Urim and Tumim into the Breastplate. (Leviticus, 8:7-8)

My Rebbe, Rabbi David Feinstein, Shlit"a, points out that Moses did it the hard way. It would have been much easier to place the parchment into the Breastplate before putting it on Aaron's chest. (After all, the parchment was inserted into a fold BEHIND the breastplate. The Breastplate was to be permanently attached to the Ephod -- Apron. The fold would certainly be more accessible before the Breastplate was attached to Aaron's apron.)

Rabbi Feinstein answers that the Breastplate was known as the *Choshen HaMishpat* – Breastplate of Justice. The Ephod symbolized service to G-d. The symbol of service to G-d had to be fastened to the symbol of justice in order to demonstrate that true and fair justice can only come through commitment to G-d's will.

Only once that attachment was made was the breastplate worthy of housing G-d's holy Name. Judgment that does not yield to G-d's will is not judgment at all. Rather, such decisions will be based upon personal bias and political agendas.

Could that, perhaps be the reason that society has to stand by, helplessly watching the courts help a Florida man murder his wife?

Is this what has led the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals to decide that Terri Schiavo's parents have "failed to demonstrate a substantial case on the merits of any of their claims"? Is this truly the result of the fact that the court has been "...called upon to make a collective, objective decision concerning a question of law"?

Could there be anything more G-dless than using the law to justify starving a defenseless woman to death? The Schiavo case is not about whether it is appropriate to perform heroic measures to save a dying person. It is not about whether we should passively allow nature to take its course in the case of (supposedly) incurable disease. Such situations are matters of debate among the greatest minds in the Torah world. Such cases are extremely complex, and this humble writer would be doing a great disservice by even offering an opinion in such difficult situations.

This case is simply a question of whether there is any justification in depriving a patient of the food and water that has been keeping her alive. Is there even the slightest G-dliness in the thought processes of "judges" who decide which lives are worthwhile?

Haman told the king that he wanted to get rid of a nation for whom "*... it is not worthwhile for the king to allow them to stay alive...*" (Esther, 3:3) Mengele chose who went to the left and who went to the right based upon whose life was of value (to him). Florida and Federal courts seem to have found ample precedent for deciding who gets to live and who doesn't.

May G-d have mercy on us all...

Have a great Shabbos.

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