**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT TETZAVEH**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

Among the articles worn by the *kohen gadol*, as discussed in Parashat Tetzaveh (28:30), was the *Urim Ve-tumim*. While there is some difference of opinion as to what precisely this was, all agree that it was a kind of oracle that the *kohen gadol* would use when questions of great import arose. The *Urim Ve-tumim* contained a certain text, and the response to the *kohen*’s query would come through the protrusion of the letters that spelled the answer. The Gemara in Masekhet Yoma (73b) cites the view of Rabbi Yochanan that the letters would protrude from the *Urim Ve-tumim*, and the *kohen* would then assemble the letters in his mind to determine the answer. Reish Lakish, by contrast, maintained that the letters would protrude and then assemble in the proper sequence.

A number of *Acharonim* addressed the question of whether the *kohen gadol* was permitted to consult with the *Urim Ve-tumim* on Shabbat, or if this was forbidden, as it resulted in “writing.” This question was first addressed by Rav Yitzchak Binyamin Zev of Landsberg, in his [*Nachalat Binyamin*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=6083&st=&pgnum=265&hilite=), where he proposes that this issue would seemingly depend on the debate between Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish. According to Rabbi Yochanan, the *kohen gadol*’s question did not result in any actual writing, as the letters simply protruded from the text of the *Urim Ve-tumim*. According to Reish Lakish, however, the *kohen gadol*’s query had the effect of forming words, which would, seemingly, constitute “writing” with respect to the laws of Shabbat.

The *Nachalat Binyamin* suggests drawing proof that the *Urim Ve-tumim* was used on Shabbat from the story of David’s visit to the city of Nov, which is told in Sefer Shemuel I (21). The Gemara in Masekhet Menachot (95b) cites one view that this visit occurred on Shabbat, and *Targum Yonatan* there in Sefer Shemuel I (21:10) comments that David had Achimelekh, the *kohen gadol*, who lived in Nov, consult the *Urim Ve-tumim* on his behalf at this time. This would seemingly indicate the consulting the *Urim Ve-tumim* was permissible on Shabbat. However, the *Nachalat Binyamin* refutes this proof, noting that as David was fleeing from Shaul who sought to kill him, his situation was unique, and he likely needed a response from the *Urim Ve-tumim* for a matter of dire importance. The use of the *Urim Ve-tumim* on this occasion thus does not necessarily prove that it was permissible on Shabbat, and it remains likely that according to Reish Lakish’s view, the *kohen gadol* was not allowed to consult the *Urim Ve-tumim* on Shabbat.

It should be noted that the Rambam, in his description of the procedure for consulting the *Urim Ve-tumim* (*Hilkhot Kelei Ha-mikdash* 10:11), writes that the *kohen gadol* would see the response in a prophetic vision. In his view, no physical change occurred in the *Urim Ve-tumim*, as the process occurred through a form of prophecy. According to this opinion, of course, there is no question whatsoever that consulting the *Urim Ve-tumim* was permissible on Shabbat. (This point is made by Rav Mordechai Eliezer Lebovics, in his [*Darkhei Ezri* commentary to Masekhet Yoma](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=50255&st=&pgnum=453)*.*)

Sunday

Yesterday, we noted the question addressed by several *Acharonim* as to whether it was permissible for the *kohen gadol* to consult the *Urim Ve-tumim* on Shabbat. Seemingly, as noted by the [*Nachalat Binyamin*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=6083&st=&pgnum=265&hilite=), this would hinge on the debate between Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish (Yoma 73b) as to how precisely the *Urim Ve-tumim* responded to the *kohen gadol*’s queries. According to Rabbi Yochanan, the letters that spelled the answer would simply protrude from the text, which would not seem to constitute a halakhic act of writing. According to Reish Lakish, however, the letters would protrude and then assemble into words, and thus the process of consulting the *Urim Ve-tumim* could, potentially, constitute an act of Shabbat desecration, as the *kohen gadol* causes words to be written by posing his query.

A particularly interesting approach to this question is taken by Rav Chaim Yehuda Leib Litvin, in a responsum he wrote about the use of a telephone on Shabbat, which appears in his [*Sha’arei Dei’a* (194)](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=9206&st=&pgnum=111). In a parenthetical note inserted amidst his discussion, Rav Litvin suggests associating this debate between Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish with a more famous debate between these two sages concerning liability for fire damage. In Masekhet Bava Kama (22-23), the Gemara cites these *Amora’im* as debating the question surrounding the nature of liability for damages caused by a fire that one ignited in his property and then spread to a neighboring property. Rabbi Yochanan took the position of “*eisho mishum chitzav*,” which means that we view the path of the fire just as we would the flight of an arrow that one shoots, such that the individual is considered as having caused the damage through his actions, by starting the fire. The destruction wrought by the fire is directly attributed to him, as he set the fire into motion and it spread and caused destruction, just as a stone which one throws causes damage in flight. Reish Lakish disagrees, and maintains “*eisho mishum mamono*” – one is liable for damages caused by his fire because the fire is considered his property. Just as one bears liability for damages caused by his animals, since they belong to him, similarly, one bears liability for damages caused by his fire, which is viewed as his possession. A person who starts a fire is not viewed as having caused the resulting damage, but he is nevertheless accountable because the damage was caused by something he owns, and for which he must therefore assume responsibility. The practical difference between these two perspectives arises in a case where a dependable wall surrounded one’s property at the time he kindled the flame, but subsequently collapsed, thus allowing the fire to spread. According to Reish Lakish’s perspective, the one who kindled the fire bears liability, because his property caused damage. Rabbi Yochanan’s perspective, however, would exempt the person from liability, since in this instance, the damage cannot be attributed to him. The fire was not able to spread under the conditions that existed at the time it was kindled, and so we cannot attribute to the person the damages caused by the change of circumstances that occurred after the fire was lit.

These different perspectives, Rav Litvin suggests, can be applied to the question of whether the *kohen gadol* can be considered guilty of writing on Shabbos by speaking to the *Urim Ve-tumim*. According to Rabbi Yochanan, the consequences of a person’s actions are directly attributable to him, as long as conditions allowed for those consequences at the time he committed the act. Therefore, the “writing” of the *Urim Ve-tumim* is attributed to the *kohen gadol*, and so in principle, it should be forbidden to consult the *Urim Ve-tumim* on Shabbat. For this very reason, Rav Litvin writes, Rabbi Yochanan maintained that the letters of the *Urim Ve-tumim* merely protruded and did not actually form words, because otherwise, if they did actually form words, posing a question to the *Urim Ve-tumim* would be forbidden on Shabbos. According to Reish Lakish, however, the consequences of a person’s actions are not considered part of his actions, and thus the *kohen gadol* would not be considered to have caused the writing of the *Urim Ve-tumim*’s response. This is why Reish Lakish could maintain that the letters of the *Urim Ve-tumim* actually formed words in response to the *kohen gadol*’s query. As this result is not attributed to the *kohen gadol*’s speech, this would be permissible on Shabbat, whereas according to Rabbi Yochanan, such a result would constitute an act of Shabbat desecration.

Monday

In the last two editions of S.A.L.T. we noted the question addressed by a number of writers concerning the use of the *Urim Ve-tumim* on Shabbat. In response to queries posed by the *kohen gadol*, the letters of the *Urim Ve-tumim* would, according to one view in the Gemara (Yoma 73b), protrude and rearrange themselves to provide the answer. This could, conceivably, constitute an act of writing that would be forbidden on Shabbat.

The Klausenberger Rebbe addresses this issue in the context of a fascinating discussion regarding the general question surrounding the case of *melakha* (forbidden activity) performed on Shabbat through speech. In a responsum on the topic published in his [*Divrei Yatziv* (O.C. 105)](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=15079&st=&pgnum=208), the Rebbe asserts that indeed, a *melakha* caused through speech constitutes an act of Shabbat desecration. He cites the Gemara’s comment in Masekhet Shabbat (119b) that “*dibbur ke-ma’aseh*” – speech is akin to action. The Gemara draws proof from King David’s proclamation in Tehillim (33:6), “*Bi-dvar Hashem shamayim na’asu*” – “The heavens were made with the word of the Lord.” The verse here speaks of the heavens being “made” (“*na’asu*”), despite the fact that they were brought into existence through mere speech, the proclamations of the Almighty, indicating that producing something through speech is equivalent to producing something through action. The Gemara makes this comment amidst its discussion of the laws of Shabbat, and thus the Klausenberger Rebbe concludes that the Gemara here establishes a halakhic equation between speech and action with respect to the Shabbat prohibitions. The concept being conveyed, the Rebbe explains, is that as we refrain from creative activity on Shabbat in commemoration of the end of the process of the world’s creation, we must refrain even from creative activity performed verbally, because this is precisely the activity which God performed, as it were, during creation. Since our Shabbat commemorates God’s cessation of work, we must refrain from creative action performed through speech, as this is the very kind of “activity” that ceased on the first Shabbat after the six days of creation.

Amid this discussion, the Klausenberger Rebbe notes the question raised concerning the *Urim Ve-tumim*. He suggests that indeed, consulting the *Urim Ve-tumim* could constitute a Shabbat violation, since causing *melakha* through speech is forbidden no less than performing *melakha* through direct action.

The Rebbe applies this concept to explain the startling position of the *Semag* (cited by the *Beit Yosef*, O.C. 244) that the prohibition of *amira le-nokhri* – asking a gentile to perform *melakha* on one’s behalf on Shabbat – is forbidden by force of Torah law. Many later writers noted that the Talmud frequently speaks of *amira le-nokhri* as a prohibition enacted by *Chazal*, and they thus wondered how the *Semag* could make such statement. The Klausenberger Rebbe cites a theory advanced by some *Acharonim* that the *Semag* refers to the specific case of a gentile employed by a Jew, and in his view, instructing one’s non-Jewish employee to perform *melakha* constitutes a Torah violation. The Rebbe explains that in such a situation, where the Jew’s request is almost guaranteed to be fulfilled by the gentile employee, the Jew is considered as having produced *melakha* through his speech. As such, according to the view of the *Semag*, the Jewish employer has committed a Torah violation, as the Torah forbids performing *melakha* on Shabbat both through action and through speech.

Tuesday

As we’ve seen in our last several editions of S.A.L.T., the process of consulting the *Urim Ve-tumim* resulted (at least according to one view in the Gemara) in the formation of words from the letters on the *kohen gadol*’s breastplate, and the question thus arises as to whether this was permissible on Shabbat. Among the writers who discussed this question was Rav Aharon Levine, the “Reisha Rav,” who devotes a section to this subject in his famous work [*Ha-derash Ve-ha’iyun* (Parashat Pinchas, 59)](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=20949&st=&pgnum=186).

Among the considerations that Rav Levine raises is the fact that the “writing” performed through the *kohen gadol*’s query was only temporary, for soon after the *kohen* saw the response, the letters returned to their original places. As Rav Levine cites from the *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 340:5), impermanent writing does not constitute a forbidden act of writing on Shabbat, and thus, seemingly, consulting the *Urim Ve-tumim* should be permissible on Shabbat.

However, Rav Levine draws our attention to two sources which establish that even temporary results are formally considered permanent when they are brought about by the word of God. The Talmud Yerushalmi (12:1) comments that the Torah prohibition of *boneh* (constructing) is modeled after the placement of the wooden planks of the *Mishkan* in their sockets when the *Mishkan* was constructed. Although this construction was only temporary, as the *Mishkan* was dismantled each time *Benei Yisrael* needed to travel, the prohibition of *boneh* applies only to building permanent structures. The reason, the Yerushalmi explains, is because *Benei Yisrael*’s journeys and encampments were all determined by the divine command, and, as such, they were halakhically considered “permanent.” The Gemara in Masekhet Eiruvin (55b) makes a similar point concerning the prohibition of *techum Shabbat*, which forbids walking beyond two thousand *amot* outside the boundary of one’s city on Shabbat. *Halakha* permits walking within the city limits, even vast distances, but only if the city is permanent, and not a temporary encampment. Nevertheless, *Benei Yisrael* were permitted to walk on Shabbat throughout their temporary camp in the wilderness, and the Gemara explains that since they journeyed based upon the divine command, their encampments were considered permanent.

Rav Levine thus raises the question of whether we might perhaps consider the “writing” of the *Urim Ve-tumim* permanent, by virtue of the fact that it was done by the word of God. The basis for this contention, Rav Levine notes, is Rashi’s comments in explaining the aforementioned passage in Masekhet Eiruvin. Rashi explains that since *Benei Yisrael* encamped by the word of God, their encampment was considered “important” enough to have the status of a permanent encampment. Possibly, Rav Levine writes, we can consider even temporary writing halakhically “permanent” if it has unique importance. If so, then it is conceivable that the writing produced by the *kohen gadol*’s question posed to the *Urim Ve-tumim* can be considered permanent with respect to the Shabbat prohibition of writing, and thus be forbidden.

Rav Levine notes, however, that the commentaries to the Talmud Yerushalmi offer a different explanation for why *Benei Yisrael*’s encampment was considered permanent. Namely, when *Benei Yisrael* encamped, they did not know whether they would be remaining in that location for only a brief period, or for several years. Their encampment was “permanent” in the sense that they anticipated the likelihood that God would have them remain encamped for an extended period. If so, then in the case of the *Urim Ve-tumim*, which responded to the *kohen gadol*’s query by forming words that immediately then disappeared, this would not be considered permanent writing that would be forbidden on Shabbat.

Wednesday

Among the most famous and intriguing sources regarding the nature of Purim is found, ironically enough, in the *Zohar*, which draws a comparison between Purim and Yom Kippur. The *Zohar* comments that the term “Yom Kippurim,” with which the Torah refers to Yom Kippur, should be read as, “Yom Ke-Purim” – “the day which is like Purim.” Somehow, these two occasions – Purim and Yom Kippur – are deemed comparable to one another, despite the fact that the former is characterized by festivity and merriment, and the second by somber fasting, introspection and prayer.

One of the explanations given for this surprising comparison is offered by Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapiro of Piaseczno, in his *Eish Kodesh* (Purim, 5700). He explains that just as one must fast and repent on Yom Kippur even when he is not driven to on his own, similarly, one must feast and rejoice on Purim even when he does not naturally feel moved to celebrate. These two opposite occasions are compared to one another because both require us to conduct ourselves in a certain manner even if our mood at that time is entirely inconsonant with that mode of conduct.

Ideally, when Yom Kippur arrives, we are to sense the awe of judgment and recognize the urgent need to repent. However, there are many who, for one reason or another, do not experience fear, and approach Yom Kippur with indifference and complacency, feeling no need to repent or ask for forgiveness. But *Halakha* requires us to confess our sins, fast, introspect and pray on Yom Kippur, even if we fail to appreciate the significance of the pending judgment, and even if we feel perfectly content with who we are. The annual Yom Kippur experience forces us into a mindset of serious reflection about ourselves and our conduct, imposing upon us a process of repentance even if we are not naturally inclined to undergo this process. Even if we feel confident and secure with who we are, the obligation of Yom Kippur forces us to carefully examine ourselves and to search until we find flaws to correct and improvements to make.

The Rebbe of Piaseczno is teaching us that the same is true of Purim, only in the reverse. There are times when we feel incapable of rejoicing, of recognizing, appreciating and celebrating the good in our lives and in the world. Whether it’s because of the rigors of day-to-day life and the pressures and problems it presents, or due to other people’s suffering that we observe, or the tragic events of which we hear, we can occasionally feel overwhelmed and distraught, and despair of true, pure joy. Just as Yom Kippur forces us to find the flaws in our characters, Purim forces us to find the beauty and joy in our lives and in the world. Even if we feel disinclined to rejoice and experience happiness, when Purim arrives we are required to find a reason and a way to feel joyous, jovial and cheerful.

This insight of the Rebbe of Piaseczno sheds new light on the famous *halakha*, “A person is obligated to become inebriated on Purim until he cannot distinguish between ‘cursed is Haman’ and ‘blessed is Mordekhai’” (Megila 7b). Much has been said and written about this startling Talmudic passage, but in light of what we have seen, we might explain that Purim obligates us to ignore the “Haman” phenomena in our lives and in the world. On Purim, we must feel pure, genuine joy despite the “curses” that we witness and we experience, despite the adversity that abounds. The purpose of drinking on Purim is not to lose our rational faculties, and most certainly not to compromise our dignity, but to help us forget, for one day, the difficulties and challenges that we face. We are forced to rejoice over the “blessings” in our lives and not worry at all about the “curses,” and this objective underlies the requirement to drink.

Just as Yom Kippur serves as a safeguard against complacency, forcing us to identify flaws in our characters to address, Purim serves as a safeguard against negativity, cynicism and despair, forcing us to identify the goodness in the world for which we can and must feel grateful and joyous.

Thursday

Rashi, commenting to the final verse of Parashat Beshalach, writes, “The Almighty swore that His Name is not complete and His throne is not complete until the name of Amalek is entirely eradicated.” The source of Rashi’s remark is the *Midrash Tanchuma* (Parashat Ki-Teitzei, 11), which formulates this concept a bit differently, writing that God’s Name and throne are incomplete until “*zar’o shel Amalek*” – Amalek’s offspring – is entirely eradicated. The phrase “*zar’o shel Amalek*” also appears earlier in this passage in the *Midrash Tanchuma*, where it lists the obligation “to annihilate the offspring of Amalek” among the three *mitzvot* cast upon *Am Yisrael* when they entered the Land of Israel. This formulation is also found in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 20b) and in the Rambam’s *Hilkhot Melakhim* (1:1).

Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapiro of Piaseczno, in his [*Eish Kodesh* (p. 169)](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=3892&st=&pgnum=52), suggests that the phrase “*zar’o shel Amalek*” refers to more than the biological heirs of the Biblical nation of Amalek. He writes that this phrase refers to the practical effects of “Amalek,” of the pressure and oppression we have endured under foreign rule. “Amalek,” in its various manifestations, has often caused us to lower our religious standards and placed us in situations where we had no choice but to suspend Torah laws. Our nation has frequently been forced, under duress, to make significant compromises in Torah standards, compromises which some may consider acceptable even after the pressure subsides. The Rebbe of Piaseczno warned that the reign of Amalek produces “offspring,” spiritual consequences, in the form of a watering down of Torah life, and the dilution of our religious ambitions. We are commanded to eradicate this “offspring,” all vestiges of laxity and indifference that could result from the pressure applied by our adversaries.

The Gemara in Masekhet Shabbat (88a) tells that following the Purim miracle, the Jews of the time formally reaffirmed their acceptance of the Torah which they had declared at Sinai (“*Hadar kibluha bi-ymei Achashveirosh*”). Significantly, this reaffirmation was made in circumstances that could hardly be more different from those that *Benei Yisrael* experienced at Sinai, when the Torah was first given. At Sinai, they lived a supernatural existence, beholding God’s miracles each day, and living under the guidance and leadership of Moshe, the greatest prophet who ever lived. In the days of Mordekhai and Ester, the Jews announced their acceptance of the Torah while living and integrating in the decadent Persian society. Rather than eating the heavenly manna with Moshe Rabbenu, they ate and drank in large feasts with their Persian neighbors. Their reaffirmation of *kabbalat ha-Torah* (acceptance of the Torah) under those circumstances expressed their commitment to strive, to whatever extent possible, for the standards of Sinai even while living in Persia. They proclaimed that although they are submerged in a foreign culture, and obviously could not rise to the level of their ancestors who beheld the Revelation at Sinai, they would make an effort to reinvigorate their religious lives and aspire to more. Rather than complacently accept the low standards and watered-down Jewish lives to which they had grown accustomed in exile, they would now reach for the lofty standards of Sinai, and work to draw closer to the ideal standards of Torah observance.

One of the lessons of Purim is to eradicate the “offspring” of Amalek, of the tendency to lower standards and to accept unnecessary and unjustified compromises in our *avodat Hashem*. While we cannot realistically expect to live on the level of Sinai, we must nevertheless not allow the realities of “Amalek,” of undesirable circumstances, to dilute our ambition and discourage us from rigorously pursuing higher standards of study and observance.

Friday

*Chazal* characterize Amalek as an arrogant, cynical nation. The *Midrash Tanchuma*, as cited by Rashi (Devarim 25:18), compares Amalek’s unprovoked attacked on *Benei Yisrael* to a person who jumps into a tub of scalding hot water in order to cool it off. While nobody else dared to enter the water, this individual was prepared to suffer some burns in order to make the tub appear less intimidating. Similarly, the Midrash explains, the nations of the world stood in awe of *Benei Yisrael* after the miracles of the Exodus (Shemot 15:14-16), and Amalek set out to assuage their fears and assure them that *Benei Yisrael* were vulnerable. As everyone else marveled at *Benei Yisrael*’s emergence onto the world stage, Amalek looked on cynically, with arrogant disdain, stubbornly refusing to acknowledge that this nation was anything special.

Rav Aryeh Tzvi Frommer, in his [*Eretz Tzvi – Moadim*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=20149&st=&pgnum=220), points to Amalek’s quality of arrogance as the reason why we prepare for the Purim celebration through the reading of *Zakhor* on the preceding Shabbat. This reading presents the command to constantly remember Amalek’s assault on our ancestors and the obligation to eradicate that nation. Symbolically, Rav Frommer suggests, this command represents the need to abolish our own arrogance and conceit, our natural tendency to look down on others. This annihilation of our inner “Amalek” is a necessary prerequisite to the Purim festivity, which, to a large extent, revolves around the theme of joyous camaraderie and friendship. When the *Megilla* (9:16) speaks of the Jews in Persia “assembling” to defend themselves (“*nikhalu ve-amod al nafsham*”), Rav Frommer writes, this refers to the emotional bonds of friendship that were strengthened before the Jews went out to wage war against their foes. In commemoration of this “assembly,” we are required to send one another gifts, an obligation famously explained by the *Manot Ha-levi* (commentary to the *Megilla* by Rav Shlomo Alkabetz) as intended to enhance the feelings of friendship and camaraderie among Jews. However, no gift will succeed in forging strong bonds of friendship when one of the parties is plagued by arrogance and condescension. As long as we look down on other people with feelings of pride and superiority, the desired goal of “*nikhalu*,” of joyous fraternity among Jews, will never be realized. And thus Purim is preceded by Shabbat Zakhor, when we read of the command to abolish the arrogance and cynicism of Amalek from our minds and our hearts.

We might add that this theme perhaps helps explain the Gemara’s famous ruling in Masekhet Megilla (7b), “A person is obligated to become inebriated on Purim until he cannot distinguish between ‘cursed is Haman’ and ‘blessed is Mordekhai’.” The idea underlying this statement, perhaps, is that Purim is the time to work on avoiding judgment, to put an end to the all-too-common tendency to evaluate and scrutinize other people. The Purim festivity is intended, at least in part, to lead us to the point where we love and respect all our fellow Jews, without discriminating between “cursed is Haman” and “blessed is Mordekhai,” without any judgment or scrutiny. The humor, levity and inebriation create an atmosphere that enables us to fully enjoy the company of other people, and pay no attention to what we might like or dislike about them. On Purim, as we celebrate the miraculous, eternal survival of the Jewish People, we are to look fondly and lovingly upon each and every member of our nation, and to that end we are commanded to feast and rejoice to the point where we make no distinctions between “Haman” and “Mordekhai,” and truly respect, appreciate and cherish all our fellow Jews for who they are, without analyzing or dissecting their conduct or character in any way.

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