

Tetzaveh: Exodus 28:1-30 *Proto-Ouija Board?*

Rashi

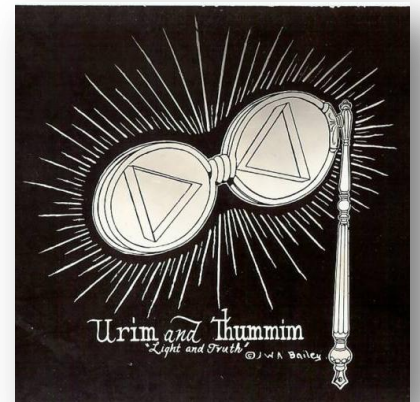
The Urim and the Thummim. This was an inscribed Tetragrammaton, which would be put within the folds of the breastpiece. By means of it the breastpiece would bring its words to light, ur, and fulfill them, thammim. In the Second Temple they still had a breastpiece—for it would be impossible for a High Priest not to have a complete set of priestly garments—but that Name was not inside it. It was because of this inscription that it was called "a breastpiece of judgment" (v. 15), as we see from Num. 27:21, "He shall present himself to Eleazar the priest, who shall on his behalf seek the judgment of the Urim before the LORD."

Ramban

Inside the breastpiece of decision you shall place the Urim and Thummim. Ibn Ezra decided to show off his wisdom with regard to the Urim and Thummim, going on at great length about how they were objects of silver and gold like those used by astrologers to divine what is in the thoughts of the one who is consulting them. But that is nonsense. They were, as Rashi explains, "an inscribed Tetragrammaton which would be put within the folds of the breastpiece." (This is why it had to be doubled.) The proof is that the Urim and Thummim are not mentioned among the things that had to be made by the artisans, they are never commanded to be made, and they are not mentioned when the making of the Tabernacle is described.

But Moses is not commanded to make them at all, merely to put the Urim and Thumrnim inside the breastpiece (which was done in Lev, 8:8). For they were not made by the artisans, and were not part of the contributions brought by the community, but were a mystery transmitted to Moses directly from the Almighty, and he wrote them in holiness. And they were made in heaven. They were holy Names, by whose power the letters on the Stones of the breastpiece could light up, for the priest who, was inquiring of them to read. For example, when the Israelites inquired, "Which of us shall be the first to go up against the Canaanites and attack them?" (Judges 1:1), the priest concentrated on those names that were the Urim - the "lights" - and saw the name Judah light up, along with the yud of Levi, the ayin of Simeon, the lamed of Levi, and the heh of Abraham (or perhaps the heh of Judah a second time). Now these letters could have been arranged in any number of ways to spell words. But there were other holy Names there, called

Thummim, through whose power the mind of the priest was "perfected," thammim, in the knowledge of how to interpret the letters. With the letters of the Urim still glowing before his eyes, he would turn his attention to the Thummim, and the correct interpretation—in this case, yehudah ya'aleh, "Judah shall go up"—would come into his mind. This was done on the level of the Holy Spirit, which is below that of prophecy but above that of the Bat Kol, or heavenly voice, which (as our Sages tell us) was used during the Second Temple period, once prophecy and the Urim and Thummim had ceased.



When the latter prophets died, that is, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, then the Holy Spirit came to an end in Israel. But even so, they made them hear through a Bat Kol. One time [Sages] gathered together in the upper room of the house of Guria in Jericho, and a Bat Kol came forth and said to them, "There is a man among you who is worthy to receive the Holy Spirit, but his generation is unworthy of such an honor." The Sages all set their eyes upon Hillel the elder. Sanhedrin 11a

Said Rab Avdimi of Haifa, "From the day on which the house of the sanctuary was destroyed, prophecy was taken away from prophets and given over to Sages." So are sages not also prophets? This is the sense of the statement: Even though it was taken from the prophets, it was not taken from sages.

Said Amemar, "And a sage is superior to a prophet: 'And a prophet has a heart of wisdom' (Psa. 90:12). Who is compared to whom? Lo, the lesser is compared to the greater."

Said Abbaye, "You may know that [sages retain the power of prophecy,] for if an eminent authority makes a statement, it may then be stated in the name of some other eminent authority [who can have gotten it only by prophecy]." Said Raba, "So what's the problem? Maybe both were born under the same star." Rather, said R. Ashi, "You may know that it is the case, because an eminent authority may say something, and then the same thing may be reported as a law revealed by God to Moses at Mount Sinai." But perhaps the sage is no better than a blind man groping about to a window? But doesn't the sage give a reason for what he says! Bava Batra 12a