

Parashat Pekudei Tribal Gemstones

My 'New' Engagement Ring

A couple of years ago the precious diamond in my engagement ring fell out of its setting. I don't know how it happened. One day I felt my ring scratching my finger in a strange way. Then I looked shocked at the gaping empty setting and began to panic. Although I turned the house upside down in my search, I never recovered the diamond. I don't even want to think about how much of a financial loss this was. Rather, I have worked on accepting it as a *kapara* – an atonement for my many misdoings. We all prefer to lose 'dead things' and keep our loved ones and our health. Yet, as the years passed, I never got used to the empty space on my finger where the engagement ring used to shine. For our 35th anniversary, *Rosh Chodesh Adar Alef*, my husband took me out to celebrate in town. We had brought the empty setting of the engagement ring with us, as my wish was to replace the sparkling diamond with a blue sapphire. It is not that I desire expensive jewelry. It is more the sentimental value of wanting to wear the ring that ties me to my husband, strengthening all the dimensions of our relationship. Jewelry holds energy and captures the essence of those who wear it. This is why a divorced woman must get rid of all jewelry gifts given by her X, in order to free herself from his energy and become open to a new and lasting relationship. Feeling the tug of my 'new' engagement ring on my finger, while separated from my husband by my annual North American tour, I experience love and longing toward him. There is something even more special about engagement than marriage. Engagement is about longing, yearning and looking forward to marital fulfillment. It is important to keep the energy of engagement in our marriages, especially when circumstances sometimes separate us temporarily.

The Precious Stones on Aharon's Heart

The reason I wanted to replace my diamond with a sapphire was not just because it would be less than a 10th of the cost. First of all, I love the deep, blue, mysterious color of sapphires – like the color of the sky at the beginning of night when the stars wake up. Moreover, the sapphire represents Torah, as the Tablets of the Ten Commandments were carved from sapphire (Rashi, *Shemot* 34:1). This stone corresponds to the tribe of Yissaschar, who represents Torah and wisdom (Malbim, *Yesha'yahu* 54:12). Aharon, the Kohen Gadol would wear a special square-shaped breastplate on his heart filled with twelve stones, each representing one of the twelve tribes of Israel. This garment is called the *choshen mishpat* in Hebrew, which means the "breastplate of judgment" because of the unique role that it played in helping to render fateful decisions. The breastplate consisted of four rows, each containing three, small, square stones in a setting of gold. The name of the corresponding tribe was engraved on each stone. Special *segulot* (spiritual properties) are ascribed to each of these stones. The healing properties of stones or crystals is widely known in the new age world. For example, it is known, to wear a rose quartz to attract love and use an onyx for protection. It may be less known that the source of the spiritual properties of various stones or crystals is found in the Torah commentaries on the stones of Aharon's breastplate.

The Stones Corresponding to each of the Tribes in Order of their Birth

This week's *parasha*, which summarizes all the materials used for the Tabernacle, and the garments of the Kohanim, repeats almost word for word the description of the breastplate first given in *Parashat Tetzaveh, Shemot 28:17-21*.

ספר שמות פרק לט

(י) וַיִּמְלְאוּ בו אַרְבַּעַה טוּרֵי אֶבֶן טוּר אֶדָם פְּטֹדָה וּבְרֻקַת הַטּוּר הָאֶחָד:

(יא) וְהַטּוּר הַשֵּׁנִי נִפְךָ סַפִּיר וַיְהִלֵּם:

(יב) וְהַטּוּר הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְשֵׁם שָׁבוּ וְאַחַלְמָה:

(יג) וְהַטּוּר הָרְבִיעִי תַרְשִׁישׁ שֹהֵם וַיִּשְׁפָּה מוֹסֶבֶת מְשֻׁבָּצֵת זָהָב בְּמִלְאֵתָם:

(יד) וְהָאֲבָנִים עַל שְׁמַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִנֵּה שְׁתֵּים עָשָׂרָה עַל שְׁמֹתָם פְּתוּחֵי חֹתָם אִישׁ עַל שְׁמוֹ לְשָׁנַיִם עֶשֶׂר שָׁבֹט:

“They set in it four rows of stones: a row of ruby, topaz, and emerald was the first row. The second row, a garnet, a sapphire, and a diamond. The third row, an opal, an agate, and an amethyst. The fourth row, a beryl (aquamarine), an onyx, and a jasper; they were enclosed in fittings of gold in their settings. The stones were according to the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names, like the engravings of a signet, every one according to his name, for the twelve tribes” (*Shemot 39:10-14*).

The Midrash teaches us about the stones and the flags of each tribe. Can you believe that the established practice of having individualized flags representing each country derives from the flags of the tribes? “Every tribe had a flag in the color of their stone, which was on Aharon’s heart. From them the nations learned to make flags with the individual colors for each tribe similar to the color of his stone” (*Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah 2:7*). Based on this Midrash, Rashi explains that the order of the stones are according to the order of their birth, ruby for Reuven, topaz for Shimon and likewise with all of them (Rashi, *Shemot 28:21*). A support for Rashi’s explanation is, “They called Leshem Dan after the name of Dan their father... (*Yehoshua 19:47*) because the name of Dan is written on the opal.” (Rashi, *Shoftim 18:27*). If the stones are assigned to tribes according to the order of the birth of the mothers, Leah, Bilha, Zilpa, Rachel, then we arrive at the name Dan for the opal (Chizkuni, *Shemot 28:21*).

The Twelve Foundational Root Stones

Whereas each crystal comes in many different colors, the midrash informs us that the particular colors of each tribes’ stone was reflected in their flag: “Reuven’s stone was ruby and his flag was red... Shimon’s stone was topaz, and his flag was green... Levi’s stone was emerald and his flag was colored one third white, one third black and one third red and a picture of the Urim and Tumim was on it. Yehuda’s stone was garnet and the color of his flag was like the sky with a picture of a lion. Yissaschar’s stone was sapphire, and the color of his flag was dark blue with a picture of the sun and the moon, as it states, “*From the sons of Yissaschar who know the times*” (I *Divrei Hayamim 12*). Zevulun’s stone was a diamond, and the color of his flag was white with a picture of a boat, as it states, “*Zevulun to the seashore*” (*Bereishit 49:13*). Dan’s stone was opal and the color of his flag was similar to the sapphire... Gad’s stone was an agate and the color of his flag was a mixture of black and white... Naftali’s stone was the amethyst and the color of his flag was similar to clear wine... Asher’s stone was aquamarine, and the color of his flag was similar to a precious stone that women decorate themselves with... Yosef’s stone was

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onyx, and the color of his flag was very black... Binyamin's stone was a jasper and the color of his flag was similar to all the colors of the 12 tribes..." (*Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah* 2:7). Rabbeinu Bachaya explains that according to natural science, there are exactly twelve main root stones, which are the sources and fathers of all other stones. "All other stones derive from these" (Rabbeinu Bachaya, *Shemot* 28:15). He continues to go into the healing properties of each of the twelve stones, which I have translated and summarized for you below. I have added general knowledge of the healing properties of each stone only when it coincides with Rabbeinu Bachaya's commentary.

1. Reuven's Fertility Stone

Reuven's stone was a Ruby – אֹדֶם/*Odem*, a very red, blood-colored stone, as its name testifies. When worn by a pregnant woman, the ruby prevents miscarriage. It is also known as the fertility stone. It is highly recommended for women who wish to become pregnant, especially when ground into powder and mixed with food and drink. It eases pregnancy and keeps the mother and fetus healthy. Many women with fertility problems finally became pregnant when wearing a ruby (best worn as a ring or bracelet). Even women who have been through unsuccessful medical fertility treatments, finally conceived by holding the Ruby during the treatment. The ruby is also beneficial for women in difficult labor.

2. Shimon's Cooling Stone

Shimon's stone was a Topaz – פִּטְדָּה/*pit'da*, a shiny green stone, the color of the pools of the ocean. The Topaz cools down the body from excessive heat. Therefore, this stone is found in Africa where it is very hot and the people are hot-blooded and need to be cooled down.

3. Levi's Wisdom Stone

Levi's stone was an Emerald – בְּרֶקֶת/*bareket*, a multicolored illuminating stone. It is the stone that Noach hung in the Ark for light. It was given to Levi because this tribe illuminates through the Torah. Among its properties, the topaz causes wisdom and illuminates the eyes, if used the same way the light of the candle is used. When ground up and mixed with food and drink it is very beneficial for engendering wisdom and opening the heart. It increases the ability of self-expression and strengthens the heart.

4. Yehuda's War-Victory Stone

Yehuda's stone was a Garnet – נוֹפֶּחַ/*nofech*, a glittering green stone, the color of leeks. It chases away enemies, makes them turn their backs, and thus causes victory in war. It strengthens self-confidence. The garnet is known as the stone of commitment because it strengthens determination and devotion to a cause or goal, to other people and to self-obligation. It relieves shoulder and back pains. In case of backache, it is recommended to paste a number of small stones on the painful area. For shoulder pain, wear it in a necklace.

5. Yissaschar's Illuminating, Pain-relieving Stone

Yissaschar's stone was a Sapphire – סַפִּיר/*sapir*, the color of *techelet* (sky-blue). The masters of Torah are known to be bound with the bundle of life under the throne of glory made from sapphire, as it states, "The appearance of the sapphire resembles the throne (*Yechezkiel* 1:26).

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This sky-blue color is not the color of arrogance like red or green. Rather, it is the color of humility- good for young as well as old people. The sapphire strengthens the light of the eyes. Therefore, it is good to pass it over the eyes. It also helps counteract pain and swelling any place in the body. Likewise, the Torah heals the entire body, as our sages said, "If his body hurts he should occupy himself with Torah" (*Iruvin* 54a). Kings wore the sapphire stone in order to protect them from jealousy and injury. The sapphire improves ones mood and relieves pressure. It increases intuition and creates balance, wisdom and stability. One who wears it will talk from within, with higher, inner wisdom.

6. Zevulun's Business Stone

Zevulun's stone was a Diamond – יָהָלוֹם/*yahalom*, white as silver, a sign of wealth. It was given to Zevulun, who was a merchant, as it causes success in business transactions. It also counteracts insomnia and brings about sleep.

7. Dan's Sensitivity Stone

Dan's stone was an Opal – לִישֵׁם/*leshem*. Rabbeinu Bachaya doesn't have much to say about this stone so I will bring general knowledge about it. It strengthens the awareness of feelings and intuition. However, if you are not sure of yourself or your judgment, the opal might increase this feeling and cause stress. For this reason, the opal is not recommended for young people who are generally more sensitive. Since the opal causes expression of inner feelings, it may cause physical or mental unease for those who repress their feelings. For those who are open and assertive, this stone will provide happiness, joy, perseverance and confidence. When a person is ill, the color of the opal may change.

8. Naftali's Driving Stone

Naftali's stone was a Turquoise (Agate) – שָׁבוֹ/*shavo*. This stone helps a person remain seated when riding (driving) and helps him succeed in driving all of his life. Since it connects him to his chariot, it was given to Naftali whose name means connection (*Bereishit* 30:8). A balancing stone, it is particularly suited for those who use logic more than intuition. It strengthens motoric abilities and aligns the body with the brain. It provides the sensation of courage and strength.

9. Gad's Courage Stone

Gad's stone was an Amethyst – אַחְלָמָה/*achlama*. It strengthens the heart and provides courage. Therefore, it is called *achlama* from the language of recovery and strength. It eases fears, provides a sense of courage, intuition and creativity. It may help those who do not sleep well and decrease nightmares.

10. Asher's Digestion Stone

Asher's stone was an Aquamarine, (Beryl) – תַּרְשִׁישׁ/*tarshis*, a turquoise sea colored stone. The aquamarine is beneficial for digestion, especially when ground up and mixed with food until it becomes a thick mixture. As it states, "From Asher, his bread is fat" (*Bereishit* 49:20). The aquamarine flows as water and therefore may help with the flow of life.

11. Yosef's Success Stone

Yosef's stone was a very black Onyx – שׁוֹהָם/*Shoham*. In Hebrew, this stone includes the letters that spell out the name of G-d, הַשֵּׁם/*Hashem*, because "Hashem was with Yosef, and he was a man of success, and He gave him grace in the eyes of the jail keeper" (*Bereishit* 39:2). The property of the onyx is to bring grace. It is beneficial for finding favor in the eyes of all the people we meet. It is good to wear an onyx in the royal house. It will bring success and cause your word to be heeded. The onyx balances male/female polarity, increases hormonal balance and self-control. It strengthens the ability to distinguish correctly and objectively and make intelligent decisions.

12. Binyamin's Self-Awareness Stone

Binyamin's stone was a Jasper – יַשְׁפֵּה/*yaspeh*, which may be red, black or green. The Jasper is good to stop bleeding and it was given to Binyamin because his heart changed to many nuances and he thought many thoughts regarding the sale of Yosef- whether to tell his father about it or not. In the end, he overcame his urge and didn't reveal the matter to his father. The name of this stone is contracted from two Hebrew words פֶּה שִׁי/*yesh peh* – there is a mouth. This alludes to Binyamin's virtue that although he had a mouth, he remained silent and didn't reveal the sale of Yosef. Jasper helps unite the subconscious with self-awareness. It affects the abdominal area and may relieve pain.

Channeling Hashem's Upper Power

"The stones need purity. If an impure person wears them, their power will be nullified or weakened. When the person purifies himself, the stone he wears will regain its original power. The reason for this is that the upper power that the stone draws from depends on the spiritual level. This power cleaves to purity but distances itself from impurity. It is proper to believe thus, for there is no single stone of these precious stones which do not draw from the Upper power. The same way it says about the herbs 'There is no herb below that doesn't have a spiritual constellation above' (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 10:6); (Rabbeinu Bachaya, *Shemot* 28:15). I found it very interesting that Torah commentaries agree that gemstones have healing properties. Thus, it is possible to be a Torah person and to use such stones for healing. However, when working with gemstones it is important to keep reminding ourselves that the stones have no powers or energy on their own. They only channel Hashem's healing power. Each stone attracts particular lights of healing from Above, similar to herbs that Hashem imbued with the power to channel Divine healing energy. Mazal tov! May we all merit to wear our jewelry in good health!