

The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

Parashat Hashavua
Yeshivat Har Etzion

PARASHAT VAYAKHEL-PEKUDEI

The Efod

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The *parashot* of *Vayakhel-Pekudei* describe the construction of the Mishkan, concerning which Bnei Yisrael were commanded in detail in the *parashot* of *Teruma-Tetzaveh*.

Parashat Vayakhel describes the construction of the actual Mishkan and its vessels, while *Pekudei* describes the fashioning of the priestly garments, and the establishment of the Mishkan.

What is the logic behind the order of the garments as addressed in the Torah?

The first garment mentioned in *Parashat Pekudei* is the *efod*:

“And from the blue and purple and scarlet they made the uniforms with which to serve in the holy place, and they fashioned the holy garments belonging to Aharon, as God had commanded Moshe.

And he made the *efod*...” (*Shemot* 39:1-2)

In our study of *Parashat Tetzaveh*, we noted that the breastplate (*choshen*) is the first garment mentioned in the command concerning the garments; this apparently reflects its importance.^{1[1]} However, in the detailed command concerning the fashioning of each garment, the breastplate does not appear first. Rather, the *efod* comes first, and the breastplate follows.

^{1[1]}Our *shiur* on *Parashat Tetzaveh* was devoted to the *choshen*. The following is a summary of that discussion: In the opening verse of the command concerning the priestly garments, the first garment to be mentioned is the breastplate. Like the Ark, which is mentioned first out of all the vessels of the Mishkan because of its centrality and importance, so the breastplate appears first out of all the priestly garments because of its importance. The Ark and the breastplate are both artifacts that express the special connection between God and Israel. The Ark bears the Tablets of the Covenant, inscribed with God’s word and His commands to Israel, while the breastplate bears the Ineffable Name of God, by means of which Bnei Yisrael may inquire of God and clarify His will. The Ark and the breastplate are the vessels that express the essence of the Mishkan – the concept of the Divine Presence abiding in Israel’s midst. Hence, the breastplate is the most important of the priestly garments. The breastplate is composed of two elements, each of which has its own important function: one is a display of the names of the tribes of Israel, meant to serve as a perpetual “reminder” of Israel before God and to show that the Kohen Gadol, in approaching the Holy of Holies, is the representative of all of Israel. The other important element is the *urim* and *tumim*, which facilitate the presentation of inquiries to God. God’s answer is transmitted specifically through the letters comprising the names of the tribes; this symbolizes the idea that Israel stands before God and turn to Him for guidance.

Why is this so? If the breastplate is indeed the most important of all the garments, why does it not appear here first? (In contrast, the detailed command concerning the Ark does come before all the other vessels of the Mishkan.)

Ibn Ezra, in his long commentary, explains as follows:

“The reason for the *efod* [being mentioned first] is that it is larger than the breastplate, and it must not move from the girdle.”

To Ibn Ezra’s view, the command to make the *efod* comes first not because it is more important than the breastplate, but simply because the breastplate is attached to the *efod*, and therefore it is necessary first to make the *efod* and only afterwards to make the breastplate and attach it. This is a logical enough explanation, but it is more appropriate as an explanation of the order in *Parashat Pekudei*, which describes order in which the garments were made.

In *Parashat Tetzaveh* we find the actual command. The order of the command does not necessarily need to correlate with the order of its execution. It seems more logical that the order here should reflect the respective level of importance of each item (as we find in relation to the Ark), rather than the merely technical matter of the order of creating them.

Another place where we find the *efod* and breastplate mentioned together is where the Torah describes the the precious stones required for the Mishkan:

“Shoham stones and stones to be inlaid in the *efod* and the breastplate.” (*Shemot* 25:7)

The exact same words appear again in *Shemot* 35:9, and again in verse 27, where the Torah describes the contributions being brought. It is interesting to note that in the context of the contributions, too, the *efod* is mentioned before the breastplate in all three places.

Both in the contribution and in the construction, the *efod* is mentioned before the breastplate. Why is this so?

- Is the *efod* mentioned first for purely technical reasons, since the breastplate rested on and was fastened to the *efod*, and therefore the *efod* had to be made first? Perhaps the *efod* is nothing more than the basis for the breastplate, devoid of any independent importance, such that its creation is the first stage in the fashioning of the breastplate, and it is for this reason that it is mentioned only in relation to the breastplate.
- Alternatively, it may be that the *efod* is mentioned first for exactly the opposite reason – to emphasize its own importance. Perhaps, in a certain sense, the *efod* is more important than the breastplate.
- Is the *efod* simply a garment to which the breastplate is attached, or does it have some independent significance?

What is the *efod*? In what way does its function differ from that of the breastplate?

In order to attain a better understanding of why the *efod* is mentioned first, and the relationship between it and the breastplate, let us review the fashioning of the *efod* as described in *Parashat Tetzaveh*:2[2]

“They shall make the *efod* with gold, blue, and purple, scarlet, and fine twined linen; an artistic creation.” (*Shemot* 28:6)

The *efod* was made from fabric that was woven from five different types of thread that were spun together into a single fiber.

The Torah provides no description as to how the *efod* itself looked; it tells us only how the shoulderpieces and the girdle should look:

“It shall have two shoulder-pieces joined to its two edges, and it shall be joined. And the finely wrought girdle of the *efod*, which is upon it, shall be of the same, in accordance with its fashioning: gold, blue and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen.” (7-8)

Rashi, commenting on the *efod* in 28:4, notes:3[3]

“I have neither heard nor found in any Beraita an explanation of its form; I imagine that it was worn at the back and was as wide as the girth of a man’s back, like a sort of apron that the ministers wear when they ride upon horses. So was its fashioning from below....”

Since neither the Torah nor any Beraita describe how the *efod* looked, Rashi is forced to imagine its appearance, based on existing forms of clothing.

To his view, the *efod* is a sort of long apron that is worn at the back, open at the front, and tied in the front.

The Torah makes no mention of this part of the *efod*. It addresses only the shoulder pieces and the girdle.

Why does Rashi add a part that appears nowhere in the Torah? Why does he not conclude that the shoulder pieces and the girdle are themselves the *efod*?

Rashi, in fact, raises this question, and answers it:

“We cannot say that it possessed only a girdle, for it is written, 'He put upon him the *efod*' (*Vayikra* 8:7) – and then afterwards, 'And girded him with the wrought

2[2] In *Parashat Pekudei* we find a description of the actual creation of the *efod*, corresponding to the unit in *Tetzaveh*. We have chosen to focus on the description in *Tetzaveh* because it is more detailed (especially with regard to the Shoham stones). In the footnotes we shall add details from the verses in *Parashat Pekudei*.

3[3] There is some controversy as to how the *efod* looked. We have chosen to follow Rashi’s approach, and where there is debate, we note the other opinions in the footnotes.

girdle of the *efod*... Thus, we conclude that the 'artistically wrought girdle' is a belt, while the *efod* is an independent article of decoration.

Nor can we say that what is referred to as the *efod* is the two shoulder pieces, for the Torah states, 'The two shoulder pieces of the *efod*' (27). Thus, we conclude that there is an *efod*, there are shoulder pieces, and there is a girdle.

Therefore I conclude that the name *efod* refers to the apron [that hangs] down, since he [the kohen] is bound and decorated by means of it, as it is written, 'And he bound him with it' (*Vayikra* 8:7) The girdle is the belt at the top of it, and the shoulder pieces are attached to it.”

The Torah describes the shoulder pieces and the girdle as being joined to the *efod*; hence, they themselves cannot be the *efod*.

The *efod* itself, then, is not described in the Torah^{4[4]}. According to Rashi, it is sort of long apron that is worn at the back and tied in front.

Shoulder pieces of the *efod*:

How are the shoulder pieces meant to look? The description in the text is not altogether clear, and there is some controversy in this regard. To Rashi's view (commenting on verse 6), the shoulder pieces were attached to the *efod* from behind, and then came up to hook over the kohen's shoulders.^{5[5]}

What is the “wrought girdle”?

The “wrought girdle” is the belt by means of which the *efod* is tied.

The verse emphasizes, “It shall be of the same, in accordance with its fashioning.” From here Rashi deduces that “it is woven together with it; it is not to be woven alone and then attached to it.” In other words, when the *efod* is woven, the top part of it is made longer, so as to create a belt with which to tie the *efod*.

The Shoham Stones

4[4] Why is the fashioning of the *efod* itself not described? Is it because it was clear how it was supposed to look, or is there some special hidden matter that should not be revealed?

5[5] According to Tiferet Yisrael, they were joined in the front, too. Rashbam, commenting on verse 7, posits that they were not two separate straps, but rather joined together and covering the entire back. Chizkuni and Rambam (*Laws of the Temple Vessels*, 9:11), the *efod* was a short garment worn on the top part of the body, down to the hips (like a modern jacket). For illustrations, see “*Bigdei ha-Kodesh, Bigdei ha-Kehuna*” by S.D. Steinberg.

“And you shall take two Shoham stones, and engrave upon them the names of the children of Israel.

Six of their names on one stone, and the names of the six others on the other stone, according to their birth.

With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, shall you engrave the two stones with the names of the children of Israel; you shall place them in settings of gold.

And you shall place the two stones upon the shoulder pieces of the *efod*...” (9-12)

On the shoulder pieces of the *efod*, upon the kohen’s shoulders, there were two gold settings – one on each side; each of them held a Shoham stone.

The Shoham stones were engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel – six names on each stone.

There are differences of opinion as to the order in which the names were written on the stones. According to Rashi, they were written in order of their birth.^{6[6]}

גד
אשר
ישכר
זבולון
יוסף
בנימין

ראובן
שמעון
לוי
יהודה
דן
נפתלי

The second part of verse 12 describes the function of these stones set in the shoulder pieces worn by the kohen:

^{6[6]} Other opinions appear in the Rambam (Laws of the Temple Vessels, chapter 9) and in the Beraita (*Sota* 36a). See *Mishkan Hashem* by S. Shapiatzky, pp. 140-141. There is also debate as to the color of the Shoham stones. The author of *Shiltei Giborim* maintains that they were green (as in the illustration above). Rav Saadya Gaon (commenting on verse 9) suggests that they were a translucent white. Ibn Ezra (verse 9) also mentions white. According to Rabbeinu Bechaye (commenting on *Bamidbar* 2:2) the stones were black.

“... As stones of **remembrance** for the children of Israel; and Aharon shall bear their names before God, upon his two shoulders, **as a remembrance**.”

The purpose of the Shoham stones on the shoulder pieces of the *efod* is reminiscent of the function of the stones set in the breastplate. In verse 29 we read, concerning the stones of the breastplate:

“Aharon shall bear the names of the children of Israel... **as a remembrance before God** at all times.”

Aharon’s bearing of the names of the children of Israel, as a remembrance, before God, includes all three elements that were also mentioned in relation to both the breastplate and the *efod*. On the basis of the similarity between the function of the breastplate (mentioned in verse 29) and the function of the *efod* (mentioned in verse 12), it would seem that the *efod* and the breastplate share the same function.

Is something here superfluous?

Is there indeed no difference between the *efod* and the breastplate? Do they share the same function of bearing the names of the children of Israel as a remembrance before God?

If our conclusion was indeed that both share the same function, then we could explain why the *efod* appears before the breastplate. The Torah would be seeking to teach us that the *efod* itself, too (independently of the breastplate) plays a role in the “bearing of the names of the children of Israel as a memorial before God.” However, if we adopted this view, we would have to ask: what need is there for two garments that both share exactly the same function? Isn’t one of them redundant?

Obviously, the breastplate cannot be redundant, since it also has another function: it is not only a set of stones bearing the names of Bnei Yisrael before God; it also contains the “*urim* and *tumim*,” by virtue of which the breastplate becomes the “breastplate of judgment,” facilitating inquiries of God. This other function of the breastplate is mentioned in verse 30, and there is no parallel function in the case of the *efod*. If the breastplate has an additional function that does not exist in the case of the *efod*, then clearly the breastplate cannot be redundant.

This leads us to consider the possibility that the *efod* is redundant. After all, if the breastplate alone also fulfills the function of bearing the names of Bnei Yisrael before God, then what need is there for the *efod*?

Perhaps the *efod* is indeed devoid of any inherent significance; perhaps its entire purpose is to serve as the basis to which the breastplate is attached. However, this does not seem possible: the Torah emphasizes that upon the *efod* there are Shoham stones, and these have an independent function: bearing the names of Bnei Yisrael as a memory before God.

In light of this it would seem that the *efod* does, in fact, have its own independent significance, unrelated to the breastplate. If we were to hear of the breastplate, and only afterwards be introduced to the *efod*, we would think that the function of the *efod* - to bear the names of Bnei Yisrael before God - applies only

when the breastplate is attached to it. However, by describing the *efod* first, rather than the breastplate, the Torah emphasizes that even without the breastplate, the *efod* has an important function. In other words, it has a function in its own right.

Aside from this, we may deduce from a careful study of the language of the verses that the *efod* and the breastplate have significant roles that differ from one another, and therefore it is clear that each of them has its own independent importance.

In verses 29-30, which describe the function of the breastplate, emphasis is placed on the expression, “before God.” Likewise, in *Bamidbar* 27, describing the function of the breastplate, the expression “before God” appears.

In contrast, when it comes to the *efod*, it is the matter of “memorial” or “memory” that is emphasized. In verse 12, describing the role of the ‘*efod*,’ the word “*zikaron* - memorial” appears twice - at the beginning of the description of the role of the *efod*, and at the end, such that a framework is created that highlights the “memory”:

“Stones of **memorial for the children of Israel**; and Aharon shall bear their names before God, upon his two shoulders, **as a memorial.**”

In *Parashat Pekudei* (39:7), too, the Torah teaches:

“He put them on the shoulders of the *efod* – stones of **memorial for Bnei Yisrael.**”

In *Parashat Pekudei*, the function of the *efod* is described very briefly. When the function of the *efod* is compressed in this way, the crux of it stands out clearly: the essence of the *efod* is the matter of “remembrance.”

In contrast, with regard to the breastplate, the Torah teaches:

“Aharon shall bear the names of Bnei Yisrael... as a **memorial before God**, at all times.

And you shall place upon the breastplate of judgment the *urim* and the *tumim*, and they shall be upon Aharon’s heart when he comes in **before God**, and Aharon shall bear the judgment of Bnei Yisrael upon his heart, **before God**, at all times.” (29-30)

Attention should be paid here to the difference: the crux of the role of the *efod* is to serve as a memorial for Bnei Yisrael. The breastplate, on the other hand, is meant mainly to be “before God.” Admittedly, the breastplate is also “a remembrance,” and the matter of “before God” is mentioned in connection with the *efod*, too, but these are not the most central, defining symbols of these garments.

What is the significance of the “remembrance”?

Obviously, the implication is not that God “forgets,” and therefore needs reminding. Rather, the “memorial” invokes God’s Providence; His guidance of people’s lives.

The *efod* symbolizes God's special providence towards Bnei Yisrael. When the *efod* is worn for the Divine service, Bnei Yisrael must remember the special relationship between them and God, with the special guidance that He gives.

The breastplate emphasizes the aspect of Bnei Yisrael standing before God. Aharon's approach of the holy place, before God, represents all of Israel standing before God.

These two elements are strongly interdependent, and for this reason the *efod* and the breastplate are attached to one another. For the same reason there are also parallels in the description of their functions – to the extent that we have the impression of them sharing the same function. Nevertheless, the *efod* has its own importance and significance, and the fact that it is described prior to the breastplate, separately from it, demands that we pay attention to its uniqueness.

Only after the Torah notes the fashioning of the *efod*, and its function, does it go on to describe the fastening of the breastplate to the *efod*:

“And you shall make fittings of gold.
And you shall make them two chains of pure gold at the ends, of braided work, and you shall attach the braided chains to the fittings.” (13-14)

The *efod* and the breastplate both have fittings/settings of gold. Gold chains attached the golden fittings of the *efod* and the golden settings of the breastplate.

The *efod* does have its own importance and significance, but it is attached to the breastplate, and this attachment unquestionably imbues it with an added, higher significance.

The missing breastplate

If we review the biblical narratives that describe the use of the *efod* and the breastplate, we discover an interesting phenomenon:

- The **breastplate** is never mentioned as a vessel used for inquiring of God. In fact, the breastplate is mentioned nowhere in the whole of *Tanakh*, except in the *parashiyot* dealing with the construction of the Mishkan and its vessels!

• The *urim and tumim*, whose function is to facilitate inquiring of God, are mentioned only twice in this context. The first occasion concerns the appointment of Yehoshua:

“He shall stand before Elazar the kohen, and he shall seek the judgment of the *urim* for him, before God.” (*Bamidbar* 27:21)

The second occasion is during Shaul’s last battle, when he attempts to inquire of God, via the *urim*, and God does not answer him:

“Shaul inquired of God, but God did not answer him – neither in dreams, nor through the *urim*, nor by means of the prophets.” (I *Shemuel* 28:6)

There is no other mention of inquiring via the *urim* anywhere else in *Tanakh*.

However, we find that there are several instances of Israel inquiring of God before going out to war (as well as in certain other situations).^{7[7]} We assume that the inquiry was made via the *urim* and *tumim*, which are meant to serve as the channel for such communication. Nevertheless, it is interesting that no explicit mention is made of the fact that the *urim* and *tumim* were involved.

• The *efod*, in contrast, appears in several places. It, too, is mentioned as a vessel used for inquiring of God (which is most surprising: nowhere in the Torah is there any indication that this is part of its function). The impression arising from this is that the *efod* is a vessel (or garment) of great importance.

Let us examine some sources that make mention of the *efod*:

a. The creation of an *efod* for purposes of Divine service:

Two narratives include the fashioning of an *efod* (i.e., an item is made, apparently similar in form to the *efod* of the Mishkan, but not as a garment to be worn by priests; it is apparently made of gold) that is used for Divine service:

“Gidon made it into an *efod* and he displayed it in his city, in Ofra, and all of Israel went astray there after it, and it became a snare to Gidon and to his household.” (*Shoftim* 8:27)

“The man, Mikha, had a shrine, and he made an *efod* and *terafim*, and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.” (*Shoftim* 17:5)

Obviously, in these narratives the use that is being made of the *efod* is unlawful, but what we learn from this is that the *efod* itself was significant, and therefore there was good reason to reproduce it.

b. *Efod* of linen as a garment for the kohanim:

^{7[7]}

See the *shiur* on *Parashat Tetzaveh* for sources of both types.

In a number of places, mention is made of the kohanim as wearing a linen *efod*:

“Shemuel ministered before God, as a child, girded with a linen *efod*.” (I *Shemuel* 2:18)

“...Doeg the Edomi turned and he smote the kohanim, and there died on that day eighty-five men, wearers of the linen *efod*.” (I *Shemuel* 22:18)

“David leaped about with all his might before God, and David wore a linen *efod*.” (II *Shemuel* 6:14)

In all of the above instances, it is clear that the reference is not to the *efod* that Moshe was commanded to make, to which the breastplate was attached. There was only one such *efod*, and this garment was worn only by the Kohen Gadol. As Ibn Ezra explains, in his long commentary, on verse 6:

“... The linen *efod* was made of some sort of linen. The *efod* of Moshe was not made of [linen] fabric, but rather [was woven from] gold, blue, purple, scarlet, and fine twined linen all together. And it was not only of the breastplate of judgment that they inquired...”

Nevertheless, we learn from here that the *efod* was a garment that signified either priesthood or some other important status.

c. Description of the kohen as wearing an *efod*:

In God’s revelation to Eli, He says:

“I chose him out of all the tribes of Israel to minister to Me, to offer sacrifice upon My altar, to offer incense, to wear the *efod* before Me...” (I *Shemuel* 2:28)

God mentions specifically the *efod* as a symbol of the importance of the priesthood.

d. *Efod* as a vessel by means of which to inquire of God:

The *efod* appears several times as a means of inquiring of God:

1. In the battle waged by Shaul and Yehonatan against the Pelishtim, in I *Shemuel* 14, mention is made of the kohen wearing the *efod*:

“Achiya, son of Achituv, brother of I-khavod son of Pinchas, the son of Eli, was God’s priest at Shilo, wearing an *efod*.” (3)

Further on in the story, we read of an attempt to inquire of God; no mention is made of the breastplate, but the account features the Ark:

“Shaul said to Achiya: Bring the Ark of God (for the Ark of God was, at that time, with Bnei Yisrael).

And it was, while Shaul was speaking to the priest, that the tumult in the camp of the Pelishtim grew increasingly great, and Shaul said to the priest, Withdraw your hand.” (18-19)

In these verses we find the *efod* and the Ark mentioned as being connected to the inquiry of God, but the breastplate is entirely absent.^{8[8]}

2. In David’s battle against Ke’ila, we read that David inquired of God by means of the *efod*:

“David inquired of God, saying: Shall I go and smite these Philistines...

And it was, when Evyatar, son of Ahimelekh, fled to David at Ke’ila, that he came down with an *efod* in his hand...

David knew that Shaul had devised this evil against him, and he said to Evyatar the priest: Bring the *efod*.” (I *Shemuel* 23:2,6,9)

3. David’s battle against Amalek in Tziklag:

“David said to Evyatar, the priest... Please bring the *efod* to me. So Evyatar brought the *efod* to David.

And David inquired of God, saying: Shall I pursue this legion? Shall I catch them? And God said to him: Pursue, for you shall surely catch them, and you shall surely save.” (I *Shemuel* 30:7-8)

A review of all of the above verses gives rise to a difficulty: according to the Torah, inquiry of God is performed using the breastplate, by means of the *urim* and *tumim*. Why, then, is no mention made of the breastplate? Why does the text, in all of these places, refer only to the *efod*?

Perhaps these verses are meant to imply that it was the breastplate that was consulted, but since it is attached to the *efod*, the combined vessel is referred to as an *efod*.

In addition, the Torah itself also emphasizes that the breastplate must be fastened to the *efod*. In other words, the breastplate can never stand alone.

Thus, the combined garment is called an *efod*, even though technically the inquiry of God is performed by means of the breastplate, which is attached to the *efod*.

However, if the breastplate is really the most important part of this combination, why is the garment in its entirety not referred to as the “breastplate” – at least in those instances where it is used for inquiring of God, since this is achieved solely through using the breastplate? Why is the *efod* awarded such an important place?

^{8[8]} A further source mentioning the *efod* is I *Shemuel* 21:10 – “The kohen said: The sword of Goliath, the Philistine, whom you smote in the Ela Valley – behold, it is here, wrapped in a cloth behind the *efod*.” Rashi comments: “Behind the *efod*: After they inquired of the *urim* and *tumim*, he told him this.” According to this view, the same question arises: why does the text suggest that it was the *efod* that was consulted, rather than the breastplate?

The commentators debate this question. Ibn Ezra (in his long commentary) provides a surprising explanation. To his view, while the breastplate is the vessel that is meant to be used for inquiring of God, it was also possible to inquire by means of the actual *efod*, without involving the breastplate:

“There were many *efodim* among the kohanim, and they all had girdles; all that they lacked were a breastplate and *urim*. In the same way that the *urim* and *tumim* that were upon the breastplate of judgment could be used, so a questioner could obtain his answer purely through the likeness of the *efod*, but not at all times.”

In his short commentary (*Shemot* 28:4), Ibn Ezra presents the same idea:

“The essence of the *efod* and the breastplate is hidden from us... the kohanim made *efodim* like that of Moshe, and the Torah does not forbid this... One who inquired via the *efod* of a kohen would inquire by means of two stones; only in the case of the *efod* of Moshe was there the judgment of the *urim*, for which reason it is called the 'breastplate of judgment'— for it would judge and clarify any matter of doubt.”

Ibn Ezra expounds at length in his description of the “secret essence” of the *efod* and the breastplate, and explains the connection between the form of the *efod* and breastplate and the possibility of inquiring of God by means of them. We shall not attempt here to delve into these secrets; suffice it to summarize from Ibn Ezra’s words that there was one special *efod* to which the special breastplate fashioned by Moshe was attached, and via this it was possible at all times to inquire and to receive a clear, absolute response. In addition, there were other *efodim* – linen *efods* – to which no breastplate or *urim* were attached.^{9[9]}

It was possible to inquire by means of an *efod* that contained no *urim* and *tumim*, but this was an inferior option:^{10[10]} the answer to the inquiry was not accessible “at all times,” and was also less clear. Only someone who was experienced in the communications of the breastplate might be able to decode it. The answer provided by the *urim* and *tumim* was far more absolute, leaving no room for doubt.

Ibn Ezra’s thesis does explain the fact that it is always the *efod* that is mentioned, rather than the breastplate. According to his view, it is the *efod* that is

^{9[9]} From where does Ibn Ezra deduce the existence of several *efodim*? He bases his opinion on the fact that there was an *efod* in the possession of Evyatar the Kohen, who accompanied David in his wanderings in the Judean desert, and which David used to inquire of God (as recounted in I *Shemuel* 23 and 30), while at the same time there was an *efod* in the possession of the kohen who was with Shaul, such that Shaul was able to inquire of the *urim* and *tumim* (as narrated in I *Shemuel* 28, concerning his final battle). How was this possible? Ibn Ezra (as well as Ramban) maintains that the original *efod* was in the hands of Shaul, but there was another in the possession of Evyatar; this was a linen *efod* that could similarly be used to inquire of God.

^{10[10]} Ramban agrees with Ibn Ezra that additional *efodim* existed, and that they could be used to inquire of God, on a lower level than that afforded by the *efod* and breastplate of Moshe. According to his view, however, these other *efodim* also had breastplates attached to them and featured *urim* and *tumim*.

mentioned because it was possible to inquire of an *efod*, without a breastplate. The *efod* itself served as a vessel for inquiring of God.

We conclude, then, that the *efod* is mentioned often because it is significant in its own right. It is not simply the “basis” for the breastplate, but may be used independently to inquire of God. At the same time, though, it is specifically the fact that the *efod* is mentioned so often, while the breastplate is absent, that testifies that there was only one breastplate, special and sanctified, that was fashioned by Moshe, while the *efod* was of a lower level and was therefore more common.¹¹[11] A number of *efodim* existed, they were more accessible, and a question could be posed by means of them without having to involve the Kohen Gadol himself.¹²[12]

Fortune-telling or performing the will of God?

The Torah describes the breastplate as a vessel used for inquiring of God, while assigning the *efod* a different function – the “memorial” of Bnei Yisrael before God.

Perhaps the *efod* represents the basic level of connection between Israel and God. Upon the kohen’s shoulders sit the Shoham stones, with the names of the tribes of Israel. The breastplate, with the *urim* and *tumim* and God’s Ineffable Name, represents a higher level of that connection – a level whose source is the Name of God, and whose essence is “before God.”

The *efod* appears first – not because of the order of importance, nor for merely technical reasons (the order in which the garments are donned); rather, for a substantial reason: the *efod* testifies to the basic level of connection between Israel and God, and the measure of God’s Divine Providence towards Israel.

Having established this level of connection, the next stage is the breastplate, with the Name of 42 letters, from which the names of Bnei Yisrael arise. This is no normal connection; it is a connection whose source and roots lie in the Divine realm.

The basis of the connection between Israel and God is what facilitates the inquiry and clarification of the future. It is the basis of God’s Providence in the world that allows mortals to seek knowledge of what is going to happen in the future.

¹¹[11] From the Ibn Ezra’s commentary we may infer that an *efod* could also be used by idolaters for inquiring. This in turn may explain why no description is given of the way in which the *efod* is made – perhaps because it was clear to everyone what an *efod* was. It also explains the creation of statues in the form of an *efod*, by Mikha and Gidon. However, Ramban (commenting on verse 30) disagrees with Ibn Ezra with regard to the *urim* and *tumim*. He maintains:

“Rabbi Avraham (Ibn Ezra) pretended wisdom with regard to the *urim* and *tumim*, stating (verse 6) that they were an artistic creation of silver and gold, and he expands in this regard, for he believes them to be similar to the forms made by the idolaters, to know the mind of the questioner. But he has actually said nothing.” To Ramban’s view, the *urim* and *tumim* were a Divine creation, not a mortal one, and that there was no similarity between inquiring by means of them and the various forms of wizardry performed by the idolaters. However, Ramban agrees with Ibn Ezra that other *efodim* existed that were not the *efod* of Moshe, and that it was possible to inquire by means of them, under certain conditions.

¹²[12] Even according to this explanation, we are left with a question concerning the many places where it is clear that it was the breastplate, with its *urim* and *tumim*, that was consulted, but the text makes no mention at all of the “urim and tumim,” and speaks only of the *efod*. Perhaps the *efod* occupied such an important place that it became the name for the vessel used for inquiring of God.

Accordingly, we can understand that there is a fundamental difference between clarification of the future in the light of the *efod*, and clarification of the future in the light of the breastplate.

Inquiring of the *efod* is based on the fundamental connection between God and the nation of Israel. This type of questioning may be interpreted as divining or fortune-telling, as a device used by man to make decisions on the basis of the data that he obtains. The *efod*, then, becomes a provider of information, a fortune-telling device, facilitating more propitious decision-making.

The use of the breastplate, on the other hand, is open to no such misinterpretation. Here, the whole picture arises from “standing before God.” God’s Name, located in the center of the breastplate, symbolizes total commitment to performing the will of God. Here, there is no impression of man standing in front of a device that provides information; rather, man stands in front of his Creator, seeking to know God’s will in the world. This is not fortune-telling or divining; there is no hint of using the vessels of the Mishkan as a device for serving ourselves. We stand before God with commitment, and with the goal of performing His will.

It is possible that Bnei Yisrael’s need to know the future was very strong, and therefore additional *efodim* were used to inquire of God. It is for this reason that there are so many instances in which an *efod* is mentioned. This phenomenon, taken to an extreme, at times led to the *efod* turning into a religious symbol, and even actual idolatry (as in the case of Gidon, and of Mikha).

This may explain the words of the prophet Hoshea:

“I said to her: For many days you shall remain with me; you shall not pay the harlot, nor shall you belong to another man, and so I will be towards you. Since for many days Bnei Yisrael will remain with no king, and no prince, nor any sacrifice, nor pillar, nor ‘*efod*,’ nor terafim. Thereafter, the children of Israel will return, and they shall seek the Lord their God....” (*Hoshea* 3:3-5)

Ibn Ezra explains that the reference here is not to an *efod* fashioned for the sake of idolatry, but rather to an *efod* used for inquiring of God.

But what is evil about an *efod* used for inquiring of God?

Apparently, Bnei Yisrael turned the technique of inquiring of God via the *efod* into an external form of worship, like fortune-telling. Only after they would separate themselves from this approach “for many days” would they be able to return to God in the proper manner.

This problem of turning the Mikdash into an external form of worship arises from several sources in the books of the prophets, with reference to both the sacrifices

and the Ark.¹³[13] The prophets expect Bnei Yisrael to understand the inner meaning of the Mikdash: its significance not as a center for worship rituals, similar to those used by the idolaters, but rather the connection between Israel and God, and Israel's commitment to stand before God, to represent His path in the world, and to perform His will.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

13[13] The "ritualistic" view of the Mikdash, devoid of understanding of its inner significance, is improper, and therefore the prophets convey the message that God has no desire for sacrifices performed in this manner. In many places the prophets cry out that God is not interested in burnt offerings and sacrifices; what He desires is that people will listen to His words (as Shemuel reprimands Shaul in I *Shemuel* 15:22). For instance, Yirmiyahu, in chapter 7, states: "So says the Lord of Hosts, God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat their meat. For I did not speak with your forefathers, nor did I command them, on the day when I took them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. Rather, this thing I commanded them, saying: 'Listen to Me, and I shall be your God, and you shall be My nation, and walk in all the ways that I have commanded you....'" Likewise in many other sources.

The same idea arises from the words of Hoshea concerning the *efod* (quoted above), as well as in the words of Yirmiyahu (chapter 3) concerning the Ark: "In those days, promises God, people shall no longer say, 'The Ark of God's Covenant,' nor shall it be recalled to their heart, nor will they remember it, nor visit it, nor will they make it again." From these verses we conclude that in the time to come, perhaps the *efod* and the Ark will no longer be used, since they were turned into vessels of external ritual.

The most important vessels of the Mikdash – the Ark, the *efod* and the breastplate – are meant to express the special connection between Israel and God, and the Divine Presence that rests amongst Israel; God's special Providence towards Israel, and Israel's commitment to stand before God and to obey Him.

It is specifically these vessels which, according to these prophets, will be done away with in the time to come, because Bnei Yisrael apparently used them in the wrong way. But perhaps, in the time to come, Bnei Yisrael will know how to attribute the proper significance to these vessels, and then they will be worthy of using them.