

# Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Pekudei 5785

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The stones in the Choshen are set.

**וְהַטּוֹר הָרְבִיעִי תַרְשִׁישׁ שֶׁהֵם וְיָשָׁפָה מְסֻבֶּת מְסֻבֶּת זָהָב בְּמִלְאָתָם:**

“And the fourth row was yellow jasper, onyx, and natural (red) jasper. They were encircled in gold frames in their mountings.” (Shmos 39:13).

This was the fourth row of stones in the Choshen – the Kohen Gadol’s breastplate. The stones corresponded to Asher (yellow jasper), Yosef (onyx), and Benyamin (jasper). The stones in the Choshen were framed and were called **וְאֶבְנֵי מִלְאִים** “the framed stones.” What is tarshish? And why was Shoham used in the Shoham stones (shoulder stones) and also for Yosef in the Choshen?

When Moshe asked for special, precious stones to be donated, he called them “the Shoham stones and the framed stones.” (Ibid 25:7). They were donated by the tribal leaders. (Ibid 35:27). When originally constructing the shoulder plates with the stones, the instruction is all about carving the six names on each stone. (Ibid 28:9). Then at the end it says, “and surround them with gold mountings.” The stones were surrounded by gold but only so that they mounted into the shoulder straps. Similar instruction is repeated when the actual vestments are made. (Ibid 39:6).

When making the Choshen, each stone had a frame besides the mounting. There the instruction is to place the twelve stones. (Ibid 28:17). Then they shall be mounted with gold frames. (Ibid 28:20). Then the instruction is for them to correspond to the Sons of Yisroel with engraving. (Ibid 28:21). That is a strange order to make the Choshen. It would be easier, like the shoulder stones, to first engrave or carve the names into the stones, and then put them into the breastplate. Later, when actually making it, the order is repeated. The stones were set into the breastplate (ibid 39:10-13) and they were mounted and framed (ibid 39:13). Then each stone was seemingly sealed with the names of each of the Sons of Yisroel. (Ibid 39:14). Why did they carve placing the stones?

The plain reading, and how almost every commentary reads the Torah, is that the names were on the actual stones of the breastplate. However, it could be, according to the contextual reading, that the names were not on the stones, but on the gold frames. This is for several reasons. First, when the Torah instructs the engraving names into the Shoham stones for the shoulder pieces, it says, “And you shall take the two Shoham stones, and you shall engrave them, with the names of Bnei Yisroel.” (Ibid 28:9). This clearly means the stones were engraved. Further, “And they constructed the Shoham stones with engraved seals upon (corresponding to) the names of Bnei Yisroel, surrounding them with gold mountings.” (Ibid 39:6). The stones were carved before mounting them in gold.

In contrast, with the Choshen stones, it says put them into the breastplate first. (Ibid 28:20 and 39:13). The pasuk says, "And the stones shall be upon (correspond to) the names of Bnei Yisroel, twelve for their names, an engraved seal a man for his name, it shall be for the twelve tribes." (Ibid 28:21). Here it does not say the engraving and seal should be on the stones, it says each stone shall correspond to one of the Bnei Yisroel. To be clear, it says when actually making the Choshen, "And the stones were upon the names of Bnei Yisroel, they were twelve for their names." (Ibid 39:14). Each stone corresponded to a Bnei Yisroel. Then it concludes, "a stamped seal of a man for his name, for the twelve tribes." (Ibid). The engraving is not specifically on the stones. It says, "a stamped seal" for each man for his name. However, it is unclear where the seal was. Unlike by the Shoham stones, the Torah does not say to engrave or stamp these stones.

The Torah is saying that on the shoulder stones it was the carved names that represented each shevet. On the Choshen stones it was the stones that corresponded to each of the Yisroel's sons. The names, however, were engraved or stamped on the frames that went around each stone and would light up when the Urim v'Tumim was consulted.

Notice, too, that while there were two onyx stones for the shoulder straps, Yosef's stone in the Choshen was also a Shoham (onyx) stone. This stone is special. It a deep, bright blue. Like the techeilis, it reminds one of the seas and of the sky and, thus, points to Hashem. Blue is all over royal garments, the Mishkan, and priestly clothing. This stone is also special. Of the four rivers that issue from Eden Garden one branch was Pishon. It winds through the Land of Hachavila, a land rich in gold. It also a land filled with onyx. (Bereishis 2:12). The Torah specifies this stone as precious from the outset.

In Yechezkel, Hashem talks about Man in Eden Garden and says he was surrounded by precious stones. The Navi mentions nine of the twelve stones, including this last row, but leaving out the entire third row. (Yechezkel 28:13). Onyx is also mentioned as a precious and valuable stone. (Iyuv 28:16). The Beis HaMikdash was also made with super precious and valuable stones, including the Shoham. (Divrei HaYamim I 29:2).

This signifies that Yosef was equal to all his brothers. Not only did he have two tribes that came from him, but when he was bundled with Levi as one of the twelve, his stone was equal the rest. His was Shoham and all of his brothers were carved together onto the shoulder Shoham stones. This corresponds to the extra brochos that Yaakov gave to Yosef and his sons, Menashe and Efraim. Forever in history, even as kingship came from Binyamin and Yehuda, Yosef has a symbol that he was equal to all his brothers combined.

Some translate the *Tarshish* stone as chrysolite. It can be because this stone is found in abundance in Tunis / Tunisia, where Tarshish is opined to be. However, chrysolite is asbestos and asbestos is deadly. It would not make sense that Hashem would put a carcinogen into the Choshen. Hashem would not have yirei shamayim workers work with the stone, even in small amounts, that was poisonous. While this translation of the stone as chrysolite may come from the Septuagint, it is a mistranslation of the Greek word for Tarshish. More likely it is golden topaz. Thus, like in the land of Hachavila where onyx is next to gold, in the Choshen, onyx was next to a gold-colored stone.