

Two verses in this parasha talk about the High Priest **carrying** the names of the tribes of Israel.

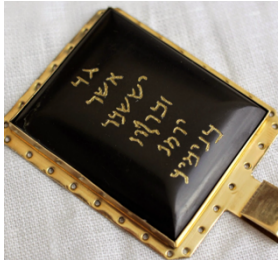
וְשָׂמַתְּ אֶת שְׁמֵי הָאֲבִינִים עַל כְּתֹפֶת הָאֶפֶד אֲבִינֵי זָכָר וְלִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנָשָׂא אֶהְרֹן אֶת שְׁמוֹתֵם לִפְנֵי ה' עַל שְׁתֵּי כְתָפָיו לְזִכְרוֹן. (שְׁמוֹת כח:יב).

*You are to place the two stones on the shoulder-pieces of the efod, as stones of reminder for the Children of Israel. And Aaron is to **carry** their names before the presence of God on his two shoulders, for remembrance. (Exod. 28:12)*

And,

וְנָשָׂא אֶהְרֹן אֶת שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּחֹשֶׁן הַמִּשְׁפָּט עַל לְבוֹ בִּבְאוֹ אֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ לְזִכְרוֹן לִפְנֵי ה' תָּמִיד. (שְׁמוֹת כח:כט).

*So Aaron is to **carry** the names of the Children of Israel on the Breastpiece of Judgment over his heart, whenever he comes into the Holy-Shrine for reminder, before the presence of God, regularly. (Exod. 28:29)*



Setting aside the question of exactly which gem-stones were used, where they got them, and



how they etched them, what we have here are two ways of **carrying** the names: **"collectively"** in groups of six on the shoulder stones, and **"individually"** on the breastplate, one stone per tribe. Israeli writer Yair Agmon gives a lovely explanation:



אֶת אֲבִינֵי הַשְּׁמוֹת 'הַקּוֹלֶקְטִיבִיּוֹת' מֵנִיחַ אֶהְרֹן עַל כְּתָפָיו כִּי הַקּוֹלֶקְטִיבִיּוֹת הֵיא עַל ה' יְחִיד" הוּא עֲנֵן מְרַכֵּב וְכָבֵד, שְׁנֵי לְהַתְמוּדָה אִתּוֹ. וְאֵת הַשְּׁמוֹת הַפְּרָטִיִּים מֵנִיחַ אֶהְרֹן עַל הַבֶּטֶן שֶׁלוֹ (אוּ בְּלִשׁוֹן הַכְּתוּב "עַל לְבוֹ")... יֵשׁ מִטָּעַן הַגְּדֵרִיתִי כְּפוּל, שֶׁמִּסְפֵּר שְׁנֵי כְּפוּרִים. כְּפוּר אֶחָד עַל אִישׁ יְצוּגִי וְנִקְשָׁה, שֶׁסּוֹחֵב אֶת עַל הַקּוֹלֶקְטִיבִיּוֹת עַל כְּתָפָיו הַיְצוּקוֹת, וְכְּפוּר נוסף עַל אִישׁ פְּרָטִי, אֲבִהּ וְחָם, שְׁנוֹתָיו נֶחֱסוּ אִישִׁי לְכָל אֶחָד מֵיְלָדָיו מֵעֵמֶק הַלֵּב וְהַבֶּטֶן.

*Aaron places the stones with the **'collective'** groupings of names on his shoulders because **'collectiveness'** is a **burden**, the idea of "group" is a complicated and heavy concept to deal with. In contrast, Aaron places the **individual** names on his stomach (or in the words of the text, "on his heart")... The High Priest's clothing narrates two stories: the first is about a man who is stalwart representative of his people, who **carries the burdens of the collective** on his sturdy shoulders, and the second is about a private person, fatherly and warm, who gives **personal attention to each one of his children** from the depth of his heart and his stomach.*

The **carrying** of the names in these different manners represents the two essential ways that we participate in the Jewish people: first, as individuals, with **individual**

identity, who are part of a family system, a micro-culture, a "tribe", and second, as part of a **collective**, a people, a nation. **Carrying** names is quite a striking idea altogether. Analogy: we **carry** pictures of our loved ones in our wallets or as screen savers. In shul people often **carry** the names of loved ones when they recite a *Misheberach* or a *Yizkor*. Like the High Priest who **carries** the names of Israel, it is both a burden and an act of love. Metaphorically, names have **weight**. **Lifting up** is a common theme in prayers. Consider this verse:

תִּכּוֹן תְּפִלָּתִי קִטְרֹת לִפְנֶיךָ (תהילים קמ"ב)

*Take my prayer as an offering of **incense**, (Psalm 141:2)*

It is quite evocative in terms of the way it imagines how prayers are **lifted up** to God like incense smoke.

Or this verse about **lifting up** our hearts:

נָשָׂא לִבֵּנוּ אֶל כְּפִים אֵל אֵל בְּשָׁמַיִם. (איכה ג:מ"א)

*Let us **lift up** our hearts with our hands to God in **heaven**. (Lam. 3:41)*

And of course, this verse which we sing when we return the Torah to the Ark, in which we **lift up** God's name:

גָּדְלוּ לַה' אֲתִי וְנִרְמָמָה שְׁמוֹ יַחְדָּו. (תהילים לד:ד)

*Exalt the **LORD** with me; let us **raise up** His name **together**. (Psalm. 34:4)*

When the High Priest is **carrying** the names of Israel, he is **lifting up** the names to God.

The Power of Names. One of the great themes in the bible is that names have power. There is no name more important than God's name. When called upon to bless the people, the priests symbolically **place** God's name upon them:

וְשָׂמוּ אֶת שְׁמִי עַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (במ' ו:כז)

*And they shall place **My name** on the children of Israel. (Num. 6:27)*

Here, by **carrying** the names of the tribes of Israel on his body, the High Priest reciprocally **places**, as it were, the names of the tribes of Israel before God.

Liturgical Significance. We could also see this symbolism in a liturgical way. The recitation of names is a common feature in prayer. So many of our prayers, the opening lines of the *Amida*, the *Misheberach*, the *Hineni*, and many more contain the recitation of names. Genealogies are also liturgical. The end of the Book of Ruth is not simply a rollcall of David's ancestors, but when it is chanted with the beautiful melody of the megillah trope, it functions as a prayer, especially in its last line, heralding the birth of David **וְעֵבֶד הוֹלִיד אֶת-יִשָּׁי וַיֵּשֶׁי הוֹלִיד אֶת-דָּוִד** *And Oved begat Yishai, and Yishai begat David* (Ruth 4:22) - which is a liturgical salute to the Davidic dynasty. To that end, we can take note of an emerging practice of reciting names of loved ones to a person on their deathbed. This recitation, which is in every sense liturgical, unites the dying person with his or her predeceased loved ones and also with successive generations bound to him or her in the bond of life.

The Third Commandment includes the motif of **carrying** names, specifically God's name.

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת שֵׁם ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹן (שמות כ:ו)

You shall not take the name of God in vain. (Exod. 20:6)
or *You shall not swear falsely by the name of God.*

These translations actually mislead us to the deeper intent of this commandment. For the sake of argument, we should translate them alternatively as: **Do not carry the name of God for evil.** While awkward, it conveys in rather concrete terms that we - a holy nation, God's partners and messengers - **carry** God's name into the world. Because we act in God's name, as God's "representatives", **when we do good things, we make God's name a source of blessing in the world. Acts of kindness, justice, righteousness done in the name of God, magnify and sanctify God's name in the world.** On the other hand, when evil people do evil acts in God's name, God's name is **mis-carried**. When murders and atrocities are done in God's name, God's name has been diminished and misused. Nothing is worse for God's name than shouting praises for God while committing atrocities. The goal of the Jewish people is to **magnify and sanctify God's name. Just as we are vessels of God's name, the High Priest is a vessel for the names of Israel.**

Shabbat Zakhor: Remembering and Erasure: Having presented the symbolic and liturgical function of the recitation and **carrying** of names, we can offer an interpretation of the paradoxical commandment that we read on this Shabbat Zakhor, namely, to remember what Amalek did and also **erase** the name of Amalek.

וְהָיָה בְּהֵנִיחַ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְךָ מִכָּל אֹיְבֶיךָ מִסָּבִיב בְּאַרְץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ
נָתַן לְךָ נַחֲלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ תִּמְחָה אֶת זִכְרֵ עַמְּלֶק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא
תִשְׁכַּח. (דב' כ:ו)

when the Lord your God gives-you-rest from all your enemies round about in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, to possess it, you are to blot out the name of Amalek from under the heavens; you are not to forget! (Deut. 25:19)

We are commanded to remember what Amalek did, and at the very same time, we are commanded to blot out their name. Blotting out a name could very well mean going after every single surviving remnant of Amalek and eradicating them. This is articulated in Sefer HaHinukh, an anonymous 13th century, widely studied pedagogical compendium of the mitzvot:

וּבְאֵמֶת כִּי גַם עַל כָּל יְחִיד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל הַזְּכָרִים מוֹטֵל הַחַיּוּב לְהַרְגֵם
וּלְאַבְדֵם מִן הָעוֹלָם, אִם יֵשׁ בָּתוֹ בְּנֵדָם בְּכָל מְקוֹם וּבְכָל זְמַן, אִם יִמָּצֵא
אֶחָד מִכָּל זֶרַעם.

And in truth it is that the obligation to kill them and destroy them from the world is also incumbent upon every male individual from Israel — if they have the power in their hands — in every place and at all times, if he finds one from all of their seed. (Sefer Hahinukh 604)

This is akin to the obligation of destroying idols. In the Mishnah, R. Yossi expresses his profound revulsion and sense of defilement that those objects impart. Upon finding such an object, he rules that one has to **שוֹתֵק וְזוֹרָה לְרֵית אוֹ**

grind it and throw the dust to the wind or cast it into the sea. (Avodah Zara 3:3) The eradication of Amalekites is a law that, for obvious reasons, cannot be fulfilled today. We wouldn't be able to identify them and even if we did, it would be a crime. However, the law gives voice to the paradox of both remembering what evil people have done to us, and the profound desire of erasing their memory. Maimonides reconciles this paradox as follows

זְכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְּלֶק". מִפִּי הַשְּׁמוּעָה לְמַדּוּ זְכוֹר בְּפֶה לֹא
תִשְׁכַּח בִּלְבָב. שְׂאִסּוֹר לִשְׁכַח אִיבָתוֹ וְשִׁנָּאתוֹ:

Remember what Amalek did to you.' The Oral Tradition teaches: ...Remember' - with your mouths; ...Do not forget' - in your hearts.' For it is forbidden to forget our hatred and enmity for them. (Maimonides, Laws of Kings and Wars 5:5)

In other words, **erase** them by not mentioning their names from your mouths and by saying **יִמַח שְׁמוֹ -may his name be erased**, when having to mention the name of an evil person. (That's the reason for blotting out the name of the Purim villain during the Megillah reading.) This is similar to how Salman Rushdie dealt with his assailant when he wrote about the attempt on his life. He never mentions the name of the assailant. Doing so would accord him a measure of dignity which he has abrogated by attempting to murder him. Rushdie simply refers to him as the 'A'. With regard to those who perpetrate evil today against the Jewish people, on the one hand, a proper historical narrative of the events requires us to name them and understand who these people are and how they have managed to flourish. On the other hand, the very mention of their names is defiling. Following Maimonides we can reconcile this paradox by saying, in the context of history, yes, we need to name names. But in the context of emotional, spiritual and liturgical life, we need to **erase** names to deny them the dignity of our common humanity because they have abrogated it. And most importantly, just as the High Priest literally **carries** the names of the tribes to elicit God's blessing, we must **erase** the names of those who have killed us to deny them any possibility of God's blessing and subject them to the oblivion which they so justly and rightly deserve. Historical knowledge and naming names satisfies our need to shape the way we live with lessons of the past. **Erasure** of names satisfies our spiritual and emotional need to mete out a just and fitting punishment to those who have tried to destroy us. May their names forever be **erased**!

Shabbat Shalom. A Joyous Purim!

Today is Day 519 of the war. We pray for the speedy release of the remaining live hostages, and the return for proper burial, of those who were cruelly murdered in Gaza by those whose names deserve erasure. May God comfort the bereaved families together with all those who grieve in the House of Israel. May God heal the wounded and shield Israel from terror.

This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Suzy Levin to commemorate the Yahrzeit of her father, Joseph Levin z'l.