



Around the Shabbat Table

**Shabbat Pekudei 5763
March 2003**

This week's writers: Staff, Nassau/Queens Services, BJE of Greater New York

Shalom!

Introduction

This week's parasha, Pekudei, is a rather brief one. Continuing the theme of last week's Torah reading, we read the record of exactly how the *mishkan* (tabernacle) and its vessels were constructed. Once these tasks are completed, Aaron and his sons are consecrated as the people who will officiate and will serve as *kohanim* (priests) in all future generations.

The narrative of the building continues with a description of a cloud which covered the "Tent of Meeting." God's presence, we are told, now filled the *mishkan*. According to the Torah, the people would only continue their travels through the wilderness when the cloud lifted from the *mishkan*.

Our Torah portion (and the book of Exodus) concludes by telling us that the *mishkan* was covered by cloud during the day, with a fire appearing by night. These phenomena were seen by the people of Israel throughout their journeys.

One of the items described in the *parasha* is the *choshen*, the priest's breastplate. According to other biblical texts, it was on this breastplate that the *urim v'tumim* were housed. According to Jewish tradition, this part of the breastplate was used to help the people of Israel in making certain key decisions. Among the times that this instrument was consulted was before declaring a war. Given the tense world situation, most of our discussion will focus on this topic.

Questions for your Family's Discussion

- I. According to our tradition, a decision to go to war was made by consulting the High Priest's breastplate. This was supposed to help the people to know

whether it was God's intention that a war be waged. Why would the people of Israel go through such a process?

2. While Israel today does not have a High Priest or a breastplate, what processes could it go through to determine whether a war that it might have to fight is justified?
3. While the United States does not have an official religion, the same ethical considerations that Judaism would address in relation to war would also be confronted. What steps would you recommend that the United States take to be sure that a war which is currently being considered meets a certain ethical standard?



Texts to Wrestle With

1. The Talmud and Jewish law codes speak of two types of wars that might be fought:
 - a. obligatory war -- such as the war to drive the Canaanites from the land of Israel, the destruction of the nation of Amalek, or war fought in self-defense.
 - b. optional war – to expand territory

If the United States was to go to war against Iraq, which type of war might it be? Why? How would you categorize Israel's battle against terrorism? Why?

2. The project of building the mishkan and its vessels was headed by Bezalel, who is described as the grandson of Hur. Who was Hur, and why is he mentioned when Bezalel's lineage was first described in last week's parasha?

Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands. So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up - one on one side, one on the other-so that his hands

remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

(Exodus 17: 9-13)

When the Israelites wished to do that deed [the sin of the Golden Calf that they built in the desert], they said to Aaron, "Come make for us a lord." Hur, the son of Caleb, arose and chastised them. They immediately arose and killed him.

(Midrash Tanchuma)

This seemingly minor character, Hur, is seen in three contexts: 1. He assists Moses and Joshua in inspiring the people as they fight their archenemy, Amalek; 2. He attempts to stop the people from sinning, and is killed; 3. He is rewarded with a grandson who builds the *mishkan*.

What do you learn about Hur from these texts? Is there a relationship between his roles as a spiritual leader and as a military leader? What can be learned about the relationship between Hur's spiritual support role, his principled stand, and the creativity of his grandson?

Towards an Action Agenda

In our time, the decisions about war and peace are not made through a High Priest. Nevertheless, our tradition has a great deal to say about the topic. You can learn more from the following sites:

<http://www.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/respdisp.pl?file=8&year=5762> - A rabbinic responsa regarding the question of what types of war are permitted by Jewish law.

<http://www.jlaw.com/Articles/war1.html> - A comprehensive introduction to Judaism's view on war.

<http://www.rac.org/issues/iraq.html> - A page of links from the Reform movement's Religious Action Center, including information about Jewish views on war, as well as specific information about the Iraq conflict.

<http://www.bjeny.org/pdf/CrisisResponseFebruary2003.pdf> - This guide was created by the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York for use by educators, but includes helpful guidelines for parents in discussing the current situation and threats with children.



Shabbat Shalom!

Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to RavADS@bjeny.org

If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: <http://www.bjeny.org/>

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