

Urim VeTummim

Introduction

This topic has not yet undergone editorial review

What are the Urim and Tummim?

In Shemot 28, at the end of the unit regarding the Choshen, Hashem includes a command about the Urim and Tummim:

(ל) וְנָתַתָּ אֶל חֹשֶׁן הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֶת הָאוּרִים וְאֶת הַתְּמִימִים וְהָיוּ עַל לֵב אַהֲרֹן בְּבֹאוֹ לִפְנֵי יְיָ וְנָשָׂא אַהֲרֹן אֶת מִשְׁפַּט בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל לְבוֹ לִפְנֵי יְיָ תָּמִיד.

(30) You shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron's heart, when he goes in before Hashem: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Hashem continually.

The verse mentions that the Urim and Tummim must be put into the Choshen, but it does not state what these are, what they look like, or from what materials they were to be made. We are told only that they were to lie on Aharon's heart in order that he bear the judgment of the Children of Israel before Hashem. What, though, does this mean? What does this verse suggest is the Urim and Tummim's function? Interestingly, this almost exact language is used in the verse right before ours, where Aharon is told that the names of the Children of Israel that were on the Choshen stones were to "lie on his heart" and "be before Hashem continually":

וְנָשָׂא אַהֲרֹן אֶת שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּחֹשֶׁן הַמִּשְׁפָּט עַל לְבוֹ בְּבֹאוֹ אֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ לְזִכָּרוֹן לִפְנֵי יְיָ תָּמִיד.

Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment on his heart, when he goes in to the holy place, for a memorial before Hashem continually.

What does this linguistic overlap suggest about the connection between the Choshen stones (and/or the inscribed names) and the Urim and Tummim? What exactly were the Urim and Tummim and what was their purpose?

Placement in the Choshen

Shemot 39 describes the fulfillment of Hashem's command and the making of Aharon's clothing. However, counter to expectation, when describing the creation of the Choshen there is no mention of the Urim and Tummim. They are first placed in the Choshen by Moshe during the days of consecration, as described in Vayikra 8:8:

וַיִּשֶׂם עָלָיו אֶת הַחֹשֶׁן וַיִּתֵּן אֶל הַחֹשֶׁן אֶת הָאוּרִים וְאֶת הַתְּמִימִים.

He placed the breastplate on him; and in the breastplate he put the Urim and the Thummim.

Why do we not hear about the creation of the Urim and Tummim, as we do about the other vestments? Moreover, why is it that Moshe is the one to place them in the Choshen rather than the artisans?

A Tool for Divination?

Two other verses give some insight into the function of the Urim. Bemidbar 27:21 states that before Yehoshua was to go to war, he was to consult the Urim:

וּלְפָנַי אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן יִעֲמֹד וְשָׁאַל לוֹ בְּמִשְׁפַּט הָאוּרִים לְפָנַי יְיָ עַל פִּי יִצְאוּ וְעַל פִּי יָבֹאוּ הוּא וְכָל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אִתּוֹ וְכָל הָעֵדָה.

He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before Hashem: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.”

Similarly, in Shemuel I 28:6, Shaul turns to the Urim to ask about his upcoming battle with the Philistines:

וַיִּשְׁאַל שְׂאוּל בַּיְיָ וְלֹא עָנָהוּ יְיָ גַם בְּחִלְמוֹת גַּם בְּאוּרִים גַּם בְּנְבִיאִים.

And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.

Both of these verses describe using the Urim to seek advice of God,¹ but give little insight into the process and how one was to receive an answer. What about the Urim enabled divination? In addition, in each verse there is mention of the Urim, but not the Tummim. Does this suggest that the two might have served distinct functions? Finally, elsewhere we see leaders turning not to the Urim and Tummim with their questions but to the Ephod.² In these cases, is a different mode of divining being employed, or is it to be assumed that here, too, questions were asked via the Urim (and Tummim)?

Additional Questions

Several additional questions arise from the verses discussing the Urim and Tummim:

- **Meaning of the name** – What does the name Urim and Tummim mean and how might this shed light on the object's function and nature?
- **Definite article** – Shemot 28:30 introduces the Urim and Tummim with a definite article, "הָאוּרִים וְתֻמִּים", implying that the object was a known one, yet, they are never mentioned before our verse. Why, then, are they described as "the" Urim and Tummim?
- **Last mention** – The last time the Urim and Tummim are mentioned in Tanakh is Ezra 2:63³. Though the verse is ambiguous, it implies that by this time the Urim and Tummim were no longer in use, suggesting that they were not functional during the Second Temple period. When did the nation stop using the Urim and Tummim and why?

¹ See also Ezra 2:63 and its parallel in Nechemyah 7:65 which also imply that the Urim and Tummim were used to consult God (in this case, not about battle but about the priestly status of certain individuals). Shemuel I 14:38-42 might be another set of verses which speak of the Urim and Tummim in the context of divination. When trying to determine whether his family or the nation had sinned, Shaul says "הֲבֵרָה תְּמִיִּים", perhaps an allusion to the Tummim (see R. Avraham b. HaRambam who asserts that Shaul consulted the Urim and Tummim and might understand the phrase this way).

² See Shemuel I 23:9-12 and Shemuel I 30:7-8. See also Shofetim 18:14-20 which does not explicitly mention seeking Divine advice via the Ephod, but mentions it alongside "תרפים", understood by many to be a tool for divination. Cf. Shofetim 20:18-28 where the nation asks advice of Hashem in the presence of the priest, but neither the Ephod nor the Urim and Tummim are mentioned. In other verses where people consult Hashem, it is unclear how they did so. See, for example, Shofetim 1:1-2, Shemuel II 2:1, and Shemuel II 5:19.

³ See also the parallel verse in Nechemyah 7:65

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Exegetical Approaches

This topic has not yet undergone editorial review

Name of Hashem

The Urim and Tummim were an inscription of the proper name of Hashem (or perhaps several names of Hashem) inserted into the folds of the Choshen.

SOURCES: Targum Yerushalmi (Yonatan), Rashi, Ramban, Ralbag #1,¹ Abarbanel

No description in Shemot 28 and no execution in Shemot 39 – Ramban points to these omissions as support for this approach, explaining that since the Urim and Tummim were an inscription of the Divine name and not the work of artisans or the product of Israelite donations, it is logical that there is no command and no description of their creation. He posits that either Moshe himself wrote the name via Divine secret, or that the inscription was heavenly made.

Definite article – Ramban points to this as further proof of his position, suggesting that the Urim and Tummim are referred to with a definite article, as "the" Urim and Tummim, due to their holy status and/or Divine creation.²

"וַיִּתֵּן אֶל הַחֹשֶׁן אֶת הָאוּרִים וְאֶת הַתּוּמִּיִּם" (Vayikra 8:8) – Ralbag and Abarbanel note that this verse, too, supports this approach, for it implies that Moshe placed a distinct object into the Choshen. The fact that the Choshen was folded over to form a pocket³ further suggests that it was meant to hold something (and not simply serve as a backing for the Choshen stones, as per the position below).

How did the divination work?

- **Spell out message** – Ramban suggests that when asked a question, the power from the Divine names of the Urim caused certain letters from the names on the Choshen stones to be illuminated.⁴ These, though, appeared simultaneously and were not in order, and so other Divine names from the Tummim inspired the priest so he would correctly arrange them to form a word.⁵ Abarbanel, instead, suggests that Hashem's name caused the letters to be illuminated one by one, so that the message spelled itself.⁶
- **Inspire prophecy** – Ralbag, instead, suggests that focusing on the Divine name in the Urim and Tummim helped the priest attain prophecy. It was this prophecy alone which allowed him to answer the question posed. [According to him, nothing on the Choshen was illuminated or protruded, so nothing about the Urim and Tummim was supernatural or could be mistaken for magic.]

Why are they called Urim and Tummim?

- **Purpose** – Targum Yonatan maintains that the name derives from their function, with Urim, related to אור (light), referring to how they illuminated Israel, telling them how to act, and Tummim, from "תם" (complete), referring to the fact that the predictions made were always fulfilled.
- **Technique** – Ramban, alternatively, suggests that the name refers to the techniques by which the divination occurred. The Urim relates to the shining of the letters and Tummim to the perfection given to the priest which enabled him to unscramble the letters to form a message.

Relationship between Urim and Tummim – According to most of these sources, who posit that the inscription contained just the proper name of Hashem, there is no difference between the Urim and Tummim and it constitutes but one object. However, according to Ramban, who maintains that each of the Urim and Tummim refers to different names of Hashem, the two are distinct. Nonetheless, it seems that even Ramban might agree that in those cases where the text refers only to the "Urim", it is simply a shortened formulation for "Urim and Tummim" (and does not refer to the Urim alone).

Relationship between 28:29 and 28:30 – These sources might suggest that each verse is focusing on a different part of the Choshen, as each had a different role. The names on the stones were meant to be a memorial, while the Urim and Tummim were for judgment and determination. The similarity in language stems only from the fact that both were connected to the Choshen and worn on the heart.

Ephod – Ramban suggests that the secrets of the Urim and Tummim and its Divine names might have been passed on to the learned scholars of Israel. Thus, others besides the priest might have made Ephods with a Choshen and Divine names similar to that made by Moshe, and used them periodically to consult with God

Use in Second Temple period – Abarbanel suggests that the Urim and Tummim were not in use during the Second Temple period because by then the inscriptions of the Divine name that Moshe had inserted into the Choshen had been lost. As this was the essence of the Urim and Tummim, without it, divination was no longer possible.⁷



Choshen Stones

The Urim and Tummim are identified with the stones of the Choshen on which were engraved the names of the tribes.

SOURCES: Josephus, Lekach Tov, perhaps Rambam,⁸ opinion in R. Avraham b. HaRambam

No description in Shemot 28 and no execution in Shemot 39 – The lack of description of the Urim and Tummim might be one of the factors motivating this approach. If the Urim and Tummim are identical with the stones of the Choshen which are described at length, there is no need to describe them separately. For this same reason, there is no distinct description of the Urim and Tummim being created in Shemot 39. Their creation is included in the chapter's detailing of the making of the Choshen stones.

Relationship between 28:29 and 28:30 – This approach might additionally be motivated by the similarity in language between 28:29 and 28:30. As both verses speak of the same object, the overlap is understandable. The Choshen stones "lay on Aharon's heart... before Hashem" to play two roles: they were meant to both ensure that the tribes were constantly remembered and to enable Aharon to determine the answers to their questions.

Why are they called Urim and Tumim? Haketav VeHaKabbalah⁹ suggests that the name might relate to the stones' physical properties. They were lustrous (full of "אור") and, being unhewn, were complete and perfect ("תם").¹⁰

Why two names? This position must explain why the same object is given two distinct names:

- Rav Shriria Gaon suggests that the additional name is simply a sign of praise, highlighting the unique and important nature of the object.
- It is also possible that the Urim and Tummim is the name given to the entire framework of twelve stones in their gold settings. The Choshen, in contrast, referred to the multicolored woven fabric, or perhaps to the fabric together with the framework of stones, while the stones themselves each have individual names.

"וַיִּתֵּן אֶל הַחֹשֶׁן אֶת הָאֲזָרוֹת וְאֶת הַתְּמִימִים" – Ibn Ezra¹¹ questions that if the Urim and Tummim are identical with the Choshen stones, how is one to understand the phrase "וַיִּתֵּן אֶל הַחֹשֶׁן" (Vayikra 8:8), which implies that Moshe placed a distinct object into the Choshen? Moreover, he asks, were not the stones already put into the Choshen by the artisans before the days of consecration, as implied by the phrase "וַיִּמְלֵאוּ בוֹ אֲרָבָעָה טוּרֵי" (Shemot 39:10)? HaKetav VeHaKabbalah answers that 39:10 refers only to the making of hollows in which the stones were to be later set.¹² In Vayikra 8:8, Moshe then attaches the entire framework of stones (a distinct object) onto¹³ the embroidered square of the Choshen.

How did the divination work?

- **Prophecy** – According to Rambam,¹⁴ when asked a question, the priest would get divine inspiration, look at the Choshen, and via prophecy see certain letters from the engraved names protrude to spell a reply.¹⁵ According to him, the letters on the stones themselves did not physically shine or pop out and there was no supernatural component to the Choshen.¹⁶
- **Illumination** – Josephus, in contrast, implies that the stones might not have been used for general questions but only to foretell victory in battle. He suggests that when heading towards war, the stones would shine brightly to indicate that Hashem's presence was within the nation. One might also suggest, as above, that when asked a question, various letters in the stones were illuminated to spell a response.

Use in Second Temple period – According to Rambam, though the Urim and Tummim still existed in Second Temple times, as they were part of the Choshen and necessary to complete the priestly garb, they no longer played a divining role. This resulted from the lesser level of the priests of the time, for only one who had the Divine spirit (רוח הקודש) rest upon them could attain the Divine inspiration necessary to answer the nation's questions.

What is the relationship between the Urim and Tumim? This position would suggest that there is no difference between the Urim and Tummim. When the Urim is mentioned alone, it is simply an abbreviation.

Definite article – HaKetav VeHaKabbalah suggests that the Urim and Tummim are referred to with a definite article because they indeed refer back to something known, the Choshen stones which have been spoken about previously.

Philosophical motivations? It is possible that Rambam's rejection of the opinion that the Urim and Tummim consisted of Divine names relates to his discomfort with the masses' belief in and use of magical amulets "empowered" by Divine names (Moreh Nevukhim 1:61). According to him, the Urim and Tummim are totally removed from any magical component, and work purely via prophecy.



Astrological Signs

The Urim and Tummim referred to forms of various astrological objects, such as the stars and constellations.

SOURCES: Ibn Ezra, Ralbag

What types of astrological signs?

- Ibn Ezra is intentionally obscure but claims that the Urim were made of gold and silver, perhaps implying that one was meant to represent the sun and the other the moon.¹⁷ He further alludes to the twelve constellations,¹⁸ perhaps what he thinks the Tummim represented. As such, it seems that according to him, the Urim and Tummim might have functioned as a sort of astrolabe, a model of the celestial spheres.
- Ralbag explains similarly, explicitly suggesting that the Urim refer to images of the stars, while the Tummim refer to forms of other celestial objects and their movers, including their prime mover, Hashem. According to him, then, the latter was presumably alluded to via some type of writing and not via a physical image.

Process of divination – Both Ibn Ezra and Ralbag¹⁹ believe that Hashem gives power to the celestial spheres to control the terrestrial ones. Thus, a proper understanding of the stars can reveal future fate. This, though, is an imperfect science, as that fate might be overturned by Hashem. Ralbag suggests that, as such, focusing on each of the Urim and Tummim facilitated attaining knowledge of the future - either via astrology or via prophecy.

Difference between the Urim and Tummim – According to Ralbag, since the Urim related only to the stars, even one who was not a prophet could attain knowledge of the future by studying them. This, though, was accurate only for questions related to the immediate future, where time did not allow for one's fate to change. The knowledge granted by the Tummim, however, relied on full prophecy, as it related to meditating on the Prime Mover, Hashem, who can overturn the decrees of the stars. He, therefore, suggests that verses which speak of someone consulting only the Urim imply that the user was not at a high enough level to receive prophecy and could not access the knowledge granted by focusing on the Tummim. He was forced to rely on the astrological data gained from the Urim, which sufficed, but only if the question was of immediate relevance.

Meaning of name – The name Urim, from the word "אור", relates to the fact that these represent various luminaries. Ralbag implies that Tummim relates to perfection and completion, perhaps because the knowledge gained by focusing on it was more complete.

Plural language – Ibn Ezra suggests that the plural language of "הַאֲוִרִים" and "הַתְּמִיִּם" supports his position as it implies that there were multiple objects placed in the Choshen.

"וַיִּתֵּן אֶל הַחֹשֶׁן אֶת הָאֲוִרִים וְאֶת הַתְּמִיִּם" – Ibn Ezra points to this verse, too, as support, noting that it implies that Moshe inserted distinct objects into the Choshen.

No description in Shemot 28 and no execution in Shemot 39 – Ramban questions this approach, noting that if the objects were made of gold and silver, as claimed by Ibn Ezra, then they required skilled craftsmanship and the manner of their creation should have been described. Ibn Ezra might respond that the secrets of the celestial spheres were not known to the artisans and thus only Moshe could form the Urim and Tummim. As such, there was no need to describe them in the commands to the craftsmen.

Definite article – It is not clear why the Urim and Tummim are referred to with a definite article.

Color of the robe of the Ephod – Ralbag notes that the robe upon which the Ephod and Choshen with the Urim and Tummim rested was sky blue, supporting this position that all was supposed to allude to the celestial spheres.

Divining via the Ephod – Ibn Ezra suggests that others might have made Ephods similar to that made by Moshe and even though they did not include the original Urim and Tummim, if the priest was familiar with the Urim and Tummim made by Moshe, he might imagine it and be able to respond to a questioner with the Ephod alone.



Lottery

The Urim and Tummim functioned as a lottery. This opinion subdivides regarding the lottery dynamics:

Alphabet

The Urim and Tummim consisted of small pieces of wood or metal on which were inscribed the letters of the alphabet. When drawn randomly from the Choshen they would form words.

SOURCES: Shadal, Hoil Moshe²⁰

Meaning of name – Shadal suggests that each of the letters of the alphabet might have been given unique names, with aleph referred to as "אור" (appropriate for the first letter) and taf as "תם" (fitting for the final letter). All the letters together, from aleph to taf, were called "Urim and Tummim".

No description in Shemot 28 and no execution in Shemot 39 – Since the letter tablets did not need to be crafted specially and were not made by Betzalel, there is no description of them in the commands of Shemot 28 and no mention of them in the verses detailing the fulfillment of the commands in Shemot 39.

"וַיִּתֵּן אֶל הַחֹשֶׁן אֶת הָאוּרִים וְאֶת הַתְּמִיִּם" – Shadal suggests that the fact that Moshe first inserted the Urim and Tummim into the pocket of the Choshen during the consecration ceremony implies that they were not a fixed part if it and were meant to be removed periodically. Moreover, the fact that the Choshen was folded to form a pocket further implies that it was meant to serve as a holder. As such, viewing the Urim and Tummim as individual letter blocks matches the description.

How did the divination work? Shadal suggests that the priest would randomly take out one letter at a time and Divine providence would thereby provide an appropriate response to whatever question was asked. This theory allows for even intricate responses to questions, as all the letters of the alphabet²¹ were available to spell out the message.

Definite article – If the Urim and Tummim is simply another name for the alphabet, then it was a known entity, explaining the presence of the definite article.



A concession to human needs? U. Cassuto suggests that use of the Urim and Tummim might have been a concession to the nation's natural desire to know the Divine will (and their familiarity with such divination practices in surrounding cultures). Though most forms of divination are prohibited by the Torah, Hashem allowed these lots in a very limited manner; only a leader could ask the priest questions and these were of national import. However, they were never an ideal.³⁴

No description in Shemot 28 and no execution in Shemot 39

- If the Urim and Tummim consisted of merely two stones or dice, there was nothing special for the craftsmen to create and thus no need to describe them.³⁵
- Cassuto, instead, explains that the lack of mention might stem from Torah's discomfort with the notion of divination. As the Urim and Tummim was a concession to human needs but not an ideal, Torah used as little detail as it could in discussing them.

End of use – U. Cassuto notes that there is no mention of using the Urim and Tummim after the reign of David and that it might have already been early in the Monarchic period when their usage stopped (long before the Second Temple era). He suggests that divining via the Urim and Tummim might have been discouraged, as it was not a desired method of ascertaining Hashem's will.³⁶ As such, as soon as the nation developed enough spiritually, such divination was discontinued.



Borders

In addition to their divining function, the Urim and Tummim contained a list of the borders of the tribal inheritances.

SOURCES: R. Yosef Bekhor Shor

Meaning of name – R"Y Bekhor Shor suggests that "אורים" refers to regions of land, pointing to the word's usage in Yeshayahu 24:15 (where it is parallel to "the islands of the sea") and to the name "Ur Kasdim", "the land of the Chaldeans". The word "תמים" refers to borders or ends, as תם relates to something which is completed. As such, he suggests that the Urim and Tummim were a listing of the regions and borders of each tribe's future inheritance.

"וַיִּתֵּן אֶל הַחֹשֶׁן אֶת הָאֹרִים וְאֵת הַתָּמִים" – These borders were inserted by Moshe into the Choshen, with each tribe's inheritance placed by the stone which bore its name.

No description in Shemot 28 and no execution in Shemot 39 – As the Urim and Tummim was not a work of craftsmanship, their creation is not described.

"וְנָשָׂא אֶהָרָן אֶת מִשְׁפַּט בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" – R"Y Bekhor Shor notes that the verse defines the function of the Urim and Tummim as "carrying judgment" since the lists of borders found in the Choshen ensured that later no one argued about the inheritances, with all recognizing that this was a judgment from Hashem. [He suggests that in the time of Yehoshua, lots were cast to define the tribal borders and these were then checked against the list in the Choshen. When everything matched, no one could argue.]

"וְנָשָׂא לוֹ בְּמִשְׁפַּט הָאֹרִים... עַל פִּי יִצְאוּ וְעַל פִּי יָבֹאוּ" – This approach might suggest that this verse (Bemidbar 27:21) which speaks of Yehoshua consulting the Urim via Elazar, refers not to asking whether to go to war

(as is commonly understood) but to checking the borders mentioned there when dividing the land. "Going and coming", then, refers not to embarking and returning from battle, but going to and entering one's tribal plot.

Divination? As Shemuel I 28 explicitly refers to the Urim in connection with divination and cannot possibly refer to tribal borders, R"Y Bekhor Shor must posit that they had more than one function, and that they were also used as a means to consult the Divine. He notes that in times of war or need, letters would protrude from the Choshen stones to answer the nation's questions. However, he does not elaborate as to what facilitated such divination and how it was connected to the Urim or the list of tribal borders.

¹ Ralbag raises several possible understandings of the Urim and Tummim. His preferred option is to view them as astrological signs (see below).

² He compares it to the description of the cherubs who were placed to guard the Garden of Eden; they are similarly referred to as "the" cherubs even though they had not been mentioned earlier.

³ See Rashbam on 28:16.

⁴ Cf. R. Yochanan in Bavli Yoma 73 that the letters protruded. One might ask what would happen if the answer necessitated letters which are not found in the names of the tribes (like a "צ" or "ט")? Opinions in the Bavli suggest that in addition to the tribal names, the names of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov and the phrase "שבטי ישורון" were engraved on the stones.

⁵ One could have alternatively suggested that the letters shone and the priest on his own unscrambled them to form a word, though this would potentially allow for human error.

⁶ As such, according to him, there is no difference between the function of the Urim and Tummim. Cf. Reish Lakish in Bavli Yoma 73a-b that the letters on their own joined to form a word.

⁷ Though they could recreate the other priestly garments and the breastplate, they could not recreate the inscription.

⁸ Rambam is not explicit, but this is how he has been understood by later commentators. See, for example, HaKetav VeHaKabbalah.

⁹ He brings this as a second possible reason, first noting the reasoning given by Lekach Tov that the name relates to the stones' function.

¹⁰ Lekach Tov, instead, suggests that the name reflects the divining function of the stones. Urim stems from the word "אור", for they enlightened Israel when they had a question. Tummim relates to the word "תם", completeness or integrity, for their determinations always came true. [See Targum Yonatan above.]

¹¹ See also Ralbag and Abarbanel.

¹² He points to Rashi who reads the verse in this way. According to HaKetav VeHaKabbalah, Rashi understands the word "בו" to mean "for it" rather than "in it".

¹³ The phrase "וַיִּתֵּן אֵל" is understood as if written "וַיִּתֵּן עַל".

¹⁴ See also the commentary of his son, R. Avraham b. HaRambam.

¹⁵ He does not address the question of what would happen if a reply necessitated one of the letters of the alphabet which did not appear in the names of the tribes that were engraved on the stones. See suggestions in Bavli Yoma 73a-b.

¹⁶ Cf. Ralbag above. It is not clear, though, why the Choshen stones were necessary, as one would have thought that the priest could have just as easily seen the answer to his questions in a prophetic vision

without the stones. It is possible that Rambam assumes that the priests, who were had only a lower level of prophecy, needed an object to inspire the vision. Perhaps, meditating on the names of the tribes facilitated prophecy as it helped the priest focus on the nation and its needs.

¹⁷ See R. Kasher, תורה שלמה, Volume 22 (Jerusalem, 5725): 174-175, who understands Ibn Ezra in this manner.

¹⁸ He writes, "והמספר ידוע בראיות גמורות מהעליון והשפל", alluding to the belief that there were twelve constellations, the signs of the zodiac. See also the end of his comments, "וששה בצפון וחלוקתם במחשבת, וכן בדרום..בעבור הקו, וכן בדרום."

¹⁹ See Ibn Ezra Second Commentary Shemot 20:2, 32:32, 33:21, Tehillim 69:29 and elsewhere and Ralbag Milchamot Hashem 5:3.

²⁰ Several centuries before Shadal and Hoil Moshe, the Christian theologian Hugo of Victor wrote similarly, suggesting that the Urim and Tummim comprised a series of signs containing various letters which served as a lottery. When they were cast, a message was spelled. He writes, "On this account, the lots which were cast in antiquity for the indication of truth were called Urim Tummim. They were signs inscribed with different letters. When they were cast, it was shown by a combination of the letters visible from above, by a true indication, what ought to be done or evaded." (Annot. elucid.in Pent. 8 (PL, CLXXV, 72, cited and translated by C.V Dam, The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel, (Indiana, 1997): 36.)

²¹ Hoil Moshe posits that there might have been several full alphabets worth of letters.

²² For a list of scholars who view the Urim and Tummim as lots see C.V Dam, The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel, (Indiana, 1997): 37-36 and notes 121-124 there. The scholars mentioned disagree as to the nature of the lot, some viewing it as a binary lot and others as more complicated. For several 20th century sources who view it as a binary lot, see N. H. Tur Sinai, אורים ותומים, Encyclopedia Mikrait I 179-182 and U. Cassuto on Shemot 28:30.

²³ See R. Avraham b. HaRambam who might read it this way. Many traditional commentators, however, appear to assume that the verse might refer to a regular lottery and that Shaul was not asking to bring the Urim and Tummim but requesting of Hashem that the lot he cast be true.

²⁴ See, for example, Yeshayahu 34:17, Yonah 1:7, Esther 3:7 or Nechemyah 10:35 where the root "נפל" is explicitly related to the noun "גורל". See also Yehoshua 7:14-16 and Shemuel I 10:20-21 where "ליכד" is used in the context of a lottery (though the word "גורל" does not appear).

²⁵ He assumes that in these verses too, one asked via the Urim and Tummim which were on the Ephod. See Bemidbar 27:18-21, Shemuel I 23:9-12 and Shemuel I 30:7-8. In each case, the questioner asks whether or not to go to battle, and whether or not he will be victorious. All require only a yes or no answer.

²⁶ Questions could be answered with either a "yes" or "no", or a first or second possibility etc. He further notes that only one question could be answered at a time (see Shemuel I 23:9-12). This, too, can be explained if one posits that the response was of a binary nature.

²⁷ See above note.

²⁸ These scholars assume that the Septuagint preserves a more original form and that a mistake fell into the Masoretic text when a copyist accidentally omitted several words in the middle of the verse, his eye skipping from the word "ישךאל" in the beginning of the verse to the "ישךאל" at the end (a case of haplography). However, even if one does not posit that a mistake fell into the Masoretic text and assumes that it is the original, one can still turn to the Septuagint as a possible understanding of the intent of the verses.

²⁹ See the article cited above.

³⁰ One could alternatively suggest that it was but one object with two sides and functioned like the flipping of a coin.

³¹ Thus, if one were to ask which of the twelve tribes should head a battle, one would have to slowly narrow it down, perhaps first pitting six tribes against six, then of the chosen six, pitting three against three etc.

³² See also Shemuel I 14:37

³³ For a full discussion of the possible relationship between the practice described in the tablet and the Urim and Tummim see V. Hurowitz, "Urim and Thummim in Light of a Psephomancy Ritual from Assur (LKA 137)", *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 21 (1992): 107-115. Hurowitz also notes that in the ancient near eastern ritual, the stones used were alabaster and hematite, which might further connect to the Urim and Tummim. Alabaster is white and luminous (thus perhaps parallel to the Urim), while hematite was connected to truth and trustworthiness, like the Tummim.

³⁴ For other laws which have been viewed as not ideal, but rather a concession to the nation's needs see Purpose of the Sacrifices, Why Permit Slavery, and Purpose of the Captive Woman Protocol.

³⁵ undefined

³⁶ The preferred route was to consult a prophet. [This might be one of the motivations for others, such as Rambam and Rabbag, to suggest that the Urim and Tummim itself worked via prophecy.

