

Potomac Torah Study Center

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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.

Perhaps the most basic striving in the world, especially for an older person, is a human's attempt to reach for eternity. What is the meaning of my life? Why am I here, and what will have been the meaning of my life once I am gone? The eternal in our world is God, but there is a limit to how close any human can come to God and survive. What does this limitation mean to us? Whatever it means, the question seems to become increasingly relevant over a person's life.

We have been through a very scary year in which a newly discovered virus swept the world, infecting (at least) tens of millions of people, and killing a few million. We shall never know the true extent of the fallout from this disease, especially since some countries did not have the resources to compile statistics, and other countries misstated the numbers for political reasons. Moreover, many deaths from the disease occurred long after "recovery," because the virus caused secondary medical issues that led to deaths months later. Others delayed seeking medical care for dangerous diseases out of fear of coronavirus, and the delays resulted in their diagnosis and treatment being too late for success. Fear of the consequences of this virus affected the psyches of many people – and also led to isolation that caused other psychological problems.

Hannah and I had our second dose of the Pfizer vaccine earlier this week, and Monday will mark one solar year since we started our enforced period of social isolation. We look forward to being able to return (finally) to socializing safely with other similarly vaccinated friends, and to return to shul by Pesach, when the new CDC guidelines indicate that these activities will be safe for us. We shall also follow guidelines by wearing what I call our "permanent" Purim masks whenever we may encounter those who have not fully vaccinated.

Our double parsha raises a question that most Torah commentators ask. "Why does the Torah repeat the extensive details of every aspect of the building of the Mishkan and its sacred objects just a few chapters after providing exactly the same information in God's instructions to Moshe?" Rabbi David Fohrman adds another question. Why does the Torah repeatedly link the instructions of the Mishkan with statements about observing the laws of Shabbat? The quick answer is that the Talmud teaches that we are to learn the laws of Shabbat from the activities involved in building the Mishkan. This answer leads to amazing insights, as Rabbi Fohrman discusses in his chapters on the double parsha.

In a non-leap year, we always complete reading Sefer Shemot between Purim and Pesach, and we start Sefer Vayikra in the weeks leading up to Pesach. During a leap year, we read Tazria and Metzora around the Pesach time. The parshot in this section of the Torah all involve aspects of coming close to Hashem, a goal for humans since God expelled Adam and Chava from Gan Eden. Vayikra and Tzav provide the methods and laws of korbanot (sacrifices). The experience and consequence of bringing korbanot had the result of enabling Jews to feel close to God during the period of the Mishkan and Temples. Tazria and Metzora discuss bodily purity, a necessary condition for any Jew wishing to participate in the korbanot or to approach the holy spaces (Mishkan or Temple). What about our double parsha?

Outside of Gan Eden, the way to come as close as possible to God was to approach His holy space, where our Creator's presence was most intense and obvious for a human to experience. During the Revelation, God's holy space was Har Sinai. Once B'Nai Yisrael built the Mishkan, that was God's holy space – a home for God's presence among B'Nai Yisrael. Shabbat was and still is God's holy time, a place where we are to refrain from creative work, because Shabbat

was the time that God rested from His creative work, forming a world for humans out of a void in which humans were unable to survive. The Talmud teaches us that the Mishkan was the place where holy space and holy time came together – and that was why it was so special both to God and to us.

A basic and key structure in the Torah is a chiasm, a form such as A-B-C-D-C'-B'-A'. In this structure, A and A' contain parallel ideas; as do B and B'; and also C and C'. D, the central idea, is the key element. In the Torah, the Bereishis and the first half of Shemot are basically chronological, as are Bamidbar and Devarim. The center, which consists of the Mishkan section of Shemot and Vayikra, is primarily laws and arranged thematically rather than chronologically. In this structure, the center, or the legal section is the most important. There are two basic central locations in the Torah. One is our double parsha, especially the end of Pekudei, when Moshe completes erecting the Mishkan, and God returns His presence to the Ohel Moed. The cloud and fire (at night) over the Ohel Moed replicate the cloud and fire on Har Sinai during the Revelation – signals that God has returned His presence among B'Nai Yisrael.

A second view of the central point in this chiasm is the middle of Sefer Vayikra. The Kohen Gadol could only enter the Ohel Moed once a year, at a designated time on Yom Kippur, after extensive preparations (Vayikra ch. 16-17). When the Kohan Gadol would offer his korban and enter the Ohel Moed, the smoke of his korban would mix with Hashem's cloud. This mixing of smoke and cloud was the closest that any human could come into contact with God and survive. This parsha – Acharei Mot – is the center of the Torah, and it is fitting that again the subject is man's eternal quest to come as close as possible to the closeness that Adam had with our Creator in Gan Eden. (Both these suggested central points of the Torah involve Moshe or Aharon offering a korban whose smoke mixed with Hashem's cloud.)

When I first asked my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, how to understand God's existence, at least 45 years ago, I probably could not have understood the concept of closeness in terms of a human's smoke mixing with the cloud of God's presence. Rabbi Cahan told me to look closely at symmetry and beauty in the world, and try to understand how these elements could possibly have arisen without a God. This approach to understanding humanity, God, and eternity was what I needed as a young man in my 20s. Years of study have enabled me to appreciate deeper levels of understanding in the Torah. Unfortunately, none of us can have enough time on earth to understand and appreciate all our religion has to offer. We can only keep studying and strive to learn more. In doing so, hopefully we make enough of a mark to be worth remembering after our time – our way of reaching toward eternity.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Menachem Mendel ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Vayakhel: More or Less

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

In a magnanimous show of unity, men and women of all tribes of the nation converge their hearts, minds, and pockets to complete the Mishkan. In the next two Torah portions, the Torah summarizes the accomplishments of the nation by detailing the work that was done by Betzalel and his host of artisans and craftsmen who were filled with Heavenly spirit.

Moshe declares the success of the campaign and the generosity of the donors by announcing, that “the work (and contributions) had been enough for all the work, to do it — and there was extra” (Exodus 36:7). Not only was there enough for the completion of the task there was extra.

But many commentaries are concerned about Moshe’s seemingly strange expression of completion. “There was enough, and there was extra.” After all, if there was enough, then there was not extra. And if there was extra then it should not be called enough! The Torah could just well have stated, “There were extra contributions of work and material for the work that was needed.”

It seems that only by having more than enough, by only having extra gifts, there was actually enough. Is that possible?

President John F. Kennedy loved to tell the story of a political battle for the mayoralty of the small manufacturing city of Fall River, Massachusetts.

The candidates scoured the industrial community for support, each pledging prosperity, growth, and increased productivity. But general promises would not persuade the voters. The candidates scoured the community, talking to citizens as if each vote would truly decide the election. They were right.

It was the tightest race in Massachusetts’s history. During the vote counting the candidates sat nervously with their supporters awaiting the final tally. It took days to declare, and weeks to finally confirm, that the winner of the mayoral race was actually decided by one vote! But the winner’s jubilation was muted only days after the results were declared.

You see, everyone in the town reminded him, “It was my vote that got you elected!”

The Sichos Tazdikim explains that Moshe wanted the proud accomplishment of building the Mishkan combined with humility, despite the enormity of the accomplishment. Had there been exactly enough gold, silver, copper, and other materials contributed in order to complete the construction, then perhaps a false sense of pride may have crept in.

If it were not for me, some may have thought, “there would be no Mishkan!” “I gave the contribution that turned the tide!” Everyone would have pinned the success on his or her copper or silver or gold.

The only way this false pride could be avoided was if there was a bit more given to the cause than actually was needed. Only then, would you have not only a Mishkan, but an edifice bereft of individual haughtiness. Therefore, only when there was more given than was actually needed, did Moshe feel that he truly had enough!

When we face extreme situations, and we contribute to their positive resolution, it is important to realize that we are only messengers. If Hashem wants success it will come without us as well.

In that vein, our contribution will be even more pure, for it will have every good attribute and will only be missing only one ingredient. It will be missing a false sense of conceit. It will not only be enough, it will be more.

Good Shabbos!

It Arises Miraculously (From Our Efforts)

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

When we work together as a group — collaboratively, and with a single goal and a shared mission in front of our eyes, something miraculous occurs.

When God commanded the building of the Mishkan in Terumah, the words we heard over and over again were “ve-asita – you shall make,” and “ve-asu – you shall do.” This is echoed in Vayekhel-Pikudei, where the people take up this charge and throw themselves into this holy task. Throughout these parshiyot one word is repeated, va’yaas – “he made,” va’yaasu, “they made.” Everyone acted, everyone constructed, everyone contributed. Men and women, individually and as groups, donated money and materials and brought their unique talents to the task.

Once everything is done, after all of this effort and work, we find a fascinating shift in the verses from the active to the passive. God tells Moshe “You should erect the mishkan,” (Shemot 40:2), only to be told a few verses later that “The mishkan was erected,” (40:17) passively, as if by itself.

Responding to this passive verb, the midrash tells us that it was not Moshe who brought the Mishkan to completion, but the angels. What is meant by this?

When the angels build the Mishkan, it is being built in a way that exceeds our human efforts. After each person gave 110% of his or her effort, the Mikshkan arose as if by a miracle. Everyone knew they were working towards this end result, and yet, when it actually came into being, they looked at one another and said: this is amazing what we just created. Did we just do that? How could we have produced this awe-inspiring building, this place for God’s presence?

There was, of course, a rational explanation for what their joint efforts accomplished, and yet, on the experiential level, what they accomplished felt like so much more than just the sum of their individual contributions. When people are working together towards a shared goal, and that goal is constantly before their eyes, then a certain energy takes over that propels them forwards. With this flow running through them, they are lifted above the grind of the work, they organically share efforts and ideas, build off of one another’s ideas and contributions, and inspire each other to greater heights and creativity.

The Amish build a whole house in a day. One moment there is nothing, and the next you step back and exclaim, “Oh my God. How did that happen?”

Closer to home, we have all seen such a miracle in the development of the coronavirus vaccine. Who could have imagined that we would develop such a highly effective vaccine in just one year? Normally it takes years upon years, and sometimes it never happens. It was truly a miracle.

But of course it wasn’t, not truly. It was an amazing accomplishment produced by an entire society working together and in parallel to achieve this one goal. Everything came together: the collaboration between the public and the private sectors, the funding that was made available, the waving of normal procedural requirements without compromising safety, an unprecedented number of people stepping up to volunteer for challenge trials, scientists both cooperating with one another, sharing data and results, and in competition with one another, urging each other on to work even harder.

The end result was a vaccine that was at once both the product of human ingenuity and cooperation and at the same time a miracle.

This has been true about the Yeshiva as well. We recently celebrated our 21st year, and we have so much of which to be proud, with 150 rabbis serving in the field, supporting individuals and transforming communities. Building on that, this year we strived for something even higher — a new, expanded vision of the yeshiva reaching beyond a rabbinical school, becoming a Center of Torah and Torah Leadership. This vision — for a YCT 2.0 — has been our shared focus this last year, propelling us forward, with everyone dedicated to this goal. Each person gave it his or her all, building on and energized by one another. And with all that, what resulted seem to arise by itself, larger and more powerful than we could have imagined.

For each of us, let's give thought how in our lives — whether it is at work, with friends or with family — we can find those clear focused goals to which we want to dedicate ourselves. Some deep passion or vision that we have never acted on. It's okay, maybe even better, if this goal seems out of reach. For if we then work together with that compelling vision before us, the angels will come and help us. We will achieve something that had before this only been a dream. After all the hard work, dedication, and sweat and the tears, what we had envisioned will arise by itself, as if by a miracle.

Shabbat Shalom.

<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/it-arises-miraculously-from-our-efforts/>

Parshas Vayakheil- Pikudei - “Can You Tell Time?

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine* © 2021 Teach 613

The time of Pesach was drawing near. The prophecy of the tenth plague and the promise of imminent redemption had already been shared. Now it was time for Hashem to give the Mitzva of Korban Pesach and describe the steps of the long-awaited Exodus. But first Hashem gave the People a Mitzva called Rosh Chodesh (literally translated: The first of the month).

At first glance, Rosh Chodesh is simply the Mitzva to have a Jewish calendar. Our calendar is based on lunar months. Each month, the astronomical nature of the moon is that it appears larger, then smaller, until it disappears from sight. Then, when the moon appears again as a sliver, a new month is declared.

But Rosh Chodesh is much more than a mathematical or astronomical calculation. Rosh Chodesh represents the power of rebirth. The Jewish people may experience challenging times; we sometimes feel that our “light” is diminishing. But, with time, our light will be apparent again because the Jewish people are eternal.

Rosh Chodesh also represents the power of the Jewish people to sanctify time. Unlike Shabbos which is already sanctified by Hashem; the actual choice of which day will be Rosh Chodesh is up to the Jewish people. The representatives of the Jewish people are charged with declaring Rosh Chodesh. Using the declaration, “It is sanctified!” they imbue the day, and the holidays that result, with holiness.

The power to sanctify time is not limited to the scholarly Jews who are charged with the Rosh Chodesh declaration. The power to sanctify time is really up to each of us. Unlike a philosophy of life that considers man nothing more than a cork in a large ocean, bobbing around according to the currents of time, Judaism believes that mankind can sanctify time, that mankind is capable of free choice, and that mankind can make a difference.

The common expression, “It is what it is,” may be true. But once we understand “what it is,” the true work begins. Making the most of situations-- imbuing time with purpose and vision-- is up to us. Even the way we react to things beyond our control is a sanctified life experience.

Modern psychology recognizes that a human being can create good habits associated with time and place. A person, for example, who goes for a daily walk at a certain time, will condition themselves to this good habit as they imbue the time with a certain energetic quality. A time of day, or a place or situation, can be imbued with an ambiance, mood, and karma of our own making. We are able to train ourselves into lifelong habits of our choice. Once you get into the groove, the time and space acquire a mind and conditioning of their own. The sanctified space that you create enable you to naturally follow through successfully on those priorities that are meaningful to you.

Certainly, a person can “go with the flow” and let time and situations dictate what happens next. But Rosh Chodesh empowers us to consider what we would like to happen next. Rosh Chodesh empowers us to tell time and be all we can be.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

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Religious Music/Muzak: Thoughts for Vayakhel-Pekudei

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

When we visit malls, take elevators, or get put on hold on telephone, we frequently find ourselves hearing some sort of music. Actually, this music is often called muzak, based on the Muzak corporation which first developed it.

It's a strange kind of music. It is played in order to create certain psychological moods. It can subconsciously induce shoppers to spend more time and money at malls; it can affect our moods in ways the purveyors wish to influence us. Muzak sounds like regular music but it generally has no beginning, middle or end. We hear it in the background and hardly pay attention to it. After hearing muzak, we don't walk out whistling a tune we just heard. Indeed, we hardly remember having heard it.

Real music is an art form. Muzak is a psychological device. Real music seeks to elevate us or move us emotionally. Muzak seeks to generate background noise that can manipulate us into thinking we've heard music.

Just as there is a vast difference between music and muzak, there is a vast difference between real education and pseudo education. Genuine teachers provide us with skills; more than that, they provide us with ways of thinking on our own. Genuine teachers open our minds to new ideas, encourage us to work independently, stimulate creativity. On the other hand, there are teachers who are stale and boring, who talk at students rather than with students. There are teachers who are entertainers, more interested in being popular with students than with challenging and teaching them. They pretend to teach, but lack the content, vision and imagination of real teachers.

If we think back to the many teachers with whom we've studied, we can rejoice in those who have actually taught us and pushed us to our limit. But we can also remember those who provided educational "muzak," who blathered on, who lacked originality, who joked around rather than opening our minds.

The difference between genuine and pseudo education is particularly problematic when it comes to religion. Real religious teachers not only teach us the dos and don'ts of Judaism; even more importantly they teach us how to approach our holy texts and observances with a sense of awe. They provide us with spiritual uplift; they expand our range of ideas and experiences. When we are in the presence of genuine religious teachers, we feel their authenticity and honesty, their idealism, their quest for truth, their innate humility.

"Muzak" types of religious teachers give the external impression of teaching religion but they lack content and authenticity. They teach religion by rote. They do not convey a grand religious vision but are satisfied to present anecdotes and platitudes that don't inspire and don't allow us to grow or to think for ourselves. They preach about prayer but don't take prayer too seriously themselves. They speak about Torah study but their own study is shallow. They tell us to observe mitzvoth, but they lack gravitas in their own religious behavior.

In describing the building of the Mishkan, the Torah indicates that God chose Betzalel to head the construction project. Betzalel is described as a person endowed with the spirit of God, with wisdom and understanding. He not only was gifted as an inspired artist; he had the ability to teach others.

In his commentary on the Torah, the 19th century Italian Rabbi Yitzhak Shemuel Reggio notes: "Added to the amazing qualities with which God endowed Betzalel and Aholiab, He added also the power to teach building skills to the wise of heart; for there are many sages who have deep ideas in their hearts, but they are unable to explain them to others. The Torah testifies that Betzalel also had the power to teach the aspects of construction [of the Mishkan] to other wise people, and these wise people were then able to perform according to the instructions they received."

Betzalel was a genuine artist who had the genuine talent to communicate his skills and vision to others. This is the mark of a special kind of genius—the ability to instruct, inspire and empower.

All parents and grandparents—indeed all of us—are either conveyors of real Jewish education or pseudo Jewish education. Through our own knowledge, commitment and example, we teach—for better or for worse—how Judaism is to be lived. Authentic, honest and humble religionists are able to communicate the beauty, the music of Jewish living. Careless, insincere and egotistical people preach the muzak of Jewish living. It may sound like Judaism, but it is inauthentic and unconvincing. Just as music is different from muzak, so genuine religious teaching is different from pseudo religious teaching. Our responsibility is to choose the way of authenticity.

* jewishideas.org, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, <https://www.jewishideas.org/religious-musicmuzak-thoughts-vayakhel-pekupei> **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](https://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

Rabbi Chaim Amsalem Discusses Conversion to Judaism *

By Rabbi Chaim Amsalem *

NOTE: Not all readers will accept these arguments – but we should all read and understand the opinion of a leading Sephardic scholar, halachic authority, and Rabbi.

The truth is that Orthodox (i.e. halakhic) conversions require an initial acceptance of mitzvoth [kabalat mitzvoth] as a necessary element in the conversion. But the definition of “kabalat mitzvoth” is not what they [the rabbinic establishment in Israel] say, but [their view] is based on a limited group of rabbinic authorities, mainly from the Ashkenazic sector. The intention of “kabalat mitzvoth” actually entails a basic acceptance of the Jewish religion and what is implied by that acceptance: acceptance of the mitzvoth without specific connection to the degree of acceptance of mitzvoth. Even with acceptance of some of the mitzvoth, the convert is a valid convert even initially.

Isn't complete acceptance of mitzvoth essential for conversion?

There are several answers to this.

1. According to most Rishonim (medieval rabbinic authorities), a total acceptance to observe all mitzvoth is not required. This is the opinion of Maimonides.
2. According to the great Posek, Radbaz, acceptance of mitzvoth is ideal [but not mandatory]. The requirement is rabbinic, as was written [also] by Rabbi Shlomo Kluger.
3. The Rambam and Shulhan Arukh rule that if the process of kabalat hamitzvoth was omitted, the conversion is still halakhically valid after the fact.
4. Even those who argue that kabalat hamitzvoth is essential for conversion, the intention is that this is part of the process of conversion, whose basic requirement is circumcision [for males] and immersion in a mikvah in the presence of bet din.

Is there validity to a conversion that does not include an obligation to observe the mitzvoth?

Here we must expand the discussion. One first has to understand the Talmudic discussions relating to those who come to convert. Circumcision and immersion in the mikvah, with a bet din, are requirements that are clear and well-understood. But when it comes to kabalat hamitzvoth, we must clarify that the Talmud itself does not have this phrase; it only mentions informing the candidate of the mitzvoth and the acceptance, namely the person is informed of “some of the mitzvoth” in the words of the Gemara, and if he/she “accepts” then he/she is a convert. His/her acceptance means agreement to what he/she was informed. This informing [about the mitzvoth] is not a sine qua non of the process, but is a way to let the convert know what he/she is entering into in becoming a Jew.

From the Talmudic passages, we learn that the essential matter in becoming Jewish is to identify with the Jewish collective in all respects, “to suffer in their sorrows.” Certainly, one who wishes to become Jewish must follow the entire process, but there was never a contingency between observing the mitzvoth and getting converted. The proof is from clear Talmudic passages relating to a convert who, following conversion, reverts to his/her previous religion and way of life, that such a person is still deemed a Jew in every way. We learn that there is no requirement to demand that the would-be convert accept to observe the mitzvoth, and [a lack of such acceptance] does not invalidate the conversion.

Isn't it the duty of the bet din to ascertain that the candidate for conversion intends to observe the mitzvoth?

This was never the responsibility of the bet din. However, there is a rule that the bet din must initially determine why the person wishes to convert; but if this was not done, such a person is a valid convert even if he/she came for an ulterior purpose e.g. to marry a Jew or for some other motive. This is a clear Talmudic position.

What are the boundaries for conversion?

Clearly, one who wishes to join the Jewish people is obligated in the basic mitzvoth that are fundamental to Judaism. The process includes circumcision and ritual immersion; faith in God and entrance into the traditions of the Jewish people.

What are these traditions of the Jewish people?

This varies depending on the times. In the past, when most Jews observed mitzvoth, then there would be an assumption that the convert be like all the other Jews i.e. fully observant of mitzvoth. In our times, though, most Jews do not observe the mitzvoth; today, though, and especially here in the land of Israel, most Jews are “traditional.” And this blessed situation is improving. For example, a great many Jews are careful to observe the laws of mezuzah; they rest from work on Shabbat; they recite Kiddush on Shabbat and holidays; they light candles for Shabbat and holidays; they observe basic kashruth; they fast on Kippur; they avoid bread on Pessah; they observe Succoth, Hanukkah, Purim; they love fellow Jews; they guard the land of Israel; they participate in helping others and giving charity. Even if sometimes they sin and fail to observe all the mitzvoth, as a rule they understand and keep [many mitzvoth].

Is a person who converts by accepting the traditions of the Jewish people as outlined above, is such a person a valid convert according to halakha?

One must understand that there is a huge gap between our viewpoint—which is the long-held halakhic approach of Sephardic rabbis over the generations—who never required a would-be convert to transform into a meticulous observer of mitzvoth, because they knew that this would be nearly impossible or usual; but they strove to emphasize the basics i.e. that the candidate truly wants to adopt Judaism, has faith, and wants to be and live like all the other Jews. In our times, when most Jews are not scrupulously devoted to mitzvah observance, it is not reasonable to demand of a convert more than what most Jews are observing. Would that all Jews would be observant of the general traditions outlined above.

Where did the erroneous stringent approach arise?

We have explained that entering Judaism entails identification with the Jewish collective. In our times, most Jews are not fully observant of mitzvoth. One who wishes to join this majority should be accepted according to halakha, and with the hope that with time the person will advance in keeping mitzvoth. But [those who hold the stringent view] question the Jewishness of those who are not like them, thinking them Jewish only after the fact. According to them, they certainly don't want to add non-Jews to these [non-observant] Jews, who see such converts as a burden and scab; they love the [Talmudic phrase] that “converts are as difficult for Jews as a scab.”

Are the conversions performed by the rabbis of the Israel Defense Forces and similar conversions only valid “after the fact”?

First, would that these converts would be accepted even after the fact! This would mean that the conversion was done and is accepted, following the halakhic rule that all such conversions are valid. But they [that espouse the stringent view] twist the halakhic sources so that [for them] such converts are not accepted even after the fact.

Would you expand on the position of Sephardic rabbis and their halakhic traditions?

Without going into all the details that I've explained in my books, we know from the rulings and protocols for conversion and from the entire spectrum of their writings, that in practice they followed the approach I've described above. In fact they converted all who came to convert even when most came with an ulterior motive such as in order to marry a Jew. Rabbi Benzion Uziel ruled that "the condition of accepting the mitzvoth is not a sine qua non for conversion." Thus ruled Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim who was Rishon leTsiyon, and so ruled Rabbi Unterman, and so ruled in practice Rabbi Ovadya Yosef even though his writings sometimes point one way and sometimes another way, all depending on the situation. It is clear that historians who will evaluate his views on conversion will see that he validated the conversions of 5000 male and female soldiers who were converted under the auspices of the Israel Defense Forces. This was the practice of the Chief Rabbinate in the past until the predominance of the extreme position.

Since there are stringent positions, why should the halakha follow the lenient view?

First, the halakha generally follows Bet Hillel who are lenient, rather than Bet Shammai who are stringent. Second, when there is a serious crisis within the Jewish people, when assimilation is frightening, when there are people of Jewish ancestry such as the benei anousim who seek conversion but are turned away—it is a mistake to be stringent and alienate them by making unrealistically high demands that are not required by the halakha. It is a mistake not to follow the lenient position. Moreover, even if the Sephardic approach was only "after the fact", at a time of crisis like the present it is proper to adopt this position even initially. An emergency situation is in the category of "after the fact," as is well known.

Does the stringent position sin against would-be converts?

Definitely. Not only is it a perversion of halakha as we've demonstrated, it is oppression of converts which is a serious violation of the Torah, and an oppression of those who have already converted "bedi-avad". The stringent position needlessly alienates those who wish to join the Jewish people, and this is a sin. It makes converts [who were converted according to the lenient view] question the validity of their conversions, as though they are turned back into non-Jews; this is a sin and a travesty. Stringency in matters of conversion today implies leniency when it comes to assimilation.

Is a conversion final or can it be annulled?

It is clear from the Talmud and halakhic sources that once a person has converted—and even if the conversion was dubious—the conversion is fully valid. Rabbi Yosef Karo in his *Beit Yosef* truly stated that "all depends on the evaluation of the bet din" that performs the conversion. This means that before a conversion, the bet din must decide whether to accept or reject the candidate for conversion; but once the conversion has taken place, it is unquestionably valid.

Is there a chance to free the State of Israel from the dilemma it confronts today?

As long as the dominant stringent approach of the rabbinic establishment is in place, there will never be a solution to the conversion problem, assimilation, and the return of those of Jewish ancestry who wish to return to their Jewish roots and faith.

What about the Chief Rabbinate of Israel?

If things do not change and the decision is to leave things in their hand, the result will be destruction, sin and divisiveness in society, hatred of religion—these will only increase in Israel.

What is the hope for the future?

The hope is that the Jewish people will understand the critical situation and will cast off the yoke of the extremists..

* Rabbi Chaim Amsalem has written extensively on the topic of conversion to Judaism. A former member of the Israeli Knesset, he works to bring individuals of Jewish ancestry back to their ancestral faith and people.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/rabbi-chaim-amsalem-discusses-conversion-judaism>

Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei – Internal & External

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

One of the most fundamental elements of studying Chumash is the understanding that the wording of the Torah is exceedingly precise. Many of the fundamental elements of Torah law are only hinted to in the Chumash itself, using an extra letter, an unusual word, or a particular turn of phrase. For example, the basis for the intricate laws of Shabbos, what is and is not considered a creative act on Shabbos is derived from the word “Ach” – “However,” found in last week’s Parsha. One of the few exceptions is the construction of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, in the desert and the priestly garments. I have always been struck by the elaborate detail found in the Torah describing exact measurements, placements and materials. After instructing in detail how they should be made, the Torah then repeats all those details describing how they were all made according to that plan. Our Rabbis explain how many of these details are teaching us of the dedication, honesty and nobility of our ancestors and of all those who were involved in the construction of the Tabernacle.

The Sforno teaches us that one specific detail was elaborated on, in order to drive home the importance of this message. After the donations were given, the Torah lists the total donations of the gold, silver and copper. The Sforno explains (Shemos 38:24) that these are focused on to highlight how these donations were far less than the materials used for the construction of the first Temple, which itself was less than the wealth donated for the construction of the second Temple. Yet, we know that the appearance of Hashem’s Presence was more strongly sensed in the Tabernacle in the desert, than it was in the first Temple, and was not sensed at all in the second Temple. This is to highlight for us that the determining factor in bringing Hashem’s Presence into our lives is not the external wealth and grandeur we display. Rather, the key is found in reverence of G-d and acts of serving and devoting one’s self to G-d. It was specifically that dedication, honesty and nobility of the generation in the desert which brought G-d’s Presence so strongly into the Tabernacle.

This message is a powerful reminder of what is truly important in life. Yet, it leaves us with a question. If it is our dedication, morality and reverence of G-d which brings Hashem’s Presence into our lives, then why indeed were there such large donations given to the Tabernacle and the Temples? Rather than spending the time gathering, donating, and working the materials, they could have spent their time in prayer and contemplation. They could have been studying the nuances of ethics and Torah law, rather than studying the nuances and skills of smiths and carpenters.

I believe the answer to this question lies in our understanding of our relationship to this world. The Ramcha”l tells us in the first chapter of Mesillas Yesharim that this physical world is the only place where we can enhance our relationship with G-d. The Torah and mitzvos are the guides for how to use the physical world to connect with G-d, but it is through our physical existence that we connect. When we choose to accept and understand our physical and psychological makeup and choose to use those forces according to G-d’s Torah, we elevate not only our spiritual essence but our physical selves, as well.

From this perspective we can understand the full import of the Sforno’s message. We are partially physical beings, and our physicality is impacted by the beauty and grandeur of gold and silver. The display of wealth can awe us. It is quite appropriate to use these physical reactions when building a “house” for G-d. This will deepen our awe and respect for G-d. The Sforno is not telling us that this is not important. Rather, he is telling us that Hashem wants us to understand that whatever situation we find ourselves in, how much or how little we have doesn’t matter. What matters is only how deeply we devote ourselves to G-d, using the resources that are available to us. Properly using each situation is what builds our relationship with G-d.

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Building a Tabernacle and JavaScript

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

Imagine you tell your kid, "Please help clean the table, honey," and they respond in all seriousness, "What's a table? Which table? What do you mean by clean? Do you want me to just take the stuff off or wipe it down? What does honey have to do with it? Do you want me to spread it on this strange 'table' thing? And what does 'please' mean? It doesn't seem to be adding anything to the instruction."

Thank God most of us have developed the ability to store symbols in our heads. Otherwise, every instruction would have to be preceded by a deep dive into what tables are, which one you mean, etc., along with every other word we said. Even now, we still have trouble processing the word "clean." How many times have you told someone to clean something, and you come back later and there's still a mess but the recipient of your instruction insists that it's clean? Some symbols are still not universally defined.

In a nutshell, this is what computer programming is. You are talking to a substance that has no foreknowledge of symbols. A computer does not know what a table is, or what "clean" means unless you tell it. (And it definitely does not recognize the word "please." That is a distinctly human word meant to smooth over our personality's rougher edges.)

A computer programmer's job is to tell the computer what each word of instruction means exactly and all the actions that it must take in response to other actions that happen.

Let's take Tetris. All of the events that happen on the screen need to be programmed. The computer needs to know what to do when you hit the button to make it faster. Or what effects to show on the screen when we fill a line.

Perhaps Tetris would be simple, but what about modern video games that recreate whole worlds? You would need an army of programmers that all work together to make sure the computer understands all the instructions for the myriad possibilities. Imagine trying to program your body and the millions of reactions that happen everyday in just one organ to keep us alive!

It's not hard to see why so many people feel fear and annoyance when working with computers. We just expect that the computer should understand what we want to do just like we feel that our friends and fellow humans should understand what we want. But computers have their own way, and we have to be patient, figure it out, and slowly realize that we must learn how to live within another set of rules besides our own.

Have you ever felt this with a loved one? You feel they should just know what you want. They should know all the meaning behind the symbols and messages that you're sending without the need for explanation. But no matter how much you try, you slowly realize that you need to also be familiar with their symbols and work according to their rules. It's not all about you. (Except on your birthday of course.)

Some might call this process of building consideration for the world of another "spirituality." (Does that make coding a spiritual activity too?)

Look at this week's double portion that ends the book of Exodus. It reads like a computer program with all the lists of materials and instructions for the exact specifications of the Tabernacle. Each curtain had to be 28 cubits long with exactly 50 loops. Each plank of wood had to be ten cubits long. The Menorah had to have a specific amount of flower decorations and goblet decorations. The Torah lists all of these specifications, thus making one of the longest Torah readings of the year.

It can be frustrating. We wonder why the Torah cares to list everything in such specifics. Who cares? How is this necessary for our spiritual life?

Maybe after the Jews worshipped the Golden Calf last week, they needed a spiritual boost. After collapsing into hedonism where everything was about their needs and their desires and their symbols, they needed to be reminded that it's not just about what they want, but what God wants.

They didn't understand all the specifics. They didn't understand the mystical reasons why each measurement was the way it was. But it didn't matter. Sometimes you just have to run the code the way another wants it. Sometimes you have to learn the way the other person works and work within those rules. Doing this helps you escape the trap of arrogant self-servitude.

According to the Talmud, even Moses made the mistake of thinking the details weren't so important.

"Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: Betzalel was so named on account of his wisdom. Though God said to Moshe, "Go tell Betzalel to make Me a Mishkan, an ark, and vessels," Moshe reversed it and said to him, "Make an ark, vessels, and a Mishkan." Betzalel responded, "Moshe Rabbeinu, it is the way of the world that a

person first builds a house and afterwards puts vessels into it. Yet you are saying, 'Make me an ark, vessels, and then the Mishkan!' The vessels which I make – where would I put them? Perhaps God said to you, 'Make a Mishkan, an ark and vessels?' Moshe responded, "Perhaps you were in the shadow of God (betzel E-l) and you knew this!"

The action of building the Mishkan according to God's specifications served as the Jews' repentance. And it worked. As the ending of Exodus states, "For the cloud of the LORD was upon the tabernacle by day, and there was fire therein by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys."

So it seems one gateway to greater spirituality is being open to learning God's or another human being's symbols/way of doing things instead of expecting them to always conform to our own. "Make His will your will so He will make your will His will. Nullify your will before His will so He will nullify other wills for yours." (Ethics of the Fathers 2:4)

Or the next time your computer starts freezing, calm down and give it a reassuring pat on the keyboard. After all, we all have our days when the code just doesn't run.

Shabbat Shalom!

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Rav Kook Torah **Vayakheil: The Dual Nature of the Tabernacle**

An obvious question strikes anyone reading the last two portions of the book of Exodus: Vayakheil and Pekudei. Why was it necessary to repeat all of the details of how the Tabernacle was built? All of these matters were already described at great length in Terumah and Tetzaveh, which record God's command to build the Mishkan.

The Command and the Execution

In several places, Rav Kook noted the divide in our lives between the path and the final goal.¹ We tend to rush through life, chasing after goals — even worthwhile goals — with little regard for the path and the means. We see the path as a stepping stone, of no significance in its own right.

With these two sets of Torah portions Terumah-Tetzaveh and Vayakheil-Pekudei, we observe a similar divide. The first two record God's command to build the Mishkan, while the second two document its actual construction. This is the distinction between study and action, between theory and practice. And it also corresponds to the aforementioned divide between means and ends.

Just as our world emphasizes goals at the expense of means, so, too, it values deed and accomplishment over thought and study. A more insightful perspective, however, finds a special significance in the path, in the abstract theory, in the initial command.

The Sages imparted a remarkable insight: "Great is Torah study, for it leads to action" (Kiddushin 40b). This statement teaches that Torah study — the theory, the path — is preferable to its apparent goal, the performance of mitzvot. Torah study leads us to good deeds; but it has an intrinsic worth above and beyond its value as a tool to know how to act.

The Talmud discusses whether a blessing should be recited when constructing a sukkah-booth. After all, the Torah commands us to build a sukkah — "The holiday of booths you shall make for yourselves" (Deut. 16:13). Nonetheless, the rabbis determined that no blessing is recited when building the sukkah, only when dwelling in it during the Succoth holiday. Why not?

Maimonides explained that when there is a command to construct an object for the purpose of fulfilling a mitzvah, one only recites a blessing on the final, ultimate mitzvah (see Hilchot Berachot 11:8). Thus we do not recite a blessing when preparing tzitzit or when building a sukkah.

According to this line of reasoning, if Torah study were only a means to know how to keep mitzvot, no blessing would be recited over studying Torah. The fact that we do recite blessings over Torah study indicates that this study is a mitzvah in its own right, independent of its function as a preparation to fulfill other mitzvot.

These two aspects of Torah — study and action — may be described as Divine influence traversing in opposite directions, like the angels in Jacob's dream. The Torah's fulfillment through practical mitzvot indicates a shefa that flows from above to below. This is the realization of God's elevated will, ratzon Hashem, in the lower physical realm.

The intrinsic value of Torah study, on the other hand, indicates spiritual movement in the opposite direction. It ascends from below to above: our intellectual activity, without expression in the physical world; our Torah thoughts and ideas, without practical application.

Dual Purpose

The repetition in the account of the Mishkan reflects this dichotomy. The two sets of Torah readings are divided between command and execution, study and deed.

And on a deeper level, the repetition reflects the dual function of the Mishkan (and later on, the Temple). On the practical level, the Mishkan was a central location for offering korbanot to God. It served as a center dedicated to holy actions.

But on the abstract, metaphysical level, the Mishkan was a focal point for God's Presence, a dwelling place for His Shekhinah.

"They shall make for Me a Temple, and I will dwell (ve-shekanti) among them" (Ex. 25:8).

Like the diametric influences of Torah, one descending and one ascending, each of the Tabernacle's functions indicated an opposite direction. Its construction, the dedication of physical materials to holy purposes, and the offering of korbanot to God, flowed upwards. An ascent from the physical world below to the heavens above.

The indwelling of the Shekhinah, on the other hand, was a descending phenomenon from above to below, as God's Divine Presence resided in the physical universe, a source of divine inspiration and prophecy.

(Adapted from Shemuot HaRe'iyah, Vayakheil-Pekudei (1931).)

1 For example, Orot HaTeshuvah 6:7; Mo'adei HaRe'iyah, p. 110.

<http://ravkooktorah.org/VAYAKHEIL-71.htm>

Encampments & Journeys (Vayakhel & Pekudei 5777)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

Right at the end of the book of Shemot, there is a textual difficulty so slight that it is easy to miss, yet – as interpreted by Rashi – it contains one of the great clues as to the nature of Jewish identity: it is a moving testimony to the unique challenge of being a Jew.

First, the background. The Tabernacle is finally complete. Its construction has taken many chapters to relate. No other event in the wilderness years is portrayed in such detail. Now, on the first of Nissan, exactly a year after Moses told the people to begin their preparations for the exodus, he assembles the beams and hangings, and puts the furniture and vessels in place. There is an unmistakable parallelism between the words the Torah uses to describe Moses' completion of the work and those it uses of God on the seventh day of creation:

And Moses finished [vayechal] the work [hamelakhah]. And God finished [vayechal] on the seventh day the work [melakhto] which He had done.

The next verse states the result:

Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle.

The meaning is both clear and revolutionary. The creation of the Sanctuary by the Israelites is intended to represent a human parallel to the Divine creation of the universe. In making the world, God created a home for mankind. In making the Tabernacle, mankind created a home for God.

From a human perspective, God fills the space we make for His presence. His glory exists where we renounce ours. The immense detail of the construction is there to tell us that throughout, the Israelites were obeying God's instructions rather than improvising their own. The specific domain called "the holy" is where we meet God on His terms, not ours. Yet this too is God's way of conferring dignity on mankind. It is we who build His home so that He may fill what we have made. In the words of a famous film: "If you build it, he will come."

Bereishit begins with God making the cosmos. Shemot ends with human beings making a micro-cosmos, a miniature and symbolic universe. Thus the entire narrative of Genesis-Exodus is a single vast span that begins and ends with the concept of God-filled space, with this difference: that in the beginning the work is done by God-the-Creator. By the end it is done by man-and-woman-the-creators. The whole intricate history has been a story with one overarching theme: the transfer of the power and responsibility of creation from heaven to earth, from God to the image-of-God called mankind.

That is the background. However, the final verses of the book go on to tell us about the relationship between the "cloud of glory" and the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle, we recall, was not a fixed structure. It was made in such a way as to be portable. It could quickly be dismantled and its parts carried, as the Israelites made their way to the next stage of their journey. When the time came for the Israelites to move on, the cloud moved from its resting place in the Tent of Meeting to a position outside the camp, signalling the direction they must now take. This is how the Torah describes it:

When the cloud lifted from above the Tabernacle, the Israelites went onward in all their journeys, but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the Tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel in all their journeys. (Ex. 40:36-38)

There is a small but significant difference between the two instances of the phrase *bechol mas'ehem*, "in all their journeys". In the first instance the words are to be taken literally. When the cloud lifted and moved on ahead, the Israelites knew they were about to travel.

However in the second instance they cannot be taken literally. The cloud was not over the Tabernacle in all their journeys. On the contrary: it was there only when they stopped travelling and instead pitched camp. During the journeys the cloud went on ahead.

Noting this, Rashi makes the following comment:

A place where they encamped is also called *massa*, "a journey" . . . Because from the place of encampment they always set out again on a new journey, therefore they are all called "journeys."

The point is linguistic, but the message is anything but. Rashi has encapsulated in a few brief words – "a place where they encamped is also called a journey" — the existential truth at the heart of Jewish identity. So long as we have not yet reached our destination, even a place of rest is still called a journey – because we know we are not here forever. There is a way still to go. In the words of the poet Robert Frost,

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep.

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. See <https://rabbisacks.org/encampments-journeys-vayakhel-pekuidei-5777/>

The Unique Place: An Essay On Parshat Pekudei

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz)* © Chabad 2021

Why is a tabernacle necessary?

Parshat Pekudei concludes the book of Exodus and also concludes a series of parshot dealing with the Tabernacle. The particulars of the Tabernacle have given rise to many questions, which are discussed extensively in the Talmud and other sources. But before all these specifics, two fundamental questions must be addressed.

The first question relates to the time of the Tabernacle's construction. Why was the Tabernacle erected in the wilderness, a seemingly inopportune time and setting for such an endeavor?

The Song of the Sea includes the following passage: "Until Your people cross, O G d, until the people You gained cross over. You will bring them and plant them on Your own mountain, the place You made to dwell in, the sanctuary of G d, which Your hands established."¹ From these verses, there would appear to be a planned order to things: First they cross the sea, then the wilderness; then they enter the Land of Israel, and only at the very end of this process do they build the Sanctuary. But in reality, the Tabernacle was built almost immediately after the parting of the sea. As early as the first year after the Exodus, the people received the command to build it, and at the beginning of the second year it was already dedicated.

To be sure, a distinction can ostensibly be made between the Tabernacle and the "sanctuary" mentioned in the verse. Nevertheless, it would seem that the Tabernacle should have been built at least fifty years later, after the entry into the Land, the conclusion of the wars of conquest, and the apportionment of the Land.

The second question, which is more general, pertains to the very need for a tabernacle or a sanctuary in the first place. When a person is moved to do something for G d's glory, the best and most straight-forward way for him to do this would seem to be on his own, in the manner that befits him. Indeed, that is precisely what was done before the Temple was built, even when the Tabernacle was already in existence, when the use of bamot (ritual platforms or altars) was permitted.

The truth is that a bamah is less complicated than the Tabernacle in every respect, and is also much more accessible and personal; anyone can use it. In a reality where bamot are permitted, one who wants to bring a korban to G d – and not just to worship Him through prayer and the observance of His commandments – does not need to rely on the Priests, nor does he need to travel a great distance. He himself can build an earthen altar or a stone altar anywhere, even in his own yard, and then he can bring korbanot and draw himself closer to G d. Such service of G d is direct and simple.

It appears that the essence of divine worship in general, and korbanot in particular, does not require a tabernacle and could have remained a private matter, for each individual to pursue personally. Consider the view of Nachmanides,² for example, who points out that korbanot existed from ancient times and are not necessarily dependent on a tabernacle or sanctuary. Even if we do not take into account our sages' interpretation that Adam brought a korban,³ the Torah says explicitly that Cain and Abel brought korbanot at the dawn of man's existence. Apparently, the drive to bring korbanot is intrinsic to the human race. Every human being – not just the Jew – is entitled, according to halachah, to bring a korban to G d, anywhere and anytime. We, the Jewish people, are the only ones who have been limited in this regard, in that we can only bring korbanot in the Tabernacle or in the Temple.

Instead of each person building his own bamah, we were commanded to build the Tabernacle, which, in many respects, is a formidable and complex task. Here, again, the question is: Why is this necessary? What is it that can be found in the Tabernacle but not at a bamah?

Two ways of serving G d

Apparently, there is indeed a difference between korbanot brought at a bamah and korbanot brought in the Sanctuary, a phenomenon unique to Israel. These are two different ways of serving G d. Non-Jews who wish to serve G d may bring

korbanot anywhere, whereas the Jewish people were assigned a different way of serving G d, in which they require a Temple.

The first way in which one can serve G d – the way that is open to anyone – is on the level of the individual. One can lead his own life and try from within himself to achieve as much as possible in the service of G d. If his “heart moves him,”⁴ as we have seen, he can also make a private offering. If one gets up one morning, sees the sunrise, and feels that he must do something special for G d, he can follow his instinct and bring a korban. Likewise, one who feels that he has committed a sin and needs atonement can visit the nearest bamah and bring a korban as well. Whether it is a thanksgiving offering or an atonement offering, this offering is part of the person’s divine service as an individual.

This service, which is available to Jews and non-Jews alike, can certainly bring a person close to G d, but it has an inherent limit – the person remains within his limitations as a human being. This service derives from the individual’s personal life, and therefore, even though it is has no restrictions, neither in the time nor in the place of the korban, the limitations inherent in this kind of divine service prevent one from breaking through to a higher level of intimacy with G d.

The other way of serving G d – the way that is unique to the Jewish people – is based on the principle that the individual does not remain where he is but, rather, is encouraged to transcend the limits and dimensions of his personality. In the case of the Jewish people, korbanot and divine service in general are connected with the need for the Tabernacle or the Temple. The Temple is not merely an instrument to enable man to approach G d; it is also a two-way portal, a passage between the world and G d. To be sure, there is the aspect of man turning upward to G d from below in the Temple as well; but there is also the aspect of G d turning downward from above. G d dwells in the Temple, revealing Himself through it, as it says, “I will speak to you from above the Ark-cover.”⁵

These two ways of serving G d are interconnected. In order for G d to reveal Himself in the Temple, there must be an awakening of Israel from below. The place where G d reveals Himself is the place where all eyes are raised to Him, a kind of beacon for religious devotion. G d’s revelation in the Temple does not happen automatically; it requires an awakening of the will, a certain element of longing. When such collective will does not exist – whether this is intentional or the result of some constraint – the portal remains closed.

The act of building a house for G d may seem illogical at first. After all, “the whole world is full of His glory”! What is the point of establishing a physical place and instructing G d to remain there? The truth is that while G d is present everywhere, not every place contains a portal of revelation the likes of which we described above. In order for an earthly Temple to fulfill its purpose, our hearts must be open to it. When our hearts are not open to it, even the Temple cannot help us interact with G d.

Forming a center

The aspirations of a large community of people are channeled through the Temple – not the personal longing of one individual, but the longing of the entire community of Israel. When the aspirations are concentrated together, this forms something that transcends the limits of the individual’s personal will, and the Temple then becomes a place where G d can come from above to dwell down below. From the combined aspirations of the community springs something that is not always visible to the eye. When the right connection is formed among Jews, there is a twofold, threefold, or ten thousand-fold magnification of what lies within each one of them. Batteries can be joined in such a way that each one remains separate, but they can also be joined in such a way that each battery adds its energy to the whole, strengthening it. This whole is necessary so that we not remain in a situation where each individual stands separately, so that the spiritual entity called “Israel” can continue to exist.

The standards of holiness required of the Jewish people as a whole are higher and stricter than those required of the individual, even if his heart has moved him. In the Temple, as in the Tabernacle, we attempt to raise the individual’s standard to an entirely different level. Instead of the bamah, which does not become invested with sanctity of place, a Sanctuary is built, around which the complete structure of the Holy and the Holy of Holies is formed. The Temple, which includes communal -korbanot and other korbanot that cannot be brought as individual -korbanot, was created in order to induce individuals to aspire to far more than they would when alone, to enable them to accomplish what they cannot on their own. When someone says, “What I have is sufficient for me,” this is a sign that he is still stuck on the level of his private bamah, whereas in the Temple he must transcend his own aspirations. The further he wants to go in the realm of the holy, the more is required of him in terms of purity, atonement, and ascent, level after level.

The Tabernacle and the Temple radiate inward, to the sacred, but at the same time exert an influence even on what is most profane. From the moment the Tabernacle is erected, it is meaningful not only when one is inside it, but even when one is just wandering in the wilderness. From the moment the Tabernacle is erected, the whole area around it receives a center, a focal point around which various camps are formed. The Levite camp and even the Israelite camp assumed sacred significance, and as a result, it became forbidden for certain people to be inside them. Once a Tabernacle exists, even one's own private tent is no longer what it used to be.

The urgency of erecting the Tabernacle

As we have seen, the proper order of things should dictate that only when everything is already in place – they have conquered the Land, appointed a king, and wiped out the Amalekites – is it possible to build the Temple. Such an order can only be actualized once the people arrive in the land of Canaan. In truth, after the People of Israel crossed the Red Sea, if they had acted properly, the construction of the Tabernacle/Temple would likely have been a thing of the distant future.

However, the construction of the Temple was not just a matter of convenience. If that were the case, the People of Israel would have postponed its construction four hundred years in anticipation of a period of quiet and calm – the optimal time to build the Temple. Instead, the construction of the Tabernacle began almost immediately.

The reason this happened is that after the sin of the Golden Calf, the reality faced by the People of Israel posed a great danger to them. If they had entered the Land immediately and begun to become involved in all that entry into the Land entails, it might have been possible to postpone the construction of the Temple. But the people faced forty years of wandering in the wilderness (at least according to those who maintain that the sin of the spies occurred before the construction of the Tabernacle), and during that time they could not be left in a scattered state, wandering about in an entirely individualistic manner. Sometimes, if one is not firmly raised higher than he aspired to climb, he is liable to descend much lower than he could have anticipated. The condition of the People of Israel at the time dictated the need for something that lay beyond their own spiritual dimensions. They needed an element that would raise them higher; for otherwise, they may not have reached the stage of entering the Land at all.

When it became necessary to warn the People of Israel not to sacrifice to demons, this was a sure sign that it was necessary to build the Tabernacle. In light of this, the construction of the Tabernacle became more than just an optional convenience; it became a necessity.

There is an adage that appears, in various forms, in many languages: "If you can't get through from above, try from below." But what should be done in the opposite situation, if you can't get through from below? Following the same pattern, it would seem that if you can't get through from below, you must get through from above. If the usual route is blocked, you must find another route; you must leap much higher than you had originally intended. In such a situation, one must ascend in holiness, in a way that is not at all commensurate with one's present level.

The silent majority

The process that ultimately necessitates the "early" construction of the Tabernacle begins with the sin of the Golden Calf. When Moses descended Mount Sinai and said, "Whoever is for G d, join me!" 6 all the Levites rallied to him, and they killed many people – three thousand altogether. But this number is a small fraction of the total population of the People of Israel at the time. Assuming that these three thousand people represented those who created the Golden Calf and its hardcore followers, where was the remainder of the People of Israel?

It is clear that the majority of the people was not involved in creating the calf. If that is so, what happened? Apparently, once the calf was created, a large percentage of the people began to follow the calf along with everyone else. Moses was absent, and someone suggested that a calf should take his place. To be sure, the calf was not exactly like Moses, but this was an emergency; the calf would have to suffice. In this situation, even the seemingly levelheaded masses were drawn in to the allure of the calf.

The same question arises when Jeroboam sets up calves in Dan and in Bethel. What happened to all the good Jews who for so many years had gone to bring korbanot in the Temple? What happened to all those who learned Torah from Samuel, from David and Solomon? Until Jeroboam's time, there was a long period in which idolatry became taboo. King Saul took the first major steps, clearing the country of all sorts of idolatry, and David and Solomon continued on this path

after him. This period of devoutness lasted for a relatively long time; yet when the calves are made, there is no popular rebellion. Everyone is simply swept along.

The reality, then, is that whenever there is a calf, there is a crowd – including many average individuals – that is ready to follow it. If that is the case, the Temple can no longer be delayed; it must be constructed immediately. In order to avoid a spiritual vacuum, in order to allow G d to “dwell in their midst,” the people must fulfill the command to “make Me a sanctuary”⁷ – precisely in the wilderness, and precisely during the forty years of wandering.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Ex. 15:16–17.

2. Lev. 1:9.

3. Avodah Zarah 8a.

4. Ex. 25:2.

5. Ex. 25:22.

6. Ex. 32:26.

7. Ex. 25:8.

Vayakheil - Pekudei: How to Educate Successfully

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky

The people brought their gold earrings, nose-rings, finger-rings, and bracelets. bracelets
(Ibn Ezra, Exodus 35:22)

The four items that the women donated allude to the four aspects of proper child-rearing and Jewish education:

Earrings: Listening carefully to children’s conversations with their peers, for children learn how to talk from their elders’ example; if something is amiss in how they speak, it means something is amiss in how their role models speak.

Nose-rings: Developing a keen sense of “smell” to determine if children’s friendships with other children are beneficial.

Finger-rings: Pointing children to the proper path, by gently guiding them to adhere to the Torah’s teachings and not to follow harmful paths.

Bracelets: Being strong-armed—for even if children are well-behaved, it is necessary to be firm with them in order to foster their enthusiasm for their studies.

– * from Daily Wisdom #1

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via the Internet

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Shabbat Parashat Vayakhel-Pekudei - HaChodesh

5781 B'H

In memory of our beloved mother,
Evelyn G. Butler Morris, a'h

(Chava Gitel Bas Shraga Feivel HaLevi V Michla Reichel)
Bev Morris (Silver Spring)
Burton D. Morris (Harrisburg)
Elayne Mayerfeld (Los Angeles)

Covenant and Conversation Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Celebrate

If leaders are to bring out the best in those they lead, they must give them the chance to show they are capable of great things, and then they must celebrate their achievements. That is what happens at a key moment toward the end of our parsha, one that brings the book of Exodus to a sublime conclusion after all the strife that has gone before.

The Israelites have finally completed the work of building the Tabernacle. We then read:

So all the work on the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, was completed. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses ... Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. So Moses blessed them. (Ex. 39:32, 43)

The passage sounds simple enough, but to the practised ear it recalls another biblical text, from the end of the Creation narrative in Genesis:

The heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. On the seventh day God finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done. (Gen. 2:1-3)

Three key words appear in both passages: "work," "completed" and "blessed." These verbal echoes are not accidental. They are how the Torah signals intertextuality, hinting that one law or story is to be read in the context of another. In this case, the Torah is emphasising that Exodus ends as Genesis began, with a work of creation. Note the difference as well as the similarity. Genesis began with an act of Divine creation. Exodus ends with an act of human creation.

The closer we examine the two texts, the more we see how intricately the parallel has been constructed. The creation account in Genesis is tightly organised around a series of sevens. There are seven days of Creation. The word "good" appears seven times, the word "God" thirty-five times, and the word "earth" twenty-one times. The opening verse of Genesis contains seven words, the second fourteen, and the three concluding verses 35 words. All multiples of seven. The complete text is 469 (7×67) words.

The account of the construction of the Tabernacle in Vayakhel-Pekudei is similarly built around the number seven. The word "heart" appears seven times in Exodus 35:5-29, as Moses specifies the materials to be used in the construction, and seven times again in 35:34 – 36:8, the description of how the craftsmen Bezalel and Oholiav will carry out the work. The word *terumah*, "contribution" appears seven times in this section. In chapter 39, describing the making of the priestly vestments, the phrase "as God commanded Moses" occurs seven times. It occurs again seven times in chapter 40.

A remarkable parallel is being drawn between God's creation of the universe and the Israelites' creation of the Sanctuary. We now understand what the Sanctuary represented. It was a micro-cosmos, a universe in miniature, constructed with the same precision and "wisdom" as the universe itself, a place of order against the formlessness of the wilderness and the ever-threatening chaos of the human heart. The Sanctuary was a visible reminder of God's Presence within the camp, itself a metaphor for God's Presence within the Universe as a whole.

A large and fateful idea is taking shape. The Israelites – who have been portrayed throughout much of Exodus as ungrateful and half-hearted – have now been given the opportunity, after the sin of the Golden Calf, to show that they are not irredeemable, and they have embraced that opportunity. They are proven capable of great things. They have shown they can be creative. They have used their generosity and skill to build a mini-universe. By this symbolic act they have shown they are capable of becoming, in the potent rabbinic phrase, "God's partners in the work of creation."

This was fundamental to their re-moralisation and to their self-image as the people of God's covenant. Judaism does not take a low view of human possibility. We do not believe we are tainted by original sin. We are not incapable of moral grandeur. To the contrary, the very fact that we are in the image of the Creator means that we humans – uniquely among life forms – have the ability to be creative. As Israel's first creative achievement reached its culmination Moses blessed them, saying, according to the Sages, "May it be God's will that His Presence rests in the work of your hands."^[1] Our potential greatness is that we can create structures, relationships and lives that become homes for the Divine Presence.

Blessing them and celebrating their achievement, Moses showed them what they could be. That is potentially a life-changing experience. Here is a contemporary example:

In 2001, shortly after September 11th, I received a letter from a woman in London whose name I did not immediately recognise. She wrote that on the morning of the attack on the World Trade Centre, I had been giving a lecture on ways of raising the status of the teaching profession, and she had seen a report about it in the press. This prompted her to write and remind me of a meeting we had had eight years earlier.

She was then, in 1993, the Head Teacher of a school that was floundering. She had heard some of my broadcasts, felt a kinship with what I had to say, and thought that I might have a solution to her problem. I invited her, together with two of her deputies, to our house. The story she told me was this: morale within the school, among teachers, pupils and parents alike, was at an all-time low. Parents had been withdrawing their children. The student roll had fallen from 1000 children to 500. Examination results were bad: only 8 per cent of students achieved high grades. It was clear that unless something changed dramatically, the school would be forced to close.

We talked for an hour or so on general themes: the school as community, how to create an ethos, and so on. Suddenly, I realised that we were thinking along the wrong lines. The problem she faced was practical, not philosophical. I said: "I want you to live one word: celebrate." She turned to me with a sigh: "You don't understand – we have nothing to celebrate. Everything in the school is going wrong." "In that case," I replied, "find something to celebrate. If a single student has done better this week than last week, celebrate. If someone has a birthday, celebrate. If it's Tuesday, celebrate." She seemed unconvinced, but promised to give the idea a try.

Now, eight years later, she was writing to tell me what had happened since then. Examination results at high grades had risen from 8 per cent to 65 per cent. The enrolment of pupils had risen from 500 to 1000. Saving the best news to last, she added that she had

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just been made a Dame of the British Empire – one of the highest honours the Queen can bestow – for her contribution to education. She ended by saying that she just wanted me to know how a single word had changed the school, and her life.

She was a wonderful teacher, and certainly did not need my advice. She would have discovered the answer on her own anyway. But I was never in any doubt that the strategy would succeed, for we all grow to fill other people's expectations of us. If they are low, we remain small. If they are high, we walk tall.

The idea that each of us has a fixed quantum of intelligence, virtue, academic ability, motivation and drive is absurd. Not all of us can paint like Monet or compose like Mozart. But we each have gifts, capacities, that can lie dormant throughout life until someone awakes them. We can achieve heights of which we never thought ourselves capable. All it takes is for us to meet someone who believes in us, challenges us, and then, when we have responded to the challenge, blesses and celebrates our achievements. That is what Moses did for the Israelites after the sin of the Golden Calf. First he got them to create, and then he blessed them and their creation with one of the simplest and most moving of all blessings, that the Shechinah should dwell in the work of their hands.

Celebration is an essential part of motivating. It turned a school around. In an earlier age and in a more sacred context it turned the Israelites around. So celebrate.

When we celebrate the achievements of others, we change lives.

[1] Sifrei, Bamidbar, Pinchas, 143.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And he erected the courtyard around the sanctuary and the altar, set up the screen gate of the courtyard; and Moses completed the work." (Exodus 40:33)

Why repeat all the details of the construction of the Mishkan after we have already heard them when they were initially commanded? Would it not have been simpler to deal with the entire execution of external building, furnishings and priestly garb with the single verse: "And the People of Israel built the Mishkan exactly as God commanded"?

In order to understand the significance of the repetition, it is important to remember that the Almighty desires an intimate relationship between Himself and the People of Israel. That is why they are commanded to build a Mishkan in the first place: "that I may dwell among them" [29:46].

However, worshiping the golden calf was a betrayal of the ideals given at Sinai. In effect, the Israelites committed adultery, scarring the love and intimacy God had just bestowed upon

them. Were God only a God of justice, this would have been the demise of the Jewish people, their sin mandating a punishment that would have meant the end of the Abrahamic mission.

But since God is also a God of compassion, He forgives. However, can we legitimately expect forgiveness for as heinous a crime as idolatry? Will the Almighty take Israel back even after they have committed adultery?

Herein lies the true significance of the repetition of each and every painstaking instruction regarding the Mishkan. God places his nuptial "home" with Israel before they sin with the golden calf, and God accepts their construction of the nuptial home after they have sinned with the golden calf. The repetition is a confirmation that the intimacy between God and Israel has been restored, that the relationship between God and His bride, Israel, has returned to its original state of mutual commitment and faith. The repetition of the exact details is essentially God's gift of forgiveness.

It is interesting to note that on the weeks when we read the concluding portions of Exodus, the calendar is usually host to another sequence of special readings, wherein a second Torah scroll is removed from the ark for an additional reading as well as a special haftorah reading from the prophets.

The first special reading is Shekalim, which speaks of the obligation of every Jew to give a half-shekel to the Mishkan. This represents an act of commitment: a pledge of a four thousand year-strong covenantal relationship between God and Israel, demonstrated in our daily lives by the giving of our "half-shekels" to build our sanctuaries – yeshivas and synagogues, day schools and outreach centers – thus bringing God within our midst. Financial commitment is also the traditional halakhic form of betrothal (symbolized in the wedding ring).

The second special Sabbath – immediately preceding Purim – is Shabbat Zakhor: "Remember" to destroy the evil Amalek. Shabbat Zakhor always precedes Purim because in Shushan there were two threats: externally, from Haman, the descendant of Amalek; while internally, the Jews themselves, who, deep in the amnesia of assimilation, were seduced by the invitations to the parties at the palace of Ahashverosh, with all the non-kosher wine and shrimp one could enjoy.

Israel, betrothed by the shekel to God, had succumbed to the temptation of Amalek, substituting the temptations of gold and licentiousness for their God-groom.

The third special Sabbath, Parah, symbolizes the process of purification. The People of Israel, having defiled themselves, are reminded by God that even when our impurity stems

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from death, the highest degree of impurity, He has provided the red heifer to spiritually cleanse us.

Finally, the namesake for this Sabbath's special reading, HaHodesh, brings us towards a new beginning. "Hodesh," the Hebrew word for month, is also bound up with "hadash" [new] and "hidush" [renewal]. In effect, the moon is the messenger of change and renewal, the ability to emerge from total darkness to a state of fullness and perfection.

Thus the special portions of Shekalim, Zakhor, Parah and HaHodesh parallel the portions of Terumah, Tetzaveh, Ki Tissa and Vayakhel-Pekudei. The journey begins with commitment and love, stumbles through failure and sin, and concludes with the possibility of purification and renewal. These stages mark the path of individual and national freedom, culminating in the festival of freedom, Passover.

The Person in the Parsha **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

Endings and Beginnings

What is life all about? One answer to that question is that life is all about beginnings and endings. Birth and death, marriage and divorce, Hopeful anticipation and inglorious defeat.

Most commonly, beginnings are bright. Even the pessimists among us cherish new beginnings and find promise in them. A new leaf is exciting, encouraging, and full of possibilities.

Yet, beginnings have downsides, too. They are often fraught with the handicap of inexperience and sometimes contain moments of anxiety and even foreboding.

Our sages recognized this well when they cautioned us, "Kol hatchalot kashot, All beginnings are difficult!"

Endings, on the other hand, are not always negative. Sometimes it is good to close the book on an unfortunate set of circumstances and to exclaim, as we do on Rosh Hashanah Eve, "Let the past year and its curses be gone!"

Indeed, there are endings which are truly happy occasions, which represent the successful conclusions of long processes of efficient effort and hard work. Those endings celebrate achievement and accomplishment.

This week's Torah readings include two lengthy parshiyot, Vayakhel and Pekudei, and the supplemental reading of Parshat HaChodesh. These readings exemplify celebratory endings and hopeful new beginnings.

Vayakhel and Pekudei are twin portions, replete with technical details. They describe the completion of the construction of the Tabernacle, a significant accomplishment

made even more significant because it was a process in which every Jew participated.

Additionally, with these readings, we conclude our study of the Book of Exodus, in its own right an achievement worthy of celebration. What can be a more joyous ending than a siyum, the completion of one of the most basic and essential books of the Bible?

One of the most powerful educational tools in our tradition is the festive party known as the siyum. Even the very young Jewish student knows that when he or she finishes a chapter or a book of Torah, at least a modest party will mark the occasion. The cupcakes, or ice cream, or pizza of the siyum is the perfect reinforcement of the achievements of learning. Adults, too, celebrate siyummim and find them rewarding markers of adult learning. The grand siyum of the entire Talmud in which those who study Daf Yomi, a page of Talmud each day, has in our time become an event which fills large stadiums and in which tens of thousands participate.

We have, then, two happy endings this week: The completion of the first Jewish house of worship, so long ago in our history. And the completion, in which we all will participate this Shabbat, of a formidable section of our Torah.

Shabbat Parshat HaChodesh, which is soon upon us, is special too because it heralds a new beginning in its supplemental Torah portion (Exodus 12:1-20), in which we hear the Almighty proclaim the upcoming month of Nissan as the beginning of all the months on our calendar. A beginning of beginnings.

It is no coincidence that, although we call next month Nissan, it carries but one name in the Torah, Chodesh Ha'Aviv, the month of spring. For springtime is the ultimate beginning, nature's herald of newness and hope. No wonder, then, that spring was the season chosen by God for the Exodus long ago, and for the festival of Passover, which now approaches.

Every one of us endures numerous endings and beginnings in our lives. As we soon welcome a new month, it is profoundly appropriate that we reflect on those life events, attempt to transcend the challenges of those which were difficult, and celebrate those which are worthy of celebration.

This is a season of beginnings and endings for us all. Endings of siyum, accomplishment, and beginnings symbolized by the blossoms of spring signaling life and potential renewal.

What a wonderful, complex Shabbat this is!

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Will To Do More Than Is Necessary Pleases the Almighty

In Parshas Vayakhel, the pasuk says, "Moshe commanded and they proclaimed in the camp, saying, 'Man and woman shall not do more work toward the portion of the Sanctuary!' And the nation was held back from bringing. And the work was sufficient for them for all the work, to do it – and having a surplus." [Shemos 36:6-7] Moshe let out a clarion call that there was nothing more to bring, and the people stopped bringing. They already had more than necessary to complete the job.

Rashi comments on the word "Vayekaleh" (and the nation was held back): This is an expression of restraint (m'neeyah). I heard an observation from the Tolner Rebbe, shlit'a, explaining why the Torah in fact uses the language "Vayekaleh" rather than using the virtually synonymous word that Rashi uses to translate "Vayekaleh" (namely — the root word m'neeyah).

In fact, the root mem-nun-ayin that Rashi uses is much more common than the word "Vayekaleh." For instance, the expression Yakov uses in deflecting Rachel's complaint to him: "...Am I in place of G-d who has restrained you (asher ma-nah mi'mech) from having children?" [Bereshis 30:2]. Likewise, we find this usage when Balak tells Bilaam: "Behold Hashem has restrained you (me'na-acha) from receiving honor" [Bamidbar 24:11]. In truth, there are numerous examples of each of these two synonyms. However, this is an interesting observation and the Tolner Rebbe explains this observation in a fantastic way.

The Medrash says in Parshas Pekudei, on the above quoted pasuk ("and the work was sufficient..."): Moshe came into Bezalel and saw that there was leftover material after the work of the Mishkan was completed. He asked the Almighty – "Master of the Universe, we have completed the work of the Mishkan and have leftovers – what should we do with the leftover money?" The Medrash continues: "The Almighty responded and said 'Go make with them a Mishkan for the Testimony (Eidus)'."

This is a very difficult Medrash to understand. The Mishkan is finished. Everything is complete. Bezalel tells Moshe they have a surplus. Moshe goes to the Almighty and asks what he is supposed to do with the surplus, and Hashem says to make a Mishkan for the Eidus. What is that supposed to mean?

The Yefei Toar on the Medrash says that there was a shteeble next to the Mishkan. It was a small little synagogue, perhaps like a Beis Medrash. This is a very difficult interpretation. So what does it mean that the Almighty instructed Moshe to take the surplus and make a "Mishkan l'Eidus"?

Likutei Divrei Torah

The Tolner Rebbe says that the Chidushei haRim (the first Gerer Rebbe) once heard a very interesting observation from the Rebbe, Reb Bunim: When a person does any type of mitzvah – whether it is giving charity or davening, whatever it may be – and the person has the desire and the initiative to do even more than he has already done – that gives the Almighty nachas Ruach. A person's will to do more (when there is really nothing more to do) gives the Almighty a certain satisfaction of Spirit that is even greater than He receives from the basic act itself.

A person needs to have a Chassidishe soul to appreciate this insight: We say in davening (at the end of Yishtabach) "The one who chooses musical songs of praise" (ha'bocher b'sheerei zimrah). The Rebbe Reb Bunim would say, "ha'bocher b'sheeyarei zimrah", meaning the Almighty chooses that which is left over from davening.

Most of us finish davening – especially a long davening – and say, "Baruch Hashem, davening is over!" However, if someone has a desire – if only I could daven more.... If after Yom Kippur, a person feels "I wish I could stay longer..." That is an example of "ha'bocher b'sheeyarei zimrah", the One who chooses the leftovers of davening!

The Eliyahu Rabbah mentions the widespread Jewish custom to sing Adon Olam at the end of davening. Where does this come from? He gives a beautiful explanation: When we finish davening, the Satan says "Aha! Do you see? They are finished and glad to go home!" No. We want to stay. What is the proof that we want to stay? It is the fact that we remain by our seats to recite Adon Olam after davening concludes. Adon Olam appears at the beginning of the siddur. We start davening with it. Therefore, by reciting it after davening, we are proclaiming – I would really want to start davening all over again! The proof? "Adon Olam" – this is exactly where I began three hours ago! This is "ha'bocher b'sheeyarei zimrah".

The Chidushei haRim says that what happened by the Mishkan was that the people wanted to give even more. Moshe Rabbeinu told the Almighty "There is left over! The people want to give more!" The Almighty says "Go and make of them a Mishkan haEduis. Now, I want to reside with them. This echoes the vort everyone says at the beginning of Parshas Terumah: "They should take for Me a donation and I will dwell in their midst" (not in its midst – i.e. the Mishkan's midst; but rather in their midst – i.e. in the midst of the Children of Israel). Here too, the desire they have to keep on giving demonstrates that they were not satisfied with merely their basic donation (which sufficed to build the Mishkan completely). That is the meaning of the Midrash's statement "Aseh ba'hem Mishkan ha'Eduis" i.e. – make with them (the people), [not with "it" (the money)] a Mishkan haEduis.

They will be the Mishkan. I want to be with them. The resting of the Divine Presence will be amongst those people who possess such a desire (chey'shek) to donate more and more.

The Malbim, who is a master of nuance of the Hebrew language, wrote a volume called *Sefer haKarmel*, in which he explains the differences between various similar words. He discusses the difference between the expression *va'Yekaleh* (as it appears in *Shemos* 36:6) and the expression *me'neeah* (which Rashi uses to explain the word *va'Yekaleh*). He says that *va'Yekaleh* is used when by nature one would want to do more, but one is stopped from proceeding. The proof is that the Hebrew word for prison is "Beis haKe'lah" (kaf-lamed-aleph), as it appears in *Bamidbar* 11:28, where Yehoshua tells Moshe about Eldad and Meidad: "My master, Moshe, Kela-aim – throw them in jail!" Why? It is because a person is jailed against his will. I want to be free. They put me in jail – that is the "Beis haKe'lah". The word "me-nee-ah," on the other hand, says the Malbim, does not indicate stopping caused by an outside force, but rather it indicates something that stops on its own.

The Malbim explains that this is the interpretation of the Rashi in our Parsha. The Biblical word *Va'Yekaleh* in the expression "and the nation stopped bringing" is appropriate because over here Klal Yisrael wanted to keep on giving. They did not want it to end. They wanted to contribute even more. The Almighty says this is literally a "shiyarei zimra" – this is what I love.

The Malbim cites parallel usage by the cessation of rain in *Parshas Noach*. The pasuk says, "The rain from Heaven was restrained." (*vaYekaleh hamayim min haShamayim*) [*Bereshis* 8:2]. Why? It is because the nature of rain is to descend. The Almighty had to hold it back, an act that went against nature. When the desire is there but outside forces stop it, the Torah uses the word *vaYekaleh*.

With this, the Chidushei haRim gives an amazing interpretation of a famous Gemara [*Bava Metzia* 62a]. Two people are walking in the desert and one has a jug of water in his hand. If they each consume half the jug, they will both die. If one of them drinks the entire jug, he will be able to make it out of the desert to civilization (and the other will die). What does the person with the jug of water do? Does he share it with his friend and they both die or does he drink it all himself, giving himself a chance to live?

Ben Petura rules that it is preferable that they both drink and both die and not have one witness the death of his friend. The Gemara continues "...until Rabbi Akiva came and expounded: 'And your brother shall live with you'" [*Vayikra* 25:36] – your own life takes priority over the life of your friend."

The Chidushei haRim asks a question: What does it mean, "Until Rabbi Akiva came and expounded"? The Gemara does not frame this in the form of a standard disagreement between two Tana'im – Ben Petura says one thing; Rabbi Akiva says another thing. What do the words "ad she'ba Rabbi Akiva" imply?

The Chidushei haRim answers that when a person is in that type of situation, he is supposed to feel "I want to give you the water. My will is actually to share the water with you. I do not want to stand idly by and watch you die!" UNTIL RABBI AKIVA CAME ALONG and said you cannot do that! Without Rabbi Akiva's teaching, I would have held – this is my will – to share the water. In other words, a person should not just view this as a machlokes Ben Petura and Rabbi Akiva and happily apply the principle that we rule like Rabbi Akiva over any individual colleague with whom he argues and thereby bid his friend farewell and drink the contents of the jug. No! He should want to share the jug! That should be his inclination UNTIL RABBI AKIVA CAME ALONG and gave him no choice because he taught, "your own life takes priority."

This principle is that even if a person is prevented by outside forces – be it nature, be it halacha, be it the fact that no more supplies are necessary for the Mishkan, whatever it is – but the will and desire to do more than is necessary or more than is required should be there. This will and desire pleases the Almighty and it is about this will (to contribute even more to the Mishkan) that He said – take it and make with it (yourselves) a Mishkan l'Edus – the dwelling place of the Divine Presence in the sense of "And you shall make Me a Mikdash and I will dwell BACHEM." I will not only dwell in the Mishkan, but I will dwell within you as well.

Dvar Torah Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Should chefs share recipes?

You know, it's very interesting. There are many chefs and cooks who are delighted to give you a recipe that impresses you. But – if for example you had the very best cheesecake that you've ever had or a marvellous honey cake – sometimes the people who bake them refuse to divulge the secret of their success.

In *Parshat Vayakel* we are told how Hashem gave Betzalel natural talent, he was the most amazing artist and in addition, the Torah tells us, 'u'Lehorot natan b'libo' Hashem made it natural to him to want to teach others. Together with Aholiav, his assistant, he was called upon to be the architect of the Mishkan, the sanctuary in the wilderness – and he readily shared everything he knew with others.

The Mishnah tells us that in temple times the Garmu family was responsible for baking the show bread, however they never revealed the

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secret of the recipe. And the Aftinas family was responsible for preparing the incense and similarly didn't let anyone know how they did it. Hashem however, created within Betzalel natural desire to share what he knew with others. I believe there is a powerful message here for each and every one of us, if Hashem has given us some natural talent, some ability or some knowledge, we shouldn't keep it to ourselves. We should ensure that our environment is enriched through what we have to give. Of course we must maintain our sense of humility with regards to our talents and achievements but if Hashem has enabled us to do something well, let us share it with others so that as a result of what we have the world will be blessed.

OTS Dvar Torah

Adv. Tamar Oderberg

"Chochmat nashim banta beita" - The wisdom of a Woman Builds her Home
Is the spinning of yarn mentioned in this week's Parsha laudatory or derogatory? "And all the skilled women spun with their own hands, and brought what they had spun, in blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and in fine linen. And all the women who excelled in that skill spun the goats' hair."

Our Parsha describes what the entire nation of Israel had contributed to the construction of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle. This raises a question: what was the nature of the female wisdom mentioned in these verses? Why would the text single out the activities of the women at this point?

Some of the commentators describe the pshat, or the face value interpretation of the text, suggesting that the wisdom of the women of those days was tied to the loom, and it was generally accepted that yarn was spun using a loom and a spindle. Thus, the wisdom of the women, described here, refers to the fact that they had hand-spun the fabrics. Some commentators posit that even the wealthier women, which had handmaidens who could have spun the yarn on their behalf, had spun the yarn themselves, because they were so eager to perform this commandment. Other commentators stress that the exceeding wisdom of the women wasn't necessarily tied to the use of their looms, which is considered a rather mundane activity, but rather to the spinning of goat-hair, which is a unique skill.

I feel that the connection between the women and spinning and concepts such as wisdom and the possession of a warm heart is indicative of something even more profound. King Solomon praised women for their expertise at spinning, as we find in the "Eshet Chayil" (Woman of Valor) poem: "She sets her hand to the distaff; Her fingers work the spindle."

We also find, in the Babylonian Talmud (Tractate *Yoma* 65b), the following text:

A wise woman asked Rabbi Eliezer: Since all bore equal responsibility for the incident of the Golden Calf, due to what factor were their deaths not equal? He said to her: There is no wisdom in a woman except weaving with a spindle, and any woman who was wise-hearted spun with her hands.

The Gemara emphasizes that she was a wise woman, and various commentators believe that Rabbi Eliezer's response, namely, that the wisdom of women "is in the loom", was said derogatorily. Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, however, sees Rabbi Eliezer's words as praiseworthy of women. How so?

The essence of a woman's wisdom is in the creation of thread, which is designed to connect two or more objects. The wisdom of spinning is used to connect threads as part of the process of building Hashem's house – "The wisdom of a woman builds her home". Our parsha deals with the construction of Hashem's house, and clearly, when a regular house is built, it is the woman who, through her wisdom, creates the family framework and connects the different parts of the family (examples of this abound in the stories about the four matriarchs and other women in the Bible).

However, wisdom doesn't operate alone in our parsha – it is joined by the heart. When the two connect, a new level of wisdom comes into play. This wisdom isn't external, that is, wisdom that can be acquired through our minds alone. Nor is it a mundane artistic skill. It is the internal wisdom of the heart, something that today we call "emotional intelligence". Women are gifted with this emotional intelligence, which lets them build the house of Hashem, the Tabernacle.

Having just celebrated Purim, we can ask, who better demonstrates this principle than Queen Esther, who possessed the gift of "wisdom of the heart"? Esther was able to devise a brilliant plan and show Ahasuerus exactly who had desired to annihilate her nation and her homeland. Yet she never forgot her heart, entreating Mordechai to "assemble all of the Jews, fast over me...". This is wisdom of the heart: the mental wisdom that produces a well thought out plan to topple Haman, coupled with the heart and the unity and rebuilding of the entire Jewish people. This was despite the fact that the Jewish people "were scattered and dispersed among the other peoples."

Though she managed to rebuild the Jewish people, she paid a heavy price. She married someone she didn't desire, and even had to stay married to him all the way to the end. It is therefore quite symbolic that the Fast of Esther – the day that the Jewish people was rebuilt – was chosen as International Aguna Day. We must never forget that every woman has the right to use the wisdom of the heart to build her home; but she should only do so freely, happily and joyfully.

The Mishkan - A Perpetuation of Ma'amad Har Sinai - Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

This shiur provided courtesy of The Tanach Study Center In memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Is Parshat Vayakhel simply a repeat of Parshat Teruma?

Indeed, the details of the mishkan are practically identical in both parshiot - however, their manner of presentation is quite different.

To explain why, this week's shiur first considers the different purpose of each Parsha. Afterward, we will attempt to tackle the more difficult question concerning the necessity of this 'repetition'.

Introduction - Before we discuss the similarities between Teruma and Vayakhel, let's first note the obvious difference between these two Parshiot.

In Parshat Teruma / Tetzaveh, the Torah records God's commandment to Moshe to build the mishkan - or in Hebrew, what we refer to as 'tzivui ha-mishkan'. In contrast, Parshat Vayakhel / Pekudei describes how Moshe conveyed these instructions to Bnei Yisrael.

Let's explain how this affects their order:

The Order in Parshat Terumah - The primary focus of the tzivui ha-mishkan unit (i.e. chapters 25-29) is the tabernacle's function, hence this unit opens with its 'statement of purpose':

"And you shall build for Me a mikdash in order that I shall dwell among you" (see 25:1-8). and closes with an almost identical statement: "And I shall dwell among Bnei Yisrael, and I will be for them a God, and they shall know..." (see 29:45-46).

In our shiur on Parshat Tetzaveh, we explained how these opening and closing psukim serve as 'matching bookends' that highlight how the Mishkan serves first and foremost as the place where God's shechinah can dwell with His nation. This observation helped us understand the logic of its flow in topic.

For example, that unit began by describing the aron [ark of the covenant], which will house the luchot [tablets] - the symbol of brit Sinai - and hence the focal point of the mishkan, as well as the kaporet, the protective cover of the aron, from where God will speak to Moshe.

The next set of parshiot described the various 'keilim' (vessels) that are situated in the ohel mo'ed, such as the menorah and shulchan (25:23-40). This was followed by a detailed description of the ohel moed - the portable structure [i.e. the canvas for the tent /'yeriot ha-mishkan' and its poles /'krashim' (see 26:1-37)] that will house those vessels.

In this unit, the description of vessels precedes the details of that tent, for they perform its key functions, while the structure that houses them serves only a secondary function.

These instructions are followed by the commandment to build an altar ['mizbeach hanechoshet'], which will be placed in front of this ohel mo'ed (see 27:1-8), and a courtyard ['chatzer'] constructed from curtains and poles that would encompass it (see 27:9-19).

This Shechinah unit concludes with the laws concerning the kohanim who are to officiate in

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the mishkan (chapter 28), and the seven day dedication ceremony (chapter 29).

In chapters 30 and 31 we found an additional unit, that contained a list of peripheral mitzvot relating to the mishkan (and its protection from the shechinah], including the 'mizbeach haketoret' and the 'kiyov'.]

At the very conclusion of the tzivui ha-mishkan we find the instruction to appoint Betzalel to build the mishkan, and the important reminder not to build it on Shabbat.

The following table summarizes this order in Parshat Teruma according to its most general categories:

Intro - Shchina

Keilim - the vessels (chapter 25)

The aron - which will house the luchot The kaporet - from where God will speak to Moshe

The shulchan - on which the lechem will be placed

The menorah - which will provide light

Structure - the ohel mo'ed (the tent - chapter 26)

The yeriot

The krashim

The "parochet"

Chatzer - The courtyard (chapter 27)

The mizbeach - the altar in front of the ohel mo'ed

The courtyard - "amudei ve-kelei hachatzer" Kohanim (chapters 28 & 29)

The bigdei kehuna

The dedication ceremony (milu'im)

Misc. Topics (chapter 30)

The Builder - Betzalel (chapter 31)

Shabbat (not to build the mishkan on Shabbat/ 31:11-17)

In contrast to this 'functional order', the order in Parshat Vayakhel is quite different, for in this unit - Moshe must explain to Bnei Yisrael how to build the mishkan. Therefore, the sequence will follow a more practical order, reflecting the considerations of its construction.

For example, the tent will precede the vessels, for the ohel moed will house them. Furthermore, this time, the mizbeach ketoret will be included with the other vessels, even though its function in regard to the shechinah is different. Similarly, this time the kiyov will be recorded together with the mizbeach ha'olah.

The following table summarizes this 'practical' order, as presented in Parshat Vayakhel:=

Shabbat

Guidelines re: when construction work is permitted (35:1-3):

Teruma

The collection of the building materials (35:4-29);

The Builder

The appointment of the chief architect - Betzalel - and his fellow artisans (35:30-36:7);

Structure - the ohel mo'ed - the tent (36:8-38):

The yeriot

The kerashim

The parochet

Keilim (chapter 37)

The aron

Shulchan

Menorah

Mizbeach Haketoret (from misc. above)

Chatzer (chapter 38)

6

The mizbeach
The kiyor (from misc. above)
The courtyard
Kohanim (chapter 39)
Their garments
Construction
Assembly of the mishkan on the 1st of Nissan (40:1-33)
Shechina

God's glory dwells on the mishkan (40:34-38)

As you review (and compare) these two tables, be sure to note their similarities and differences. Doing so, while considering this distinction between 'function' and 'construction', will help you understand how and why the order in Vayakhel / Pekudei differs from the order in Terumah / Tetzaveh.

[Note as well that the mizbeach haketoret and the kiyor that were omitted (for thematic reasons) from the Shechina unit in Terumah / Tetzaveh are now included (for practical reasons) in Parshat Vayakhel - right where they belong!]

[See also the shiur on Parshat Tetzaveh.]

Why the Repetition? - With this distinction in mind, let's consider now a more basic question, i.e. the very need to repeat anything!

After all, the building of the mishkan was only a 'one-time' mitzva. Would it not have been sufficient for the Torah to simply tell us in one pasuk that Bnei Yisrael constructed the mishkan 'as God commanded Moshe on Har Sinai'?

To answer this question, we return to our study of the overall theme of Sefer Shmot.

The Mishkan Exclusive - In Sefer Shmot, from the time that Moshe ascended Har Sinai to receive the first luchot (see 24:12), the mishkan emerged as its primary focus. Even though Moshe received numerous other laws during these forty days, in chapters 25 thru 31 Sefer Shmot records only those mitzvot relating to the mishkan.

Likewise, when Moshe descends from Har Sinai (after the last forty days), even though the Torah informs us that he conveyed all the mitzvot to Bnei Yisrael at that time (see 34:32), nevertheless Sefer Shmot chooses to record only Moshe's transmission of the mitzvot concerning the mishkan (i.e. chapters 35->40). All the other mitzvot appear only later, in the books of Vayikra, Bamidbar and Devarim (see Chizkuni 34:32)!

So the question is not only - why the 'repeat'; but also why the exclusivity of the mishkan in Sefer Shmot?

Ramban, in his explanation of the overall theme of Sefer Shmot, suggests an answer:

"... Sefer Shmot discusses the exile [i.e. the slavery in Egypt]... and Bnei Yisrael's redemption from that exile... for the descent of the children of Yaakov to Egypt marked the beginning of that exile... and that exile does not end until they return to the spiritual level of their forefathers... Even though Bnei Yisrael had left Egypt [i.e. physical redemption], they are not yet considered redeemed... [However,] when they reach Har Sinai and build the mishkan, and God returns His Shechina to dwell among them, then they have returned to the spiritual level of their forefathers [spiritual redemption]... Therefore, Sefer Shmot concludes with the topic of the mishkan and the constant dwelling of God's Glory upon it [for this

marks the completion of the Redemption process]." (see Ramban, introduction to Sefer Shmot)

According to Ramban, Sefer Shmot concludes with the story of the mishkan because its construction marks the completion of Bnei Yisrael's redemption. His explanation can help us understand the manner in which the Torah repeats the details of the mishkan in parshiyot Vayakhel/ Pekudei.

Spiritual Rehabilitation - As Ramban explained, the 'spiritual level' that Bnei Yisrael had achieved at Ma'amad Har Sinai was lost as a result of chet ha-egel. Consequently, God had removed His Shechina from Bnei Yisrael (see Shemot 33:1-7), effectively thwarting the redemption process that began with Yetziat Mitzrayim.

Moshe Rabbeinu's intervention on Bnei Yisrael's behalf (see 32:11-14) certainly saved them from immediate punishment and secured their atonement (see 32:30, 34:9). However, that prayer alone could not restore Bnei Yisrael to the spiritual level achieved at Har Sinai. The Shechina, which was to have resided in their midst, remained outside the camp (see 33:7, read carefully!).

Moshe interceded once again (see 33:12-16), whereupon God declared his thirteen 'attributes of mercy' (33:17-34:8), thus allowing Bnei Yisrael a 'second chance'. Nonetheless, the Shechina did not return automatically. To bring the Shechina back, it would be necessary for Bnei Yisrael to do something - they must actively and collectively involve themselves in the process of building the mishkan.

In other words, Bnei Yisrael required what we might call 'spiritual rehabilitation'. Their collective participation in the construction of the mishkan helped repair the strain in their relationship with God brought about by chet ha-egel. Or, using more 'kabbalistic' terminology, the construction of the mishkan functioned as a 'tikkun' for chet ha-egel.

A closer examination of parshiyot Vayakhel / Pekudei supports this interpretation and can explain why Sefer Shmot repeats the details of the mishkan in Vayakhel/Pekudei.

Textual Parallels - Let's take for example the Torah's use of the word 'vayakhel' at the beginning of the parsha. This immediately brings to mind the opening line of the chet ha-egel narrative:

"Va-yikahel ha'am al Aharon - and the nation gathered against Aharon..." (32:1).

This new 'gathering' of the people - for the purpose of building the mishkan, can be understood as a 'tikkun' for that original gathering to build the egel. As opposed to their assembly to fashion the golden calf, Bnei Yisrael now gather to build a more 'proper' symbol of God's presence.

Similarly, the commandment for the people to 'donate their gold' and other belongings for this project (see 35:5) can also be understood as a tikkun for Aharon's solicitation of the people's gold for the egel (32:2-3).

However, the strongest proof is the Torah's glaring repetition of the phrase: "ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe" ["as God commanded

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Moshe"]. This phrase not only appears in both the opening commandment (35:1 & 35:4) and the finale (39:32 & 39:43), but it is repeated like a chorus over twenty times throughout Vayakhel- Pekudei, at every key point of the construction process. [I recommend that you note this using a Tanach Koren. See 35:29; 36:1; 36:5; 39:1,5,7,21,26,29,31,32,42,43; and especially in 40:16,19,21,23,25,27,29,32, as each part of the mishkan is put into its proper place.]

Clearly, the Torah's repetition of this phrase is intentional, and may very well point to the mishkan's function as a tikkun for chet ha-egel. Let's explain why:

Recall from the Shiur on Parshat Ki Tisa that the people's initial intention at chet ha-egel was to make a physical representation of their perception of God. Despite the innocence of such aspirations per se, a man-made representation, no matter how pure its intention, may lead to idol worship (see Shmot 20:20). This does not mean, however, that God cannot ever be represented by a physical symbol. When God Himself chooses the symbol, it is not only permitted, but it becomes a mitzva. It is this symbolism that makes the mishkan so important. [See 23:17,19; 34:24, Devarim 12:5,11 & 16:16.]

The Torah therefore stresses that Bnei Yisrael have now 'learned their lesson'. They construct the mishkan precisely 'as God commanded Moshe,' down to the very last detail, understanding that there is no room for human innovation when choosing a symbol for His Divine Presence.

An Appropriate Finale - This concept of tikkun for chet ha-egel finds further support in the very conclusion of Sefer Shmot.

Although the aspect of Shechina (a central feature in Terumah/Tetzaveh) is mentioned nowhere throughout the detail of the mishkan's construction in Vayakhel / Pekudei, it makes a sudden reappearance at the very end of the sefer. After each component of the mishkan is put into place on the first of Nissan (see 40:1-33), this entire process reaches its dramatic climax:

"When Moshe had finished his work, the anan (cloud) covered the ohel mo'ed and God's kavod ('glory') filled the mishkan" (40:34).

This pasuk describes the dwelling of the Shechina on the mishkan in the exact same terms used to depict the dwelling of the Shechina on Har Sinai:

"When Moshe ascended the har [Mount Sinai, to receive the first luchot], the anan covered the har, and kvod Hashem (God's glory) dwelled upon Har Sinai..." (24:15-16).

Clearly, the Torah intentionally parallels, thereby associating, the descent of the Shechina onto Har Sinai with the dwelling of the Shechina on the mishkan. Only after Bnei Yisrael meticulously complete the construction of the mishkan - precisely 'as God commanded Moshe' - does the Shechina return to Bnei Yisrael and dwell therein (40:34), just as it had dwelled on Har Sinai.

Thus, the end of Sefer Shmot marks the completion of the tikkun for chet ha-egel. Accordingly, as Ramban posits, the entire 'redemption process' - the theme of Sefer Shmot - has also reached its culmination.

The Shchina's return to the camp also signifies Bnei Yisrael's return to the stature they had lost after the golden calf. Recall that in the aftermath of that incident:

"Moshe took his tent and set it up outside the camp, far away from the camp, and called it the ohel mo'ed [tent of meeting (with God)], such that anyone who would search for God was required to go out to this ohel mo'ed, outside the camp" [see 33:7 and its context in 33:1-11].

This ohel mo'ed, located outside the camp, symbolized the distancing of the Shechina. Once the mishkan is built, God will bring His Shechina back inside the camp. [See 25:8 and 29:45.]

Back to Bereishit - Thus far, we have shown that the manner by which Bnei Yisrael construct the mishkan serves as a tikkun for chet ha-egel and relates to the overall theme of Sefer Shmot.

One could suggest that the very concept of a mishkan - irrespective of its mode of construction - may constitute a more general tikkun, beyond the specific context of the golden calf. In this sense, the mishkan relates to a more general biblical theme developed in Sefer Breishit.

As explained in our shiurim on Sefer Breishit, the Garden of Eden reflects the ideal spiritual environment in which Man cultivates his relationship with God. After Adam sinned and was consequently banished from the Garden, God placed keruvim to guard the path of return to the Tree of Life (see Breishit 3:24).

It may not be coincidental that the mishkan is the only other context throughout the entire Chumash where the concept of keruvim appears. Recall how the mishkan features keruvim:

on the kaporet as protectors of the aron, which contains the luchot (Shmot 25:22), and

woven into the parochet, the curtain which guards the entrance into the kodesh ha-kodashim - the Holy of Holies (where the aron and kaporet are located).

This parallel suggests a conceptual relationship between Gan Eden and the mishkan. The symbolic function of the keruvim as guardians of the kodesh kodashim may correspond to the mishkan's function as an environment similar to Gan Eden, where man can strive to come closer to God:

The keruvim of the kaporet, protecting the aron, indicate that the 'Tree of Life' of Gan Eden has been replaced by the Torah, represented by the luchot inside the aron. ["Etz chayim hi la-machazikim bah" - see Mishlei 3:1-18.]

The keruvim woven into the parochet remind man that his entry into the kodesh kodashim, although desired, remains limited and requires spiritual readiness. [Note that keruvim are also woven into the innermost covering of the mishkan (see Shmot 26:1-2).]

In this sense, we may view the mishkan as a tikkun for Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. Should man wish to return to the Tree of Life, he must keep God's covenant - the laws of the Torah - as symbolized by the luchot ha-eidut in the aron, protected by the keruvim.

If so, then the Torah's repetition of the laws of the mishkan, as well as their exclusivity, may be alluding to one of the most important themes of Chumash - man's never ending quest to develop a relationship with his Creator.

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet
Vayakhel Pekudei (Hachodesh) 5781

In My Opinion PRAYER AND CONCERTS

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

There is always an element of musical performance associated with Jewish prayer. In Temple times, Levites presented a musical performance every day in the Temple in Jerusalem, as part of the temple service itself. This presentation included musical instruments as well as a male choir.

Josephus describes how many non-Jews from all parts of the Roman Empire visited the second Temple to gaze at the architectural wonder and ornate splendor of the building that Herod built. The Talmud records for us that one who did not see the building of the second Temple that Herod built never saw a beautiful building in his lifetime.

The second Temple was beyond comparison, even in an age of the Parthenon and the Roman Forum. All this opulence and grandeur was, unfortunately, only fleeting, and temporary in historical terms. The second Temple was destroyed, Levites no longer performed daily concerts, and the Jewish people were exiled from their homeland in the land of Israel, forced by circumstances and the divine will, to wander over the face of many continents.

The service of the Temple in Jerusalem was canceled by the exile of the Jewish people and the destruction of the Temple building itself. However, in its place the prayer services of Judaism, with which we are all familiar even today, was substituted. The Lord himself allowed for the service of our lips in prayer to be a replacement for the lack of the sacrificial services that were the centerpiece of Temple service in Jerusalem.

The prayer services have now become the central role in Jewish communal life. They are not to be mere ritual and rote, but rather emotional, heartfelt expressions of praise to the God of Israel and the Creator of the universe. As such, the prayer services were never conducted without some sort of melodic intonation and musical rhythm. Musical instruments themselves, reserved for the Temple in Jerusalem, now morphed into cantorial renditions and male choir selections.

Depending upon the location of Jews in the worldwide diaspora, different musical revisions of the prayers entered Jewish cultural and historical life. The Jews who lived within Moslem dominated countries adopted the melodic innovations of that dominant culture, so Arabic music and Sephardic music seem to be one and the same. It was the same thing for Jews who lived in Greece and Turkey, as well as Jews who lived in the Iberian Peninsula. Ashkenazic Jews adopted the rhythms of melodies similar to the music of Germany, and these became the standard prayer melodies of Polish, Lithuanian and Russian Jewry.

In the 19th century, great cantors began to appear in both the Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities. They developed operatic voices and many different variations on traditional melodies used for prayer. They also adopted non-Jewish melodies from the outside environment of their societies and introduced these melodies into Jewish prayer service as well. Thus, in today's melodic liturgy of the synagogue, it is difficult to find true Jewish music, in the sense of it being completely and authentically Jewish.

The Halachic prohibitions against the use of musical instruments during prayer services remains binding and in force even today. One of the major breaches of Reform in the 19th century was the introduction of musical instruments, especially the organ, used in church services, incorporated into their prayer services. In today's world, Reform Judaism substitutes guitars, saxophones, clarinets, drums, and violins instead of the original organ music. All these attempts to make prayer more relevant, so to speak, have pretty much fallen on deaf ears.

People who wish to hear musical concerts go to theaters and concerts, not to synagogues and houses of prayer. Reform services have become so modern that they are already considered to be obsolete and out of date. There has been a revival of cantorial music and performers over the past decades in the Orthodox Jewish world, with cantorial concerts and performances as well. However, all agree that it is only during the prayer services itself, when there is true intent to attempt to reach spiritual heights, that these melodies and brilliant voices take on proper dimension.

In the Chasidic world, music and melody has always played an important role, not only in prayer but also in general communal life. This trend continues today with many civic groups and individuals serving as musical performers at concerts and private events. This reflects the process of acculturation that accompanies Jewish life throughout all the ages. Music enlightens the soul and is a crucial element of fervor and concentration during prayer services.

Shabbat shalom

Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha VAYAKHEL – PIKUDEI 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The book of Shemot concludes with the detailed accounting of the materials collected and used in the building of the Tabernacle. Even

though this accounting may appear to us to be superfluous and even overly detailed, the words and letters that appear in this week's Torah reading are as holy and important as any others that appear in our holy Scriptures.

There is an important overriding lesson – a moral imperative – that is being imparted to us in the words of the reading of this week. That lesson can be summed up in that we are responsible for each of our actions and behaviors during the year, and during our lifetime. It is as if each of us signs our name at the bottom of the pages that record each of our activities in life with one word: accountability.

Judaism holds its adherents to strict standards of accountability. Accountability in speech, in deeds and action, regarding financial income and expenses, and in all other matters of human interaction and relationships. We are informed by the prayer services of the High Holy days that each of us has pages in God's ledger book, so to speak, and that each of us signs with our own signature at the bottom of those pages to attest to the accuracy of that accounting.

The basis of all responsible human behavior is accountability. Without that, having good intentions and high hopes by human beings to accomplish good things are mostly doomed to failure and disappointment. It is only the concept of accountability that is the driving force that creates efficiency, and the feeling of spiritual advancement and accomplishment within us. Educational institutions that never administer exams or do not make demands upon its students are really cheating them out of the benefits that an education can bring to a person.

The Torah is exacting and meticulous in recording for us all the activities, donations, and actual results regarding the enormous task of constructing the Tabernacle in the middle of a wasteland, by a people just recently freed from physical and mental bondage. One could be fooled to say that in such circumstances any demand for accountability should be lenient, if not even muted. However, we see that the Torah makes no allowance for the inherent difficulties and stress that must have been involved in building the Tabernacle in the desert. In general, we can say that Judaism rarely, if ever, accepts excuses for poor performance or lack of effort, no matter how seemingly valid they might be. No excuse, no matter how good and valid it may be, ever equals accomplishing the task that was set out before the person to realize and fulfill.

The Torah wishes to impress upon us that accountability requires exactitude, paying of attention to what otherwise may seem to be small and unimportant, and an understanding that in the great picture of life there really are no small events or minor incidents that can be glossed over as though they never occurred. That is not our method of accountability. The Torah is never sloppy in dealing with human events.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Celebrate (Vayakhel-Pekudei 5781)

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

If leaders are to bring out the best in those they lead, they must give them the chance to show they are capable of great things, and then they must celebrate their achievements. That is what happens at a key moment toward the end of our parsha, one that brings the book of Exodus to a sublime conclusion after all the strife that has gone before. The Israelites have finally completed the work of building the Tabernacle. We then read:

So all the work on the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, was completed. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses ...

Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. So Moses blessed them. (Ex. 39:32, 43)

The passage sounds simple enough, but to the practised ear it recalls another biblical text, from the end of the Creation narrative in Genesis: The heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. On the seventh day God finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done. (Gen. 2:1-3)

Three key words appear in both passages: “work,” “completed” and “blessed.” These verbal echoes are not accidental. They are how the Torah signals intertextuality, hinting that one law or story is to be read in the context of another. In this case, the Torah is emphasising that Exodus ends as Genesis began, with a work of creation. Note the difference as well as the similarity. Genesis began with an act of Divine creation. Exodus ends with an act of human creation.

The closer we examine the two texts, the more we see how intricately the parallel has been constructed. The creation account in Genesis is tightly organised around a series of sevens. There are seven days of Creation. The word “good” appears seven times, the word “God” thirty-five times, and the word “earth” twenty-one times. The opening verse of Genesis contains seven words, the second fourteen, and the three concluding verses 35 words. All multiples of seven. The complete text is 469 (7×67) words.

The account of the construction of the Tabernacle in Vayakhel-Pekudei is similarly built around the number seven. The word “heart” appears seven times in Exodus 35:5-29, as Moses specifies the materials to be used in the construction, and seven times again in 35:34 – 36:8, the description of how the craftsmen Bezalel and Oholiav will carry out the work. The word terumah, “contribution” appears seven times in this section. In chapter 39, describing the making of the priestly vestments, the phrase “as God commanded Moses” occurs seven times. It occurs again seven times in chapter 40.

A remarkable parallel is being drawn between God’s creation of the universe and the Israelites’ creation of the Sanctuary. We now understand what the Sanctuary represented. It was a micro-cosmos, a universe in miniature, constructed with the same precision and “wisdom” as the universe itself, a place of order against the formlessness of the wilderness and the ever-threatening chaos of the human heart. The Sanctuary was a visible reminder of God’s Presence within the camp, itself a metaphor for God’s Presence within the Universe as a whole.

A large and fateful idea is taking shape. The Israelites – who have been portrayed throughout much of Exodus as ungrateful and half-hearted – have now been given the opportunity, after the sin of the Golden Calf, to show that they are not irredeemable, and they have embraced that opportunity. They are proven capable of great things. They have shown they can be creative. They have used their generosity and skill to build a mini-universe. By this symbolic act they have shown they are capable of becoming, in the potent rabbinic phrase, “God’s partners in the work of creation.”

This was fundamental to their re-moralisation and to their self-image as the people of God’s covenant. Judaism does not take a low view of human possibility. We do not believe we are tainted by original sin. We are not incapable of moral grandeur. To the contrary, the very fact that we are in the image of the Creator means that we humans – uniquely among life forms – have the ability to be creative. As Israel’s first creative achievement reached its culmination Moses blessed them, saying, according to the Sages, “May it be God’s will that His Presence rests in the work of your hands.”^[1] Our potential greatness is that we can create structures, relationships and lives that become homes for the Divine Presence.

Blessing them and celebrating their achievement, Moses showed them what they could be. That is potentially a life-changing experience. Here is a contemporary example:

In 2001, shortly after September 11th, I received a letter from a woman in London whose name I did not immediately recognise. She wrote that on the morning of the attack on the World Trade Centre, I had been

giving a lecture on ways of raising the status of the teaching profession, and she had seen a report about it in the press. This prompted her to write and remind me of a meeting we had had eight years earlier. She was then, in 1993, the Head Teacher of a school that was floundering. She had heard some of my broadcasts, felt a kinship with what I had to say, and thought that I might have a solution to her problem. I invited her, together with two of her deputies, to our house. The story she told me was this: morale within the school, among teachers, pupils and parents alike, was at an all-time low. Parents had been withdrawing their children. The student roll had fallen from 1000 children to 500. Examination results were bad: only 8 per cent of students achieved high grades. It was clear that unless something changed dramatically, the school would be forced to close.

We talked for an hour or so on general themes: the school as community, how to create an ethos, and so on. Suddenly, I realised that we were thinking along the wrong lines. The problem she faced was practical, not philosophical. I said: “I want you to live one word: celebrate.” She turned to me with a sigh: “You don’t understand – we have nothing to celebrate. Everything in the school is going wrong.” “In that case,” I replied, “find something to celebrate. If a single student has done better this week than last week, celebrate. If someone has a birthday, celebrate. If it’s Tuesday, celebrate.” She seemed unconvinced, but promised to give the idea a try.

Now, eight years later, she was writing to tell me what had happened since then. Examination results at high grades had risen from 8 per cent to 65 per cent. The enrolment of pupils had risen from 500 to 1000. Saving the best news to last, she added that she had just been made a Dame of the British Empire – one of the highest honours the Queen can bestow – for her contribution to education. She ended by saying that she just wanted me to know how a single word had changed the school, and her life.

She was a wonderful teacher, and certainly did not need my advice. She would have discovered the answer on her own anyway. But I was never in any doubt that the strategy would succeed, for we all grow to fill other people’s expectations of us. If they are low, we remain small. If they are high, we walk tall.

The idea that each of us has a fixed quantum of intelligence, virtue, academic ability, motivation and drive is absurd. Not all of us can paint like Monet or compose like Mozart. But we each have gifts, capacities, that can lie dormant throughout life until someone awakes them. We can achieve heights of which we never thought ourselves capable. All it takes is for us to meet someone who believes in us, challenges us, and then, when we have responded to the challenge, blesses and celebrates our achievements. That is what Moses did for the Israelites after the sin of the Golden Calf. First he got them to create, and then he blessed them and their creation with one of the simplest and most moving of all blessings, that the Shechinah should dwell in the work of their hands. Celebration is an essential part of motivating. It turned a school around. In an earlier age and in a more sacred context it turned the Israelites around. So celebrate.

When we celebrate the achievements of others, we change lives.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayakhel

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

A Tzadik on Someone Else’s Back

Why Didn’t the Mishkan Have a Spare Parts Warehouse?

The Torah says that after Moshe told the people to donate to the Mishkan, the voluntary donations surpassed the amount of material required. Moshe Rabbeinu had to tell them to stop bringing material, and they were left with more material than needed. (See Shemos 36:4-7).

The Sforno comments: Hashem stated the exact amount of materials needed to build the Mishkan. X amount of gold, Y amount of silver, Z amount of copper, and so forth. He gave a precise measure for every item in the Mishkan, specifying no more and no less than the exact amount required for the structure and the keilim (vessels) of the Mishkan. The Sforno points out that this was not the case with either Shlomo’s construction of the First Beis HaMikdash or Herod’s (re-

construction of the Second Beis HaMikdash. In both those cases, they initially sought out and collected more than enough funds and raw materials, however, in the Mishkan, it was the exact amount necessary that was sought – no more and no less.

The Talmud Yerushalmi says that they had duplicates and triplicates of all the keilim in the Beis HaMikdash. This was not unreasonable. Keilim break, wear out, and become impure (Tameh). Any serious enterprise must maintain an inventory of spare parts. Take, for example, a caterer. He does not keep only X numbers of sets of china for the maximum number of servings he expects to prepare. He always must be prepared for breakage, loss, or theft. The Beis HaMikdash also needed to have “back up” to be prepared for foreseen or unforeseen occurrences.

The question must be asked – did the same problem not exist in the Mishkan? Was there no breakage in the Mishkan? Why not maintain an inventory of “backup parts” for the structure and the keilim of the Mishkan? Why didn’t they make extra?

Listen to the following very interesting Daas Zekeinim m’Baalei HaTosfos (in Parshas Teruma): The Aron HaKodesh, in which they kept the Luchos HaBris (Tablets of Stone containing the Ten Commandments), was gold on the outside but wood on the inside. The Daas Zekeinim says it would have been fitting for the Aron to be made completely from gold. However, since it needed to be made portable and be transported by the Leviim on their shoulders, the Aron was made to weigh less. Pure gold would make it much heavier to carry. And even though, the Daas Zekeinim writes, Chazal say that “the Aron lifted up those who were supposedly carrying it”, that was not always the case. In other words, there was a period of time when it was that way, but it was not like that forever. The same, he writes, regarding the Golden Mizbaeach (on which the incense was burnt). It was made of lighter Shitim wood and only overlaid with gold on the outside, to make it lighter to carry.

So, the reason they did not have spares – duplicates and triplicates in the Mishkan – was because “someone has to schlep all this.” The Jews moved from place to place during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. When someone needs to schlep, you make it as light as possible.

Herein lays a very important principle in Yiddishkeit, which says, in effect, “Do not be a Tzadik on someone else’s back!” In other words, if someone needs to carry this – we are going to make it as light as possible. It is like packing. I do not know how it is in most houses, but my assumption is that men travel lighter than women. But who schleps the suitcases?

This is akin to the famous incident they say about Rav Yisrael Salanter (1809-1883). He came to someone’s house for a Shabbos meal. He had to wash for Netilas Yadayim. Based on the Gemarah (Chullin 106), the halacha (Orach Chaim 161:4) is that ideally (l’chatchilah) a person should wash Netilas Yadayim up until the wrists. In special circumstances (b’dieved), a person fulfills his obligation for washing his hands by only washing until the knuckles. Rav Yisrael did not wash his entire hands. He relied on the opinion that he only needed to wash to the point where his fingers bend.

The observers asked him why he was being so lenient with his handwashing. After all, they told him, the Shulchan Aruch ideally requires that water comes up to where the hand meets the arm. Those were the days before running water. The answer was that there was a well down the hill and Rav Yisrael knew someone had to schlep the water up from the well to the kitchen. He saw that the hired help was a poor girl who would be the one schlepping the water, and he was not going to be a “Tzadik” at her expense! Better, too, to make the Aron HaKodesh out of wood rather than gold, because someone needs to schlep it.

There is another famous story with Rav Yisrael. When he was older, he no longer went to bake his own matzah before Pesach, but rather he asked his students to bake his matzas mitzvah for him. The students asked their teacher, “What are the ‘Chumras’ (stringencies) the Rebbe practices during the time he bakes matzah?” All sorts of different stringencies are practiced by righteous individuals while baking their

Seder Matzahs. They asked Rav Yisrael Salanter which Chumrah he was particular about. He told them “Be careful not to yell at the woman who cleans up between every batch of matzah baking. She is a widow. Please do not yell at her. That is my ‘chumrah’!”

This is why there were no duplicates or triplicates in the Mishkan.

Even When We Are Camped, We Are Travelling

I heard the following beautiful homiletic observation on the last pasuk in Sefer Shemos from Rav Isaac Bernstein, z”l: “For the Cloud of Hashem would be on the Mishkan by day, and fire would be on it at night, before the eyes of all of the House of Israel throughout their journeys.” (Shemos 40:38). The Cloud was upon the Mishkan in all of their travels. Rashi explains that whenever they would camp, the Cloud would cover the Mishkan. However, he asks, the pasuk is imprecise. It says that the Cloud was on the Mishkan when they travelled. However, in actuality, it was not on the Mishkan when they travelled – only when they camped! It should say “The Cloud was on the Mishkan in all their encampments!” Rashi answers that when they camped—that was also part of their travels. Even when they were stationary, it was considered “mas’eyhem” (their travels).

This is a thought, Rav Bernstein says, that we all need to remember: Even when we are encamped, we are still travelling. Jewish history is replete with a mindset (we are as guilty of this as anybody else) which assumes that wherever we happen to be residing, “this is our place.”

Jews were in Poland for one thousand years. They used to quip in Yiddish that Poland was a transliteration of the Yiddish expression ‘Po Lin’ (Here we will sleep). In other words, this is where we are and this is where we will stay. When people are in the same location for a thousand years, they can easily assume that “this is it”, “this is our home.” The Jews were in Spain for hundreds of years. Unfortunately, Jewish history is a testimony to the fact that no matter how comfortable we may get, we are not home yet!

America is no exception. This is a Malchus shel Chessed. It is the most hospitable place that the Jews have settled in their long history. One can easily make the mistake that “we have come to the resting place and to the inheritance.” (Devorim 12:9).

This Rashi is implicitly teaching that this assumption is not to be relied upon. The places of their encampments are part of their travels. Even where we find ourselves encamped, it is still just part of our long journey forward. We are on this long journey until we finally see the rebuilding of Zion and the comfort of Yerushalayim with the coming of Moshiach, may it be speedily, in our time.

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Vayakhel-Pekudai: The Meaning of Work

Ben-Tzion Spitz

My share of the work may be limited, but the fact that it is work makes it precious. - Helen Keller

Perhaps one of the commandments that are most repeated throughout the Torah is regarding observing the Sabbath. It has proven to be a central pillar of Jewish practice and tradition. The poet, Ahad Ha’am, famously stated that “More than the Jews have kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept the Jews.” The Sabbath has undoubtedly been a major factor in keeping the Jewish people as an unbroken, cohesive entity throughout generations and millennia.

The Torah, in each mention of the Sabbath, adds another detail, another nuance, to flesh out what the Sabbath experience is meant to entail. The Bechor Shor on Exodus 35:2-3 teases out additional clues as to what the Torah is prescribing regarding Sabbath observance.

The verse states: “Six days shall you work and on the seventh day it shall be holy for you.”

The Bechor Shor explains that during the six days of the week we are commanded to do the work that God has ordered (in this context the work of building the Tabernacle). However, on the seventh day, on the Sabbath, you shall perform no labor, even sacred, divinely commanded

labor that God Himself ordered is forbidden to be performed on this day of rest, much less any labor that was not directly ordained by God. The next verse provides additional detail: "You shall not kindle a fire in all your dwellings on the Sabbath."

The Bechor Shor explains that the act of transferring fire may not seem arduous. To move a flame from an existing fire and let it take hold someplace else cannot be considered strenuous and involves almost no exertion. Nevertheless, the Torah considers it a form of labor. The many prohibited labors of the Sabbath may not seem to be "work" nor would we classify them as toil by any stretch of the imagination. Nonetheless, it is not only "work" in the modern sense of the word that is prohibited on the Sabbath but any type of creative action which changes or transforms the world around us. The Sabbath is not only a day to hold back from affecting the world, but a day to recharge our physical, emotional, and spiritual beings by retreating from creative activities for a day. If we're constantly busy, constantly active, constantly absorbing and transmitting bits and bytes, our souls will never know inner peace or quiet. Especially in our era, the sounds of modernity threaten to drown out what is left of our humanity.

May we each achieve the next level of peace that a Sabbath respite offers.

Dedication - To the Pesach Haggadah. It boggles the mind how every year there seems to be an exponential number of commentaries on it being published.

Shabbat Shalom Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

Rav Aviner

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

Taxes

Q: I purchased a \$300 item and the overseas company notified me that the cost recorded was less than \$100 (apparently to expedite delivery and avoid tax). How can I reimburse the parties involved?

A: Donate money to the Israel Defense Forces.

Literature

Q: Is Sefer Ha-Razim (a book containing cryptic mystical content) considered authentic Jewish literature?

A: No. It's nonsense and heresy.

Kashrut

Q: Is every tea essence Kosher, for example 'Combochia'?

A: If it's pure tea essence without additional ingredients it's Kosher.

Stringencies

Q: The Rambam states that the middle path in life is preferable. This being the case, are stringencies in lifestyle recommended?

A: Stringencies are recommended for very few individuals as we learn in the Guide for the Perplexed (Moreh Nevuchim, written by the Rambam). Everyone may carefully and gradually add stringencies to his lifestyle (see the first chapter of Hilchot Deot).

Netilat Yadayim Vessel

Q: Is Netilat Yadayim permitted with a vessel manufactured from non-Kosher materials?

A: Yes, but preferably not.

Different interpretations of Jewish Law

Q: How can I distinguish between authentic differences of opinion within Jewish Law and what is extraneous to Judaism?

A: Check the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Messilat Yesharim or any book of Halacha.

Eating Chumus

Q: Is dipping pita, crackers etc. into a plate of Chumus acceptable?

A: No. It's respectable to use cutlery.

Beit Knesset

Q: Is it permissible to pray in a Shul where the Mechitza not in accordance with Jewish Law?

A: No. The Shul is an official place of prayer, supplication and service of the Creator.

Kaddish

Q: When a grandson has been delegated the responsibility of reciting Kaddish (according to the Rama), should he, in addition to saying it during the first eleven months, also recite Kaddish on the Yahrtzeit?

A: Out of reverence he should recite Kaddish on the Yahrtzeit as well (based on Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah and Sefer Match Ephraim) Parents and Children

Q: What is the appropriate reaction of a parent whose devout and learned son apparently abandoned his religious lifestyle? In such a case would one say that the child's decision is Hashem's will?

A: Hashem wants us to perform the Mitzvot. Beseech Hashem with all your might and sincerely pray that your son will repent.

Insights Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei Adar 5781

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Soro Beila bas Shimon. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

Haziness of Laziness

And the Nesi'im [heads of the tribes] brought onyx stones, and stones to be set, for the ephod, and for the breastplate (35:27)

Rashi (ad loc) points out that by the inauguration of the Mizbeach (Bamidbar 7:1-2) the Nesi'im were the first to contribute, yet by the construction of the Mishkan they lagged behind everyone else. Rashi explains that by the Mishkan the Nesi'im decided that they should wait to see what everyone else would contribute, and then they would supply whatever was still missing.

Yet the Nesi'im underestimated the generous spirit of Bnei Yisroel; almost everything necessary for the Mishkan was donated. The only thing left to bring were the stones mentioned in the possuk. For this reason, they were the first to contribute by the inauguration of the Mizbeach. Rashi continues; "Because they were lazy [by the construction of the Mishkan], a letter was removed from their title" – בְּאַשְׁרָנָה is written without a letter yud.

Rashi's characterization of the Nesi'im as being lazy can be difficult to comprehend. After all, the Nesi'im offered to complete whatever was missing from the communal contributions. In essence, they were offering to deficit fund the construction of the Mishkan. This is every fundraiser's dream. Obviously, they cared enough to make sure that the Mishkan would be completed properly; so, why are they referred to as lazy?

What is the definition of lazy? Most people assume that being lazy has something to do with how slow you move. In fact, the very slow moving animals of the Central and South American jungles are known as sloths – a synonym for lazy. Just how slow does someone have to be in order to be considered lazy?

In truth, laziness has nothing to do with how fast or slow one moves. Shlomo Hamelech characterized the thought process of a lazy person; "A lazy person says there is a lion on the road" (Mishlei 26:13). Why is this the quintessential example of laziness? If there is a lion in the road then he is right for staying at home and not venturing out. However, if there is no lion outside, then he isn't lazy, he's delusional! What does Shlomo Hamelech mean?

The key to understanding laziness is the analysis of individual motivation. Is the motivation internal or based on external factors? In other words, do I go to work because I want to be productive or because I need to pay for groceries and rent?

Many people say that they work best under pressure – and this is the reason they leave important projects or term papers to the very last moment. In truth, they are just lazy and unmotivated to excel unless there is an external pressure forcing them to achieve.

Shlomo Hamelech is saying that of course there is a lion on the road, but a lazy person sees it as an insurmountable obstacle, while an industrious person just looks at the situation as a problem that he must overcome. After all, there is no shortage of solutions to almost any situation. Lazy people find excuses while motivated people find solutions. The key to curing laziness is to have goals that both inspire and motivate you.

There are dozens of excuses as to why one cannot contribute to communal projects like Shuls and schools; “The Rabbi isn’t inspiring enough” or “The board isn’t transparent enough” or “The education isn’t as good as it could be.” At the end of the day, these are all merely the excuses of lazy individuals who do not have the community’s best interest at heart. Committed community minded individuals are inspired and motivated to look for solutions, not excuses.

This was the mistake of the Nesi’im. They weren’t motivated enough to actually help with the building of the Mishkan; they were only motivated by the external pressure of not having a Mishkan. This is why they only offered to deficit fund the Mishkan, in case Bnei Yisroel did not come through. However, as community leaders, they should have led the contributions. For this reason, the Nesi’im are called lazy and had a letter removed from their name. The Torah tells us in Sefer Bamidbar that they actually learned from their mistake and by the inauguration of the Mizbeach they were the first to contribute.

Creating Shabbos

And Moshe assembled the entire assembly of Bnei Yisroel and said to them: “These are the things that Hashem commanded to do them...” (35:1)

Moshe Rabbeinu gathers all of Bnei Yisroel to instruct them on the laws of Shabbos and the commandment to construct a Mishkan. The Gemara (Shabbos 97b) derives from the words “these are the things” that there are thirty-nine creative acts that are forbidden on Shabbos (See Rashi ad loc for a detailed explanation).

Yet the Torah’s characterization that “these are the things that Hashem commanded to do them” seems a little odd. After all, these are things that Hashem is very specifically asking us not to do! Why doesn’t the Torah just simply state, “These are the things that Hashem has forbidden us to do on Shabbos?”

Additionally, all of the Torah is meant to apply to all of Bnei Yisroel; so why does Moshe specifically gather everyone as an assembly to teach them about Shabbos?

The Torah is teaching us a remarkable aspect of Shabbos, one that we are all responsible to see fulfilled. If one drives down the street early on a Sunday morning, or on a national holiday like Thanksgiving, it is readily apparent that it is not a typical weekday. The normal hustle and bustle of everyday life is missing and the day actually feels different.

This is what the Torah is teaching us; each and every one of us has a responsibility to create an environment of Shabbos. For six days a week, we are enjoined to do creative acts (35:2). Yet, on the seventh day, we are prohibited from doing those very same acts. By abstaining from the thirty-nine melachos we are actually differentiating Shabbos from every other day of the week and doing something much greater – we are creating a feeling of Shabbos in our community.

There are many things that one can do on Shabbos that doesn’t technically violate any of the Torah prohibitions: One can move furniture around for hours, go jogging, reorganize cabinets and freezers, etc. However, these activities actually detract from the feeling of a Shabbos environment, and therefore should not be done.

This also explains a Gemara in Bava Kama (37A), which says that a bull that only goes on Shabbos isn’t considered dangerous on weekdays. Tosfos (ad loc) asks; how is this possible? An animal doesn’t know what day of the week it is! Tosfos answers that perhaps it recognizes that it’s a different day because people dress differently. Perhaps we can add that, in a proper Shabbos environment, the atmosphere feels so different that a bull feels that he can do whatever he wants.

This is why Moshe gathered everyone together to teach them about Shabbos. It is incumbent on every single person to promote this environment and create a special atmosphere of Shabbos. Each individual has to recognize that his/her actions also effect everyone else’s feeling of Shabbos.

Did You Know...

In this week’s double parsha, Hashem commands Moshe to anoint everything in the Mishkan, including Aaron, his sons, and the Mishkan itself. Moshe himself made the special anointment oil, under Hashem’s

instruction. This oil was used to anoint all high priests, kings, and the vessels of the Mishkan. Here are a few interesting facts about the oil:

1. This oil was very fragrant; it was made with four of the finest perfumes, though there is some dispute as to what they were exactly. The perfumes are Mor Deror (musk, or myrrh, or a certain root), Kinman Besem (aloe wood, or Mecca straw, or a type of grass), Keneh Bosem (probably cinnamon), and Kidah (cassia or ginger).

2. Another opinion of what Keneh Bosem is that it is marijuana (The Living Torah on Ki Sisa). This is based on the fact that cannabis and Keneh Bosem have almost the same pronunciation. This certainly brings a new meaning to the term “high priest.”

3. The oil was made by soaking the different ingredients in water, until the fragrance was fully removed. They then added a gallon of oil and boiled away the water to infuse the oil with the scent.

4. Interestingly, this oil was only made once (by Moshe).

5. Furthermore, even though it was only made once – with just a single gallon of oil – they never ran out of it. Obviously, this was an enormous miracle as all the vessels and every high priest and king was anointed with it.

6. The oil was not used in the second Beis Hamikdosh; the high priests were anointed by wearing the holy clothes. The oil will be hidden until the times of Moshiach, when Bnei Yisroel is worthy again.

7. There was a very specific way of anointing everything, and of course there are different opinions on this as well. The high priests would be anointed by first placing oil on their head and above their eyebrows, then joining them together to make the letter chaf (for Cohen). All the vessels were anointed in the same way, but kings had the oil placed all around their head like a crown. The Gemara (Kereisos 5b) says that the symbol made on the high priest’s head was actually the Greek letter chi, which looks just like the letter X.

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For the week ending 13 March 2021 / 29 Adar 5781

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parshat Pekudei

The New Israel

“And he made the breast-plate as a craftsman, like he made the ephod, from gold, turquoise, purple and crimson wool...” (39:8)

At the beginning of Megillat Esther, Achashverosh throws a party to end all parties. The party of the millennium. He was celebrating his unassailable grip on the throne of the Persian Empire. At this party, Achashverosh brought out the vessels of the Holy Temple which the Babylonians had plundered and caroused with.

But he didn’t stop there. Achashverosh’s party attire consisted of the vestments of the High Priest. Why did he do this? Was it some elaborate spoof? Was Achashverosh poking fun at the Jewish People and their prophecies of the demise of his all-mighty kingdom? Or was there something more sinister behind this charade?

“And the land was formless and empty and darkness on the face of the deep.” (Bereishet 1:2)

These words form part of the opening words of the Torah. They hint to four mighty empires that will subjugate the Jewish People. The first, Babylon, will snatch the crown of Empire from the Jewish People, and then the Persian, Greece and Roman empires will successively snatch world domination, one from the other. Eventually, the last of those empires, Rome and its cultural heirs, will return the kingship to the Jewish People.

When that happens, “The lost ones will come from the land of Ashur” (Yeshayahu 27:13) — and the final exile will end. The name Ashur is related to the Hebrew word ishur. An ishur is a certification. Each nation who takes the kingship from the Jewish People seeks to “certify” itself as being the true and final recipient of the crown of the world. But they can only do this by proclaiming themselves the true heirs. They claim to

be the "New Israel," so to speak. They claim that the testament of faith of the Jewish People is old and that they have a new one. This, in essence, was what Achashverosh was attempting to do at his millennial party. He was certifying himself as the "New Israel." His party was a grotesque replication of the Temple service. The vessels of the Temple were there and were being used. He was dressed as the Kohen Gadol, the high priest. He even went so far as to name his ministers after the offerings of the Holy Temple. He was trying to utilize those forces of holiness for his own means, to set his own seal on world domination, using the higher spiritual forces. This was no charade.

But we know what transpired. The truth and eternity of Hashem, His Torah and His nation of Israel prevailed, and will always prevail.

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message

Vayakhel-Pekudei 5781-2021

"The Original Jewish Renewal Movement"

(Updated and revised from Vayakhel-Pekudei 5762-2002)

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This Shabbat, two parashiot, Vayakhel and Pekudei, are read, which conclude the book of Exodus. These parashiot describe the actual erecting and dedication of the Mishkan—the Tabernacle.

This Shabbat, an additional portion, Exodus 12:1-20 is read from a second Torah. Known as parashat Hachodesh, this portion announces that the month of Nissan, the first month of the year, is soon to commence. In the year 5781, Rosh Chodesh Nissan occurs on Saturday night and Sunday, March 13th and 14th. Passover, of course, will be observed 15 days after Rosh Chodesh Nissan.

Exodus 12:2 reads: **הַחֶדֶשׁ הַזֶּה יְהִי לְךָ מֶלֶךְ לְךָ בָּם רַאשׁ הַמָּеּוֹנְחָה**, This month shall be for you the head of the months, it shall be for you the first of the months of the year. The rabbis point out that the word **מֶלֶךְ**—“lachem,” to you, is composed of the exact same letters as the word **מֶלֶךְ**—“melech,” king, indicating that the month of Nissan should be honored more than any other month. By reading the special Torah portion and the special Haftorah (prophetic message) on the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh Nissan, we publicize that this month is indeed honored and hallowed.

The Jewish calendar has several important propitious times. The month of Tishrei, is a propitious time for teshuva, repentance. The month of Av, is an inauspicious time for calamity and misfortune. The month of Nissan is the propitious time for **גַּאֲלָה**—“geulah,” redemption. The Hebrew word **שְׁנָת**—“Chodesh,” month, has the same root letters as the Hebrew word **שְׁנָה**—“chadash,” which means new, obviously, related to the fact that the new moon appears at the beginning of the month. Chodesh also emphasizes renewal, renaissance, and rebuilding. The dark, cold winter has come to an end, and spring blossoms forth with hope and promise. The festival of Passover reflects that hope as well.

Eliyahu Kitov, writes in his landmark work, “The Book of Our Heritage”:

Our sages tell us that the word “redemption” applies only to one who emerges from darkness into light. One who has never experienced the suffering of bondage and oppression, cannot appreciate redemption. The very essence of redemption is the freedom, which comes from the oppression itself. Had the children of Israel never been enslaved, they would never have experienced true freedom. Once they were enslaved, the slavery itself gave rise to the redemption, and from the midst of the darkness, the light burst forth. Thus said our sages: “The Israelites said to the Holy One, Blessed be He, ‘Oh Lord of the universe when will You deliver us?’ The Holy One, Blessed be He answered: ‘When you will have reached the lowest steps, at that moment I will redeem you.’” (Yalkut Hasheia 533, cited by KiTov, page 121.)

KiTov provides examples of how our people rise up from the depths of despair. When Isaac was born, the people of the world said that he is destined to be a slave because of the promise of G-d to Abraham (Genesis 15:13) that, “Your children will be slaves in a land which is not theirs.” Instead, Isaac became the father of the great nation and the free people.

When Isaac was bound on the altar, it seemed as if there would be no future to Abraham, and that his progeny would perish from the face of the earth. And, yet, Isaac survived to have his own children, and to preserve life for future generations.

When Jacob put on the garments of his brother Esau, he was afraid that his father would discover his deception, which would bring a curse upon him rather than a blessing. Despite the deception, Jacob was blessed for all generations.

And, so, points out KiTov, “In the long history of Israel, troubles and dark sorrows became the basis for salvation and light.” In fact, says KiTov, “the darker the troubles, the greater was the light which came forth afterwards.”

Nissan is the month of redemption. G-d has made Nissan the month and the time of salvation. The redemption will burst forth from the midst of darkness, and, as we tremble to the point of despair, the glory of G-d will shine forth.

There is a special Psalm, which Jews recite on the Sabbath day. The psalmist, in Psalm 92:3, writes: **לְהִיא בְּבָקָר סְפִירָה, וְאַמְגַנְתָּךְ בְּלִילּוֹת**. We speak of G-d’s loving-kindness in the morning, and of His faithfulness at night. In the morning, when everything is bright and shiny it’s easy to speak of G-d’s loving-kindness. At night, in the dread of darkness, it is very difficult to see any light emanating from G-d, and almost impossible to express a sense of hopefulness. That is why throughout the night we must rely on “Emunah,” faith.

These past months of the ubiquitous pandemic have been a period of great darkness for all people. Hundreds of thousands of wonderful, otherwise healthy, humans, of all stripes and colors, have succumbed to the dreaded COVID-19 virus. Normal life routines have come to a halt, freedom to congregate with others has been profoundly limited, and even the ability to visit with children and grandchildren have been sharply curtailed.

While it is very difficult in times such as these to see light, we need to be strong, and faithfully declare G-d’s faithfulness in this night.

We pray, that the month of Nissan, which begins next week, will usher in a season of renewal—renewal of spirit, renewal of courage, renewal of faithfulness, and a renewal of peace.

We pray that the remarkable development, and aggressive distribution, of the COVID vaccine will finally bring the COVID nightmare to an end.

We hope that the enemies of the Jewish people, who have exploited these perilous times to attack our people and the State of Israel, will see the light in this new month of Nissan. May their desire be to see goodness for their children, as we desire for ours. May they lay down their swords, and pick up their pruning hooks. May we all plant in joy and reap together in good health and abundant happiness.

May you be blessed.

chiefrabbi.org**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

Dvar Torah Parshat HaChodesh: Rosh Hashana is at the commencement of the seventh month of the year!

Yes, it is true. Rosh Hashanah takes place at the commencement of the seventh month of the year. This anomaly is a feature of our Jewish calendar thanks to a portion in the book of Shemot, which we will be reading this coming shabbat – Parshat HaChodesh. The Torah says:

“HaChodesh hazeh lachem rosh chadashim.” – “This month of Nissan shall be for you the head of the months of the year.”

So Nissan starts the months of the year while Tishrei starts the year itself.

Freedom

Why is Nissan so central and significant for us? It is because in this month we attained our freedom from slavery in Egypt. This unusual phenomenon on our calendar comes to teach us four important lessons:

First of all, ‘zecher lemaasei Bereishit’ – remembering the acts of creation – takes us back to the commencement of life on earth. In a similar way, ‘zecher leytziat Mitzrayim’, remembering the Exodus from Egypt, during Nissan, takes us back to the commencement of the Jewish nation.

Secondly, we are reminded here of the greatness of Hashem, who against the odds was able to deliver our people. And as is very often the case, Hashem asks us to have ‘bitachon’, trust in Him. He also calls upon us to do ‘nishtadlut’ – to try our best to attain our own freedom. Moshe went back to Egypt; he stood

before Pharaoh; he devised a plan – and all the miracles that transpired in Egypt for our people came about in the context of the Jewish people trying our best.

The third lesson – the month of Nissan, reminds us of the persecution of our people in Egypt. Here, there is a call for us always to speak out; to try our utmost to neutralise the forces of persecution and never to be silent when we witness the suffering of others. Here too there is a further reminder that no nation on earth, however powerful, should ever presume that it can indefinitely persecute innocent people, because ultimately history shows us that what is right will prevail.

The fourth lesson – we attained our freedom from Egypt in Nissan not merely just to exist as a people but as a means towards leading a responsible way of life. That is why the counting of the Omer serves as a bridge between Pesach and Shavuot – taking us from Nissan through to Mount Sinai where we received the Torah. We are privileged not just to have a physical existence – to have something to live with – but in addition, to have something wonderful to live for. And as a result, thanks to our Torah, we can inspire others and have a joyous and meaningful life always.

Nissan

So yes, it is true. Rosh Hashanah takes place in the seventh month of the year but Nissan is the head of the months of the year, and from Shabbat Parshat HaChodesh we learn so many important lessons for our lives.

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Vayakhel – Pekudei

Who Produces Our Medicine

24 Adar 5781 March 8, 2021

In this week's two parashot of Vayakhel and Pekudei, we read about the implementation of the directions on how to build the Mishkan (Tabernacle), how to make the clothing for the kohanim, etc... which we read in Teruma and Tetzaveh. While reading these two parashot, we notice a phrase that is repeated often while the Torah describes the execution of the directions: "As the Lord commanded Moses." This phrase is repeated no fewer than nineteen times. At every stage, we are reminded that things were done precisely as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Couldn't we have understood this after being told once? Was it necessary to "plant" this phrase in each stage of the execution? Clearly, the Torah is trying to direct our attention to the fact that the Mishkan and its utensils were made exactly according to the directions.

When we examine this closely, we realize that sticking to directions does not come naturally at all. The people chosen to create the Mishkan were distinguished artists, led by Bezalel, the son of Uri from the tribe of Judah, about whom the Torah writes, "He has imbued him with the spirit of G-d, with wisdom, with insight, and with knowledge, and with [talent for] all manner of craftsmanship to do master weaving, to work with gold, silver, and copper...to work with every [manner of] thoughtful work" (Exodus 35, 31-33). However – isn't unconstrained freedom a prerequisite for art?

When we delve into the words of Chazal, we wonder about this even more. Chazal teach us that the Mishkan was not built to fulfill a need of G-d's, but rather of people. The building of the Mishkan was due to a demand of the Children of Israel. Therefore, who could fulfill the spiritual aspects more than those who required them? It would have made sense that the Children of Israel invest their efforts and build the perfect creation as they saw it. But that is not what occurred. They created the Mishkan "as the Lord commanded Moses."

Rabbi Yehuda Halevi (1075-1141), one of the greatest authors of Spanish Jewry's Golden Age, wrote a book that became one of the foundational books of Jewish philosophy: The Cuzari. In this book, he wonders about the need for detailed commandments. Wouldn't it be better to direct humans to behave as their hearts tell them to behave, according to what draws them spiritually? He responds to all the questions using an allegory of a man who enters a famous physician's treasure-trove of medicines. When he saw people waiting to get medication from the doctor, he distributed medicine to each waiting patient without knowing what kind of medicine it was or if it suited the patient's illness. This fool did not help, and even harmed, those who took the medicine based on his instructions.

This is how Rabbi Yehuda Halevi viewed a person trying to create his own values and act according to his needs, even if these were worthy spiritual needs. A person trying to attain wholeness of his soul, without divine revelation, cannot help himself. Ideologies and theories rise and fall one after another because human wisdom does not have the power to find a remedy for a person's spiritual needs!

Repair of the human soul can only take place when a person takes on values external to himself. The most accurate and efficient art is that which follows the directions "as the Lord commanded Moses." Even Moses, the greatest prophet, is the not the source of spiritual direction a human strives for. Only G-d, the Creator of the Universe, knows the depths of the human soul and the secrets of

existence and creates the correct "medicine" for people. Only He Who created humans knows what they need to redeem their souls and transcend to a spiritual and moral life.

Judaism believes in living a life directed by the Torah – "as the Lord commanded Moses." We do not try to create medicines by ourselves. We know the greatest physician and follow His directions. Thus, we can live an exemplary life of spirituality and humanness, in the light of the Torah and its commandments.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Sheba Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Vayakhel

פרק ח' – פקודי תשפ"א

לא תבערו אש בכל משבתיכם ביום השבת

You must not kindle a fire in all your dwelling places on the day of Shabbos. (35:3)

Chazal (Shabbos 70a) debate the reason for the singling out of *meleches havarah*, kindling a fire, on *Shabbos*. Some say *l'laav yatzah*, it is singled out to teach a negative precept, (*lo saaseh*) that one who lights a fire is subject to the death penalty, *kares*, Heavenly excision, or bringing a sin-offering – as is the law regarding any other one of the *avos melachos*, 39 primary categories of labor prohibited on *Shabbos*. The other position vis-à-vis *havarah* is *l'chalek yatzas*, it was singled out to separate the *melachos* of *Shabbos*. This means: If one, out of ignorance, transgresses the various major labors on *Shabbos*, they are considered separate, distinct and unrelated. Thus, he must bring a separate *Korban Chatas*, sin-offering, for each and every *melachah*. This is in contrast to when one commits the same *melachah* over and over again, in which case he brings only one *korban*.

This is the third instance that *Shabbos* is mentioned in *Sefer Shemos*. First, in the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, "You must not do any work... (on *Shabbos*)" (*Shemos* 20:10). Second, in *Parashas Ki Sisa* (*Shemos* 31:14), "You shall preserve the *Shabbos*... for whoever does work on it, shall be cut off from the midst of the people."

Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, zl, writes that he heard from the *Brisker Rav*, zl, that these citations concerning the prohibition of *Shabbos* follow a specific sequence. In the *Aseres HaDibros*, the Torah begins by introducing the concept of *Shabbos*. It follows up in *Parashas Ki Sisa* with an exhortation concerning the punishment (*sekillah*, stoning, or *kares*) for one who desecrates *Shabbos*. Last, once the Torah teaches the concept of *Shabbos*, then follows up with its punishment, it can now distinguish between *havarah*, a *lo saaseh*, which incurs punishment, and a *l'chalek*, which teaches that *melachos* are separated. The *Rosh Yeshivah* noted the *Brisker Rav*'s brevity, making a comment (which is laden with commentary) allowing for it to sink into the listener's mind – and moving on.

At another occasion (*Rav Moshe Shmuel* reminisces), the *Rav* spoke at the *bar mitzvah* of his son, *Horav Meir*, zl, which was attended by *Horav Isser Zalmen Meltzer*, zl. The *Brisker Rav* held forth concerning the *nusach ha'Tefillah*, text of the *siddur*, *Shabbos Shacharis*: *V'chein kasuv b'sorasecha, v'shomru Bnei Yisrael es ha'Shabbos... bris olam*; "It is written in your Torah *Bnei Yisrael* will guard the *Shabbos*... (to make *Shabbos*) an eternal covenant (for all their generations). He asked why *Chazal* selected this *pasuk* rather than any other *pasuk* relating to the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos*. He explained that it follows the statement (in *Shemoneh Esrai*) that relates to Moshe *Rabbeinu*'s descending *Har Sinai* with the *Luchos*, upon which were engraved the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos*. It is well-known that Hashem gave the *Luchos* as a covenant between Hashem and the Jewish People. Thus, *every mitzvah* engraved on the *Luchos* retains "covenant status." Likewise, *Shabbos* is a covenantal *mitzvah*. Therefore, the *nusach*, version, of the *Shemoneh Esrai* follows with a *pasuk* that addresses *Shabbos* as an eternal covenant.

This was the gist of the *Brisker Rav*'s remarks at his son's *bar mitzvah* – rendered in the presence of the senior *Rosh Yeshivah* in *Eretz Yisrael*, *Rav Isser Zalmen Meltzer*. Once again, the *Rav* was succinct and brief, making his statement and allowing for it to be absorbed in its unembellished, almost abrupt form.

Rav Moshe Shmuel explains that was the *Brisker Rav*'s approach to speaking (veritably to everything). He spoke the truth in its unvarnished form. What can one add to the truth? On the contrary, the more one speaks, the more he detracts from the truth. The more one repeats himself, the more he is likely to give the impression that what he says requires qualification. Truth needs no qualification. It is an absolute, and, as such, is pristine in its brevity.

Horav Koppel Reich, zl, Rav of Budapest for over half a century and leader of Hungarian Orthodox Jewry, was a prolific orator, a brilliant *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar; his message was profound, his oratory dynamic and compelling. Nonetheless, he never spoke without first preparing. Regardless of the audience, he spoke only after having reviewed in his mind and collected his thoughts in such a manner that his words would have the greatest efficacy. One day, prior to a *bar-mitzvah* celebration in which he was scheduled to speak, his grandson observed him pacing back and forth in his study speaking to himself. "Zayde, what are you doing?" the young man asked. "I am preparing my *drashah*, speech." "Zayde, over the years you must have delivered hundreds of *drashos*. Do you still need to prepare your speech?" *Rav Koppel*'s reply should serve as guidance for every speaker, "I am not preparing what to say – but what not to say!" Redundancy, repeating phrases and words, while, at times used for the purpose of emphasizing an idea, is more often an indication that the speaker is concealing something. He may be struggling to gather his thoughts or trying to convince the listener to accept his deception. Someone who is sure of himself and what he has to say need not be verbose.

ויבאו כל איש אשר נשאלו ליבו... ובבאו האנשיות על הנשים... וכל איש אשר נמצא אתו... וכל הנשים אשר נשאלו בנו
Every many whose head inspired him came... the men came with the women... every man with whom was found... all the women whose hearts inspired them. (35:21,22,23,26)

Horav Yeshaya Pik, zl, posits that these *pesukim* address four types of donors. (Charitable donations usually fall under the rubric of these four circumstances.) Some men/husbands will not donate before going home and speaking it over with their wives. This type of husband is in a situation in which their bank accounts are joint, and his wife has a dominant role in the home (as it should be). Therefore, whatever money goes out must have her acquiescence. Concerning this type of man, the Torah writes: "The men came with the women." These men had their wives' consent. Next is the man who knows that he will never receive his wife's compliance. Whatever he does has to be behind her back, from a secret cache of funds. Regarding him, the Torah writes, "every man with whom was found." He kept some money for himself, so that he could contribute to *tzedakah*."

The next fellow is he who is not dependent upon his wife's permission. He either has sufficient funds to act on his own or his wife is of the same mind and/or trusts her husband's decisions. He is the one concerning whom the Torah writes, "Every man whose heart inspired him came." Last is the woman who has access to her own funds, who does not require her husband's involvement in her monetary decisions. Her husband respects her ability to make financial decisions and is, thus, in complete accord with her donations.

Interestingly, if we peruse the sequence of *pesukim*, the one who gives freely with his money – and either does not have to consult his wife or she is likeminded and in agreement with his decisions – is listed first among the donors. He can write a check immediately, since no hassle will occur concerning his contributions. Next comes the husband who has to check with his wife just to make sure that she agrees with him, followed by the poor fellow who has to donate surreptitiously behind his wife's back. The last case is the wife who gives freely of her own volition, either because she has her own funds or because her husband respects her decisions. Why is she last? I would think that she would be second – right after the husband who is in control of his checkbook. Perhaps, it is specifically because she is so circumspect and careful that she has earned her husband's respect concerning monetary decisions. Thus, she is last, because she takes her time to render each decision.

ראו קרא ד' בשם בצלאל בן אורו בן חור

See, Hashem has proclaimed by name, Betzalel, ben Uri, ben Chur. (35:30)

It was necessary for *Moshe Rabbeinu* to announce that Hashem had selected Betzalel, his sister's grandson, to be the *Mishkan*'s chief artisan. As a result, the usual malcontents, who derive their greatest pleasure from finding fault and expressing their dissatisfaction, should be aware that it was Hashem's decision – not *Moshe*'s. Why was Betzalel selected for this august position? *Chazal* (*Tanchuma Vayakhel* 4) explain that Hashem wanted to reward Betzalel's grandfather, Chur, who had given up his life *Al Kiddush Hashem* when he stood up to the sinners that committed idol worship with the Golden Calf. Hailing from the tribe of Yehudah, religious devotion was part of the tribe's DNA. Nachshon ben Aminadav had been the first to enter the Red Sea. Chur's father, Calev ben Yefuneh, stood up to the *meraglim*, spies. Indeed, David *Hamelech* descends from the tribe of Yehudah. Thus, Chur's selection brings the construction of the *Bais Hamikdash* full circle. The Jews gave gold in order to create the Golden Calf, which was the catalyst that led to Chur's murder. Now, they were giving gold to make the *Mishkan* which Betzalel, Chur's grandson, would construct, so that the *Mishkan* could atone for the Golden Calf and – by extension – in some way expiate Chur's murder. We now know the identities of Chur and Betzalel. Who was Uri, and what role did he play in this story?

Simply, we might suggest that Uri was the necessary link between Chur and Betzalel. The lesson is: Not all of us are destined to have prestigious positions, illustrious pedigrees, change the world. Some of us are "links" in order to serve as the generational conduit to transmit the legacy that we received from our parents to our children. We are just as vital as the ones who have the positions and the pedigrees, because, without the link, the pedigree is irrelevant. I think if we delve deeper into "Uri, the father," however, we might suggest that, without Uri, Betzalel might not have been able to function in his new role. Imagine Betzalel being told to construct the edifice that would atone for the Golden Calf that was the antecedent to his grandfather's murder. He probably looked at his father for advice. Apparently, his father "intimated" that he, too, had watched in horror as his father was murdered by the idol-worshipping revelers. By inference, he sanctioned Betzalel's participation. In other words, Uri quite possibly was the one who enabled the *Mishkan*'s construction via his son.

Not all fathers are dynamic; not all *rebbeim* are dynamic. Some are "just" hardworking, devoted, sincere, authentic human beings, who are conscientious, compassionate – who educate with love. That is how a community nourishes a Betzalel to distinction.

Parashas Pekudei

יברך אותם משה

And Moshe blessed them. (39:43)

Rashi teaches that *Moshe Rabbeinu*'s blessing was: "Yehi ratzon, May it be His will that the *Shechinah* rest on the work of your hands; Vihi noam, May the pleasantness of our G-d be upon us." What greater blessing can there be than knowing that Hashem's *Shechinah*, His Divine Presence, rests upon his work? One can have no greater prize than having the Divine Presence crown his finished product. How did the people warrant such an extraordinary blessing? They were sincere in their contributing. Their donations – whether it was their best material or themselves – was all *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven. There was no "self" involved. It was all for Hashem. When one's intentions are pure, he is blessed.

Growing up in Antwerp, Belgium, prior to World War II, "Chaim" purchased a parcel of land in Bnei Brak. When the winds of war were beginning to blow, he, like many of his co-religionists, fled to France. It did not take long before the accursed Nazis moved their war machine through Western Europe reaching France. Those Jews who were fortunate to escape, found safe haven in other countries. This Jew from Antwerp was able to escape to Portugal where he rebuilt his life – unfortunately, not in accordance with Torah dictate. The Jewish community was small, comprised now primarily of refugees. They were in a country that, at best, tolerated their Jewish immigrants. The best

way to earn a living and raise a family was to acculturate and eventually assimilate.

Once one begins to descend into the abyss, he freefalls quickly. Chaim soon forgot his religious upbringing. He eliminated *Shabbos* and *kashrus*, together with *davening* and *Tefillin*. To add insult to injury, he married out of the faith. His heirs were now *goyim*, as well. He invested in a small fish business, which, over time, grew into a large successful enterprise. Now, years later, he was a wealthy Portuguese citizen who happened to have a biological Jewish pedigree. Let us now return to Bnei Brak where Chaim had purchased a parcel of land. Since he had not laid claim to it his real estate purchase, according to Israeli law, it was up to the first person who claimed it. Two Torah organizations debated over its ownership, with each claiming that his organization had been there first. Back and forth, they presented their litigation before the judge, who now had access to Chaim's deed on the property. Apparently, this property belonged to a Belgium Jew who had purchased it in 1935.

We return to Portugal where Chaim became interested in a small abandoned *shul* situated in the suburb where he lived. This *shul* was built prior to the Inquisition, making it approximately 500 years old. He decided to do one good thing with his now defunct spiritual life: rebuild the *shul*. Having been made aware of the litigation that was going on in Bnei Brak, he decided that he would use the proceeds of that sale (the money paid by whichever institution was prepared to pay his asking price) to rebuild the *shul*. This came as a surprise to the members of the Jewish community who were well aware of his hefty financial portfolio. Why use the funds generated by his sale of land in Bnei Brak? He explained that he had once been a devout Jew, wholly committed to Torah study and *mitzvah* observance. It was during that period in his life when he felt that his relationship with Hashem was satisfactory. He was acting in consonance with Hashem's commands. Once the war ravaged European Jewry, it took its toll on his spiritual demeanor, as well. He had, over the years, distanced himself from Hashem, and he had profited financially from his decision to renege his spiritual affiliation with Judaism. While he felt strongly about his Jewishness, he acknowledged that his conduct in the spiritual arena was less-than-acceptable. As such, he wanted to designate those funds earned from monies he spent while his commitment to religious observance was unambiguous to be used to rebuild the synagogue.

We should neither judge nor fault our Jewish brothers and sisters who do not practice as we do. Some never had access to a Jewish education; others grew up at a time or in a place where religious observance was a difficult, almost insurmountable, challenge. Some suffered more than the average human body or mind can endure. Whatever their reason, they still know and acknowledge their ancestry. They just have a different way of expressing it.

בַּיּוֹם הַחְדָשָׁה הַרְאֵשׁוֹן בְּאַחֲד לְחַדְשָׁת קָרְבָּן אֶת מִשְׁכָן אֶל מוֹעֵד

On the first day of the first month, you should set up the *Mishkan* of the *Ohel Moed*. (40:2)

Chazal (*Midrash Tanchuma, Pikudei* 11) teach that the construction of the *Mishkan* was completed within three months. *Tishrei, Mar Cheshvan, Kislev*. The people did not set up, however, until *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*, because Hashem wanted the festivities surrounding the erection of the *Mishkan* to be combined with the celebration of the birth of Yitzchak *Avinu*. What is there about Yitzchak *Avinu*'s birth, his entrance into the world, connects with the *Mishkan*? How do these two celebrations mesh, and what is the message for us?

Let us focus on Yitzchak's name, its source and what it represents vis-à-vis our nation. The angels appeared before Avraham *Avinu* with the Heavenly message: "You will have a son!" Sarah *Imeinu* overheard and reacted with "laughter"/incredulity. When Yitzchak was born, Sarah said, *Tzchok asah li Elokim, kol ha'shomea yitzachak li*, "G-d has made laughter for me, all that will hear will laugh for me" (*Bereishis* 21:6). As a result of this laughter (earlier, when Hashem had informed Avraham of the impending birth of Yitzchak, he, too, had laughed), the child was named Yitzchak. Nothing about having a baby is mirthful – especially amid such miraculous circumstances. Furthermore,

it seems strange – almost incongruous – that the Patriarch who exemplifies *Middas HaDin*, the Attribute of Strict Justice, and the *middah* of *Gevurah*, strength, would be give a name based upon a parent's reaction to the absurdity of his birth.

Indeed, *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, observes that the term "yitzachak" (*kol ha'shomea yitzachak li*) sounds like a combination of the *kal*, simple pure conjugation, and *piel*, intensive conjugation of the verb, *tzchok*. In the *kal*, *tzchok* bespeaks a natural, almost involuntary, laughter, which we are unable to control due to the absurdity we face. *Tzachek*, in the *piel* form, alludes to the intentional mocking laughter, through which we jeer at the incongruity between the intention/plan and the act, between the desire and the achievement. Two words *tzchok* and *tzachek*, which seem to be pulling in different directions – one involuntary laughter, the other purposeful mockery.

Avraham and Sarah lived a life in which they swam against the tide of world opinion and culture. This "elderly couple" even believed that their work would continue with the "heir" to their legacy. How absurd! Can we really believe anyone for involuntary smirking – even laughter? There will always be the contemptuous scoundrels who secure their high from mockery and jeering others. At the end of the day, conceiving, giving birth, and raising Yitzchak to follow in their footsteps and continue their noble legacy were really implausible and given somewhat to catalyze laughter. When we take into consideration that Yitzchak advanced to Patriarchal status as a result of the *Akeidah*, binding, this was a moment that personified *Din*, Strict Justice, at its apex. This was certainly no laughing matter. Indeed, what an idiosyncratic name for such a serious Patriarch.

Laughter is a natural response to the absurd, to that which is incongruous. The greater the absurdity, the more pronounced the incongruity, the more conspicuous the paradox, the more one is inclined towards an expression of amusement. Yitzchak's birth was preposterous and outlandish, thus, Sarah was moved to laughter. Hers was a laughter of incredulity, of surprise and almost shock.

The *Akeidas Yitzchak* went against all rationale. After finally producing a son that would carry on his legacy, Avraham was commanded to slaughter him. Nothing within the realm of cogency can rationalize the *Akeidah* – other than this is the way a Jew lives. We do not demand "fair," or cogent. Our conviction remains firm, even when the irrational confronts us. We live by the will of Hashem. What matters most in life is how one lives it. If his life conforms with Hashem's will – then he has lived. If he lives against Hashem's Will – that is absurd!

The world laughs at us. They mock us with derision and ridicule. Their laughter hails back to Yitzchak. They laughed at his conception, his birth, his binding at the *Akeidah*. Our presence in the world after all these years of persecution is absurd. Now, who is laughing? They have tried countless times to destroy us, but we are here. Is anything more unimaginable than our existence? Nothing is inconceivable before Hashem, because, when He does something – it is real; it is in order; it is appropriate; it is congruous. He – and only He – determines what is absurd. So the world can foolishly laugh. We, however, laugh back. Yitzchak laughs. Our nation laughs.

We now understand why Hashem wanted the celebration of the *Mishkan* to coincide with Yitzchak's "birthday." Our nation has been bereft of its *Bais Hamikdash* for over 2,000 years. Our *Mikdash/Mishkan*, our Sanctuary, is no longer with us. We have been the focus of much derision during our exile. Hashem tells us: "Do not worry, you will yet laugh at the world, when the *Mishkan/Mikdash* is rebuilt." Yes, we will laugh!

Va'anu Tefillah

עלינו ועל כל ישראל עמך – Aleinu v'al Kol Yisrael Amecha. Upon us and upon all of Yisrael, Your People.

"Upon us" refers to those present in the congregation in which we are praying. We pray that this blessing of peace extend outward to Jews all over. *Kol Yisrael*, "All of Yisrael, Your People." *Amcha*; "Your People" explains *Horav Avigdor Miller, zl*, is a derivative of *Imcha*, "With You," those loyal to You. *Am Yisrael* and *Bnei Yisrael* have

diverse translations, with *Am* focusing on loyalty and subservience, and *Bnei*, as in *ben*, son/child, disregarding loyalty and focusing on patience.

We immediately follow up *Amcha* with *barcheinu Avinu* – “Bless us, Father,” a term which, by its very nature, includes all in the “family.” A father is father to all his children – even if one of them slips away. He remains part of the family. Thus, I think the blessing implies that we are unique as a nation, since we are a nation built upon family and pedigree. So, if one is in the “family,” he is part of the “nation.”

In memory of our Father and Grandfather - Martin Nisenbaum

ל מרדכי בן ר' אפרים ז'ל - נפטר ר' ח' ינין תש"ג

זוכה לראות זורת עוסקם ב תורה ויראת שמים

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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

The Pesach Sleuth

Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

Imagine walking into a factory, noticing the ceiling, 25 feet overhead, lined with rows upon rows of similar-looking pipes. “How am I possibly supposed to know what goes through these pipes? How can I possibly check if they have been cleaned properly, and how can I possibly kasher them?”

When we purchase products for Pesach, we look for a hechsher that we respect, and we rely on that hechsher to make sure everything is done properly. Fortunately, an experienced mashgiach will know how to trace all those pipes and figure out what each one contains, although it will take him time to do so. Yet, most of us do not know what it is like to be in a factory that is supervising a Pesach-dik production run, nor do we know what it is like to be checking a factory to see if it is maintaining its kashrus program. We also don’t really know why one hechsher is acceptable and another is not. Most people apply the “What do the neighbors use?” system, or, more accurately, “What does the chevrach use?” or “Do bnei Torah eat from that hechsher?” approach. Although one article cannot answer most of these questions, it can provide some direction and background.

Pesach-dik ketchup

Let me begin with a typical kosher-for-Pesach story. Ketchup, a common North American household product that, in some households, is an irreplaceable staple, is a relatively simple product containing tomato paste, water, corn sweetener, vinegar, salt, spices and flavoring. Several of these ingredients require replacement for a Pesach-dik product. Corn sweetener is kitniyos, and would require replacing, probably with a kosher-lePesach sugar made from either cane or beets. Pure spices ground for industrial use should be fine, but spice extracts or oleoresins will require more research. The water should not present any problem, and the tomato paste and salt used for commercial production should also be fine, but it always pays for the hechsher to double check the manufacturer.

Both the vinegar and the flavoring could contain chometz, and almost certainly contain kitniyos if they did not come from a specially-made Pesach run. Let us see how these sensitive ingredients will be handled:

Vinegar

Regular vinegar, usually called white vinegar, is manufactured from alcohol processed with yeast, vinegar food, and perhaps other raw materials, until the alcohol turns to vinegar. Every one of these ingredients can involve a potential chometz issue: Alcohol is commonly produced from grain. Vinegar food may also include chometz ingredients. Kosher lePesach vinegar would require that the alcohol, the yeast and the vinegar food all be specially made from a non-chometz, non-kitniyos source. Assuming that the hechsher certifying the production of the ketchup is not the one that certified the vinegar, the rabbonim or poskim of the hechsher on the ketchup will decide which hechsher for Pesach-dik vinegar they will accept.

In theory, kosher lePesach vinegar could be produced in a much easier way with virtually no halachic complications. Chemically, white vinegar is a solution of acetic acid and water. Pure acetic acid can be produced synthetically, and, therefore, a product identical to vinegar can be produced by simply mixing glacial acetic acid and water, which would be a very easy item to produce, simple to supervise, and less expensive than kosher-lePesach vinegar.

So why not?

If it is much easier to produce kosher-lePesach vinegar this way, why is it not done? The answer is that it is illegal in the United States to call this product “vinegar,” notwithstanding that it is perfectly safe to use and will accomplish whatever the “vinegar” in your product will. In the United States, this ingredient must be labeled as “diluted glacial acetic acid” or something similar, and companies are concerned that customers will not purchase a product with this ingredient listed on the label.

Vinegar in the United States must be produced by the fermentation of alcohol, and the alcohol used for this production must also be fermented and distilled from sugars or starches. Nevertheless, there are many countries of the world where it is perfectly legal to use synthetically produced vinegar in food production and to label it as “vinegar.”

Flavoring

Ketchup requires the addition of herbs, spices or flavoring. The size of flavor-producing companies varies in as great a range as you can imagine. I have seen flavor companies that are quite literally mom-and-pop shops, and I have also been inside flavor factories the size of a small city. Some flavor companies manage without any major sophisticated equipment, whereas others own hundreds of production machines that each cost in the millions of dollars.

Spray towers

Here is a very practical example: Many products are dried today in a massive piece of equipment called a spray dryer or spray tower. The purpose of this piece of equipment, usually about the height of a three-story building, is to convert a liquid product into a powder. It does so by pumping the liquid until it is dropped through the top of the spray tower. In the tower, which is usually gas-fired, very hot air, usually about 500 degrees Fahrenheit, is forced along the inside walls of the tower, and the liquid product is dropped through the middle. The temperature is hot enough so that all the liquid evaporates, leaving behind a powder that drops to the bottom of the spray tower, where it is boxed or bagged.

Many thousands of spray towers are used in the United States alone. Possibly the most frequent use is to powder skim milk, which is highly perishable, into nonfat dry milk, which occupies a fraction of the space of the liquid product, and, if kept dry, has an indefinite shelf life without any refrigeration, thus making it very easy to store and ship.

Assuming that this spray tower is used only for milk, the major question that will occur is how to kasher it for a cholov Yisroel production. There are many halachic issues here, including that a spray tower physically cannot be filled with water and brought to a boil, which constitutes *hag’alah*, the most common way of kashering. Furthermore, it is unlikely that this method suffices to kasher the tower, since the absorption into the walls of the spray tower is without liquid.

Another option is to kasher the tower by use of a flame thrower, basically a larger form of a blow torch.

On the other hand, there are halachic authorities who contend that the spray dryer does not even require kashering, since the product is not supposed to touch its walls. Because of the tremendous heat that absorbs into the stainless steel walls of the dryer, product that touches them burns, and will probably pass distaste, nosein taam lifgam, into the final product. Some of these last-quoted authorities contend that a spray tower does not require kashering.

There are also companies that have contract spray-dry equipment. This means that the spray tower is not constantly in use for their product, and, not wanting to leave a very expensive piece of equipment idle, they will spray dry other products during the “down” time, when they are not producing their own products. For example, I have seen wine powder, powdered meat extract, medicinal items, and even blood, spray dried on equipment that was also at times used for kosher supervised products.

At this point, let us return to our special kosher-for-Pesach ketchup production. A flavor whose components were spray dried, which is a fairly common procedure, would require researching what else was produced on this spray dryer, or attempting to kasher the spray dryer. All of these complicate the research involved in producing our kosher-lePesach ketchup.

To resolve all these potential complications, the flavors used for the production of this kosher-lePesach ketchup were ordered from a small manufacturer. The order was to use only pure essential oils that would be extracted by pressure -- in other words, oil that is squeezed out of the spice source in what is called a “cold press” operation and without any extracting aids. Many essential oils are extracted using alcohols such as ethanol or glycerin, which could compromise the kashrus of the product.

Of course, a knowledgeable field representative was dispatched to oversee that the flavor company indeed followed the instructions and used only cold press essential oils. The flavor company blended together these liquid oils and then added a significant amount of salt to the product. The reason for the addition of the salt was to dry out the finished spice so that it could be easily shipped and stored. From a kashrus perspective, this was certainly a far better alternative to using a spray-dried product and kashering the spray dryer.

Now our hechsher has successfully located all the ingredients and overseen the production of all the raw materials for the kosher-lePesach ketchup. The next step

is to send a knowledgeable mashgiach to the production facility where the ketchup is to be manufactured, to ascertain how that equipment will be kashered prior to the Pesach run, and to clarify with the company its production schedule prior to the dates when the equipment will be kashered and the Pesach product manufactured. He also needs to check whether other products are being made in the facility, or a nearby facility, that uses the same heating system to produce chometz products.

And this is for a relatively simple product.

Having shown how a relatively simple Pesach-dik product is made, I will shift from the simple to what is possibly the most complicated: the kashering of hotels for Pesach, which has become a colossal international business. A glance at any frum newspaper includes advertisements marketing opportunities to spend Pesach on any continent, always only with non-gebrochtz, shemurah matzos, cholov Yisroel, and glatt kosher, under a rav's strict supervision, with several prominent English speakers as scholars-in-residence, babysitting provided during the lectures, and many sightseeing activities available for Chol Hamo'eid. Yet, individuals interested in experiencing Yom Tov this way should be aware that kashering a hotel for Pesach is a mammoth and difficult process. It is even more difficult to do when the entire hotel is not being kashered for Pesach, when the hotel's regular kitchen staff are used, or when the chef and sous-chefs are not halachically observant themselves.

By the way, travel tours create the most difficult issues regarding kashrus supervision. Many hechshirim will simply not supervise them because of the complications involved with traveling to different places and using products that are available locally. These issues become even more complicated when it comes to Pesach supervision.

Aside from the many nightmares I have heard regarding Pesach hotel hechshirim, I will share with you just one nightmare story of which I have firsthand knowledge. At one point in my career, I was in charge of the hechshirim in an area that encompassed a well-known tourist area. Simply put, if anything was supervised kosher in our area, I knew about it. There indeed were several reliably kosher tours, some of whom used our kashrus organization to supervise their activities and some who did not, but, it seemed to me, still maintained a fairly respectable kashrus standard.

Once, I saw an advertisement in the Anglo-Jewish press for a "glatt kosher tour" through our area. Since none of the tour companies with which I was familiar was involved, I called the number listed for reservations and inquired who was overseeing their kashrus in the area. The woman who answered the phone dutifully notified me that "Jim Klein overseas all food production and kashrus arrangements in that area." I knew Jim well. Not only was he completely non-observant – he was married to a non-Jewish woman! Yet, the tour was advertized as glatt kosher, chassidisha shechitah. I have no idea if it was chassidisha shechitah, but it was certainly not glatt kosher, and halachically was not kosher at all!

For sure, we know not to use anything "supervised" by Jim. Can we eat something supervised by Yossel? The answer is that we rely on a hechsher that uses yir'ei shamayim personnel who are knowledgeable both in halacha and in the technical aspects of modern kashrus. Particularly, when we decide which Pesach products we allow into our home to enhance our simchas Yom Tov, we use only hechshirim that impress us with their expertise and their concern about the important role they play in our lives.

Parshat Vayakhel-Pekudai (Exodus 35:1 – 38:20)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "And he erected the courtyard around the sanctuary and the altar, set up the screen gate of the courtyard; and Moses completed the work." (Exodus 40:33)

Why repeat all the details of the construction of the Mishkan after we have already heard them when they were initially commanded? Would it not have been simpler to deal with the entire execution of external building, furnishings and

priestly garb with the single verse: "And the People of Israel built the Mishkan exactly as God commanded"?

In order to understand the significance of the repetition, it is important to remember that the Almighty desires an intimate relationship between Himself and the People of Israel. That is why they are commanded to build a Mishkan in the first place: "that I may dwell among them" [29:46].

However, worshiping the golden calf was a betrayal of the ideals given at Sinai. In effect, the Israelites committed adultery, scarring the love and intimacy God had just bestowed upon them. Were God only a God of justice, this would have been the demise of the Jewish people, their sin mandating a punishment that would have meant the end of the Abrahamic mission.

But since God is also a God of compassion, He forgives. However, can we legitimately expect forgiveness for as heinous a crime as idolatry? Will the Almighty take Israel back even after they have committed adultery?

Herein lies the true significance of the repetition of each and every painstaking instruction regarding the Mishkan. God places his nuptial "home" with Israel before they sin with the golden calf, and God accepts their construction of the nuptial home after they have sinned with the golden calf. The repetition is a confirmation that the intimacy between God and Israel has been restored, that the relationship between God and His bride, Israel, has returned to its original state of mutual commitment and faith. The repetition of the exact details is essentially God's gift of forgiveness.

It is interesting to note that on the weeks when we read the concluding portions of Exodus, the calendar is usually host to another sequence of special readings, wherein a second Torah scroll is removed from the ark for an additional reading as well as a special haftorah reading from the prophets.

The first special reading is Shekalim, which speaks of the obligation of every Jew to give a half-shekel to the Mishkan. This represents an act of commitment: a pledge of a four thousand year-strong covenantal relationship between God and Israel, demonstrated in our daily lives by the giving of our "half-shekels" to build our sanctuaries – yeshivas and synagogues, day schools and outreach centers – thus bringing God within our midst. Financial commitment is also the traditional halakhic form of betrothal (symbolized in the wedding ring).

The second special Sabbath – immediately preceding Purim – is Shabbat Zakhor: "Remember" to destroy the evil Amalek. Shabbat Zakhor always precedes Purim because in Shushan there were two threats: externally, from Haman, the descendant of Amalek; while internally, the Jews themselves, who, deep in the amnesia of assimilation, were seduced by the invitations to the parties at the palace of Ahashverosh, with all the non-kosher wine and shrimp one could enjoy. Israel, betrothed by the shekel to God, had succumbed to the temptation of Amalek, substituting the temptations of gold and licentiousness for their God-groom.

The third special Sabbath, Parah, symbolizes the process of purification. The People of Israel, having defiled themselves, are reminded by God that even when our impurity stems from death, the highest degree of impurity, He has provided the red heifer to spiritually cleanse us.

Finally, the namesake for this Sabbath's special reading, HaHodesh, brings us towards a new beginning. "Hodesh," the Hebrew word for month, is also bound up with "hadash" [new] and "hidush" [renewal]. In effect, the moon is the messenger of change and renewal, the ability to emerge from total darkness to a state of fullness and perfection.

Thus the special portions of Shekalim, Zakhor, Parah and HaHodesh parallel the portions of Terumah, Tetzaveh, Ki Tissa and Vayakhel-Pekudei. The journey begins with commitment and love, stumbles through failure and sin, and concludes with the possibility of purification and renewal. These stages mark the path of individual and national freedom, culminating in the festival of freedom, Passover.

Shabbat Shalom!

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
כילא בת (אריה) ליב ע"ה

Parshas Pekudei: Siyyum on Sefer Sh'mot

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

As recorded in the Gemara (BT Shabbat 118b), it is traditional to celebrate the conclusion of the study of a book of Torah. Whereas this tradition chiefly impacts on the study of a Massechet (Tractate) of Talmud or a Seder (Order) of Mishnah, it is certainly applicable to the completion of a book of the Torah. This “concluding celebration” is known as a “Siyyum”.

I. AN OVERVIEW OF SEFER SH'MOT

As we come to the conclusion of this Sefer, it is appropriate to look back on the past 11 weeks of study (and “leining”) and try to get a sense of the larger picture of Sh'mot. Even though (as noted earlier), chapter/verse divisions in the Torah are a Christian invention from the 11th century, the division of the Torah into five books is inherent in the text itself and built into the structure of the physical Sefer Torah from which we read. As such, it stands to reason that this unit, called Sefer Sh'mot, has an underlying theme which informs its narrative and legal passages and which finds its denouement at the conclusion of the Sefer.

The Sefer divides, quite easily, into several sections, as follows:

I. Exodus (Chapters 1:1-13:16)

- A. Description of Servitude
- B. Selection of Mosheh
- C. Plagues
- D. Korban Pesach
- E. Exodus

II. Travels (13:17-18:27)

- A. The Splitting of the Reed Sea
- B. The Song at the Sea
- C. Thirst, Hunger, Thirst
- D. Amalek
- E. Interaction with Yitro

III. Giving of the Torah (19:1-24:18)

- A. Agreement to Enter the Covenant
- B. The Ten Statements
- C. The “Mishpatim” given to Mosheh
- D. The covenant ceremony

IV. Commands of the Mishkan (25:1-31:17)

V. Golden Calf (31:18-34:35)

- A. The Sin
- B. Mosheh's plea for Divine compassion
- C. Mosheh's chastisement of the people
- D. Second plea for Compassion
- E. The Divine agreement to stay with the people
- F. The Second Tablets
- G. The covenanting

VI. Construction of the Mishkan (35:1 – 40:38)

I. DETAIL AND REPETITION

It would be simplest to posit a three-fold theme – Exodus, Covenant and Mishkan. First of all, God brought the B'nei Yisra'el out of Egypt, then He brought them close to Mount Sinai in order to initiate an encounter and enter into a covenant with them – and finally, to command them (and see the fulfillment of the command) to build a Mishkan. While this is an accurate overview, it would be more satisfying – and, hopefully, more intellectually honest and probing – to isolate and identify one theme which ties these three notions together.

Before exploring the theme of the Sefer, there is a textual oddity relating to the Mishkan which we must address – considering that it constitutes over a fourth of the Sefer.

Whereas the laws of the Torah are usually given in brief form – either general overview (e.g. “You may not do any M'lakhah on Shabbat”), case law (e.g. “if a person gives his fellow a donkey...”) or coded phrases (“You shall put a sign on your hand”) – the details of the Mishkan are spelled out in almost excruciating detail. Every item, its length, width and height; the materials from which it is made and so on are delineated such that these commands take up 7 complete

chapters (if we include the details of the sanctification of the Kohanim) in Sefer Sh'mot. Why the detailed description, so atypical of legal text in the Torah?

A second question (which we addressed in our shiur on Parashat Terumah – you can find it at <http://www.torah.org/advanced/mikra/sh/dt.57.2.07.html>) comes on the heels of this one. After reading about God's detailed commands to Mosheh regarding the construction of the Mishkan, we are presented with an equally detailed description of the fulfillment of those commands by the B'nei Yisra'el under the direction of Betzalel. As much as we are bothered by the wordiness and minutiae of these commands, their repetition stands all the more in stark distinction to the way we usually read the Torah.

Following these two questions – detail and repetition – we can ask them again when we look at the description of the offerings of the N'si'im (heads of the tribes) in Bamidbar Chapter 7. Each tribe brought the common offering (see there), which is described in detail, on successive days during the first 12 days of the first month. Why does the Torah repeat this offering in all of its detail twelve times? Wouldn't it have been sufficient – and efficient – to present the offering once and then indicate which Nasi brought for his tribe on which day? Over 60 verses (longer than several complete Parashiot!) could have been "shaved" if the Torah had followed this briefer form; why is the "longer version" given?

We will have to file these questions – all of which are different ways of asking the same question – until we address our original topic: What is the theme of Sefer Sh'mot?

III. FROM THREE THEMES TO TWO

Ramban, in his introduction to Parashat Terumah, explains the purpose of the Mishkan in a fashion which helps us "whittle down" the broad themes of Sefer Sh'mot from three to two.

The Mishkan, Ramban explains, serves as a vehicle to perpetuate the Sinai experience. Once B'nei Yisra'el had experienced the great encounter with God at the mountain, it was His desire that they be able to keep this experience – albeit in a more confined manner – with them as they travelled to Eretz Yisra'el.

The Ramban's approach explains the numerous similarities between the Mishkan and Ma'amad Har Sinai (the encounter at Mount Sinai). Here are a few examples:

* Just as God had spoken to the B'nei Yisra'el at Mount Sinai, so too does He continue to speak to them (via Mosheh) from the Kodesh haKodoshim (Holy of Holies), through the K'ruvim (Cherubim) atop the Aron (Ark) (25:22);

* The Luchot Ha'eidut (Tablets of Testimony) which Mosheh will receive (24:12) on Mount Sinai, serve as a testimony to the giving of the Torah and thus, will be kept in the Aron, the focal point of the Mishkan (25:21);

* The Cloud created by the Incense Altar (30:1-10) symbolizes the Cloud that covered Mount Sinai (19:9, 24:15-18);

* The Fire on the Altar (Vayyikra 6:6) symbolizes the Fire that descended on Mount Sinai (Sh'mot 24:17). The laws of the Altar reflect the Covenant ceremony that took place just before Mosheh ascended Mount Sinai (see 24:4-5).

We can now define two overarching themes in the Sefer – Exodus and Encounter. The first 13 chapters detail the successful political liberation of the B'nei Yisra'el from Egypt – (the next few chapters are the bridge which brings them to Sinai) and the rest of the Sefer is dedicated to bringing the B'nei Yisra'el into encounter with God. That encounter begins with the Revelation at Sinai and continues with the construction of the Mishkan. The encounter theme is interrupted by the narrative of the golden calf – which we will explore a bit further on.

Before pursuing our attempt to isolate the one theme which ties the Sefer together, it is appropriate to share a wonderful insight (which I first saw in a marvelous book about the Beit HaMikdash titled "The Temple" by Rabbi Joshua Berman – highly recommended!) on the Mishkan and its role.

IV. RETURN TO THE GARDEN

At the center of the Mishkan (thus the heart of the Camp), sitting in the Kodesh Kodoshim (sanctum sanctorum), sat the Aron (Ark), housing the Tablets of Testimony. These tablets symbolize the most powerful revelation experienced by Man and are representative of Torah. Sitting above the Aron was a Kaporet (gold covering), above which (but fashioned from the same piece of gold) were the K'ruvim – (Cherubim). These K'ruvim show up in only one other context in the Torah narrative – as the sentinels, guarding the path into Eden after Adam's expulsion. Specifically, they were set up to "guard the path to the Tree of Life".

The Tree of Life, in Mishleic metaphor, is the Torah (see Mishlei 3:18). The K'ruvim which guarded Adam's path to the Tree of Life now guard the "new" Tree of Life – the Torah.

Rabbi Berman suggests two approaches to the Mikdash-Eden analogy. On the one hand, the Mikdash may represent the ideal of Eden. Just as God is described as Mit'halekh (walking) in the Garden (B'resheet 3:8), so God says:

I will place my Mishkan in your midst, and I shall not abhor you. V'hit'halakhti b'tokhakhem (And I will walk among you – (same word as Mit'halekh)), and will be your God, and you shall be my people. (Vayyikra 26:11-12) Just as Adam's

accountability was higher when in the Garden (=nearness to God), so too the level of purity and sanctity which must be maintained within the Mishkan is higher. Alternatively, he suggests that the Mishkan is a “post-expulsion” replacement for Eden. While it would be inappropriate to replicate too much of his thesis here, one point will suffice to make the point. The multiple levels of distance (Kodesh/Kodesh haKodoshim) and the presence of the K’ruvim (both woven into the Parokhet [curtain] dividing the Kodesh from the Kodesh haKodoshim and in gold over the Aron) seem to make the statement that the distance caused by the original expulsion is permanent and that the Mishkan is as close as any human can come to reentering – but can not truly come all the way back.

Following this general thesis, we can now find a greater “inclusio” at the end of Sefer Sh’mot. Instead of being a fitting conclusion to the Sinai experience (as per Ramban), with God’s Presence now accessible to the B’nei Yisra’el as they travel, the end of our Sefer concludes a saga whose onset is at the beginning of B’resheet. The intervening chapters (from B’resheet 3 until the end of Sh’mot) are, effectively, the story of Man’s attempt to return to the Garden. The end of Sh’mot gives us either the “mini-return” afforded to us by God – or the closest possible access.

While this approach is appealing and has much merit, it still leaves us searching for a unifying theme within Sefer Sh’mot. Let’s turn to the beginning of the Sefer for some clues.

V. V’ELE SH’MOT B’NEI YISRA’EL

Our Sefer begins with a recounting of the descent of Ya’akov’s children to Egypt:

These are the names of the sons of Yisra’el who came to Egypt with Ya’akov, each with his household: Re’uven, Shim’on, Levi, and Yehudah; Yissachar, Zevulun, and Binyamin; Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. The total number of people born to Ya’akov was seventy. Yoseph was already in Egypt. (1:1-5)

This introduction is difficult on two counts:

* It seems superfluous, as we have already been told about the descent of Ya’akov’s household – along with a complete listing of the names of the family members – in B’resheet 46 (vv. 8-27);

* In that earlier counting, the grandchildren were listed – whereas here, only the sons appear.

The Rishonim are sensitive to these problems and are divided in their approaches to a resolution.

Rashi (ad loc.) says that this recounting shows the depth of God’s love for the B’nei Yisra’el – just as He lovingly “brings out” the stars every night and calls them by name – and then calls them by name when He “puts them away” (see Yeshaya 40:26); similarly, He reckons the B’nei Yisra’el in their lifetime (in B’resheet) and again after their death (at the beginning of Sh’mot).

Ramban (ad loc.), while favoring the sentiments expressed in Rashi’s approach, challenges it as an accurate reading of p’shat in the verse. Ramban suggests that the book of Sh’mot is an holistic unit – telling the story of redemption. As such, the story had to pick up from the roots of servitude – from which that redemption would take place. Even though we had already learned of the descent into Egypt (indeed, the last four chapters of B’resheet take place there), the Torah wants to teach us one story in this Sefer and, as such, needs to begin it at the genesis of that story. There is a need for a short recap, bringing us back into the story of descent and oppression, setting the stage for redemption.

Ramban explains that since this is only a recap, there was no need to list the entire family, just the heads of household (Re’uven, Shim’on etc.).

Ramban anticipates the challenge that if the theme of this Sefer is redemption (as it is sometimes called Sefer haG’ulah – the book of redemption), why doesn’t it end when the B’nei Yisra’el exit Egypt? Why are the stand at Sinai and the construction of the Mishkan included in this Sefer?

He explains that G’ulah implies a restoration to previous glory. When the Avot (patriarchs) resided in Eretz Yisra’el, they interacted with God and His Presence was felt among them. Only after restoring His Glory to the camp and assuring the welcome of His Presence in the Mishkan were they truly redeemed and “restored to the stature of their ancestors.”

Building on the Ramban, I would like to suggest another understanding of the underlying theme of our Sefer in a way that integrates Rashi’s approach to the beginning of the Sefer and which explains the repetition and details of the construction of the Mishkan.

VI. SH’MOT B’NEI YISRA’EL IN THE MISHKAN

Among all of the vestments and vessels in the Mishkan, only three had some form of writing on them:

* The Hoshen (breastpiece) worn by Aharon. The Hoshen had four rows of three precious stones each (parenthetically, the prophet identifies nine of these twelve precious stones as being in Eden! – see Yehezqe’el 28:13). Each stone was engraved with the name of one of the tribes:

So Aharon shall bear the names of the B'nei Yisra'el in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart when he goes into the holy place, for a continual remembrance before YHVH. (Sh'mot 28:21)

* The shoulder-pieces of the Ephod (apron) worn by Aharon. Each piece had an onyx stone and between the two stones, all twelve names (Re'uven, Shim'on etc.) were engraved:

You shall set the two stones on the shoulder-pieces of the ephod, as stones of remembrance for the B'nei Yisra'el; and Aharon shall bear their names before YHVH on his two shoulders for remembrance. (ibid. v. 9)

Aharon is to wear them as a Zikkaron (remembrance) – what is the goal of this Zikkaron? Is it to be a remembrance before God, that He should bless His people? Is it something for the B'nei Yisra'el to remember?

Note that in 28:28, we are commanded that the Hoshen and Ephod are not to be separated.

* The Tzitz (headband) worn by Aharon. On the Tzitz, the words KODESH LASHEM (holy to God) were represented (ibid. v. 36)

What is the meaning behind these words and their presence as a Zikkaron in the Mishkan?

Let's look back at the stated purpose of the Mishkan: "Let them build for Me a Mikdash, that I may dwell among them" (25:8). The Mishkan was to be a vehicle through which God would manifest His Presence among the B'nei Yisra'el. Aharon's job – as the great Ohev Yisra'el (lover of Israel) – was to be the "shadkhan" (matchmaker) between God and His people. He was to bring the B'nei Yisra'el back to God, by bringing them into the Mishkan. Carrying their names at all times was a reminder to Aharon of his task. He was not in the midst of the holiest possible place on his own merit, rather, he was there as a representative of two sides – God and the B'nei Yisra'el.

This explains why there was one garment with their names – but why both the Hoshen and the Ephod? In addition, why did the Hoshen carry each name on its own stone, whereas the Ephod combined them into two onyx stones?

VII. THE GOAL OF DIVINE WORSHIP

Avodat Hashem – the worship of God -demands a delicate balance between individual expression and communalism. Although there is a great deal to be said for communal worship, as the members stand as one unit and in common practice, nonetheless, it is not the Torah's goal to obliterate the individual talents, needs, creative urges or expressions found in each member of the community. Some religions maintain an ideal of group worship, where the individual submerges and negates his or her own needs into the expression of the group (perhaps the strongest and most frightening examples of this extreme are contemporary "cults"). Others (such as some schools of Zen) place the entire emphasis on individual expression – paying little or no heed to the power of the community.

In both Halakhic and extra-Halakhic literature, the sensitive balance between individual and community is addressed. On the one hand, we pray the most central prayer – T'fillah – silently. On the other – it is (during the day) followed by a public repetition, known as T'fillat haTzibbur – the prayer of the community.

God's directive to us contains both of these pulls – "You shall be a Kingdom of Kohanim and a Holy Nation" on the one hand; "You shall worship YHVH your God with all of your heart..." on the other.

The Mishkan is the nexus of our worship of God. Even worship which takes place outside of the Mishkan is oriented around it (note what direction we face when saying T'fillah). Aharon's job was to bring the B'nei Yisra'el back into encounter with God – on two almost opposing levels. He was to (help Mosheh) lead them as a nation, as a community, as a group. He was also to lead each of them – in his or her own way – into a more sincere and honest encounter with God. Thus, he had to carry their names as individuals (represented by the individual tribes), each in his own glory (represented by a different precious stone) – and as a group. Note that the two stones on the ephod shoulder-pieces were both onyx – and (following Rambam's approach – see MT K'lei Mikdash 9:9) the names were listed in birth order, alternating between the right and left shoulder-pieces. This is clearly a statement about the unification of the families into one unit.

The third component – the Tzitz – was the focus through which this worship was able to unify the people. Note that the individual representation of the names sat on Aharon's breast; moving up towards his head (where the Tzitz rested) were the two shoulder-pieces which unified their names. The message is fairly self-explanatory: **The method by which the tribes of Ya'akov properly unite is in their common focus upward towards God.**

VIII. THE MISHKAN AS A COMMEMORATION OF THE EXODUS

We can now posit a third role of the Mishkan. Not only is it a return to Eden and a continuation of Sinai – it is also a commemoration of the Exodus (Zekher liY'tzi'at Mitzrayim). The Exodus is introduced by the listing of the Sh'mot B'nei Yisra'el who descended into Egypt (away from God's presence – see B'resheet 46:4 and Rashi ad loc.; compare with Vayyikra 18:1-3). As mentioned above (in Ramban's name), **the entire goal of the Exodus was to bring them back to the lofty stature of their ancestors – with the Shekhinah (Divine Presence) resting among them. That is why the Torah begins Sefer Sh'mot with a partial listing of their names – unlike the narrative in B'resheet which is telling a story, the opening paragraph in our Sefer is setting a scene. These names have been exiled from the Shekhinah! Their return is only assured when Aharon comes into the Mishkan with these same twelve names on his vestments – thus bringing these names, both as individuals and as a unit (on the Ephod) back into the proximity of God's Presence, back to the gates of Eden. The very existence of the Mishkan, with all of its vessels and Kohanic vestments, stands as a commemoration of the renewed nearness of God's cherished people – and of the balance of individual and community in Divine worship.**

We now understand why the Torah places such an emphasis on detail in building the Mishkan – because, as the very focus of our relationship with God, we need to remember that every step in the Mishkan must be exact and deliberate (note what happens to Nadav and Avihu when they fail to comply); just as the standards in the Garden of Eden were very exacting, so too in this Dwelling Place for God. Whereas other Mitzvot serve as vehicles of worship, the Mishkan is the nexus of that worship and must be guarded and cared for much more scrupulously.

This seems to be the reason for the repetition of the details of the Mishkan (not only command – also fulfillment). In the intervening time, the B'nei Yisra'el had tried to worship via their own methods (not commanded by God) – and they ended up with a golden calf that served as the archetype of all future sin and punishment (see 32:34). Thus, the description which repeats, like a refrain, that they built each component “just as God had commanded Mosheh”, serves to indicate a realization that the only way to enter God's Presence is – on His terms!

We also understand the repetition of the offerings of the N'si'im in Bamidbar 7. Even though each one brought the same offering as the others, indicating the “communal” approach to worship, each one brought his own intention and motivation to that service (see Midrash Rabbah ad loc.) – supporting the individual component of Avodat Hashem. The Torah repeats them to show us this lesson – that although we may have a common worship structure, we (not only may, but must) bring our own personalities, conflicts, concerns etc. to the act of worship, making it our own and solidifying our own relationship with haKadosh Barukh Hu.

IX. POSTSCRIPT: KODESH YISRA'EL L'YHVH

At the end of the first prophecy of Yirmiyah, the prophet relates:

The word of YHVH came to me, saying: Go proclaim in the ears of Yerushalayim, Thus says YHVH: I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Kodesh Yisra'el L'YHVH (Yisra'el was holy to YHVH), the first fruits of his harvest. All who ate of it were held guilty; disaster came upon them, says YHVH. (Yirmiyah 2:1-3).

In this passage, Yirmiyah uses an odd phrasing to describe the relationship between God and the B'nei Yisra'el – Kodesh Yisra'el Lashem. What does this mean?

Following our explanation of the Hoshen-Ephod-Tzitz continuum (the seeds of which came from a shiur by R. Elyakim Krumbein of Yeshivat Har Etzion), it seems that Yirmiyah is describing a (tragically) past relationship in which (the name of the B'nei) Yisra'el fit between the words Kodesh and Lashem which sat upon the Tzitz. Note how Yirmiyah associates this relationship with our travels in the desert – when we had the Mishkan at the heart of our camp, assuring us not only of God's Presence but of our place in that Edenic Sanctuary.

HAZAK HAZAK V'NIT'HAZEK

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Parshat Pekudei: Summing up Shemot, Introducing VaYikra

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

TRANSITION: SEFER SHEMOT / SEFER VAYIKRA

This week, we will split our focus between a retrospective on Sefer Shemot (Exodus) and an introduction to Sefer VaYikra (Leviticus). Since the Torah is split into five independent units, there must be some reason why each book ends at a particular place and the next book begins there. It seems reasonable to assume that the Torah begins each new sefer (book) not simply to break a long text into manageable sections, but because each book develops a different central theme. It is worth stepping back for a moment from the particular themes of each parasha we have seen in Sefer Shemot to identify the broader and perhaps more subtle theme which unites the sefer. I hope this will help summarize what we have learned on the way through Sefer Shemot and begin to provide us with a grasp of Sefer VaYikra.

SEFER SHEMOT, IN 481 WORDS:

Sefer Shemot opens with the growth of Ya'akov's family into a nation. Fearing an uprising, Egypt enslaves the fledgling nation; eventually, the enslavement turns into the systematic murder of all potential rebels and leaders, but despite the Egyptians' best efforts, leadership appears in the form of Moshe. We follow Moshe through his infant adventures in the Nile, his first contact with his Jewish brothers after a childhood spent in the royal palace, and his long years shepherding for Yitro, his Midianite father-in-law. Then Hashem contacts Moshe in the famous scene of the (non-) burning bush; Moshe reluctantly accepts the mission of representing Hashem to Paro and Bnei Yisrael and demanding that Paro release Hashem's people. Paro claims that he "does not know Y-HVH" and rejects Moshe's demand for freedom, but by the end of the plagues, Egypt lies in smoking tatters and Paro, finally recognizing Y-HVH, releases the people. Soon he changes his mind and pursues Bnei Yisrael into the desert, where Hashem lures him and his army into the sea and drowns them. The people celebrate their salvation with the Song of the Sea.

Bnei Yisrael journey from the sea but soon complain of their lack of food and water. Hashem provides their needs and they move on. Yitro briefly visits the nation, and, among other things, helps reform the judicial system to lighten the burden of judgment heretofore borne by Moshe alone. The people move to Sinai, where they prepare for the revelation of the Torah. Amid thunder, lightning, earthquakes, and other frightening phenomena, Hashem descends on the mountain and delivers the Decalogue, but the people, already overcome and fearing death if they continue to hear Hashem's voice, beg Moshe to listen to the rest and report it to them. Moshe agrees and ascends the mountain, where Hashem teaches him the halakhot (laws) of Parashat Mishpatim. Moshe then descends the mountain, teaches the laws to the people, and establishes the covenant between Hashem and the people.

Moshe ascends the mountain again (at Hashem's behest), and in great detail, Hashem shows him the plans for the Mishkan (movable Temple), its Kelim (altars, candelabrum, ark, etc.) and the clothing to be worn by the Kohanim (Priests). While Hashem and Moshe discuss the Mishkan, the people become unstable without a leader and create a golden egel (calf) and worship it. Moshe successfully convinces Hashem not to destroy Bnei Yisrael and descends the mountain to deal with the people. Moshe then returns to Hashem to ask forgiveness for the people's sin, and Hashem, while at first distant and resistant, eventually returns His Presence to the nation, restoring the plan for the Mishkan in which He will reside among the people. Moshe then communicates the Mishkan plan to the people in all of its myriad details; the people do as commanded, and with the construction of the Mishkan and its contents, Sefer Shemot ends.

OK, SO WHAT?

Sefer Shemot brings us slavery, destructive miracles, redemption, revelation, laws, the Divine Presence, and the establishment of the cult.* But this list can hardly be thought of as a "theme."

(*Please note that while the word "cult" is popularly used to refer to groups -- like the Moonies -- which use mind control and other evil methods to gain adherents, in our discussion it is being used in the sense of "formal religious veneration; a system of religious beliefs and ritual" [Webster's Collegiate dictionary]. I obviously do not consider anything about the Torah to be cultic in the popular -- derogatory -- sense. I use it to refer primarily to the laws of sacrifices.)

How about this: The first part of the sefer describes the creation of a nation (growth, slavery, miracles, redemption, judicial reform), the middle describes the revelation of Hashem (the Decalogue, Parashat Mishpatim), and the latter part describes the institutionalization of Hashem's Presence among the people (Mishkan, Egel, Mishkan again).

BUT:

But this neat classification of the sections of the sefer is really false. While it does seem that the first part of the sefer focuses on the emergence of a nation, this first section also contains all of the plagues and the miracle at the sea -- and the Torah repeatedly makes explicit that the plagues are intended not simply to convince Paro that the smart choice is to release these slaves, but to teach Bnei Yisrael and Egypt "that I am Y-HVH." The plagues are primarily a tool for theological instruction, a way for Hashem to communicate to His new nation and to Egypt (representing the nations who embrace the pagan pantheon) that He is present and all-powerful. If the first part of the sefer is about the creation of the nation and the middle is about the revelation of Hashem, then the plagues really belong in the middle of the sefer.

A perhaps even more explicit example of the revelation of Hashem in the first part of the sefer is the conversation between Hashem and Moshe at the beginning of Parashat Va-Era in which Hashem announces to Moshe that a new stage of Divine revelation is about to begin. Although He had revealed Himself to the Avot (forefathers) only in the aspect of E-L Shad-dai, Hashem will now reveal Himself in the aspect of Y-HVH. As we discussed at the time, these divine names indicate different modes of divine action; E-L Shad-dai is the mode of divine action through which Hashem makes covenants and establishes the destiny of the people, but Y-HVH is the mode in which He appears before the world in all of His majesty and power. Hashem demonstrates His presence in history and in human affairs by bringing powerful Egypt to its knees. Clearly, this is not about nation-creation, it is about theology; therefore it seems out of place in the first part of Sefer Shemot.

The neat classification seems suspect also when we look at the middle of the sefer: If the middle is about Hashem's revelation, it is strange to find that this section contains material essential to the formation of the nation and its character, such as "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

In any event, even if the "neat classification" theory did a good job of splitting up the sefer (which we have just seen is questionable), it would not explain what holds the sefer together. Three themes seem to be struggling for prominence: the development of the nation, the revelation of Hashem, and the Presence of Hashem among the people.

THE KEYS:

As usual, the keys are in the text itself. A look at Parashat Ki Tisa, in the thick of the debate between Hashem and Moshe about whether Hashem will accompany the people now that they have worshipped the Egel, is telling:

SHEMOT 33:15-16 --

He [Moshe] said to Him [Hashem], "If You will not accompany us personally, do not take us up from here! For how would it be known that I have found favor in Your eyes, I and Your nation? Certainly, it is [made known] by Your going with us, singling us out, myself and Your nation, from all nations on the face of the Earth!"

As we saw this past week in our discussion of this section, Moshe is arguing that the entire purpose of Hashem's having created this nation is that it should bear His name. This is Hashem's nation, and through it, Hashem is made known in the world. If so, then Hashem's decision to withdraw His Presence from among the people (in response to their worship of the Egel) makes their existence meaningless; they might as well stay put in the desert forever, perhaps to die there. It doesn't really matter anymore.

The theme of Sefer Shemot is the public revelation of Hashem to the world. The primary way that Hashem chooses to accomplish this goal is by creating a nation to bring Him into the consciousness of the world and spread His name.

STAGES:

It is true that the different sections of the sefer appear to focus on different themes -- the first focuses on the nation, the second on revelation, and the third on the Divine Presence among the people -- but these are all simply developing stages in or aspects of the creation of the nation and the infusing of the Divine into the nation so that it can execute its mission.

STAGE 1:

In the first stage, the nation reflects Hashem passively: the people do nothing at all to spread knowledge of Hashem, and instead they are used by Hashem as objects which He has selected because of His promises to their ancestors. Hashem inflicts a series of plagues on Egypt which demonstrate His power, but He does not strike His own people with the plagues -- and He makes a point of this to Paro on several occasions. He thereby identifies these people as His own while demonstrating that He is in full control of the calamities He has brought upon Egypt, fully able to limit the effect of the plagues so that those He favors are not afflicted.

STAGE 2-A (responsibility of the people):

In the second stage, the people are charged with Hashem's commands (through the Decalogue and Parashat Mishpatim), which when performed sanctify Hashem by demonstrating to the world both the perfection of the divine system of law and the devotion of His nation to His commands. The people become active reflections of Hashem's perfection. This is recognized by Hashem through His response -- stage 2-B.

STAGE 2-B (response of Hashem):

In response to the people's acceptance of the responsibility of reflecting Hashem's justice and wisdom through performing the mitzvot, the people are infused with holiness by the resting of the Divine Presence among them. Not only is this nation Hashem's favored nation (stage 1), and not only do they perform His will (stage 2-A), but they maintain an intimate relationship with Him in a bond of holiness (stage 2-B). The Presence of Hashem's tent among the tents of the people (and, at a later stage in history, Hashem's house among the houses of the people) demonstrates to the world that Hashem rests among those who accept His will and perform His commands; His open manifestation in the daily life of the Mishkan and Mikdash clearly advertises that Hashem is present in the world (chiefly among His closest adherents).

EXAMPLE: MOSHE AFTER THE EGEL:

It is telling that when the people worship the Egel, causing Hashem's Presence to withdraw (2-B) because they have disobeyed His will (2-A), Moshe can fall back only on stage 1-related arguments in trying to prevent Hashem from destroying the people:

- a) The fact that Hashem has already identified Himself with this nation, and that to destroy them would indicate to Egypt (=the nations of the world) Hashem's failure (or that He is evil by nature);
- b) The fact that He took them out of Egypt with great power and obvious divine intervention, which indicated His connection with them;
- c) The fact that Hashem had promised to the Avot that He would give Eretz Yisrael to their descendants.

All of these arguments ignore stage 2 (obedience to mitzvot and Hashem's consequent Presence) because the people have shown themselves disobedient, rejecting Hashem for a false god. This posture of Moshe's -- the focus on stage 1 -- characterizes many sections of Sefer Yehezkel (Ezekiel), in which Hashem makes it clear to the sinful people of that time that He remains supportive of them only because His name is connected with theirs, not because they deserve good treatment. Under these circumstances, favoring the Bnei Yisrael is only damage control, a way to prevent hillul Hashem (profanation of the Divine name).

IN CLOSING, A SHORT SERMON:

Normally, I try to avoid getting up on the soapbox, but I do want to close our study of Sefer Shemot by drawing some of the implications of the sefer for practical application. The practice of closing a unit or sefer with something slightly 'different' is enshrined in our mesorah (tradition) by the examples of Rav Yehuda ha-Nasi (redactor of the Mishna) and the Rambam (Maimonides), both of whom often closed major units of their works with inspirational material.

The lowest level of relationship between Hashem and ourselves is that His name is identified with us. This makes us responsible not to behave in ways which reflect poorly on Hashem and means that sometimes Hashem will do us a favor we don't deserve just to prevent hillul Hashem. But we are responsible to bring that relationship to stage 2, where we become active emissaries of Hashem by observing the mitzvot in the eyes of the world; in the words of Moshe to Bnei Yisrael as they prepare to cross to Eretz Yisrael, "Take care to do [the mitzvot], for they show your wisdom and understanding before the nations, who will hear of all these laws and say, 'This great nation is surely a wise and understanding one!'; for what nation is so great that it has a God close to it, like Hashem, our God, whenever we call Him? What nation has laws and statutes as just as this Torah, which I place before you today?" (Devarim 4:6-8). We are responsible to ready ourselves to accept the Presence of Hashem into our 'camp' -- our homes and our personal lives, so that Hashem's holiness is apparent in the way we live.

THE CHALLENGE OF SEFER VAYIKRA:

Most of us have an easy time relating to the stories in Sefer Bereshit (Genesis) and remembering them because they are stories about individuals. We compare ourselves to the heroes and villains of the sefer and use our sense of psychology to try to understand the figures we encounter.

Some of us have slightly more difficulty with Sefer Shemot (Exodus) despite its many stories because 1) it contains a good amount of halakha (law), always more dense than narrative, and because 2) the stories are often national narratives; we are now dealing with a group, not individuals.

Almost all of us have even more difficulty grasping Sefer VaYikra (Leviticus): not only are there almost no stories, and not only is the sefer almost wall-to-wall halakha, but the halakha it contains is largely ritual, technical, abstract, and sometimes -- particularly when we come to the korbanot (sacrifices) and issues of tahara (ritual purity) -- no longer relevant to our everyday lives.

Without being aware of it, many of us are profoundly alienated from large parts of our most basic and important text, the Torah itself. We may be well acquainted with Sefer Bereshit, the 'user-friendliest' of the books of the Torah, and we may also maintain a warm relationship with the first half of Sefer Shemot, with its miracles of redemption and the giving of the Torah. But already beginning with Parashat Mishpatim (in the middle of Sefer Shemot), with its dense legal material, we may begin to feel that we are out of our depth or just no longer interested. We remain numbly detached all the way through Sefer VaYikra, until we reach Sefer BeMidbar (Numbers), where the stories begin again.

This, of course, is a tragedy and a failure.

Understanding the Torah's stories is obviously part of our responsibility as Jews, but so is understanding the Torah's laws. Many of the most important lessons Hashem teaches us are expressed only through halakha and not (or not explicitly) through the Torah's narratives.

Part of the responsibility for our attitude toward Sefer VaYikra is ours. But part is to be laid squarely at the feet of some of our educators! In the elementary school I attended, we skipped (if memory serves) straight from the end of Shemot to the beginning of Bemidbar, completely avoiding VaYikra and its challenges. That curricular decision has always affected me profoundly: The message was that the teacher had no confidence in my and my peers' ability to handle the material, or perhaps no confidence in his own ability to bring the material to life and make it relevant.

My impression is that many of us share this attitude. Either we have tried VaYikra and grown bored with its technicalities, or we have absorbed the impression that it is beyond us.

Our challenge in learning Sefer VaYikra is to destroy or overcome all of these assumptions. But let me say at the beginning that this will demand work, just as understanding Bereshit and Shemot demanded work. Whatever narratives we have encountered until now have always been only the surface. We have been peeling back that surface, asking what is *really* going on: What value is being expressed here? What does this event mean for the development of the nation? How does this affect the individual's or the nation's relationship to God? Why does God behave in certain ways, and why do people? We will be asking the same kinds of questions about the mitzvot of Sefer VaYikra. Just as it was important not to get lost in the details of the stories, and instead to mine the details for the meaning and messages latent in the narratives, it is crucial not to get lost in the details of the halakha we will be encountering. Instead, it will be our job to first become familiar with the details of the halakhot and then to use them to answer the same questions of inner meaning and message.

THE STRUCTURE OF SEFER VAYIKRA:

As usual when we face a new sefer, our job is to survey the contents of the sefer and try to get a feel for its theme. Obviously, since we have yet to learn through the sefer, we are not qualified to say definitively what the theme is and how it plays out in the sefer. But it is important to try to make some preliminary generalizations at the beginning, which we will test as we go through the sefer and refine when we reach the end.

On that note, we will take a look at the actual content of Sefer VaYikra, perek (chapter) by perek. Our tasks as we become more familiar with the sefer will be:

- 1) To understand what connects one topic to the next, how the text flows.
- 2) To recognize what the major sections of the sefer are and what the main theme of each section is.
- 3) To step back from the whole sefer and come to a reasonably precise formulation of what holds the sefer together.

Perek Topic (chap.)

- 1 Korban: the "Olah" (completely burned sacrifice).
- 2 Korban: the "Minhah" (flour offering).
- 3 Korban: the "Shelamim" (meaning to be discussed).
- 4-5 Korban: the "Hatat" (sin sacrifice type I).
- 5 Korban: the "Asham" (sin sacrifice type II).
- 6-7 Instructions for korbanot, mostly addressed to the Kohanim.
- 8 Moshe inaugurates the Mishkan and Kohanim.
- 9 The Kohanim take an active role in the Mishkan inauguration.
- 10 The death of Aharon's sons & its aftermath.
- 11 Pure (kosher) & impure (non-kosher) animals, birds, etc.
- 12 Purity and giving birth.
- 13 Purity: diagnosing & treating tzara'at (growths) on skin and fabric.
- 14 Purity: post-tzara'at purification.
- 14 Purity: diagnosing & treating tzara'at on a house.
- 15 Purity: genital & menstrual discharges.
- 16 Purity: repurification of the Mishkan & atonement (Yom Kippur).
- 17 Where to bring sacrifices; how to properly treat blood.
- 18 Sexual crimes.
- 19 A little of everything! (interpersonal, ritual, religious, etc.)
- 20 Idolatry; sexual crimes.
- 21-22 Kohanim: maintaining high standards.
- 22 Sacrifices: maintaining high standards.
- 23 Shabbat and other Mo'adim (special times).
- 24 Oil for the Menora; bread for the Shulhan (table).
- 24 "Blessing" God (a euphemism for the opposite).
- 25 Transactions of land in Eretz Yisrael.
- 26 Reward and punishment for our behavior.
- 27 Making donations to God's treasury.

It should already be clear that certain issues come up with frequency in Sefer VaYikra:

- 1) Laws of korbanot:
 - a) Under what circumstances are various korbanot offered?
 - b) How to properly offer each type of korban.
- 2) Purity and impurity:
 - a) What animals, birds, etc. may be eaten?
 - b) Giving birth and how it affects purity.
 - c) Tzara'at.
 - d) Genital and menstrual discharges.
 - e) Repurifying the Mishkan (Yom Kippur).

Beyond these patterns, it is not obvious what the other major themes of Sefer VaYikra are; to put it another way, it is not clear how to categorize the rest of the material in the list above. In a sense, at the same time as the list above answers the question, "What is in Sefer VaYikra?", it also asks several questions:

- 1) What is the purpose of korbanot? What is their role in the God-human relationship? How do the specific details of each type of korban reflect what each type of korban tries to accomplish?
- 2) There seems to be a great emphasis on ritual status -- purity and impurity, "taharah" and "tum'ah." What do these concepts mean? Why is the Torah so concerned with them? Is the Torah trying to communicate a system of values through the laws of purity, or just the natural laws of metaphysics (in which case it would make as much sense to look for moral meaning and values in the halakhot of purity as it would to look for moral meaning and values in the law of gravitation or the laws of thermodynamics)? Perhaps both? If the Torah is communicating a system of values, how are these values developed by the different areas of halakha in which purity plays a central role?
- 3) From childhood, we are bombarded with the idea that Sefer VaYikra is all about holiness. This raises all kinds of questions: Where does the theme of holiness appear in Sefer VaYikra -- what halakhot are cast as manifestations of the imperative that we be holy? What does holiness mean in Sefer VaYikra? Why should we try to be holy?

These are some of the questions which will be keeping us busy over the next nine weeks or so.

A WORD ON "TA'AMEI MITZVOT":

This brings us to the issue of ta'amei mitzvot, reasons for the commandments. Discussions about ta'amei mitzvot stereotypically begin with a classic caveat which applies to what we will be doing as well: No matter what we say here about the reasons for the mitzvot, our conclusions are at best educated guesses at some of the possible messages of each mitzva, and at worst can completely miss the point. Moreover, some mitzvot have traditionally been understood as hukkim, laws whose rationale is inaccessible to us.

'BONUS': THE RAMBAM ON IMPURITY

I want to close with a fascinating piece from the Rambam (Maimonides). The piece addresses the question implicit above: Should we be looking for rationales to the mitzvot, particularly those which seem highly ritualistic and technical, like the halakhot of purity and korbanot, or should we assume that these matters are beyond us?

As I mentioned above, the Rambam made a practice of closing major sections of his halakhic code with inspirational material. It is appropriate that we spend some time looking at the last halakha (paragraph) in the Rambam's "Book of Purity":

RAMBAM, HILKHOT MIKVA'OT 11:12 --

"It is clear and obvious that impurity and purity are decrees of Scripture; they are not matters which human intelligence judges/discerns, and they are included among the 'hukkim.' Immersion [in a mikvah] for the purpose of removing impurity is also among the hukkim, for impurity is not tar or filth, which would be removed by water, but instead it is a decree of Scripture and a matter which depends on the intent of the heart. Therefore the Sages said, "If one immerses [in a mikvah] without conscious intent, it is as if he has not immersed"

On the surface, it seems that the Rambam is saying that we have no access to the rationale behind purity and impurity; these laws are "decrees of Scripture" and "hukkim" (the 'code word' in Talmudic and halakhic literature for laws which escape human understanding). But two features of what the Rambam says raise questions:

- 1) If the Rambam's point is that we have no access to the rationale, why does he seem to connect this with the fact that matters of purity "depend on the intent of the heart"? There seems to be little connection between the claim that these laws are beyond our understanding and the halakha that in order for ritual immersion to 'work,' it must be done with the conscious intent of the immersee to become pure.
- 2) We know very well (if we have indeed read through all of the Rambam's halakhot of purity until this final halakha) that immersion in the mikvah has nothing to do with physical cleaning and that impurity is not some sort of dirt. How does asserting this strengthen or somehow explain further what the Rambam means when he says that these matters are "decrees of Scripture"?

In several places, the Midrash (Rabba, Tanhuma, and Pesikta) records that in truth, a human corpse (the source of the most severe form of impurity, according to the laws of impurity) does not make things impure, and in truth, a mikvah does not restore things to purity; instead, it is all a "decree of Scripture"; these halakhot are "hukkim" which we are to follow.

While the Midrash appears similar to the Rambam, it requires explanation: If a corpse, the most extreme example of an impurity-passing entity, does not actually pass impurity, and a mikvah, the prescribed place of return to purity, does not actually purify, then what are the laws of purity and impurity all about? The answer: It is a "decree of Scripture," a set of "hukkim." In other words, by giving us all of the laws of purity and impurity, the Torah is not communicating to us the laws of a sort of spiritual physics; in fact, there IS NO SUCH THING as purity and impurity. Dead bodies are not somehow spiritually impure, and the mikvah does not somehow "fix" whatever is spiritually wrong with something which is considered impure. What the Torah has done is to create an artificial construct in which there are two pretend statuses -- purity and impurity. Calling something "pure" means that certain rules apply to it, and calling it "impure" means that other laws apply to it. But in essence, there is no such thing as purity and impurity. This is what the Midrash means when it tells us that the corpse does not truly pass impurity and that the mikvah does not truly remove impurity.

The obvious question, then, is why bother? If purity and impurity truly existed, it would make sense to take great care about them, but if they are an invention of the Torah, why invent them? Clearly, to teach us a lesson of some sort. But the Rambam and the Midrash are silent on what that lesson might be . . . that is, the Rambam in *that* book is silent; in his Guide to the Perplexed, however, where he divides the mitzvot into categories, he makes his attitude much clearer:

GUIDE TO THE PERPLEXED, 3:35 --

"The twelfth class [of mitzvot] includes mitzvot which depend on impurity and purity. The purpose of all of them as a class is to keep people from entering the Temple [often], so that they should maintain their awe of it and fear it, as I will explain."

The Rambam asserts that since the Torah's rules of purity make it rare for a person to find himself pure, he is rarely able to enter the Temple, since the impure may not enter such a holy place. Whether we accept this explanation is, for now, not the point; the point is that the Rambam is making an attempt to articulate the lesson behind purity and impurity.

In case we need stronger proof that the Rambam considers purity and impurity artificial statuses, imaginary inventions of the Torah:

GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED 3:47 --

". . . It therefore is clear that the word "impurity" is used in three different senses: 1) to indicate rebellion by man and transgression of the commandments in deed or thought; 2) to refer to dirt and filth; and 3) in reference to these IMAGINARY MATTERS, like touching or carrying certain things . . . "

These "imaginary matters" are what the Rambam was referring to in Hilkhot Mikva'ot when he said that these laws are "decrees of Scripture," that they "depend on the conscious intent of the heart" -- the whole point is that they do not actually exist, even on the spiritual plane, and that their entire purpose as halakhot is to teach us something -- so if we immerse in the mikvah without the intent to purify, nothing at all has happened. Unlike taking a shower, which cleanses us of dirt whether we think about it or not, the mikvah works only if our minds are involved, because purity and impurity are artificial which are meant to teach us something. They are not only not physical dirt, they are also not spiritual dirt or contamination; they do not exist, they are simply "decrees of Scripture" about how we are to treat certain objects.

Of course, there is a lesson behind this demand by the Torah, a lesson we will examine more carefully as we move through the sections of VaYikra on purity. The point for now is that the Torah can create an artificial status in order to communicate something important (as yet unexplained). This, we will see, is a strategy particularly employed by Sefer VaYikra's focus on purity and impurity.

Shabbat Shalom

Parshat Vayakhel: A Conspiracy to Forgive (Part II)

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PARASHAT KI TISA (Part II)

Last week we began to look carefully at the process by which Moshe 'convinces' Hashem to forgive Bnei Yisrael for worshipping the golden calf. Just to review briefly, we noticed the following elements of the conversations between Hashem and Moshe:

1) WHO TAKES THE BLAME: Hashem and Moshe struggle over who is truly responsible for the people. Hashem claims that the people are Moshe's, that he took them out of Egypt; Moshe insists that the people are Hashem's and that He took them out of Egypt.

2) OUT OF THE LOOP: While Hashem and Moshe debate, the people are busy dancing around their idol, unaware of the wrath they have provoked. Moshe's plea to Hashem for their preservation illustrates their distance from Hashem: as Moshe begins his plea, the Torah refers to Hashem as "Moshe's God" -- "Moshe beseeched HIS God," since at this moment, Hashem is Moshe's God alone, not the God of the people. The people have claimed the Egel as their god: "THIS is your god, Yisrael, who took you out of the land of Egypt." Furthermore, when Moshe offers Hashem three reasons to spare the people, none of the reasons suggest that the people actually deserve to survive. Moshe turns to history - to Yetziyat Mitzrayim (the Exodus) and the promises made to the Avot (forefathers) -- and to Hillul Hashem (desecration of Hashem's name) to convince Hashem to stay His hand.

3) FIGHTING ON TWO FRONTS: Once he has saved the people from immediate destruction, Moshe's next goal is to get Hashem to forgive the people completely. This struggle takes place on two fronts:

- a) Moshe faces the people, punishing the worst offenders and motivating (or shocking) the rest of the people into doing teshuva (repenting).
- b) Moshe faces Hashem, convincing Him to forgive the people and return His Presence to them. Hashem's withdrawal of His Presence in response to the people's worship of the egel (golden calf) meant the canceling of the Mishkan; the return of His Presence signifies the reinstatement of the Mishkan plan.

4) PLAN FOR ATTACK: Moshe employs several strategies to get the people back on track:

- a) He shatters the Luhot (Tablets), symbol of the covenant with Hashem, in front of the people, halting their idolatrous merry-making; according to the Seforno, he aims to shock the people into teshuva.
- b) He grinds up the egel and feeds it to the people. While most mefarshim (commentators) interpret this as a way of showing the avenging Leviyyim which of the people had worshipped the egel (as the offenders' bodies would somehow be physically changed in an obvious way by their ingestion of the Egel dust, as the sota's [woman suspected of adultery] body is disfigured by ingestion of the sota waters), Ramban interprets this act as Moshe's way of forcing the people to express disgust for and absolute rejection of the egel: making their god into fertilizer is a most graphic way to accomplish this psychological goal.
- c) He commands the Leviyyim, those most devoted to Hashem, to execute the worst offenders.

5) MOSHE'S ROLE: At this point we stopped to consider a puzzling question about Moshe's role in mediating between Hashem and the people: Moshe seems to be coming and going, playing both sides of the issue. When facing Hashem, he defends the people, begging Hashem not to be angry, not to kill the people. But then he goes down the mountain and does exactly these things to the people himself! First he gets angry -- the Torah uses the same words, "haron af," to describe Moshe's anger as Moshe himself used to describe the anger Hashem should really not be feeling -- and then he commands the execution of those involved in the worship. Facing the people, he plays the tough guy, recriminating, unyielding, full of vengeance. Facing Hashem, he *also* plays the tough guy, recriminating ('blaming' Hashem for taking them out of Egypt, accusing Him of not meeting His commitments), unyielding, and full of vengeance (trying to 'punish' Hashem by having himself erased from Hashem's book of life). Will the real Moshe please stand up?

Last week we sketched an approach to this question:

Moshe must play different roles on different stages: facing Hashem, Who is angry and ready to destroy, Moshe must act as a calming force, ready to defend. He certainly must hold his own anger and destructive impulses in check in order to counterbalance Hashem's anger. But when he faces the people, Moshe must show passionate anger in order to shock the people out of their gleeful worship of the calf, into realization of sin, and into doing teshuva. This is why we hear that as Moshe witnesses the worship of the calf, he "becomes angry," although he has known about the calf since Hashem informed him of it atop the mountain; his anger is not an artificial show, it is Moshe allowing his own genuine anger to burn now that he can discard the role of defender.

Moshe's use of his anger shows his emotional flexibility and self-control. Before Hashem, he stifles his anger to achieve one goal; before the people, he releases his anger to achieve another. Maintaining an emotional balance between these extremes is a precarious tightrope-walk; if the inappropriate emotion emerges at the wrong time, disaster will follow. This sort of mediation also calls on Moshe to display absolute selflessness: he does not have the luxury of indulging whatever emotions he happens to feel, as many of us might. He must channel his emotions to the needs of the hour.

[Imagine the emotional roller-coaster of a typical Sunday for the rabbi of a nice-sized congregation: first he attends a brit milah, then a funeral, then a wedding, then counsels a troubled marriage, then goes to the hospital to visit a new mother and baby and a terminally ill congregant with cancer. The rabbi has to feel the appropriate emotions at the appropriate time, and he can't fake it. To perform successfully, the rabbi (and all of the rest of us) must develop great emotional sensitivity, flexibility, generosity, selflessness, and energy.]

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE:

This brings us to our next question, which we touched last week and which will keep us busy this week:

Where does Moshe find the chutzpah to challenge Hashem? Hashem tells him that He intends to destroy the people, yet Moshe stands in the way and refuses to allow it! Some examples of Moshe's puzzling (or shocking) behavior:

- 1) Hashem tells Moshe to stand aside so that He can destroy the people; instead, Moshe stands in the way and begins to pray for their salvation.
- 2) The next time Moshe talks to Hashem, he tries to blackmail Hashem with an ultimatum: "Forgive the people or kill me!" We might expect that Hashem would do exactly that, and kill Moshe just for his chutzpah!
- 3) Hashem refuses to forgive the people and tells Moshe to go back to leading the people onward. But Moshe refuses, and Hashem has to repeat the command; even then, Moshe does not obey.
- 4) Moshe next claims that Hashem had promised him all kinds of wonderful things, but that He has not delivered. If this accusation were not astounding enough, Moshe musters the audacity to take this opportunity to ask for a special 'private screening/revelation of Hashem's mysteries -- and then he asks to *see* Hashem Himself!

These would be pretty tall requests under any circumstances, but in this context, in which Moshe has stubbornly refused to do anything Hashem tells him to do and has accused Hashem of reneging on His commitments, what makes Moshe think that Hashem will not just zap him into a cloud of vapor, much less grant all of these requests? How does he know how far to push Hashem before he walks into the danger zone and finds himself on the wrong end of a Divine lightning-bolt?

CONSPIRACY OF MERCY:

Last week we introduced the idea that Hashem and Moshe are collaborators in a "conspiracy of mercy." Hashem doesn't really want to destroy the people, He wants to forgive them. But justice and His own anger make it impossible for Him to just forget the whole thing and pretend it didn't happen. Moshe's job is to calm Hashem and find a way for Him to be merciful.

How does Moshe know he is really supposed to resist Hashem's anger and behave so aggressively and stubbornly in the process of attaining forgiveness for the people? Hashem's first hint is when He tells Moshe to "leave Me alone" so that He can become truly angry and destroy the people: paradoxically, telling Moshe about this plan is really Hashem's way of hinting that Moshe is supposed to resist the plan, because certainly, if

Hashem wanted to destroy the people, He would not have to say "excuse Me" first to Moshe. This perspective is expressed by the Midrash Rabba:

SHEMOT RABBA, PARASHA 42, SECTION 9:

"Now leave Me, so that My anger may burn against them, and I shall destroy them!" Now, was Moshe indeed grasping onto the Holy One, blessed be He, that He had to say, "Leave Me"? To what is this comparable? To a king who became angry at his son, put him into a bedroom, and began to try to hit him; as he did so, the king shouted from the bedroom, "Leave me alone, so that I can hit him!" [The boy's] teacher was just outside. He said, "The king and his son are [alone] in the bedroom -- why is he saying, 'Leave me alone'? It must be because the king wants me to calm him down over his son; this is why he shouts, 'Leave me!'" In the same way, Hashem said to Moshe, "Now leave Me!" Moshe said, "The reason why the Holy One, blessed be He, says 'Leave Me' is because He wants me to appease Him over Yisrael." Immediately, he began to seek mercy for them, and this is why "Moshe beseeched the face of Hashem, his God."

[One other example of a situation in which Hashem warns Moshe to clear out of the way so that He can blast the people -- and where Hashem is again really hinting that Moshe should intercede -- is the story of the rebellion of Korah, BeMidbar 16:19-27.]

We should also note that our parasha's story is not the first in which Moshe refuses to carry out Hashem's will. The very first time Hashem communicates with Moshe, He commands Moshe to take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt. Moshe says no -- five times, in five different ways. The first four times, he gives a reason for refusing, but the fifth time, he just flatly refuses. Finally, Hashem becomes angry with him and forces him to take on the mission. Perhaps, though, Moshe's refusals at that early stage in his career were what confirmed for Hashem that Moshe was the man to lead Bnei Yisrael: He needed someone who could "stand up" to Him in his anger.

Some see Moshe's initial refusal to undertake the divine mission as negative -- Hazal say that Moshe was to have been the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) but lost this honor because of his stubbornness; Aharon, who became Moshe's spokesman to Paro, received the Kehuna Gedola in Moshe's place. But even if Moshe's early intransigence was a mistake, at other times, like in our parasha, Moshe's willingness to take a stand against Hashem makes the difference between life and death for Bnei Yisrael. Ultimately, it makes the difference between a nation accompanied by Hashem and a nation abandoned by Him.

Getting back to our issue -- how Moshe knows to behave the way he does -- this first hint is the only indication we have seen so far. For the full picture, we must return to the text, which will also reveal Moshe's strategy is in his successful bid to get Hashem to forgive the people.

MOSHE MOVES OUT:

SHEMOT 33:7-11 --

Moshe took the tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp, and called it the "Ohel Mo'ed" [Tent of Meeting]. Whoever sought Hashem would go out to the Ohel Mo'ed, which was outside the camp. When Moshe would leave to go to the tent, all of the nation would stand up and wait, each person at the door of his tent, and look after Moshe until he came to the tent. When Moshe came to the tent, the pillar of cloud [i.e., God's Presence] would descend and stand at the door of the tent and speak with Moshe. All of the people would see the pillar of cloud standing at the door of the tent; they would all stand up and bow down, each at the door of his tent. Hashem would speak to Moshe face to face -- just as one speaks to his friend -- and then he would return to the camp. But his servant, Yehoshua bin Nun, an acolyte, would never leave the tent.

As we encounter the scene described above, Moshe has tried once for forgiveness, but Hashem has resisted and told him to return to leading the people. Of course, Moshe is not actually going to listen to Hashem, but he does change tactics. Instead of working on Hashem directly, he returns to the other front of the battle -- the people -- and strengthens his position by deepening their teshuva, making it 'harder' for Hashem to resist forgiving them.

He takes a tent outside the camp and makes that tent the "Ohel Mo'ed," the "Tent of Meeting" [=meeting between Hashem and people]. He even calls it the "Ohel Mo'ed," an appellation the Torah uses over 30 times in Sefer Shemot to refer to the Mishkan. This gesture communicates to the people that Hashem is no longer in their midst: instead of the beautiful Mishkan, a center of national worship, a meeting-place with the Shekhina [Presence of Hashem] at the center of

the camp, the "Ohel Mo'ed" is a plain tent planted "outside the camp," "far from the camp," to which interested individuals have access but to which there is no national dimension at all.

The people get the message. Whenever Moshe leaves the camp to communicate with Hashem, they look longingly after him; they show the utmost respect for the appearance of the Shekhina by bowing when it appears. These people appreciate what their sin has caused and are deep in the throes of teshuva.

JUST LIKE FRIENDS:

Note that the Torah also takes this opportunity to contrast the distance between Hashem and the people with the intimacy between Hashem and Moshe. They speak "face to face," "like friends," while the rest of the people watch from afar. But besides this contrast, the Torah's observation that Hashem and Moshe communicate as friends also expresses several other ideas:

1) Hashem and Moshe's speaking like friends means that Moshe can speak freely, as one would speak to a friend. He argues with Hashem head-to-head, openly challenging, debating, rejecting unsatisfactory alternatives. The Torah is confirming what was suggested above: Moshe has been given permission to adopt a posture of equality with Hashem which in other circumstances, or for other people, would earn Hashem's anger. Hashem expects Moshe to speak to him like a friend would. The purpose of this permission is so that Moshe can facilitate the process of forgiveness.

2) Hashem and Moshe's speaking like friends implies that Hashem has taken on a human persona. He will be Moshe's "friend," his equal, subject to being swayed by Moshe's arguments the way friends debate one another. Moreover, Hashem's behaving humanly means that He is taking on a human, **emotional** way of interacting with Moshe during this crisis. He can be swayed by arguments which are not purely rational, but instead appeal to the emotions; He may also be swayed by the mere persistence of His opponent, as people can be swayed. This facet of the interaction is hinted in Midrash Tanhuma:

MIDRASH TANHUMA, KI TISA, CHAP 27:

"Hashem would speak to Moshe face to face": we do not know [from this] whether the low one [i.e., Moshe] lifted himself up or the High One lowered Himself down. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, "As it were, the Highness of the world bent Himself over, as it says, 'Hashem descended to the tent.'"

Instead of raising Moshe higher, closer to His own level, Hashem lowers Himself to Moshe's human level, making Himself vulnerable to arguments which would sway a human.

3) Hashem's and Moshe's speaking like friends draws our attention to the strategy which Moshe will now implement to push Hashem once again toward forgiveness: making it personal. Quite aware of his special relationship with Hashem, Moshe is about to take advantage of that friendship to the maximum.

MAKING IT PERSONAL (I):

SHEMOT 33:12-13 --

Moshe said to Hashem, "Look, You told me, 'Bring the nation up [to Eretz Yisrael],' but You have not told me whom You will send with me! And [yet] You have said, 'I [Hashem] will know You [Moshe] through the Name,' and also, 'You [Moshe] have found favor in My [Hashem's] eyes.' Now, if I have really found favor in Your eyes, let me know Your ways -- then I will know You and I will be able to find favor in Your eyes. And see, too, that this nation is Your nation!"

The *way* Moshe formulates his argument is crucial to understanding the substance of the argument. Note that Moshe makes everything here completely personal:

- 1) "You have not told *ME* whom You will send with *ME*."
- 2) "You promised *ME*"
- 3) "You said *I* found favor"
- 4) "If so -- if *I* have found favor"

5) "Let *ME* know Your ways"

6) "Then *I* will know You"

7) "*I* will find favor"

Not only are Moshe's formulations personal, the content of his claims is personal as well. Moshe claims that Hashem had promised him that He would maintain intimacy with him, that Moshe had found favor in His eyes -- yet He has decided to send a faceless, nameless angel along with him instead of accompanying him Himself! Of course, the reason the angel is faceless and nameless, the reason the angel does not carry Hashem's name and represent a high level of Divine Presence, is not because of Moshe, but because of the people's own abandonment of Hashem. Moshe argues, however, that this is simply not fair: Hashem had promised that He would remain close to Moshe, and sending this angel means punishing Moshe for a crime he did not commit.

WHAT'S IN A NAME:

What promise is Moshe referring to when he says that Hashem told him that He would "know him through the Name"? And what does that mean anyway -- is Hashem about to forget Moshe's name? Has He forgotten the names of the rest of Bnei Yisrael? The Ramban suggests a possibility:

RAMBAN, SHEMOT 33:14 –

... Moshe said [to Hashem], "You have not told me which angel You are sending with me," and he [Moshe] made two requests: One, "I will know you by name," meaning that "I [Hashem] will become known through you [Moshe]"; and perhaps Moshe's saying "And You said," refers to what Hashem had said to him, "I was not known to them by My name Y-HVH."

All the way back in Parashat Va-Era, Hashem appeared to Moshe and told him that although He had revealed Himself to the Avot (forefathers) as "E-I Shad-dai," He had not made Himself known to them as "Y-HVH." Of course, they knew the name Y-HVH, as is clear from its appearance all over Sefer Bereshit (Genesis); but the name "Y-HVH" means "The One Who is Present," and while Hashem had 'visited' the Avot, He had not yet emerged publicly on the stage of history. To them, He was not actively Y-HVH, not constantly present.

This state of affairs changes dramatically with the plagues, Hashem's primary vehicle for manifesting His Presence to the world in a show of power. The key phrase, repeated many times through the course of the plagues -- "So that Egypt will know that I am *Y-HVH* -- is the signal of this new stage in Hashem's open participation in history. Paro begins his dealings with Moshe with the arrogant claim, "I do not know Y-HVH"; by the end, we can see that he "knows" Y-HVH, the Present One, quite well! (The fact that this process of Self-revelation is important to Hashem explains why Moshe uses it effectively in the beginning of our parasha to argue that decimating Bnei Yisrael would counter Hashem's purposes.)

Hashem's decision to dwell among Bnei Yisrael further manifests His presentness, His quality of "Y-HVH." Moshe is now arguing that when Hashem told him that He was now making Himself known as Y-HVH, that meant that He would remain present. But now He has decided to send only an angel with them; He is withdrawing the aspect of Y-HVH, as it was withdrawn in the time of the Avot.

MAKING IT PERSONAL (II):

But why does Moshe formulate his argument so personally? Why is his argument so focused on the closeness Hashem has promised to *him*? If his goal is to gain forgiveness for the people, how will it help to focus on himself? Can it be that he has given up on this goal and is trying to preserve his own relationship with Hashem?

Moshe has been paying careful attention to Hashem's responses to his requests and he has noticed that Hashem has singled him out several times in favorable ways:

1) When Hashem tells Moshe to stand aside so He can destroy the people, He tells Moshe that He will replace this nation with a nation produced by Moshe's descendants. Moshe rejects this plan, but he learns just how important he is to Hashem.

2) As Moshe begins his prayer to save the people from destruction, the Torah reinforces the impression of a special personal connection between Hashem and Moshe by referring to Hashem as "Moshe's God."

3) When Moshe moves the "Ohel Mo'ed" out of the camp, the Torah again emphasizes that Hashem and Moshe maintain their close relationship. One might even suggest that Moshe becomes closer to Hashem than before -- after all, the Torah never before described Hashem and Moshe as "speaking face to face, as friends do." Now that Bnei Yisrael have been rejected, Hashem devotes all of His attention, so to speak, to Moshe.

Moshe notices this trend and expands it into a strategy: he will use his closeness with Hashem to pressure Him into forgiving the rest of the people. Moshe's strategy unfolds in several stages in the parasha.

First Moshe takes a direct tack, demanding that Hashem forgive the people or "erase me from the book You have written" -- forgive them or kill me (erase me from the Book of Life, as most commentators interpret). Moshe makes no attempt to address the substance of the relationship between Hashem and the people. Hashem should forgive them not because they deserve it and not because of His relationship with them but because He prefers forgiving the people to killing Moshe. Hashem rebuffs this demand and asserts that He will punish only the sinners. But He also commands Moshe to take the people to Eretz Yisrael, so Moshe has won something in this exchange: the people will not only survive, they will realize the destiny promised to their forefathers of inheriting Eretz Cana'an.

Moshe realizes two things:

1) Hashem refused his bold attempt because Moshe was asking Him to simply ignore the demands of justice in favor of Moshe's counter-demand. Moshe must take a more subtle path.

2) He had supplied no intrinsic reason for Hashem to forgive the people; instead, he had applied the 'external' leverage of his own death. He must supply an intrinsic rationale for forgiving the people.

Moshe now begins to follow an indirect path to forgiveness: he casts all of Hashem's promises as promises made to *him* (although these commitments were made to the people as a whole) and argues that it is unfair for Hashem to deprive him of this closeness. At the same time, he supplies an intrinsic reason for forgiving the people: making a sudden transition from the personal to the national, he sounds a theme he has sounded before: "See, also, this nation is Your nation!", the insistent reminder to Hashem that these people are His people.

MOSHE TURNS THE TABLES:

Having argued that Hashem 'owes' him, Moshe now spells out the essence of his demand: Moshe wants Hashem Himself to teach him how to achieve forgiveness for the people! This is what he means by "Tell me Your ways, so that I will know You and therefore will be able to find favor in Your eyes." Tell me how to handle a situation like this -- how do I successfully arouse Your midat ha-rahamim, your merciful qualities? This perspective is articulated by Rashi:

RASHI, SHEMOT 33:19 --

"I will call before you with the name Y-HVH" -- To teach you the way to find mercy [before Me], even if the merits of the forefathers become used up.

Moshe is ostensibly asking Hashem to teach him what to do next time, how to handle crises in the future. Hashem's revelation of His merciful characteristics, the thirteen attributes of mercy, is a lesson to be used to defuse subsequent incidents of Divine anger.

How does Hashem respond to Moshe's audacious request?

SHEMOT 33:14 --

He said, "My face [personal presence] will accompany you; I will lead you."

On the one hand, it seems that Hashem has finally given in. He agrees to personally lead the people. But this is very strange for two reasons: First, the demand Moshe just made was not that Hashem lead the people, but that Hashem show him how to achieve forgiveness for the people in future incidents. So the words above seem to ignore Moshe's request.

Second, if Hashem is giving in, why does Moshe say what he says next?

SHEMOT 33:15-16 --

He said to Him, "If Your face [personal presence] will not go [with us], do not bring us up from here! How, indeed, will it be known that I have found favor in Your eyes -- I and Your nation -- is it not through Your going with us, singling out myself and Your nation from all the nations on the face of the Earth!?"

Moshe seems so dissatisfied with Hashem's response that he declares a sit-in. What did Hashem say to bring on this strong reaction? Ibn Ezra offers a very sharp answer:

IBN EZRA, SHEMOT 33:21 --

... In my opinion, when Hashem said to him, "I will send an angel before you," Moshe responded, "But You have not told me whom You are sending with me," i.e., whether he [the angel] is the one about whom it was written, "My name is within him." Hashem answered, "I Myself will go; I will lead you." The meaning of "you" ["lakh"] is that "I will go with you alone; I will not dwell among Bnei Yisrael. Moshe responded, "If You Yourself do not go" with the whole nation mentioned above ("Look, this is Your nation!"), then "do not take us up [to Eretz Yisrael]!" -- using plural language. The proof of this interpretation is [Moshe's question], "How will it be known [to the world] that I have found favor in Your eyes, I and Your nation -- is it not through Your going with us"

Hashem focuses on the opening and closing of Moshe's statement and ignores the demand in the middle: Moshe had opened with a complaint that Hashem had promised Him that He would remain closely connected with Moshe, and that He now seems to be moving away; he had closed with a reminder that the nation is really Hashem's nation. In response, Hashem proposes that He remain with Moshe but not with the people. Moshe had tried to blur the line between himself and the people, beginning his argument by focusing on the relationship between Hashem and himself and then 'sneaking' the people in at the end -- but Hashem refuses to group Moshe and the people as a unit. Keep in mind, however, that Hashem has not yet responded to Moshe's request for a tutorial in "Divine Mercy Arousal."

Moshe responds as boldly as he has throughout the parasha:

SHEMOT 33:15-16 --

He said to Him, "If Your face [personal presence] will not go [with us], do not bring us up from here! How, indeed, will it be known that I have found favor in Your eyes -- I and Your nation -- is it not through Your going with us, singling out myself and Your nation from all the nations on the face of the Earth!?"

As Ibn Ezra pointed out, Moshe understands that Hashem has agreed to accompany him exclusively, but that He will not accompany the people. As far as Moshe is concerned, that is just not enough! Once again, Moshe rejects Hashem's offer, refusing to be separated from the people. This has been his position all through the parasha, we should note:

- 1) He refuses to let Hashem kill the people and make him into the new divinely chosen nation.
- 2) He attempts to refuse to continue living if the people are not forgiven (but Hashem rejects his ultimatum).
- 3) He refuses to accept Hashem's offer of a special Divine Presence which will accompany him but not the people.
- 4) In his response here, Moshe hammers away at this point once again, emphasizing that he is part of this group entity: "Do not take *US* up from here"; "How will it be known that *I AND YOUR NATION* have found favor in Your eyes"; "*I AND YOUR NATION* will be distinguished." As far as Moshe is concerned, the only way for him to participate in all of these things is if the people can participate as well.

How does Hashem respond this time?

SHEMOT 33:17 --

Hashem said to Moshe, "Also this thing that you have spoken, I will do, because you have found favor in My eyes -- I will know you through the Name."

What does Hashem mean by "this thing that you have spoken"? Some possibilities:

1) Hashem has agreed to Moshe's most recent demand: He will accompany the people as He had originally planned before the egel. This is the simplest reading of the text -- but it is probably wrong, as we will see.

2) Hashem has agreed to Moshe's earlier demand: that He Himself show Moshe how to achieve forgiveness for the people in future incidents in which they anger Him.

That the second is the better reading of the text is not only a point of view articulated by Hizkuni (a medieval commentator), it is also supported by the following evidence:

a) We noted above that Hashem did not respond to Moshe's request ("A") for a divine how-to in achieving forgiveness for the people; instead, He offered to accompany Moshe personally ("B") while repeating that He would not accompany the people. Since Moshe has just rejected ("B") that deal, it makes sense that Hashem should eventually respond ("A") to Moshe's original request for the "divine forgiveness tutorial" (A-B-B-A).

b) Hashem's statement here comes as an introduction to His description (which we will look at in a moment) of how He will reveal His merciful attributes to Moshe; this is exactly what Moshe had asked for above.

c) Most convincing of all, Hashem's response here cannot be an affirmative response to Moshe's demand that Hashem accompany the people, because if so, Moshe would have no need to request the very same thing again below, just after Hashem reveals the attributes of mercy (34:8-9)! So Hashem must be agreeing to Moshe's previous request for Hashem to teach him how to successfully arouse His mercy.

BRING ON THE FIREWORKS:

Moshe sees that Hashem has responded favorably -- "This thing you have spoken, I will do" -- so he ups the ante just one more notch:

SHEMOT 33:18 --

He said, "Show me Your glory!"

Hashem had just agreed to grant Moshe's request to teach him how to find mercy for the people. But that was only an agreement to provide information: "Let me _know_ Your ways, and then I will know You and I will be able to find favor in Your eyes." There is no experiential component involved, just a transfer of secret information. What Moshe really wants -- and we will see in a moment why -- is an experience of the divine, an experience unparalleled by any other such experience at any point in the past and future of the God-man relationship. He wants more than to know -- "hodi'eini" -- He wants to *SEE* Hashem -- "har'eini"!

In response, Hashem describes how He will orchestrate the revelation:

(A) -- SHEMOT 33:19 --

He **SAID**, "I will pass all of My goodness before you and call out in the name 'Y-HVH' before you. [But] I will favor whom I want to favor; I will be merciful to those to whom I want to be merciful!"

(B) -- SHEMOT 33:20 --

He **SAID**, "You cannot see My face, for man cannot see me and survive."

(C) -- SHEMOT 33:21 --

Hashem **SAID**, "There is a place here by Me, where you shall stand by the rock. When My glory passes, I will place you in the crevice of the rock and cover you with My hand until I pass. I will then remove My hand and you will see My back -- but My face cannot be seen."

(D) -- SHEMOT 34:1-3 --

Hashem **SAID** to Moshe, "Carve out for yourself two tablets of stone. I will write on the tablets the things that were on the first tablets, which you shattered. Be ready in the morning, ascend in the morning to Mount Sinai and wait for me there at the summit of the mountain. No one should ascend with you; no one should be seen on the whole mountain. Even the sheep and cattle should not graze opposite that mountain."

MOSHE PLAYS HARD TO GET:

Note in the pesukim above that the Torah uses the word "Va-Yomer" -- "He said" -- four separate times, at the beginning of each statement made by Hashem. As we have seen several times in the Torah, this is the Torah's way of indicating that between each of Hashem's statements, He pauses and waits for Moshe to respond, but Moshe remains silent. Moshe's silence should make us 'suspicious': what is Hashem adding each time in the expectation that Moshe will finally agree? We must look for the progression in Hashem's statements:

(A) -- SHEMOT 33:19 --

He said, "I will pass all of My goodness before you and call out in the name 'Y-HVH' before you. But I will favor whom I want to favor; I will be merciful to those to whom I want to be merciful!"

Hashem responds quite warily to Moshe's request for the full divine experience. Still playing the 'role' of angry and distant God, Hashem 'suspects' that Moshe plans to somehow take advantage of the situation when He reveals Himself. He promises to reveal His merciful attributes, but insists that Moshe is not to attempt to use this opportunity to gain mercy and forgiveness for anyone whom Hashem is not ready to forgive: "Although I am revealing My goodness to you, calling out the name Y-HVH before you [signifying Presence, the opposite of Hashem's abandonment of the people], I will forgive only those I want to forgive, and I will have mercy only on those upon whom I want to have mercy!"

Moshe, unsatisfied with this offer, does not respond; he wants more than just a personal experience of Hashem's merciful attributes, more than just the text of the prayer he should use next time. He wants this intimate experience of Hashem's revelation to offer him a context in which to seek mercy for those whom Hashem is, so far, unwilling to forgive. Hashem has agreed to reveal His merciful attributes, but refused to allow Moshe to grab the opportunity to gain forgiveness for Bnei Yisrael: "I will favor whom I want to favor; I will be merciful to those to whom I want to be merciful!" For Moshe, this is simply not enough, and ultimately, his silence wins out, as Hashem capitulates on this point and merely offers Moshe another challenge. He 'attempts' to put Moshe off by reminding him of his limitations as a human being, arguing that the intense Divine experience he has requested will kill him:

(B) -- SHEMOT 33:20 --

He said, "You cannot see My face, for man cannot see me and survive."

But Moshe maintains his stony silence. He knows of his limitations, but he also knows that Hashem can find ways to shield him from a fatal exposure to the Divine. Hashem gives in once again, promising to make this revelation the ultimate prophetic epiphany Moshe requests and also promising to shield Moshe from harm:

(C) -- SHEMOT 33:21 --

Hashem said, "There is a place here by Me, where you shall stand by the rock. When My glory passes, I will place you in the crevice of the rock and cover you with My hand until I pass. I will then remove My hand and you will see My back -- but My face cannot be seen."

But -- incredibly -- Moshe is still not satisfied! He maintains a stubborn silence, waiting for Hashem to give in. Hashem finally does so once again, promising that this experience will culminate in the establishment of a new covenant with the people Moshe so stubbornly represents:

(D) -- SHEMOT 34:1-3 --

Hashem said to Moshe, "Carve out for yourself two tablets of stone. I will write on the tablets the things that were on the first tablets, which you shattered. Be ready in the morning, ascend in the morning to Mount Sinai and wait for me there at the summit of the mountain. No one should ascend with you; no one should be seen on the whole mountain. Even the sheep and cattle should not graze opposite that mountain."

Moshe's gamble has been successful. Hashem has agreed to become an open participant in the "conspiracy of mercy." Moshe, acting on Hashem's own instructions, has 'worn Hashem down.'

Note, though, that despite Hashem's agreement to reestablish a relationship with the whole nation, He still focuses on Moshe alone: only Moshe is to ascend the mountain, unlike at the original revelation of the Decalogue (Ten "Commandments"), when various privileged groups ascended to different levels on the mountain. Hashem communicates in no uncertain terms that He is participating in this covenant only on Moshe's merit. The covenant comes completely through Moshe; the people have no role in the Divine experience accompanying the giving of the Torah this time.

MOSHE TAKES ADVANTAGE:

All that remains now is for the Torah to tell us how the event takes place:

SHEMOT 34:4-7 --

He carved out two tablets of stone like the first ones. Moshe arose early in the morning and ascended Mount Sinai as Hashem had commanded him. He took in his hands the two tablets of stone. Hashem descended in a cloud, stood with him there, and called out the name, "Y-HVH." Hashem passed before him and called out, "Y-HVH, Y-HVH, God of mercy and kindness, slow to anger and great in kindness and truth; maintaining kindness for thousands, forgiving sin, iniquity, and transgression, but who will not simply excuse sin, remembering the sin of the fathers [with punishment] upon the children to the third and fourth generation."

Many people think that we have just read the most important part of this story: Hashem's revelation of His attributes of mercy. But the most important moment is still ahead:

SHEMOT 34:8 --

Moshe *hurried* to prostrate himself on the ground and bow. He said, "If I have truly found favor in Your eyes, then let Y-HVH please go in our midst, though it is a stiff-necked nation; forgive our sin and transgression, and make us Your possession!"

We will never know what Moshe saw as he peeked through the cracks between Hashem's protecting 'fingers,' but what we can understand is that **Hashem has detonated a hydrogen-bomb of divine mercy (so to speak) right in front of Moshe. Harnessing the power of this unparalleled expression of divine mercy-energy, Moshe does exactly what Hashem had warned him not to do (but eventually capitulated to): he takes advantage of the situation to attain forgiveness for the people. As He articulates the Midot Ha-Rahamim, Hashem's mercy creates such a powerful wave of divine Presence that Moshe must be shielded from it to survive. Moshe seizes the opportunity to make his final attempt to attain forgiveness for Bnei Yisrael: Hashem, who has just proclaimed in more than a dozen different ways how merciful He is, simply 'cannot' deny Moshe's request for mercy! He simultaneously agrees to forgive the people and establish a new berit (covenant) with them:**

SHEMOT 34:10 --

He [Hashem] said, "I hereby make a covenant: I shall perform wonders before your entire nation, which have never been created in the whole world and among all the nations; THIS **WHOLE** **NATION,** in whose midst you are, shall see the acts of Hashem, who is awesome, which I perform with you."

Note that the argument between Hashem and Moshe about whose nation this is has not been settled. Moshe begins his final request with a focus on himself -- "If I have found favor in Your eyes" -- and calls the nation "stiff-necked" -- but continues by grouping himself completely with the people, even making it sound as if he needs forgiveness along with them: "May Y-HVH go with *us*", "Forgive our sin and our transgression, and take us as Your inheritance." But Hashem responds by reasserting that he sees Moshe as separate from the people: he calls the nation "Your [Moshe's] nation" and refers to them as a separate entity from Moshe ("The nation *in whose midst* you are").

A SECOND COVENANT:

Hashem next commands a string of mitzvot which will be the substance of the new covenant. These mitzvot are a combination of the post-Exodus mitzvot, such as the sanctification of firstborn people and animals, and the mitzvot of the original Sefer ha-Berit ("Book of the Covenant"), the legal section of Parashat Mishpatim. Note what is missing here but present in the mitzvot of Parashat Mishpatim: all of the interpersonal mitzvot (the laws of damages, treatment of slaves, kindness to orphans, converts, and others, theft, murder, judicial laws, etc.). Instead, all of the mitzvot repeated here relate to our responsibilities to Hashem. We don't have the time to discuss the details here, but the choice of these mitzvot is certainly not random: a close look suggests that in different ways, **these mitzvot all reinforce allegiance to Hashem** (especially, of course, those which command us to keep away from idol worship). The original covenant, shattered by the worship of the calf, must be recast in this new berit, through its repetition of key mitzvot of the original berit.

MOSHE, LIMINAL FIGURE:

In the final piece of the parasha, a veil now covers Moshe's face, symbolic of what has taken place over the course of the parasha. Although Moshe has remained deeply loyal to Bnei Yisrael, the events of the parasha have driven a wedge between him and the people forever. He will always be on one side of this miniature mechitza/veil -- with Hashem -- and the people will always be on the other side. In a sense, although Moshe has won the 'struggle' with Hashem over forgiving the people, Hashem has won the struggle over whether Moshe is truly a part of the people, indistinguishable from them.

Ironically, although we would think that the major result of Hashem's forgiving the people is that He is now closer to them, what the Torah chooses to emphasize is that as a result of Hashem's having forgiven the people, He is now closer to *Moshe.* The second revelation of the Torah is given to the people, but they are absent from the event itself. The forgiveness of Hashem is granted to the people, but they are absent from this story as well. Moshe is not only the conduit for Hashem's interaction with the people, he has become one of the major reasons why Hashem chooses to interact with the people at all!

MALAKHI 3:22 --

"Remember the Torah of My servant Moshe, which I commanded him at Horev upon all of Yisrael, laws and statutes."

Our Torah is truly Moshe's Torah, given to us not only through him, but because of him.

Shabbat Shalom
Emphasis added

Parshas Vayakhel: Mishkan and Shabbat

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. A SIGN BETWEEN GOD AND THE B'NEI YISRA'EL

After concluding the many commands regarding the construction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle), God gave the following instruction to Mosheh:

You yourself are to speak to the Israelites: You shall keep my Shabbatot, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I, Hashem, sanctify you. You shall keep the Shabbat, because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Shabbat of solemn rest, holy to Hashem; whoever does any work on the Shabbat day shall be put to death. Therefore the Israelites shall keep the Shabbat, observing the Shabbat throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days Hashem made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed. (Sh'mot 31:13-17)

This is not the only place where the commands regarding the Mishkan and Shabbat are juxtaposed. Following the tragic narrative of the Golden Calf, at the beginning of our Parashah,

Mosheh prefaced his presentation of the commands of the Mishkan to the B'nei Yisra'el with a short statement about Shabbat:

Mosheh assembled all the congregation of the B'nei Yisra'el and said to them: These are the things that Hashem has commanded you to do: Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy Shabbat of solemn rest to Hashem; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire in all your dwellings on the Shabbat day. (Sh'mot 35:1-3)

Immediately afterwards, he presented the details of the Mishkan to the people, whereupon they began their donations and building.

II. SHABBAT PRECLUDES EVEN THE MISHKAN-CONSTRUCTION

Beginning from the Mekhilta (at the beginning of Parashat Vayakhel), many commentaries maintain that the juxtaposition of Shabbat with the construction of the Mishkan teaches us the limits of the Mitzvah of building a Mishkan – that even that, the noblest of human endeavors, must cease on Shabbat. Note R. Hirsch's words (from his commentary at the beginning of our Parashah):

The mastery of Man over matter, in getting, producing, changing, manufacturing the raw materials of the world, attains its highest meaning in the Temple. The world submits to Man, for him to submit himself and his world to God, and for him to change this earthly world into a home for the Kingdom of God, to a Temple in which the Glory of God tarries on earth. The building of the Temple is a sanctification of human labor, and in the context here, it is represented as being a combination of all those creative activities of Man, by the cessation of which – by cessation from all M'lakhah – the Shabbat is made into an acknowledgment of man's allegiance to God...

III. M'LAKHAH IN THE MISHKAN = M'LAKHAH ON SHABBAT

There is another significant connection between the Mishkan and Shabbat made by the Rabbis.

The Torah, in its initial command to avoid a certain class of activities on Shabbat, does not specify those actions. Rather, the Torah states: "Do not do any M'lakhah." (Sh'mot 20:10). This command is repeated in many other Shabbat-passages (31:14-15, 35:2, Vayyikra 23:3, Devarim 5:14). What is the meaning of M'lakhah? This key word – which is not only the principal phrase of prohibited work on Shabbat but also on the other Holy Days of the calendar (see Sh'mot 12, Vayyikra 23) – means something akin to "work" and is first used in the description of God's creation of the world (B'resheet 2:2-3). Nevertheless, it is not at all clear which type of work is prohibited on Shabbat. How do we distinguish prohibited actions from those which are permitted on Shabbat?

The Gemara (Shabbat 49b) records a B'raita that indicates that the definition of M'lakhah is based upon its meaning in the Mishkan (see Tosafot ibid. who indicates that this is the reason that the two sections were juxtaposed in the Torah) – any activity which was an integral part of the construction of the Mishkan is defined as M'lakhah and is, therefore, prohibited on Shabbat.

This association, while explaining the significance of the Torah's juxtaposition of these two institutions on one occasion (most probably at the beginning of Parashat Vayakhel) does not explain our section, nor does it explain the passages cited below from Vayyikra. [As to why the operative and categorical definition of prohibited "work" on Shabbat should be derived from the Mishkan – that is a topic in and of itself, beyond the scope of this shiur].

IV, KEEPING SHABBAT AND REVERING THE MIKDASH

There are two other places in the Torah where Shabbat and Mishkan are linked – but, in those passages, the importance of both of these institutions is linked within one verse:

Et Shab'totai Tish'moru v'et Mikdashi Tira'u, Ani Hashem – You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am Hashem. (Vayyikra 19:30, 26:2)

Why does the Torah associate the observance of Shabbat with proper reverence for the Mikdash?

These questions lead us to a larger one regarding Shabbat as presented in our Parashah. Up until this point, the commands regarding Shabbat (in the Mahn and in the Ten Statements) were framed in terms of a “gift from God” (Mahn) or testifying to God as the Creator (the Ten Statements). In addition, the selection in the Ten Statements would seem to imply that Shabbat should ideally be observed by all of humanity, as God created us all and we should all testify to that fact. Yet, in our Parashah, Shabbat is clearly presented as a uniquely Israelite practice, one which does not “belong” to other nations. (Indeed, the Rabbis stated that a non-Jew should not observe Shabbat – see BT Sanhedrin 58b, MT M'lakhim 10:9). Besides this “nationalistic shift”, several new terms are introduced in our Parashah:

* Chillul: A term with which we are most familiar, denoting a violation of Shabbat, is Chillul Shabbat. This term shows up, for the first time in a Shabbat context, in our Parashah – M'challeleha (everyone who profanes it – 31:14). Although translated “desecration”, the word Chillul actually means “defilement” or “pollution”. It is usually associated with holy people (e.g. Kohanim – Vayyikra 21:9), places (e.g. the Mishkan – Vayyikra 21:23) or sancta (e.g. Terumah – Bamidbar 18:32). How can such a term be associated with a time period, such as Shabbat? How can a day become polluted or defiled?

* Ot: Shabbat is a sign of a covenant between God and the B'nei Yisra'el. Although hand-T'fillin are called an Ot (Sh'mot 13:9,16), as was the blood to be placed on the doorposts in Egypt (ibid. 12:13), Shabbat was never previously referred to in this manner. Each of these two earlier occasions are “signs” which tell us (or remind us) about some other event (e.g. the Exodus) and might properly be called an Ot – but how can a day be considered a “sign”? What “other event” is signified here?

* Karet: the punishment of being “cut off from the people” for violating Shabbat. Until now, we have not been told what the punishment is for a violation of Shabbat – but why is it Karet – and why is it first mentioned here?

* IaDa'at Ki Ani Hashem M'kadish'khem – “that you may know that I, Hashem, sanctify you.” How does the “sign” of the Shabbat inform us that God sanctifies us? In addition, why mention this here, instead of earlier (e.g. during the Mahn narrative)?

In this shiur, I would like to suggest an additional reason for the Shabbat-Mikdash association (besides the two mentioned above – that even the building of the Mishkan ceases for Shabbat and that the activities involved in the construction of the Mishkan define “M'lakhah” for Shabbat) – one which would explain the appearance of these new terms in our Parashah.

V. THE PURPOSE OF THE MISHKAN

In order to understand the significance of this command regarding Shabbat given at the conclusion of the command regarding the Mishkan, we have to go back and review the purpose of the Mishkan:

v'Asu Li Mikdash, v'Shakhanti b'Tokham –

“Let them make a Mikdash for Me, that I may dwell among them” (Sh'mot 25:8).

The phrasing here is odd – it should have said “Let me dwell in it (i.e. the Mishkan)”. The implication is that by constructing this sanctuary, God will cause His presence to be manifest among the people.

This signals a fundamental change in the relationship between God and the B'nei Yisra'el – one which implies a unique statement not only about that relationship but also about the quality and nature of the community of the B'nei Yisra'el. Up until this point, God had made covenants, promises and oaths to our ancestors which He began to fulfill through the Exodus. God has commanded us and brought us close to Him in order to be a “kingdom of Kohanim and holy nation” (19:6) – but none of these events, commands or promises imply anything about our direct encounter-relationship with the Divine.

With the command to build the Mishkan, that relationship shifts from a purely command-driven one to an encounter-laden one. Besides sanctifying ourselves and becoming God's Kohanim (see Yesayahu 61:6), we are now God's people and stand in His Presence – at least potentially. God “walks in our camp” (Devarim 23:15 – compare with B'resheet 3:8).

How is this new relationship manifested? What indicates – both to us and to the rest of the world – that God is, indeed, “in our midst”?

VI. CHILLUL – INTRODUCING DEATH

Before answering this question, let's examine the difficult word "Chillul" which is first introduced into the lexicon of Shabbat in our Parashah.

Although, as mentioned above, Chillul is translated as "defile" or "pollute" (see BDB, p. 320), it has another meaning which may be informative in both the context of Mikdash and that of Shabbat.

A Challal (same root) is a corpse (see B'resheet 34:27, Bamidbar 19:18). The Mikdash becomes defiled by bringing Tum'ah (impurity) into it (or by contact on the part of a person who is impure with the sancta). The most essential source of Tum'ah is a corpse (read Bamidbar 19 carefully); since the Mikdash is the focus of the encounter between the B'nei Yisra'el and the Living God (see Sh'mot 29:43), any contact with death (a Challal) serves to defile (Chillul) that encounter.

We can see this most clearly from the closing verses of Parashat Yitro:

Make an altar of earth for Me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause My name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. If you make an altar of stones for Me, do not build it with hewn stones, for by your sword upon them vaf'Challalehah (you will defile it).

As Rashi points out (ad loc.), since the purpose of a sword is to shorten a man's life and the altar's purpose is to lengthen man's life, it is inappropriate to wield the "shortener" on the "lengthener". This comment becomes more impactful when viewed against the backdrop of the previous promise, "...I will come to you and bless you." The encounter with God (which, at this point in Sefer Sh'mot, is limited to the place and time of an offering and not extended to the entire community, as it is through the construction of the Mishkan) is defiled via contact with (an instrument of) death.

VII. KARET – VIOLATION OF THE SPECIAL NATURE OF AM YISRA'EL

The punishment which is introduced (along with death) into the Shabbat vocabulary in our Parashah is Karet – excision. Whatever Karet may mean, it implies some sort of disconnection or excommunication (by God) from the people of Yisra'el.

The first occasion where Karet is found (explicitly; it may be the notion behind Man's exile from Eden) is in B'resheet 17. Avraham is commanded to circumcise himself and all of the males in his household, and "If any male fails to circumcise the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off (root: K-R-T) from his people; he has broken My covenant." (17:14)

Karet here seems to be the natural result of communal disassociation – since this individual is unwilling to demonstrate his fellowship with the people of Avraham via circumcision, he is, indeed, separated from them.

The second occurrence of this punishment (although not mentioned explicitly until later, in Bamidbar 9:13) is failure to participate in the Korban Pesach (Pesach offering). Here again, the individual who doesn't see himself as a member of the people and does not identify with their destiny and history is excised from the people.

These two Mitzvot 'Aseh (which are the only two which carry this punishment for non-fulfillment), in combination, serve as rituals which affirm the individual's identification with- and allegiance to – the history (Pesach) and mission (B'rit Milah) of Am Yisra'el. (Rabbi Soloveitchik zt"l refers to two covenants – the B'rit Goral – covenant of fate – and the B'rit Yi'ud – covenant of destiny – shared by all members of K'lal Yisra'el.)

Put together, we see that Karet is a punishment given by God to someone who denies the special Godly character of the B'nei Yisra'el.

This can be seen in several of the Mitzvot Lo Ta'a seh which carry this punishment. Karet is the indicated Divine punishment for entering the Mikdash (or eating sancta) while in a state of Tum'ah; in the same way, performing some of the rituals unique to the Mikdash outside carry this punishment. See, for instance, earlier in our Parashah (30:33,38); using the special formula for the K'toret (incense) or Shemen haMish'chah (anointing oil) for your own purpose makes the violator liable for Karet.

One other example of this Karet-communal identity connection is found in the laws of Yom haKippurim. Someone who fails to afflict himself on that day of atonement is excised from the people. "Indeed, any person who does not afflict himself throughout that day shall be excised from among his people" (Vayyikra 23:29).

VIII. SHABBAT – TEACHES THAT GOD HAS SANCTIFIED US

We can now understand the enhanced nature of Shabbat as reflected in this Parashah – and the import of this new "terminology" we find here.

As opposed to the earlier presentation, Shabbat is presented here as a "sign" (Ot) – because, with the introduction of the Mishkan, God's Presence will become manifest among the people. Shabbat is the weekly sign of that constant Presence. Unlike the physical Mishkan, the existence of which has not always been assured in our history, Shabbat is an eternal (l'doroteikhem – for your generations) focal point and sign of our ongoing encounter with God. Note that unlike the earlier presentation (in Sh'mot 20), where we are told that in response to His "rest", God sanctified and bless the day of Shabbat

(which is why we should avoid M'lakhah) , here, we are just told that on the seventh day Shavat vaYinafash – He rested and had repose. We cease work on Shabbat out of a sense of shared repose with God, much more than just the commandedness implied in the earlier passages.

Since Shabbat is the sign of the special relationship between God and the B'nei Yisra'el and of the "shared experience" between the two (as evidenced by the twinned phrases "holy for you" and "holy to Hashem"), this special "place in time" must be guarded carefully.

The newly introduced phrase "Sh'mirat Shabbat" takes on a new meaning in this light. As opposed to the purely Halakhic meaning – avoiding M'lakhah (see BT Berakhot 20b and Rashi ad loc. s.v. biSh'mirah) – "guarding" Shabbat means that it is now a possession (as R. Hirsch points out) and a "closed circle" between God and the B'nei Yisra'el which must be protected. This also explains why Shabbat is not to be celebrated or observed by other nations; even though creation is a universal experience which should be declared by all creatures, the partnership-fellowship with God which is unique to the B'nei Yisra'el and which informs the meaning of Shabbat is not to be shared with others.

This sense of "Sh'mirah" is perhaps best expressed by Rambam in his prescription for the mood and mode just before the onset of Shabbat:

What is honor? – This is what the Sages have said, that it is incumbent on one to wash one's face, hands, and feet in hot water before Shabbat because of the honor of Shabbat, and he wraps himself in tzitzit and sits seriously, waiting for to greet the Shabbat, as one who goes out to greet the king. The early Sages would gather their disciples before Shabbat and wrap themselves (in the tallit) and say: Let us go out to greet the Shabbat king. (MT Shabbat 30:2)

Someone who violates the Shabbat by bringing mundane activities into this sphere is not only violating God's commandment – and failing to testify to God's creation of the world, he is also denying the special Godly nature of the Jewish people. This is as much of a Chillul as bringing impurity into the physical Mishkan.

Shabbat is a Mishkan in time, where Am Yisra'el and HaKadosh Barukh Hu encounter each other as the beloved and lover of Shir haShirim (the Song of Songs) (which explains the custom to read this beautiful love song every Friday evening at the onset of Shabbat).

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PARSHAT VAYAKHEL

Is Parshat Vayakhel simply a repeat of Parshat Teruma?

Indeed, the details of the mishkan are practically identical in both parshiot - however, their manner of presentation is quite different.

To explain why, this week's shiur first considers the different purpose of each Parsha. Afterward, we will attempt to tackle the more difficult question concerning the necessity of this 'repetition'.

INTRODUCTION

Before we discuss the similarities between Teruma and Vayakhel, let's first note the obvious difference between these two Parshiot.

In Parshat Teruma / Tetzaveh, the Torah records God's **commandment to Moshe** to build the mishkan - or in Hebrew, what we refer to as 'tzivui ha-mishkan'. In contrast, Parshat Vayakhel / Pekudei describes how **Moshe conveyed** these instructions to Bnei Yisrael.

Let's explain how this affects their order:

THE ORDER IN PARSHAT TERUMA

The primary focus of the **tzivui ha-mishkan** unit (i.e. chapters 25-29) is the tabernacle's **function**, hence this unit opens with its 'statement of purpose':

"And you shall build for Me a **mikdash** in order that I shall **dwell** among you" (see 25:1-8).

and closes with an almost identical statement:

"And I shall **dwell** among **Bnei Yisrael**, and I will be for them a God, and they shall know..." (see 29:45-46).

In our shiur on Parshat Tetzaveh, we explained how these opening and closing psukim serve as 'matching bookends' that highlight how the Mishkan serves first and foremost as the place where God's **shchina** can dwell with His nation. This observation helped us understand the logic of its flow in topic.

For example, that unit began by describing the **aron** [ark of the covenant], which will house the **luchot** [tablets] - the symbol of **brit Sinai** - and hence the focal point of the mishkan, as well as the **kaporet**, the protective cover of the **aron**, from where God will speak to Moshe.

The next set of parshiot described the various 'keilim' (vessels) that are situated in the **ohel mo'ed**, such as the **menora** and **shulchan** (25:23-40). This was followed by a detailed description of the **ohel mo'ed** - the portable structure [i.e. the canvas for the tent / 'yeriot ha-mishkan' and its poles / 'kerashim'] (see 26:1-37) that will house those vessels.

In this unit, the description of vessels precedes the details of that tent, for they perform its key functions, while the structure that houses them serves only a secondary function.

These instructions are followed by the commandment to build an altar ['mizbach ha-nechoshet'], which will be placed in front of this **ohel mo'ed** (see 27:1-8), and a courtyard ['chatzer'] constructed from curtains and poles that would encompass it (see 27:9-19).

This **Shchina** unit concludes with the laws concerning the **kohanim** who are to officiate in the mishkan (chapter 28), and the seven day dedication ceremony (chapter 29).

In chapters 30 and 31 we found an additional unit, that contained a list of peripheral mitzvot relating to the mishkan (and its protection from the shchina), including the 'mizbach ketoret' and the 'kiyor'.

At the very conclusion of the **tzivui ha-mishkan** we find the instruction to appoint Betzalel to build the mishkan, and the important reminder not to build it on Shabbat.

The following table summarizes this order in Parshat Teruma according to its most general categories:

Intro - Shchina

Keilim - the vessels (chapter 25)

* The aron - which will house the **luchot**

The kaporet - from where God will speak to Moshe

* The shulchan - on which the **lechem** will be placed

* The menora - which will provide light

Structure - the **ohel mo'ed** (the tent - chapter 26)

* The yeriot

* The krashim

* The "parochet"

Chatzer - The courtyard (chapter 27)

* The mizbeiah - the altar in front of the **ohel mo'ed**

* The courtyard - "amudei ve-kelei ha-chatzer"

Kohanim (chapters 28 & 29)

* The bigdei kehuna

* The dedication ceremony (**milu'im**)

Misc. Topics (chapter 30)

The Builder - Betzalel (chapter 31)

Shabbat (not to build the mishkan on Shabbat/ 31:11-17)

In contrast to this 'functional order', the order in Parshat Vayakhel is quite different, for in this unit - Moshe must explain to Bnei Yisrael **how** to build the mishkan. Therefore, the sequence will follow a more **practical** order, reflecting the considerations of its construction.

For example, the tent will precede the vessels, for the **ohel mo'ed** will house them. Furthermore, this time, the mizbach ketoret will be included with the other vessels, even though its function in regard to the shechina is different. Similarly, this time the kiyor will be recorded together with the mizbach ha'Olah.

The following table summarizes this 'practical' order, as presented in Parshat Vayakhel:

Shabbat

* Guidelines re: **when** construction work is permitted (35:1-3);

Teruma

* The collection of the building materials (35:4-29);

The Builder

* The appointment of the chief architect - Betzalel - and his fellow artisans (35:30-36:7);

Structure - the ohel mo'ed - the tent (36:8-38):

* the yeriot

* the kerashim

* the parochet

Keilim (chapter 37)

* the aron

* shulchan

* menora

* mizbach ketoret (from misc. above)

Chatzer (chapter 38)

* the mizbeiah

* the kiyor (from misc. above)

* the courtyard

Kohanim (chapter 39)

* their garments

Construction

* assembly of the mishkan on the 1st of Nissan (40:1-33)

Shchina

* God's glory dwells on the mishkan (40:34-38)

As you review (and compare) these two tables, be sure to note their similarities and differences. Doing so, while considering this distinction between 'function' and 'construction', will help you

understand how and why the order in Vayakhel / Pekudei differs from the order in Teruma / Tetzaveh.

[Note as well that the mizbach ha-ktoret and the kiyor that were omitted (for thematic reasons) from the **Shchina** unit in Teruma / Tetzaveh are now included (for practical reasons) in Parshat Vayakhel - right where they belong!]

[See also TSC shiur on Parshat Tetzaveh.]

WHY THE REPETITION?

With this distinction in mind, let's consider now a more basic question, i.e. the very need to repeat anything!

After all, the building of the mishkan was only a 'one-time' mitzva. Would it not have been sufficient for the Torah to simply tell us in one pasuk that Bnei Yisrael constructed the mishkan 'as God commanded Moshe on Har Sinai'?

To answer this question, we return to our study of the overall theme of Sefer Shmot.

THE MISHKAN EXCLUSIVE

In Sefer Shmot, from the time that Moshe ascended Har Sinai to receive the first luchot (see 24:12), the mishkan emerged as its primary focus. Even though Moshe received numerous other laws during these forty days, in chapters 25 thru 31 Sefer Shmot records **only** those mitzvot relating to the mishkan.

Likewise, when Moshe descends from Har Sinai (after the last forty days), even though the Torah informs us that he conveyed **all** the mitzvot to Bnei Yisrael at that time (see 34:32), nevertheless Sefer Shmot chooses to record only Moshe's transmission of the mitzvot concerning the mishkan (i.e. chapters 35->40). All the other mitzvot appear only later, in the books of Vayikra, Bamidbar and Devarim (see Chizkuni 34:32)!

So the question is not only - why the 'repeat'; but also why the exclusivity of the mishkan in Sefer Shmot?

Ramban, in his explanation of the overall theme of Sefer Shmot, suggests an answer:

"... Sefer Shmot discusses the exile [i.e. the slavery in Egypt]... and Bnei Yisrael's redemption from that exile... for the descent of the children of Yaakov to Egypt marked the beginning of that exile... and that exile does not end until they return to the spiritual level of their forefathers... Even though Bnei Yisrael had left Egypt [i.e. physical redemption], they are not yet considered redeemed... [However,] when they reach Har Sinai and build the mishkan, and God returns His **Shchina** to dwell among them, **then** they have returned to the spiritual level of their forefathers [spiritual redemption]... Therefore, Sefer Shmot concludes with the topic of the mishkan and the constant dwelling of God's Glory upon it [for this marks the completion of the Redemption process]."

(see Ramban, introduction to Sefer Shmot)

According to Ramban, Sefer Shmot concludes with the story of the mishkan because its construction marks the completion of Bnei Yisrael's redemption. His explanation can help us understand the manner in which the Torah repeats the details of the mishkan in parshiot Vayakhel / Pekudei.

SPIRITUAL REHABILITATION

As Ramban explained, the 'spiritual level' that Bnei Yisrael had achieved at Ma'amad Har Sinai was lost as a result of chet ha-egel. Consequently, God had removed His **Shchina** from Bnei Yisrael (see Shmot 33:1-7), effectively thwarting the redemption process that began with Yetziat Mitzrayim.

Moshe Rabeinu's intervention on Bnei Yisrael's behalf (see 32:11-14) certainly saved them from immediate punishment and secured their atonement (see 32:30, 34:9). However, that prayer alone could not restore Bnei Yisrael to the spiritual level achieved at Har Sinai. The **Shchina**, which was to have resided in their midst, remained **outside** the camp (see 33:7, read carefully!).

Moshe interceded once again (see 33:12-16), whereupon God declared his thirteen 'attributes of mercy' (33:17-34:8), thus allowing

Bnei Yisrael a 'second chance'. Nonetheless, the **Shchina** did not return automatically. To bring the **Shchina** back, it would be necessary for Bnei Yisrael to do something - they must actively and collectively involve themselves in the process of building the mishkan.

In other words, Bnei Yisrael required what we might call 'spiritual rehabilitation'. Their collective participation in the construction of the mishkan helped repair the strain in their relationship with God brought about by chet ha-egel. Or, using more 'kabalistic' terminology, the construction of the mishkan functioned as a 'tikkun' for chet ha-egel.

A closer examination of parshiot Vayakhel / Pekudei supports this interpretation and can explain why Sefer Shmot repeats the details of the mishkan in Vayakhel / Pekudei.

TEXTUAL PARALLELS

Let's take for example the Torah's use of the word '**vayakhel**' at the beginning of the parsha. This immediately brings to mind the opening line of the chet ha-egel narrative:

"**Va-yikahel** ha-am al Aharon - and the nation **gathered** against Aharon..." (32:1).

This new 'gathering' of the people - for the purpose of building the mishkan, can be understood as a 'tikkun' for that original gathering to build the **egel**. As opposed to their assembly to fashion the golden calf, Bnei Yisrael now gather to build a more 'proper' symbol of God's presence.

Similarly, the commandment for the people to 'donate their gold' and other belongings for this project (see 35:5) can also be understood as a tikkun for Aharon's solicitation of the people's gold for the **egel** (32:2-3).

However, the strongest proof is the Torah's glaring repetition of the phrase: "ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe" ["as **God** commanded Moshe"]. This phrase not only appears in both the opening commandment (35:1 & 35:4) and the finale (39:32 & 39:43), but it is repeated like a chorus over twenty times throughout Vayakhel-Pekudei, at every key point of the construction process. [I recommend that you note this using a Tanach Koren. See 35:29; 36:1; 36:5; 39:1,5,7,21,26,29,31,32,42,43; and especially in 40:16,19,21,23,25,27,29,32, as each part of the mishkan is put into its proper place.]

Clearly, the Torah's repetition of this phrase is intentional, and may very well point to the mishkan's function as a tikkun for chet ha-egel. Let's explain why:

Recall from our shiur on Parshat Ki Tisa that the people's initial intention at chet ha-egel was to make a physical representation of their perception of God. Despite the innocence of such aspirations per se, a man-made representation, no matter how pure its intention, may lead to idol worship (see Shmot 20:20). This does not mean, however, that God cannot ever be represented by a physical symbol. When God Himself chooses the symbol, it is not only permitted, but it becomes a **mitzva**. It is this symbolism that makes the mishkan so important. [See 23:17,19; 34:24; Devarim 12:5,11 & 16:16.]

The Torah therefore stresses that Bnei Yisrael have now 'learned their lesson'. They construct the mishkan **precisely** 'as **God** commanded Moshe,' down to the very last detail, understanding that there is no room for human innovation when choosing a symbol for His Divine Presence.

AN APPROPRIATE FINALE

This concept of tikkun for chet ha-egel finds further support in the very conclusion of Sefer Shmot.

Although the aspect of **Shchina** (a central feature in Teruma / Tetzaveh) is mentioned nowhere throughout the detail of the mishkan's construction in Vayakhel / Pekudei, it makes a sudden reappearance at the very end of the sefer. After each component of the mishkan is put into place on the first of Nissan (see 40:1-33), this entire process reaches its dramatic climax:

"When Moshe had finished his work, the **anan** (cloud) covered the **ohel mo'ed** and **God's kavod** ('glory') filled the mishkan" (40:34).

This pasuk describes the dwelling of the **Shchina** on the **mishkan** in the exact same terms used to depict the dwelling of the **Shchina** on **Har Sinai**:
 "When Moshe ascended the **har** [Mount Sinai, to receive the first **luchot**], the **anan** covered the **har**, and **kvod Hashem** (God's glory) dwelled upon **Har Sinai...**" (24:15-16).

Clearly, the Torah intentionally parallels, thereby associating, the descent of the **Shchina** onto Har Sinai with the dwelling of the **Shchina** on the mishkan. Only **after** Bnei Yisrael meticulously complete the construction of the mishkan - precisely 'as God commanded **Moshe**' - does the **Shchina** return to Bnei Yisrael and dwell therein (40:34), just as it had dwelled on Har Sinai.

Thus, the end of Sefer Shmot marks the completion of the tikkun for chet ha-egel. Accordingly, as Ramban posits, the entire 'redemption process' - the theme of Sefer Shmot - has also reached its culmination.

The Shchina's return to the camp also signifies Bnei Yisrael's return to the stature they had lost after the golden calf. Recall that in the aftermath of that incident: "Moshe took his tent and set it up outside the camp, **far away** from the camp, and called it the **ohel mo'ed** [tent of meeting (with God)], such that anyone who would search for God was required to go out to this **ohel mo'ed, outside the camp**" [see 33:7 and its context in 33:1-11].

This **ohel mo'ed**, located **outside** the camp, symbolized the distancing of the **Shchina**. Once the mishkan is built, God will bring His **Shchina** back **inside** the camp. [See 25:8 and 29:45.]

BACK TO BREISHIT

Thus far, we have shown that the manner by which Bnei Yisrael construct the mishkan serves as a tikkun for chet ha-egel and relates to the overall theme of Sefer Shmot.

One could suggest that the very concept of a mishkan - irrespective of its mode of construction - may constitute a more general tikkun, beyond the specific context of the golden calf. In this sense, the mishkan relates to a more general biblical theme developed in Sefer Breishit.

As explained in our shiurim on Sefer Breishit, the Garden of Eden reflects the ideal spiritual environment in which Man cultivates his relationship with God. After Adam sinned and was consequently banished from the Garden, God placed **keruvim** to guard the **path of return** to the Tree of Life (see Breishit 3:24).

It may not be coincidental that the mishkan is the only other context throughout the entire Chumash where the concept of **keruvim** appears. Recall how the mishkan features **keruvim**: 1) on the **kaporet** as protectors of the **aron**, which contains the **luchot** (Shmot 25:22), and 2) woven into the **parochet**, the curtain which guards the entrance into the kodesh ha-kodashim - the Holy of Holies (where the **aron** and **kaporet** are located).

This parallel suggests a conceptual relationship between Gan Eden and the mishkan. The symbolic function of the **keruvim** as guardians of the kodesh kodashim may correspond to the mishkan's function as an environment similar to Gan Eden, where man can strive to come closer to God:

1) The **keruvim** of the **kaporet**, protecting the **aron**, indicate that the 'Tree of Life' of Gan Eden has been replaced by the **Torah**, represented by the **luchot** inside the **aron**.

[*"Etz chayim hi la-machazikim bah"* - see Mishlei 3:1-18.]

2) The **keruvim** woven into the **parochet** remind man that his entry into the kodesh kodashim, although desired, remains limited and requires spiritual readiness.

[Note that **keruvim** are also woven into the innermost covering of the mishkan (see Shmot 26:1-2).]

In this sense, we may view the mishkan as a tikkun for Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. Should man wish to return to the Tree of Life, he must keep God's covenant - the laws of the Torah - as symbolized by the **luchot ha-eidut** in the **aron**, protected by the **keruvim**.

If so, then the Torah's repetition of the laws of the mishkan, as well as there exclusivity, may be alluding to one of the most important themes of Chumash - man's never ending quest to develop a relationship with his Creator.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. An important clarification

It is important that we clarify this tikkun aspect of the mishkan.

We do not claim that the mishkan itself constitutes a tikkun for chet ha-egel. Rather, the **manner** by which Bnei Yisrael must build it serves as a tikkun. Consequently, our analysis here stands independent of the controversy between Rashi and Ramban as to **when** God commanded the building of the mishkan. As we explained in our shiur on Parshat Teruma, Ramban (mishkan commanded **before** chet ha-egel) and Rashi (mishkan commanded **after** chet ha-egel) argue only whether the need for a **temporary** mishkan resulted from chet ha-egel. However, Rashi must agree that the basic concept of a mikdash is necessary to perpetuate the experience of Har Sinai, just as Ramban in Parshat Vayakhel must agree that the manner in which Bnei Yisrael ultimately construct the mishkan reflects their correction of the sin of chet ha-egel.

B. 'Shchina tamid'

We stated that Teruma / Tetzaveh describes the function of each object in the mishkan. It may be suggested that the actual function of each 'kli' relates to the constant presence of the **Shchina** in the mishkan.

The following table demonstrates the three levels of kedusha in the mishkan, according to the functions of the accessories contained in the three regions of the mishkan:

Kodesh Kodashim

the aron - contains the 'luchot ha-eidut'
the kaporet - from where God will speak to Moshe

Kodesh

the shulchan - 'lechem panim lefa'nai **tamid**'
the menorah - 'leha'ilot ner **tamid**'
the mizbach zahav - 'lehaktir ktoret **tamid**'

Chatzer ha-mishkan

the mizbach nechoshet- 'lehakriv olat **tamid**'

The kodesh kodashim contains the luchot, the eternal testament to the covenant at Har Sinai. God **speaks** to Moshe from in between the **keruvim** (25:21-22), thus perpetuating the Har Sinai experience. In this domain, God 'comes down' to man; as such, no 'avoda' (ritual) is performed.

Outside this domain, in the kodesh, the kohanim perform their daily **avodat tamid** - lighting the menorah, offering the ktoret, and keeping bread on the shulchan.

Outside the mishkan is the chatzer (courtyard). Here, Am Yisrael collectively offer their **korban tamid** on the **mizbeiaach**. [See shiur on Parshat Tetzaveh for a complete analysis.]

Significantly, each 'kli' requires an 'avodat **tamid**'. The word **tamid** means everlasting or continuous. Am Yisrael must perform their daily avodat tamid in order to deserve the continuous presence of the Shchina.

A relationship with God does not come automatically; it requires constant effort on the individual's part.

C. Beyond the parallels between the mishkan and Gan Eden (as noted in the shiur), there exist as well textual parallels between the mishkan and the story of Creation in the first perek of Sefer Breishit. For example, "va-techel kol avodat ha-mishkan..." (39:32) and "va-yar Moshe et kol ha-melacha..." (39:43) correspond to Breishit 1:31 and 2:1. Indeed, several Midrashim view the mishkan as the completion of the Creation process.

1. Based on the above shiur, explain this parallel.
2. The entire mishkan plan is repeated a total of seven times in Sefer Shmot: Teruma Tetzaveh - 25:10-30:38 / 31:7-11, Vayk.Pkd: 35:11-19 / 36:8-39:32 / 39:33-42 / 40:1-16 / 40:17-33. Connect this as well to Breishit 1 (the seven-day process of creation).
3. Relate this parallel to the location of mitzvat shabbat, which concludes the tzivui ha-mishkan unit (31:12-17) and opens the binyan ha-mishkan unit (35:1-4).

D. The highest level of hitgalut, experienced by Moshe (33:11) and Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai (Dvarim 5:4), is known as 'panim be-fanim' - literally, face to face. When God 'changed' His attributes to 'midot ha-rachamim' (Shmot 33:17-34:9), He states that man can no longer see His 'face', only His 'back' (33:20-23).

1. Find the allusions to the human face in the mishkan:
For example: menora=eyes, shulchan=mouth, etc.
2. In your opinion, could this represent 'pnei Hashem'?
3. How would the aron fit within this parallel?
How about the function of the 'erot izim ve-elim' as a cover for the mishkan?
4. Accordingly, what is the significance of the 'masach le-petach ha-mishkan' and the parochet, and the general concept of limited entry into the mishkan?
5. According to Rashi, would this have been the structure of the mikdash before chet ha-egel? According to Ramban?

E. The theme of Sefer Shmot

Throughout our study of Sefer Shmot, we traced three primary topics: (1) the Exodus (Yetziyat Mitzrayim, chapters 1->17); (2) Ma'amad Har Sinai (chapters 19->24, 32->34); (3) the mishkan (chapters 25->31, 35->40).

Based on the above shiur, we can suggest a fundamental relationship between these three sections:

- 1) Through the process of Yetziyat Mitzrayim, God fulfills His covenant with the Avot (the theme of Sefer Breishit) to redeem Bnei Yisrael from their bondage in Egypt so as to facilitate their development into His special nation.
- 2) To become this special nation, God and Bnei Yisrael enter into a covenant at Har Sinai (chapters 19->24). Bnei Yisrael receive the commandments which will mold their national and individual characters, transforming them into God's special nation.
- 3) The mishkan, the symbol of the special relationship established at Har Sinai, becomes the vehicle through which that relationship can continue. Although chet ha-egel calls into question Bnei Yisrael's ability to survive the terms of this covenant, the new terms of the **second luchot** allow them to build the mishkan, to which the **Shchina** returns.

An important pasuk in Parshat Tetzaveh highlights this overall theme. As explained in our shiur on that parasha, chapters 25-29, which appear amidst God's instructions regarding the mishkan, form a distinct unit which we may call the '**Shchina** unit' (compare 25:8 with 29:45).

The closing pasuk of that unit - "And I shall **dwell** among the people of Israel, and I will be their God" (29:45) - is followed by an important summary pasuk:

"And you shall know that I am the Lord your God who took you out of the Land of Egypt - **leshochni betocham** - in order to dwell among you; I am the Lord your God" (29:46).

This pasuk accurately reflects the overall theme of Sefer Shmot. It ties together (1) Yetziyat Mitzrayim, (2) Matan Torah, and (3) the

mishkan with the concept of Shchina. God takes Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt in order that they become His nation, and this relationship reaches its highest level with the presence of the Shchina. This level was attained at Har Sinai, and it forever remains within Bnei Yisrael's reach through the 'heir' and closest substitute to Har Sinai - the mishkan.

OH RNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Pekudei

The New Israel

"And he made the breast-plate as a craftsman, like he made the ephod, from gold, turquoise, purple and crimson wool..." (39:8)

At the beginning of Megillat Esther, Achashverosh throws a party to end all parties. The party of the millennium. He was celebrating his unassailable grip on the throne of the Persian Empire. At this party, Achashverosh brought out the vessels of the Holy Temple which the Babylonians had plundered and caroused with.

But he didn't stop there. Achavshverosh's party attire consisted of the vestments of the High Priest. Why did he do this? Was it some elaborate spoof? Was Achavshverosh poking fun at the Jewish People and their prophecies of the demise of his all-mighty kingdom? Or was there something more sinister behind this charade?

"And the land was formless and empty and darkness on the face of the deep." (Bereishet 1:2)

These words form part of the opening words of the Torah. They hint to four mighty empires that will subjugate the Jewish People. The first, Babylon, will snatch the crown of Empire from the Jewish People, and then the Persian, Greece and Roman empires will successively snatch world domination, one from the other. Eventually, the last of those empires, Rome and its cultural heirs, will return the kingship to the Jewish People.

When that happens, "The lost ones will come from the land of Ashur" (Yeshayahu 27:13) – and the final exile will end. The name *Ashur* is related to the Hebrew word *ishur*. An *ishur* is a certification. Each nation who takes the kingship from the Jewish People seeks to "certify" itself as being the true and final recipient of the crown of the world. But they can only do this by proclaiming themselves the true heirs. They claim to be the "New Israel," so to speak. They claim that the testament of faith of the Jewish People is old and that they have a new one.

This, in essence, was what Achashverosh was attempting to do at his millennial party. He was certifying himself as the "New Israel." His party was a grotesque replication of the Temple service. The vessels of the Temple were there and were being used. He was dressed as the *Kohen Gadol*, the high priest. He even went so far as to name his ministers after the offerings of the Holy Temple. He was trying to utilize those forces of holiness for his own means, to set his own seal on world domination, using the higher spiritual forces. This was no charade.

But we know what transpired. The truth and eternity of Hashem, His Torah and His nation of Israel prevailed, and will always prevail.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Pesachim 114-121

The Matzah Meal of Freedom and Purity

Rabban Gamliel would say, “Whoever does not say (i.e. explain the reason behind the mitzvah for – Rashbam) these three things on Pesach, does not fulfill his obligation, and these are: the korban Pesach, matzah and maror (bitter herbs).”

This *mishna* is likely to be familiar to everyone as part of the *Hagaddah Shel Pesach* that is read at the Seder. Historically, when the *Beit Hamikdash* stood, the *korban Pesach* was eaten on Pesach night together with matzah and *maror*. There are two views regarding how they were eaten: all at once, as a “sandwich,” which is the opinion of *Hillel*, or these three food items of mitzvah could even be eaten separately, which is the ruling of the *Chachamim*. Nowadays, we do not have a *korban Pesach*, eating *maror* is a rabbinic mitzvah, and eating matzah is a Torah mitzvah (as the Torah teaches, “in the evening they will eat matzah” – the obligation to eat matzah is independent of the *korban Pesach* and is a Torah mitzvah even in our time - *Shemot* 12:18). Nowadays, we eat the matzah and the *maror* separately, with separate blessings, and the matzah is eaten first.

The Maharsha makes a fascinating observation in the teaching of Rabban Gamliel. In this *mishna*, Rabban Gamliel is teaching that there is a requirement to explain the reasons for the need to eat each of these specific foods (including the *korban Pesach* when it was possible). Otherwise, we have not fulfilled the mitzvah. This requirement to explain the reason for the mitzvah in order to fulfill it is unique to these three mitzvahs, explains the Maharsha. For any other mitzvah in the Torah that involves eating, no reason is required to be enunciated. At most, a blessing is said, before or after the act of eating – or both. But no explanation is necessary. What makes the mitzvahs of Pesach, matzah and *maror* unique, in this aspect, that they require that we state the reason for our eating them in order to successfully fulfill the mitzvah? This question seemingly provides “food for thought” for our upcoming Pesach *Sedarim*, G-d willing.

The Maharsha offers an answer to this question, which I will try to state briefly, and I heartily suggest learning the Maharsha’s explanation in full, if possible. It is certainly, in my opinion, on any respectable “Recommended Reading List” when learning this *daf* or learning the Pesach *Hagaddah* in preparation for the Seder.

The theme that serves as the common denominator for all of these three mitzvahs is a fundamental theme of Pesach, and is essential to understand in order to truly appreciate what Pesach really means to us as individuals and as a nation. Pesach is a time when Hashem not only took us out of physical slavery in Egypt to physical freedom. More importantly, He took us out of a spiritual slavery-state of the impurity of Egypt, from the horrific spiritual slavery of knowing nothing other than idolatry. He “took us out,” and step-by- step brought us closer to the pinnacle of spiritual purity, drawing us closer and closer to Him and His holy Torah.

This is the running theme of the Pesach, mitzvah and *maror* mitzvahs, which highlight our recalling and reliving the Pesach experience: Hashem brought us out of a place of spiritual impurity in a way that gave us the opportunity to discard this impurity and follow the will of Hashem in purity and holiness.

Pesach: “The *korban Pesach* that our ancestors ate was on account of Hashem passing over the houses of the Jewish People in Egypt (when he killed the firstborn Egyptians during the tenth plague). As the Torah says, ‘It is a Pesach offering to Hashem, for He passed over the houses of the Jewish People in Egypt when He killed the Egyptians – and He saved our houses.’” (*Shemot* 12:27) This reason expresses the theme that Hashem – while killing the idolatrous

Egyptians who worshipped the lamb as a deity – told us to slaughter the lamb in view of the Egyptians to signal that it was time to stop the impure, idolatrous practices of the past, and move toward the holiness of being close to Hashem, Who would give us the holy Torah and sanctify us with its commandments.

Maror: “These bitter herbs that we eat are because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt, as the Torah says, “And they (the ancient Egyptians) embittered their (the Jewish people’s) lives with hard labor, with clay and with bricks and with all kinds of labor in the fields, all their work that they worked with them with back-breaking labor.” (*Shemot 1:14*) In taking us out from Egyptian slavery, Hashem not only saved us from the bitter hardship of torturous labor, but also saved us from the bitter impurity of idolatrous Egypt, in order to bring us to the sweetness of becoming close to the One Almighty by receiving the Torah and living according to its wisdom.

Matzah: (Here it gets a bit “tricky.”) According to the text in our *gemara*, Rabban Gamliel says that “matzah is because our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt. As the Torah says, ‘They (the Jewish People) baked the dough that they had taken out of Egypt as matzah cakes, for it had not become chametz, as they were driven out of Egypt and could not tarry – and, also, they had not made provisions for themselves.’” (*Shemot 12:39*) The Maharsha explains how the reason for matzah, based on this verse, should be understood as following the same theme of spiritual purity as explained for the *korban Pesach* and *maror*. Eating matzah on Pesach – with no chametz for seven days – is eating “bread” that has not risen, leavening being a symbolic sign for haughtiness – which leads to impure and forbidden thoughts, words and deeds. This is why the *korban mincha* – the meal offering eaten by the *kohen* – is made as matzah and not chametz. When the *kohen* serves Hashem in eating the *korban mincha*, he certainly does so in the utmost purity and holiness. Likewise is our Divine service in eating unleavened matzah on Pesach.

The Maharsha acknowledges that the reason for matzah that we find in our *Hagaddah* is different from that which we see on our *daf*. He writes that the text we have in our *Hagaddahs* is the correct text according to most copies of the *Talmud Bavli* that he had seen, and is the text accepted by many *Rishonim*. This alternate text reads, “This matzah that we eat is because *there was insufficient time for the dough that our ancestors took out from Egypt to rise*, before the King who reigns over kings – *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* – revealed Himself to them and immediately redeemed them. As the Torah says, “They (the Jewish People) baked the dough that they had taken out of Egypt as matzah cakes, *for it had not become chametz since they were driven out of Egypt and could not tarry* – and, also, they had not made provisions for themselves.” (*Shemot 12:39*)

According to our *Haggadah*’s text, the Maharsha has two new questions. One: If the matzah was baked *after* leaving Egypt, it was after midnight at that time, and why is the mitzvah to eat matzah to be fulfilled specifically *before* midnight? Two: Why were the Jewish People in Egypt commanded to eat unleavened matzah (with the *korban Pesach* and *maror*) on the first Pesach *before they had hurriedly left Egypt with their dough*, without time for it to rise? He answers both of these questions in accordance with the same theme he proposed for understanding the essence of three Pesach food mitzvahs. In the context of this Torah verse, matzah is a food of purity and humility, and Hashem – in His great kindness – took the Jewish People out of the unimaginable impurity of Egypt *before* they had a chance to “become chametz” – i.e. before they became too steeped in the Egyptian impurity. Hashem did this in order to purify the Jewish nation, bring us close to Him, and, ultimately, sanctify us by giving us His holy Torah at Mount Sinai.

• *Pesachim 116b*

Q & A

VAYAKHEL

Questions

1. On which day did Moshe assemble the Jewish People?
2. Why is the prohibition against doing work on Shabbat written prior to the instruction for building the Mishkan?
3. Why does the Torah specify the particular prohibition of lighting a fire on Shabbat right after it had already noted the general prohibition of doing work on Shabbat?
4. What function did the "yitdot hamishkan" serve?
5. What function did the "bigdei hasrad" serve?
6. What was unusual about the way the women spun the goat's hair?
7. Why were the Nesi'im last to contribute to the building of the Mishkan? How does the Torah show dissatisfaction with their actions?
8. Who does the Torah identify as the primary builders of the Mishkan? From which tribes were they?
9. What time of day did the people bring their daily contributions for the construction of the Mishkan?
10. For what was the woven goat's hair used?
11. What image was woven into the *parochet*?
12. Why does the Torah attribute the building of the *aron* to Bezalel?
13. Where were the sculptured *cheruvim* located?
14. How many lamps did the *menorah* have?
15. Of what materials was the *mizbe'ach haketoret* composed?
16. Of what material was the *mizbe'ach ha'olah* composed?
17. The *kiyor* was made from copper mirrors. What function did these mirrors serve in Egypt?
18. How did the *kiyor* promote peace?
19. The *kiyor* was made from the mirrors of the women who were crowding at the entrance to the *Ohel Mo'ed*. Why were the women crowding there?
20. Of what material were the "yitdot hamishkan" constructed?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 35:1 - The day after *Yom Kippur*.
2. 35:2 - To emphasize that the building of the Mishkan doesn't supersede the laws of Shabbat.
3. 35:3 - There are two opinions: One opinion is to teach that igniting a fire on Shabbat is punishable by lashes as opposed to other "*melachot*" which are punishable by death. The other opinion is to teach that violation of numerous "*melachot*" at one time requires a separate atonement for each violation.
4. 35:18 - The edges of the curtains were fastened to them. These were inserted in the ground so the curtains would not move in the wind.
5. 35:19 - They covered the *aron*, the *shulchan*, the *menorah*, and the *mizbachot* when they were packed for transport.
6. 35:26 - It was spun directly from off the backs of the goats.
7. 35:27 - The Nesi'im reasoned that they would first let the people contribute materials needed for the Mishkan and then they would contribute what was lacking. The Torah shows its dissatisfaction by deleting a letter from their title.
8. 35:30, 35:34 - Bezalel ben Uri from the tribe of Yehuda; Ohliav ben Achisamach from the tribe of Dan.
9. 36:3 - Morning.
10. 36:14 - It was made into curtains to be draped over the Mishkan.
11. 36:35 - *Cherubim*. (See Rashi 26:31)
12. 37:1 - Because he dedicated himself to its building more than anyone else.
13. 37:7 - On the two extremities of the *kaporet* (cover of the *aron*).
14. 37:23 - Seven.
15. 37:25,26 - Wood overlaid with gold.
16. 38:1-2 - Wood overlaid with copper.
17. 38:8 - These mirrors aided in the proliferation of the Jewish People. The Jewish women in Egypt would look in the mirrors so as to awaken the affections of their husbands who were exhausted by their slave labor.
18. 38:8 - Its waters helped a woman accused of adultery to prove her innocence.
19. 38:8 - To donate to the Mishkan.
20. 38:20 - Copper.

Q & A

PEKUDEI

Questions

1. Why is the word Mishkan stated twice in verse 38:21?
2. Why is the Mishkan called the "Mishkan of Testimony"?
3. Who was appointed to carry the vessels of the Mishkan in the *midbar*?
4. Who was the officer in charge of the *levi'im*?
5. What is the meaning of the name Bezalel?
6. How many people contributed a half-shekel to the Mishkan? Who contributed?
7. Which material used in the *bigdei kehuna* was not used in the coverings of the sacred vessels?
8. How were the gold threads made?
9. What was inscribed on the stones on the shoulders of the *ephod*?
10. What was on the hem of the *me'il*?
11. What did the *Kohen Gadol* wear between the *mitznefet* and the *tzitz*?
12. What role did Moshe play in the construction of the Mishkan?
13. Which date was the first time that the Mishkan was erected and not dismantled?
14. What was the "tent" which Moshe spread over the Mishkan (40:19)?
15. What "testimony" did Moshe place in the *aron*?
16. What function did the *parochet* serve?
17. Where was the *shulchan* placed in the Mishkan?
18. Where was the *menorah* placed in the Mishkan?
19. Who offered the communal sacrifices during the eight days of the dedication of the Mishkan?
20. On which day did both Moshe and Aharon serve as *kohanim*?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 38:21 - To allude to the *Beit Hamikdash* that would twice be taken as a "mashkon" (pledge) for the sins of the Jewish People until the nation repents.
2. 38:21 - It was testimony for the Jewish People that G-d forgave them for the golden calf and allowed His *Shechina* to dwell among them.
3. 38:21 - The *levi'im*.
4. 38:21 - Itamar ben Aharon.
5. 38:22 - "In the shadow of G-d."
6. 38:26 - 603,550. Every man age twenty and over (except the *levi'im*).
7. 39:1 - Linen (See Rashi 31:10).
8. 39:3 - The gold was beaten into thin plates from which threads were cut. (See Rashi 28:6).
9. 39:6, 39:7 - The names of the tribes.
10. 39:24,25 - Woven pomegranates and golden bells.
11. 39:31 - *Tefillin*.
12. 39:33 - He stood it up.
13. 40:17 - *Rosh Chodesh Nissan* of the second year in the desert. For seven days before this, during the consecration of Aharon and his sons, Moshe erected and dismantled the Mishkan. (Rashi 39:29)
14. 40:19 - The curtain of goatskin.
15. 40:20 - The *Luchot Habrit*.
16. 40:21 - It served as a partition for the *aron*.
17. 40:22 - On the northern side of the *Ohel Mo'ed*, outside the *parochet*.
18. 40:24 - On the southern side of the *Ohel Mo'ed* opposite the *shulchan*.
19. 40:29 - Moshe.
20. 40:31 - On the eighth day of the consecration of the Mishkan.

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WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Vayakhel/Pekudei: Animal Sounds

“Horses neigh and donkeys bray.” As every English-speaking child knows, roosters say “cock-a-doodle-do.” Yet, Israeli children will tell you that roosters crow, “koo-koo-ri-koo.” Similarly, while American children might imitate a dog by saying “bow-wow” or “ruff-ruff,” an Israeli child would instead say: “hav-hav.” All of these differences can be chalked up to onomatopoeia, which is the notion that some words are derived from the sounds associated with what those words denote. Because societies sometimes perceive sounds differently, they will sometimes refer to those sounds in different ways. What seems to be true across the board, though, is that in all languages the words for animal sounds seem to be derived from onomatopoeia. In this essay we will explore animal sounds in the Hebrew language and show how they are not synonyms in the same way that the English verbs *meow* and *bark* are not synonyms.

In English, we might say that a lion roars or growls, a cow moos, a hart coos, a bird chirps, a horse neighs, a bear snarls, etc... The notion that there are different verbs to denote each animal's particular sounds is also found in Hebrew. In his epic response to Menachem Ibn Saruk (920-970), the early Hebrew grammarian Donash Ibn Labrat (920-990) was one of the first to notice that Biblical Hebrew uses different verbs to denote the sounds that different animals make. Menachem himself makes this point in *Machberes Menachem* when discussing the biliteral root GIMMEL-AYIN, but Donash elaborated on the idea further.

In lines 82-83 of his poem, Donash writes that a hart is *oreg* (Ps. 42:2), a lion is *nohem* (Prov. 19:12, 28:15), a cow/ox is *goeh* (I Shmuel 6:12, Iyov 6:5), a horse is *tzohel* (Jer. 5:8), and a bird is *mitzaftzef* (Isa. 10:14, 29:4, 38:14). In his more prosaic comments, Donash adds that a lion is *shoeg* (Amos 3:8, Yechezkel 22:25, Ps. 104:21), a bear is *shokek* (Prov. 28:15), a wild donkey is *nohek* (Iyov 6:5), and

a dog is *novayach* (Isa. 56:10). Each of these different verbs applies to the sound-making of a specific creature. Donash additionally notes that the verb *yehegeh* applies both to the noise that a lion makes (Isa. 31:4) and to the noise that a dove makes (Isa. 59:11). (In the printed editions of Donash, the verb used for the wild donkey is *nohem*, not *nohek*. However, this is most likely a scribal error because the verb *nohem* never appears in the Bible concerning the wild donkey, while *nohek* does. By the way, the Talmud (*Berachot* 3a) also uses the verb *nohem* to denote the sound made by a dove.)

Interestingly, Donash also writes in that passage that a *gever* (“rooster”) is *tzorayach*. However, this understanding seems to be based on a mistaken reading of Tzephania 1:14 and Isa. 42:13, which use the verb *tzorayach* to denote the battle cry of a *gibbor* (“human warrior”), not *gever*.

In the Bible, the verb *noer* appears once – in reference to a lion cub's roar (Jer. 51:38). Yet, in the Talmud (*Berachot* 3a), the verb *noer* refers to the sound that a donkey makes. Rabbi Nossen of Rome (1035-1106) in *Sefer HaAruch* explains away this discrepancy by noting that this verb primarily refers to the young lion's roar, and it was used by the Talmud to refer to a donkey's bray only in a borrowed sense.

In various places, Rashi also cites Donash's list of different verbs that denote the sounds that animals make (or at least parts of that list). For example, see Rashi's comments to Isa. 8:19, 29:4, Yoel 1:20, Ps. 42:2, Prov. 28:15, Iyov 6:5, and *Chullin* 53a. Rashi (to *Chullin* 53a) adds that another verb in Biblical Hebrew for a dog's barking is *charatz* (see Ex. 11:7).

Rashi takes this idea a step further and offers various Aramaic equivalents to some of the Hebrew terms that we have encountered. For example, Rashi (to *Chullin* 53a) writes that the

Aramaic *meuh* is equivalent to the Hebrew *nohem* (lions), and the Aramaic *mikarkar* is equivalent to the Hebrew *goeh* (cows/oxen). When talking about horses, Rashi (to *Chullin* 79a, *Sotah* 42a) writes that the Aramaic *tzrif* is the equivalent to the Biblical *tzohel*. However, elsewhere the verb *tzrif* is used to describe the noise made by a wild chicken (see *Targum Sheini* to *Esther* 1:2). Needless to say, none of these three Aramaic words ever appear in the Bible.

As an aside though, the word *tzanif* in Biblical Hebrew means “crown” (*Isa. 62:3*, *Zech. 3:5*, *Iyov 29:14*). Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to *Deut. 25:18*) connects the word *tzanif*, which denotes something round whose ends are connected, to the word *zanav* (“tail”), which denotes the back-end appendage of an animal. His justification for drawing this comparison is the interchangeability of TZADI and ZAYIN, as well as PEH and BET.

An apocryphal Midrash describes the colorful sounds made by the enchanted animals etched into King Solomon’s throne. That Midrash associates a few more verbs with the sounds produced by various animals. Most of these words do not appear in the Bible: a hart is *tzohel*, a tiger is *tzorayach*, a sheep is *chonev*, a wolf is *zorer/zored*, a deer is *mifaret*, a bear is *migamgem*, a donkey/ibex is *mavrim/mavris*, an elephant is *nohem/tofes*, a Re’em is *mitzatzel*, and a giraffe is *milavlev*. This Midrash is cited by the Kabbalistic work *Sodi Razi* (*Hilchos Kisei*) ascribed to Rabbi Elazar Rokeach of Worms (1176-1238), as well as by Rabbi Avraham ben Shlomo of Yemen’s commentary to *I Kings 10:18*. (See also *Tosefta D’Targum* to *I Kings 10:20*, and *Targum Sheini* to *Esther* 1:2.)

As is his way, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenehim of Breslau (1740-1814) offers etymological insights into some of these words for animal sounds by tracing them to their core biliteral roots. For example, he writes that the word *goeh* for a cow’s moo is derived from the root GIMMEL-AYIN (“exertion to the point of exhaustion”), which gives us such words as *yagea* (“tired”), *yegiyah* (“toiling”), and *geviyah* (“expiration/death”). This is because, as Rabbi Pappenehim explains, a cow exerts much effort in letting out those moos.

In discussing the verb *mitzaftzef* (“chirping”), Rabbi Pappenehim explains that the core root is TZADI-PEH, from which words like *mitzapah* or *zipui* (“coating”), *tzofeh* (“gaze”), and *tzipiyah* (“anticipation”) are derived. The bird’s chirping expresses its anticipation and hope for the arrival of its mate and/or its food.

Concerning the word *novayach* (“barking”), Rabbi Pappenehim finds that its root is BET-CHET (“sound that travels through the air”), whose only other derivative is the first word in the term *avchat cherev* (*Yechezkel 21:2*), “the swooshing of a sword.”

When it comes to *shokek* to denote the bear’s roar, the Vilna Gaon (to *Prov. 28:15*) explains that this word is related to the word *shokek* in the sense of “desire,” because a bear is always hungry and desires food. Other commentators, like Ibn Janach and the Radak, explain that *shokek* does not refer to a bear’s roar, but to its sauntering gait as it walks. The way the Radak explains it, *shokek* is actually related to *shok* (commonly translated as “thigh,” but is more accurately the “calf”), which moves as one walks.

Rabbi Pappenehim argues that *shokek* is derived from the core meaning of the two-letter root SHIN-KUF, which means “making consecutive sounds.” He explains that when a lion is *shokek*, it produces consistent sounds one after the other. From this meaning, the word *teshukah* (“desire”) came about, because when one is in the throes of desire, one’s heartbeat becomes more noticeably consistent and consecutive. A tertiary meaning derived from this root is the word *neshikah* (“kiss”), which relates to SHIN-KUF either because it is the outward realization of one’s *teshukah*, or because kissing produces a distinct sound. Rabbi Pappenehim further explains that the word *neshek* as “weapon” relates to this root because the mechanics of the *neshek* create a certain type of noise, or because two opposing combatants approaching each other on the battlefield to fight resemble two lovers approaching each other for a kiss.

If you’ve been keeping track, there are four Biblical Hebrew words to denote the sound made by a lion: *shoeg*, *nohem*, *yehegeh*, and *noer*. Rabbi Yechiel

Michel Stern (Rav of the Ezras Torah neighborhood of Jerusalem) suggests that these different words reflect the different reasons *why* a lion might make noise. For example, the Vilna Gaon (to Prov. 28:15) explains that a lion “roars” (*shoeg*) when it is hungry. By roaring, the lion tries to show its dominance in order to cause other animals to freeze up in fear and become its prey. Yet, Rashi (to *Sanhedrin* 102a, *Berachot* 32a) writes that a lion is *nohem* when it has a lot of food to eat, such that it becomes especially happy and goes berserk. Rabbi Stern does not explain what causes a lion to be *yehegh* or *noer*.

Rabbi Pappenehim differentiates between these words for a lion’s roar by tracing them to their core roots. He explains that the word *shoeg* derives from the biliteral root SHIN-GIMMEL, which denotes “inadvertency” (like *shogeg*). He argues that *shoeg* specifically refers to the almost-involuntarily sound of letting out an emotional outburst in response to something painful or joyful.

Additionally, Rabbi Pappenehim traces the word *yehgeh* to the root HEY-GIMMEL, which primarily refers to “diligence” and “consistency,” making its derivative *yehgeh* refer to a lion’s consistent crying/sobbing.

In explaining the word *noer*, Rabbi Pappenehim offers a similar explanation. He traces that word to the two-letter root AYIN-REISH, which means “revealing.” Other words that come from this root include *ohr* (“skin,” i.e. the revealed/visible part of one’s body), *ervah* (“nakedness,” when a person’s body is *revealed*), *ta’ar* (“razor” a blade used for cutting hair and *revealing* the skin underneath), and *ar* (an “enemy” who *reveals* his enmity outwardly). *Eir* (“awake”) is also derived from this root because when one sleeps, his or her abilities are not readily apparent, but when they awaken, those abilities are suddenly *revealed*. Building on this last example, Rabbi Pappenehim explains that *noer* is an audible outburst that a lion suddenly lets out and *reveals* as being within his repertoire.

Finally, the term *nohem*, according to Rabbi Pappenehim, derives from the two-letter root HEY-MEM, “storminess” or “chaos.” Other words derived from this root include *hamon* (“multitudes,” i.e. masses joined together in a stormy or chaotic gathering) and *tehomot* (“depths of the sea,” where the deep sea waters are wild and stormy). When a lion is *nohem*, this roar is likewise an outward expression of some sort of inner turmoil and storminess (albeit done more deliberately than when a lion is *shoeg*).

Rabbi David Chaim Chelouche (1920-2016), the late Chief Rabbi of Netanya, argues that the words *nohem* and *nohek* are both derived from the two-letter root NUN-HEY. That root also yields the word *nehi* (Jer. 9:17-19, 31:14, Amos 5:16, Micha 2:4), which is an onomatopoeic interjection that denotes “sighing.” Rabbi Pappenehim, on the other hand, traces *nohek* to the monoliteral root KUF, which denotes “expulsion” and from which the biliteral NUN-KUF (“cleaning”) is derived. He consequently explains *nohek* as audible moaning or sighing intended to “clean/clear” the heart of suffering.

In summation, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) notes that the very word for “animals” in Hebrew – *behemot* (singular: *behemah*) – relates to the different noises that come from them. He explains that the root of the word *behemah* is HEY-MEM(-HEY), which means “incoherent noise” (like Rabbi Pappenehim’s explanation of that root). Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) similarly writes that the word *behemah* derives from the root BET-HEY-HEY, which is an onomatopoeic representation of a common animal sound (“baaaa”). He links this to the ancient Latin and Old Irish word *bo(s)* (an etonym of the English *bovine*, also related to *bous* in Greek and *bol/vol* in various Slavic languages). Either way, the *behemah* differs from the human being – who is sometimes called a *middaber* (literally, “speaker”) – because humans have the unique ability to produce understandable sounds through what we call speech, while animals just make sounds.

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rcklein@ohr.edu

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

TO BELIEVE IS TO BEHAVE (PART 2)

(LAILAH GIFTY AKITA)

"These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world, but whose principal remains intact in the World to Come. They are: honoring one's parents; acts of kindness; early arrival at the study hall in the morning and the evening; hosting guests; visiting the sick; providing the wherewithal for a bride to marry; escorting the dead; praying with concentration; making peace between two people; and Torah study is the equivalent of them all."

(Tractate Shabbat 127a)

The first mitzvah on this list is honoring parents. There is a fascinating narrative in the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 8:4), which describes how, when G-d began to give the Ten Commandments to the Jewish nation at Mount Sinai, the monarchs of the other nations of the world were not impressed. After hearing each of the first four commandments, they rationalized that any sovereign would put in place such directives since they are directives that emphasize the absolute authority of the ruler. But, on hearing the fifth commandment — honoring parents — they all stood up and praised G-d, admitting that when a human king is crowned, he immediately denies his parents. He thinks that his parents are a distraction and detraction from the offspring's royal dignity. However, G-d commands for *everyone* to honor their parents. The commentaries explain that the kings of the other nations understood, "retroactively," that the first four commandments were not given to honor G-d, but rather to benefit mankind.

In his explanation of the mitzvah, *Sefer HaChinuch* writes the reason behind this mitzvah is to emphasize the trait of acknowledging any kindnesses done to a person — what is called in Hebrew *makir tovah* — and to instruct us to reciprocate in kind. The author continues, "A person should not act as if he never received anything from his fellow man, as such an attitude is disgusting before G-d and before man. His father and mother brought him into the world. From when he was a child, they toiled to raise him. He should always remember this and truly honor them in every way possible."

Interestingly enough, the Jerusalem Talmud (Peah 1:1) describes the mitzvah of honoring parents as being both one of the most exalted mitzvahs and, at the same time, one of the most difficult mitzvahs to fulfill perfectly. In fact, it is so lofty that in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Kiddushin 30b, our Sages describe honoring parents as being akin to honoring G-d Himself. By honoring our parents we are attaching ourselves to the long and glorious chain stretching all the way back to the Giving of the Torah. The mitzvah is so great in scope that Rabbi Simcha Bunim Alter (1898-1992), known as the Lev Simchah and who was the sixth Rebbe of Gur, taught that every person is born with a specific allocation of days and years from Heaven that dictate how long they will live in this world. However, the amount of time that one devotes to fulfilling the mitzvah of honoring one's parents is not part of the Divine calculation. In effect, honoring parents is the source of "extra life," because it is not part of the original reckoning!

Rabbi Meir Simcha HaKohen of Dvinsk (1843-1926), one of the most brilliant and prominent leaders of Ashkenazic Jewry between the two World Wars, points out in his timeless commentary *Meshech Chochmah* on the Torah that the Holy Temple was built on the portion of land belonging to Binyamin. (Each Tribe was assigned a specific portion in the Land of Israel with the exception of Levi.) Why was the Tribe of Binyamin chosen to be the recipient of such an honor? Binyamin was the only brother who was not involved in selling Yosef into slavery. Binyamin was the only one of the brothers who did

not cause his father grief. Therefore, in Divine acknowledgement, the Holy Temple – a place of peace – was built in his portion.

Rabbi Shimon Schwab, in his epic work *Ma'ayan Beit HaShoeva*, explains that the reward that one receives in this world for fulfilling the mitzvah is not physical. Rather, it is a spiritual reward. This means that each of us must work on our awareness that we are attaching ourselves to G-d by performing the mitzvah of honoring our parents – and that by doing so we can reach a sense of tranquility that will carry us through the more difficult times as well.

The Talmud (Tractate Berachot 17a) describes the behavior of students studying Torah taking leave of each other before returning home. They would bless each other with a beautiful but somewhat enigmatic blessing. They would say, “May you see your world in your lifetime.” According to the Rabbis, the simple

understanding of the blessing is that all of a person’s needs should be met here in this world.

However, the Baal Shem Tov had a different explanation of this blessing. He was an 18th century mystic who introduced a revolutionary approach to keeping the Torah and worshiping G-d, called *Chassidut*, which was a synthesizing of the spiritual and the physical realms in a way that enabled every Jew to do the will of G-d through warmth and love. The Baal Shem Tov explained the meaning of the blessing as follows: “May you see your *future* world (i.e. the World to Come) in your lifetime.” When one serves G-d with purity and intent, it is possible to experience the tranquility and the intense clarity that is normally reserved only for the World to Come.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Vayakhel

Moshe Rabbeinu exhorts the *Bnei Yisrael* to keep Shabbat, and requests donations for the materials for making the Mishkan. He collects gold, silver, precious stones, skins and yarn, as well as incense and olive oil for the Menorah and for anointing. The princes of each tribe bring the precious stones for the *Kohen Gadol*'s breastplate and *ephod*. G-d appoints Betzalel and Oheliav as the master craftsmen. *Bnei Yisrael* contribute so many resources, such that Moshe begins to refuse donations. Special curtains with two different covers were designed for the Mishkan's roof and door. Gold-covered boards in silver bases were connected, forming the Mishkan's walls. Betzalel made the Holy Ark (which contained the Tablets) from wood covered with gold. On the Ark's cover there were two figures facing each other. The Menorah and the table with the showbreads were also of gold. Two Altars were made: a small incense Altar of wood, overlaid with gold, and a larger Altar for sacrifices, made of wood covered with copper.

Pekudei

The Book of Shemot concludes with this Torah portion. After finishing all the different parts, vessels and garments used in the Mishkan, Moshe gives a complete accounting and enumeration of all the contributions and of the various clothing and vessels that had been fashioned. *Bnei Yisrael* bring everything to Moshe. He inspects the handiwork and notes that everything was made according to G-d's specifications. Moshe blesses the people. G-d speaks to Moshe and tells him that the Mishkan should be set up on the first day of the first month, i.e., Nissan. He also tells Moshe the order of assembly for the Mishkan and its vessels. Moshe does everything in the prescribed manner. When the Mishkan is finally complete with every vessel in its place, a cloud descends upon it, indicating that G-d's glory was resting there. Whenever the cloud moved away from the Mishkan, *Bnei Yisrael* would follow it. At night the cloud was replaced by a pillar of fire.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

Vayakhel

Sanctuary, Sin, Sanctuary

The order of events in the second half of the book of Shemot has much to teach. The sin of the golden calf is flanked on each end by a commandment to build a dwelling place for G-d. First, the people are commanded to build a Tabernacle, a place where the Divine Presence will rest among them. Then, the nation committed what remains the gravest sin in our national history. Upon forgiveness, and re-giving of the Tablets, Moshe again instructs the people in the name of G-d, regarding the construction of that Dwelling Place.

The great betrayal had jeopardized the relation of the command to erect a Dwelling Place, but in the end, these events were of the most far-reaching significance for the command itself, and for the purpose of the Dwelling Place.

Now, the Mishkan would have to be constructed under the impact of this experience. The people had come to realize how weak and imperfect they still were, and how much they needed to improve themselves — how much they needed the uplifting and atonement that the Mishkan could provide. They had also come to experience G-d in the severity of His judgment and rejection, and then, in the fullness of his grace when they regained His favor.

The renewed command to build the Mishkan, then, carried a significant message: The Mishkan would be a place where, at any stage of error and weakness, the Jewish People could find renewed strength to work their way up again on high, find the strength of will to persevere on the lofty heights of their calling, and find G-d's help and blessing. The recording of the sin of the golden calf at a point in time, *between* the command to build the Mishkan and the instruction regarding execution of that command, stands as testimony that it is possible at any stage of error to return to and regain G-d's grace.

There is another critical lesson to be learned from the forgiveness granted before the building of the Sanctuary. The greatest national crime was committed, and the *highest* grace was attained from G-d — *without* the Sanctuary and *without* offerings. Thus, we learn that the Sanctuary and the offerings do not themselves secure G-d's favor, but are intended only as guides in the process.

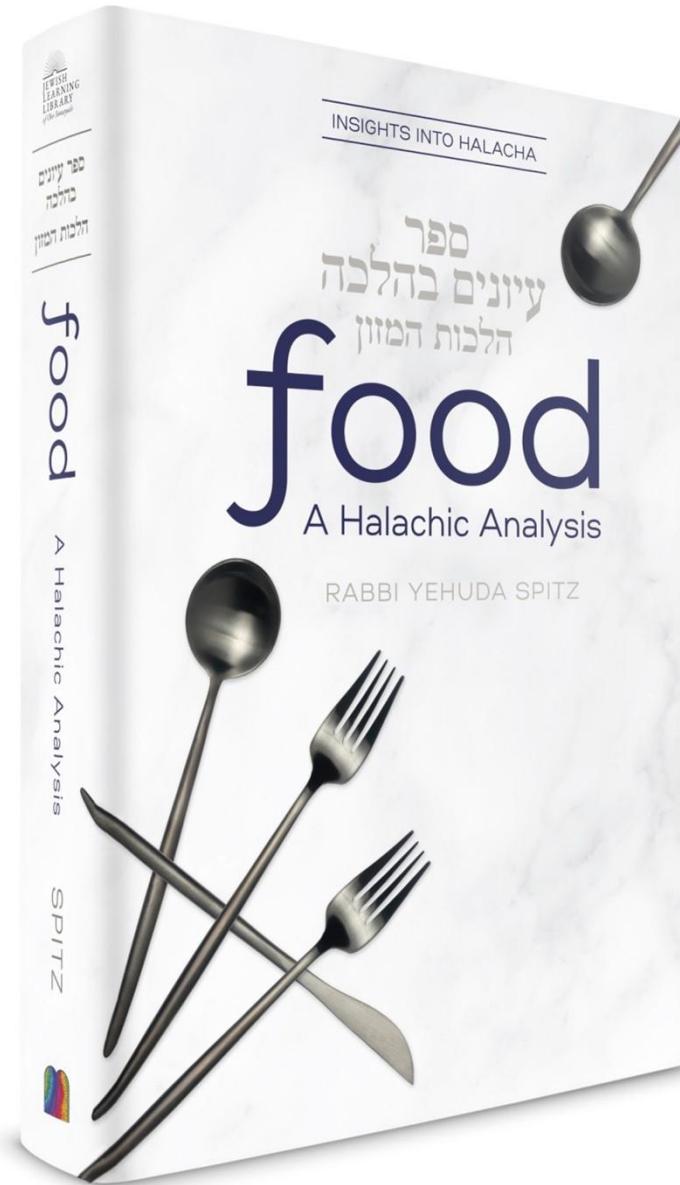
- Sources: Commentary, Shemot 35:2

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