

## Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 9 #22, February 25, 2022; 18 Adar 1, 5782; Vayakhel; Shekalim; Mevarchim HaHodesh 5782

**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 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

---

**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.**

---

**Now available: recording of Dr. Michael Matsas' interview on The Illusion of Safety – the Nazis' tragic slaughter of 87% of the Jews of Greece during World War II. Listen on YouTube at [https://youtu.be/F\\_hgB0ExYRo](https://youtu.be/F_hgB0ExYRo) Copy of Dr. Matsas' book also at Beth Sholom library.**

---

We Jews focus this week and next on the climax of Sefer Shemot. Vayakhel details how B'Nai Yisrael completed the construction of the Mishkan precisely how God commanded that Moshe convey His instructions. Next week we read how God's presence came to the Mishkan with an intensity greater than that at Har Sinai. (At Har Sinai, Moshe could enter Hashem's presence and talk to Him face to face. However, God's intensity at the Mishkan was so great that Moshe could not even approach the Ark without Hashem first inviting him to do so.)

Rabbi Ovadia (below) observes that we see God's love for B'Nai Yisrael when we realize that the Torah presents the mitzvah of Shabbat immediately before Egel Zahav and twice immediately after. The sin of Egel Zahav was so great that B'Nai Yisrael deserved to be destroyed immediately (according to the covenant of Divine Justice at Har Sinai), but the protection from Shabbat in the Torah and Moshe's brave defense of the Jews enabled our ancestors to survive. Under the new covenant of Divine Mercy (34:5-7), God forgave B'Nai Yisrael, permitted them to build the Mishkan, and brought His presence there so He would live among our people.

Moshe's primary message in Vayakhel, when he gathers the people, is Shabbat. Rabbi Ovadia contrasts Shabbat with idolatry and notes that all pagan leaders eventually become tyrants who focus on power and desire – sins that eventually lead to their destruction. Russia's tyrant-in-chief Putin endorsed this conclusion this very day by invading Ukraine. Although the birthplace of my grandmother's family and the families of countless Jews in earlier times, most Jews do not consider this country, with its history of pogroms and anti-Semitism, to be a genuine Jewish homeland. Stories of frightening pogroms during the pre-World War I period and joyous killings as the Nazis invaded during World War II meant that my grandmother and many others would never have returned to Ukraine even after it became (temporarily) free of Russia. Only a new tyrant could be worse than the old tyrant.

The construction of the Mishkan uses much of the same language and parallels God's creation of the world, as Rabbi David Fohrman (alephbeta.org) and Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, (below) both discuss. The laws of Melacha (activities forbidden on Shabbat) identify thirty-nine categories of activities involved in building the Mishkan. (The only activity that the Torah specifically identifies as forbidden is building a fire.) As Rabbi Sacks explains, items do not have inherent holiness. They only become holy as a result of human actions in accordance with the will of Hashem. Har Sinai was only holy during the Revelation. The first Luchot, which God made and engraved Himself, were holy (because of God's work), but as an object, Moshe could destroy the Luchot without sinning. The Mishkan became holy through God's instructions and the melacha of many Jews. For six days, the Jews were to perform melacha to build the Mishkan. On the seventh day, they were instead to make Shabbat – another form of melacha, but this one refraining from construction to make Shabbat holy.

As with so much in the Torah, the underlying theme in Vayakhel is man's search for a way to recreate a close relationship with Hashem, what we gave up when sin forced man out of Gan Eden. The project to create a Mishkan was God's way to permit B'Nai Yisrael to come close to God's presence in space. Shabbat, perhaps the key focus in Vayakhel, is a way to come close to God's presence in time. As Rabbi Fohrman notes, Einstein's theory of relativity holds that the faster one travels through space, the slower one travels through time. Movement through time is the inverse of movement through space. The two ways of approaching God's presence, through space and through time, are mirror images of each other.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, devoted his work life to bringing the beauty of our religion and heritage to me, my family, and many other individuals and families. He took great pride in having many of his congregants become leaders of communities and congregations all over the world. Our greatest legacy is leaving children and grandchildren to remember us and carry on the best of our lessons to new generations.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Alan & Hannah

---

**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](http://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 Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers.** I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

---

**Drasha: Vayakhel: More Than Giving**  
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 2001

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

In this week's combined reading of two 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. [note: because of the leap year, this year we read only Vayakhel this week.]

The Torah triumphantly 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). In the Torah, the Divine document whose preciseness stimulates discussion on its extra drops of ink, the expression, "There was enough for the completion of the task and there was extra," seem quite contradictory.

Last year, I pointed out the strange juxtaposition of contradictory terms. 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 though what was given amounted to enough, for some reason it was considered extra. How?

**It was a cold Chicago winter night back in early 1951. The State of Israel Bonds annual dinner was hosting none other than Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion as the guest of honor and featured speaker. The ballroom was**

packed. The non-kosher event attracted members of Chicago's wealthiest business and professional secular Jewish leadership, all who braved the frigid temperatures to support the fledgling state. They hovered around the ballroom, offering contributions at a rapid-fire pace, while carefully balancing both their martinis and checkbooks.

There was nary a yarmulke in sight. However, one individual, who stood in a corner of the massive lobby, outside the ballroom, was markedly unique. He wore a long dark caftan and sported a large black fedora. His beard encircled a face that was lined with the creases of hours of Torah study. His piercing eyes darted about the scene, observing the philanthropic flurry of activity. An ancient relic tucked in the corner of a sea of modernity, he stood stoically, observing the entire scenario, a slight smile emanating from his lips.

He was about to leave the hotel and return to the Yeshiva at which he taught when a loud voice boomed from behind him. "Rabbi Mendel Kaplan! What bring you to the Israeli Bonds Dinner?"

Rav Mendel turned around. He stood face to face with one of Chicago's wealthiest philanthropists. Though a very secular Jew, the man was still a major supporter of the Yeshiva at which Rabbi Kaplan was employed. Rabbi Kaplan was known in the Yeshiva as quite a zealous individual who disapproved of many of the policies surrounding the Labor party and the Prime Minister, and so, baffled, the man continued his mocking inquisition.

"Surely you did not come to pay your respects to the Prime Minister and join us in this event!" He added sarcastically. Then he broke into a wider grin. "I am positive you did not come here to partake in a little shellfish!" The man let out a slight guffaw.

Rabbi Kaplan did not return the tease. Instead, his answer was open, honest, and quite blunt. "I came here for one reason," he began, "to stand and watch how the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob stand in line in order to give charity."

Some people give. They give and leave. The impact of their gift is felt only as far as the dollar will go. When the food is finished, the clothing worn, or the dollars spent, the donation becomes interred into the pile of good deeds relegated to history. Of course, the impact lives on, generating futures, but the giving is confined, even stunted, with no impact that exceeds the actual gift.

But there is another type of giving. Its act has more impact than the dollars could buy. Its enthusiasm sweeps a wave of goodwill with it. It becomes an anchor for others to emulate. It inspires, it enthuses, and it stimulates. The charitable act may consist of a paltry sum, but the enthusiasm contains much more. Perhaps that is what the Torah meant, "It was enough and more." Monetarily, may be it was just enough. But the impact of the first collection of charitable contribution is what inspired generations of Jews to stand in line and give continuously. It inspired them to built the Bais HaMikdash, it inspired them to redeem captives, to build Yeshivos, to furnish hospitals and to support the yishuv in Eretz Yisrael. True, what the Jews gave thousands of years ago was just enough, but history tells us, it was more.

---

### **Magical Reflections**

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \* © 2022

The Kiyor was the receptacle which held the water in the Mishkan. From it the Kohanim would wash their hands before they started their daily service. Remarkably, it was made of the copper mirrors that the women donated.

Rashi tells us that at first Moshe was reluctant to accept the women's mirrors for the holy Mishkan. Hashem told Moshe, "These are very dear to me, because the women used the mirrors during the enslavement in Egypt to make themselves beautiful in the eyes of their husbands." These mirrors were used in an expression of hope; they represent the women's faith in the Jewish future. And so, the Kohanim would encounter the donation of the mirrors, before they began their daily service.

When we consider the function of a mirror we recognize that it enables a person to take a good look at his or her self. Typically, it gives us a picture of our external self, and enables us to know if we are looking good and, for example, which hairs to adjust. It is probable that the Kiyor retained some of those mirror-like qualities, and served as an opportunity for the Kohein to look at himself, not just in a physical sense, but in a spiritual sense. As a Kohein would wash his hands to start his service in the Sanctuary, he would "look himself in the mirror," and reflect on his life-journey in a very personal way. Only after such a personal encounter was he ready to proceed.

The commentaries tell us that one of the reasons for the daily, ritual washing -- which is to be done every morning by every Jew -- is to parallel the service of the Kohanim (Mishna Berura 4:1). Just as the Kohanim washed their hands as they stepped forward into their daily service so should we. Just as the Kohanim were recognized to be in the service of G-d, so should every Jew see his or her self as worthy of that same perspective.

It follows that just as the Kiyor had the mirror-energy to be reflective, an energy that was transformed from physical reflection to spiritual reflection, so should our thoughts be, as we wash in the morning. How convenient it is that in our time, many sinks used for morning washing have a mirror adjacent to them. At the same time that we wash our hands, it is also a time to "look ourselves in the mirror," not just a physical mirror, but also the spiritual, conceptual, mirror of self-encounter.

Sometimes the things that are on our minds as we start the day are just routine, every-day tasks that need to get done. But sometimes the things that emerge when we reflect are things that seem impossible to achieve. "It would take a miracle," we might sigh to ourselves.

We would do well to ponder the power of the mirrors, and the power that was the Kiyor. Rashi (38:8) tells us that the marriages of the Jews during the enslavement in Egypt were in jeopardy because of their exhaustion and their feelings of hopelessness. The mirrors enabled the Jews to do the impossible, to rejuvenate their marriages in a most beautiful way.

Similarly, Hashem said, "The water for the Sotah shall come from the Kiyor, to inform the husband of her innocence," if indeed, she was innocent. The mirrors, and the reflective energy which they imply, are well beyond the natural course of daily tasks and events. These mirrors accomplished the impossible in restoring family harmony, and were invested with the power that could bring the miracle of the Sotah waters to a husband and wife. Particularly when things look hopeless, the morning washing has the power of hope and can spread its magic.

The morning washing is a place where physical cleanliness and spiritual yearnings meet. Ask yourself: Where am I up to in my life goals? What things are in order, and what things need some fixing? Then, put your best foot forward, and encounter the blessings of your day.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

© Copyright 2022 by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of over 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are [www.care-mediation.com](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com). **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

---

## Seeing the Light, With Shadows: Thoughts for Vayakhel

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

The chief architect of the Mishkan (sanctuary) was Bezalel, named specifically by the Almighty to undertake this sacred task. The Torah describes Bezalel as a person filled with the spirit of God “in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship” (Shemot 35:31).

In this week’s Torah portion (as in previous Torah portions), Bezalel’s name includes reference to his father, Uri, and his grandfather, Hur. Because of the unusual inclusion of his grandfather’s name, the Midrash suggests a special reason why Hur was mentioned. Hur was one of the leaders of the Israelites. He and Aaron were second in command to Moses. Yet, we hear very little about Hur in the text of the Torah. The Midrash suggests that when the Israelites wished to fashion the golden calf, Hur stood up in bold resistance to the proposed idolatrous behavior. As a result of his moral courage, the people murdered him and then compelled Aaron to make the golden calf. The Almighty, as a reward to Hur for his valiant spiritual heroism, chose Hur’s grandson Bezalel to be the architect of the Mishkan. Thus Bezalel is identified in the Torah as son of Uri and grandson of Hur, making sure that Hur’s name is associated with the building of the sanctuary.

While the Midrash provides a dramatic homiletic story, nothing in the text of the Torah suggests that Hur indeed did resist the Israelites’ demand for an idol or that he was martyred for his spiritual heroism.

Perhaps the identification of Bezalel as son of Uri and grandson of Hur may be interpreted in another way. This interpretation is based on the literary significance of the three names.

The name Hur is related to the Hebrew word “Hor” — meaning a cave, a dark place. Uri is related to the Hebrew word “Or” — meaning light. Bezalel literally means “in the shadow of God.” Why was Bezalel chosen as the master artist and architect of the Mishkan?

Let us put his names together, starting from the earliest generation. Hur reminds us of darkness. Wisdom begins in “nothingness,” in a dark void of inner searching. But then wisdom proceeds into the light, into flashes of insight. This stage is suggested by the name Uri, light. Finally, though, wisdom requires the ability to balance darkness and light, to see nuances and subtleties. This is suggested by the name Bezalel, whose very name reminds us of shadows; not just any shadows, but “Godly” shadows, shadows of a wisdom so deep that it is sensitive to the mysteries of darkness and light. Bezalel was chosen because of his special gift of wisdom and his aesthetic sense; he combined the technical talents of an architect with the spiritual and aesthetic sense of an artist.

The larger message is that life, including religious life, operates on different levels. We need to tend to technical details and precise requirements in order to maintain orderly lives. But we also need to contemplate spiritual foundations, the underlying meanings of our technical actions. Thoughtful people plumb into the darkness of philosophical, spiritual yearnings.

A rabbinic teaching has it that wisdom is found in nothingness. Wisdom seeks ultimate meaning, and it begins with the humble and mysterious searching through darkness. But then, the serious seeker will have flashes of insight, glimpses of the light of truth. A person might think, though, that once he/she has “seen the light,” truth has been found once and for all. This is a grave mistake. A person must move to the higher level of wisdom: the ability to see “shadows,” to balance darkness and light, to live with nuances, uncertainties, hints and mysteries. Although knowledge of technical reality is essential, wisdom infuses knowledge with meaning, subtlety, sanctity.

Perhaps this is the message implied by the names of Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur. We begin in darkness, we move to light; but we then strive to live in the shadow of God, a world of shadows and hidden meanings, a world of wisdom and aestheticism, a world of reality and soulfulness.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/seeing-light-shadows-thoughts-vayakhel>

\*\* The Angel for Shabbat column is a service of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, fostering an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism. Please join our growing family of members by joining online at [www.jewishideas.org](http://www.jewishideas.org)

**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](http://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.**

---

## **The Great Privilege of being a Jew**

by Douglas Altabef \*

Let's face it: the raging debate about Jews having white privilege is a bit absurd.

Jews are basically a historical Rohrschach depiction of a People. In other words, we take the form, we are regarded through the eyes of those who perceive us.

For most of the past two millenia, Jews were certainly not regarded as being like other people. In Europe, we were first the Christ-rejectors/killers, who per Augustine, were being kept around in order to bear witness to our own degradation and supersession by the Church.

Not too much privilege there.

Come the Enlightenment, and we became the great chameleons of civilization. We could be morphed from usurious capitalists to stateless communists in the blink of an eye. We were vermin, who were still managing somehow, thanks to the Rothschilds, to control the world.

Pretty exhausting, if you ask me.

Jews were a subhuman race, who threatened the purity of the Aryans. But we also threatened the peasantry of Poland and Russia. And after the Enlightenment, we were a threat by virtue of the fact that many Jews sought to convert to Christianity in order to gain access to the higher reaches of their society.

In Muslim countries, we were tolerated as dhimmis, second class citizens. We couldn't wear the same clothes as others, nor walk on the same sidewalk if it meant inconveniencing a passing Muslim.

So where is the privilege from? It comes from the now dirty word called "achievement."

Jews who fled pogroms, death sentence conscriptions in the Tsar's or the Sultan's armies, who typically came to America with nothing, worked hard and saw their children and grandchildren rise.

Jews sacrificed, educated their children, embraced America and the American dream and vision, and they succeeded.

Somehow, that has a sinister ring to it. Somehow, to a great many people today, that cannot explain what Jews are about. There must be some secret sauce, some hidden card that has made it all possible. Could that be our latent privilege?

Or is privilege what happens when you work hard and succeed? Besides achieving material success, and social acceptance, can you achieve privilege?

Well, allow me to let you all in on a little secret. I, a proud Jew, am wildly privileged. Not because I might or might not be white, but because through no work of my own, by happy Providence, I was born into a Jewish family of two wonderful Jewish parents and was raised to be the next link of the Jewish chain.

I was shown that, despite the mind-boggling persecution, disdain, vulnerability, powerlessness, instability and uncertainty of what it meant for thousands of years to be a Jew, I was somehow, nevertheless, a card carrying, bona fide Jew.

Meaning, that against any and all odds of historical endurance, I was allowed to come into the world as a Jew. I was privileged to stand on the shoulders of generations of ancestors who had decided, against all good common sense, to stay as Jews.

I had ancestors who were expelled from Spain rather than take the easy way out of kissing a cross and letting it all go.

I had ancestors who toiled in poverty and constant uncertainty in Galicia, and in the Ottoman Empire, yet who believed that they had been endowed with something worth keeping.

So yes, I am enormously privileged. Because I have had the privilege to validate the struggles and sacrifices of those who enabled me to do all of that.

And to top it all off, I packed up my privileged self and, together with my privileged wife and one of our privileged children, moved to Israel, which has to be the most privileged place on earth.

We moved to a place that for almost 2000 years was a dream, an idea, a memory, a yearning. But not really a place.

But through the will power, fueled by the suffering of all those generations who were - let's be candid here - hated, despised and loathed by most everyone around them - of Jews who refused to give up the fraught privilege of being Jews, the place that was a dreamy memory, became a gritty reality.

And the gritty reality survived against the same kind of odds that Jews have been facing for close to forever. So, this place, Israel, succeeded, and of course by doing so, it must be guilty of unspeakable crimes against - you fill in the blank - because that is what it means to be a Jew.

You do things that shouldn't be able to be done. You endure things that shouldn't be put up with. That is part of the existential job description of what it means to be a Jew.

And I cannot imagine a greater privilege than the opportunity to be part of it all.

\* Chairman of the Board of Im Tirtzu, Israel's largest grassroots Zionist organization, and a Director of the Israel Independence Fund. Reprinted from the Jewish Press, February 25, 2022.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/great-privilege-being-jew>

---

## **Shekalim – Understanding G-d** by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \*

The obligation to read the Maftir Shekalim discussing the donations for the Mishkan comes from a Gemara in Megilla 29b. The Gemara explains that at the time of the Temple, there was an obligation that the daily burnt offerings brought during Nissan should be purchased with new donations, and not with money from last year's donations. In order to ensure this

was possible, there was an annual collection made in Adar. The Maftir reading uses the word “Terumah” (tithe) three times. The Gemara explains that each word is referring to a different donation, and the third donation is the donation used to purchase the animals for the sacrifices. We read this Maftir near the beginning of the month of Adar, in lieu of these donations.

This is based on a Gemara in Menachos (110a). Rabi Yitzchak notes that we find an unusual phrase throughout the section teaching the laws of the Korbanos/sacrifices in the sixth chapter of Vayikra. Hashem begins teaching the laws for each type of sacrifice with the phrase, “This is the Torah of” (i.e. This is the Torah of the Burnt Offering; This is the Torah of the Sin Offering, etc.) He explains that this is to teach us that when we study the Torah laws of the sacrifice we are merited in Heaven as if we have brought the sacrifice. We, therefore, study the Torah portion about donating for the sacrifices so it will be considered as if we donated.

If we stop and consider this, though, it is difficult to understand the need and purpose for this practice. The donations were simply given now in preparation for bringing sacrifices from fresh donations. There was no specific obligation to donate at this time. The focus, then, of this practice is that we want the merit of bringing the sacrifices themselves. However, that merit would seem to be served by studying the laws of the sacrifices themselves. Indeed, many have the custom to recite sections of the Torah about the Daily Sacrifice every morning, and some say it before Mincha, as well. Why, then, are we so focused on this detail of the donations?

One can also ask that there is another means which has already been established for providing us with the merit of the sacrifices – the daily prayers correspond to the daily sacrifices. This is based on a possuk in Hoshea, “And we will pay cows with our lips” (Hoshea 14:3). The commentaries explain that we will pay for the cows we are obligated to bring as sacrifices when we repent through our prayers. Our sincere repentance and prayer will be viewed as sacrifices. If we have the daily prayer, why do we also need to study these laws?

The purpose of the sacrifices in the Temple was for us to come close to G-d through giving gifts to Him as a means of recognizing His love for us and expressing our love in return. Prayer is an expression of our recognition that G-d cares about our needs and is ready to help us. Torah study can also serve this function. True Torah study is not simply a study of law. Rather, it is the study of G-d’s Will, of what G-d wants from us and of how we can connect with Him. When we study the nuances and details of Torah law, this can be an expression of our desire to understand G-d and to connect with Him. Just as one truly listens to a spouse or close friend, if they want to understand them and connect with them, so too, through careful Torah study we can express our love for G-d. It is these expressions of our recognition of G-d’s love and of our desire to show our love in return which make prayer and Torah study a meaningful replacement for the sacrifices.

Perhaps, this is why we focus on this detail of the donations and don’t simply rely on the daily prayers and the reading of the sacrifice itself. The merit we are seeking is not the merit of the sacrifices themselves. It is the merit of understanding G-d, knowing His love for us and expressing our love in return. This merit requires true devotion and true interest in what is important to G-d. If we truly want the merit of the sacrifices then we need to listen fully to what G-d wants. We need to study not only the sacrifices, but the details, even the timing of the donations. Only through the details can we truly know and express our connection with G-d.

\* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

---

## **Shabbat vs. Idolatry**

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

Shabbat is the last commandment given to the Israelites before they make the Golden Calf, and it is mentioned twice immediately afterwards (Ex. 31:12-18; 34:21; 35:1-3). In the first occurrence Shabbat is called a covenant, and in the last it is introduced with the words VaYakhel Moshe – Moshe gathered the congregation. The story of the Golden Calf, the epitome of Idolatry, is thus surrounded by the idea of Shabbat as a covenant between us and God. The Shabbat also conveys the message of a community. Shabbat is the opposite of idolatry, which the Torah refers to as other gods, or alien gods. Paganism is a false religion, created by individuals or societies to allow them to do as they wish in the name of their gods. Because humans crave power and want to satisfy their base needs, all pagan societies eventually became tyrannical or decadent. The focus of these societies on power and desire led to their destruction.



By contrast, the Torah offers a way of life which guides us on a path of spiritual and emotional growth. Once we recognize our power and our importance to society, we are prompted to help others. In this manner, the Torah has created a community of people who care about one another and who constantly synchronize their spiritual engine. The most important tool in this Guide to Life is the Shabbat. Shabbat permits us to rest, physically and mentally. It allows us to take care of ourselves and give to others, creating a beautiful community. The story of the Golden Calf, which could have spelled the end of the Israelites, is encased in the protective shell of the Shabbat.

## Women in the Mishkan

The women had a special role in the making of the Mishkan. According to the Midrash, they did not take part in the sin of the Golden Calf and were therefore rewarded. They were the first ones to bring their contribution to the Mishkan. They were also honored with being the guardians of Rosh Hodesh, a celebration marking the constant cycle of life.

Writes Rabbenu Bahya ben Asher (Zaragoza, Spain, 1255-1340):

*When Aharon asked the people to give him their jewelry to make the Golden Calf, he asked for the Jewelry of men, women, and children, but only the men gave theirs (Ex. 32-23). But when they were asked to give their jewelry for the Mishkan, they gave it with great enthusiasm, even though it was very precious and dear to them. When the men came to bring their contribution, the women were already there. They were the first to perform the Mitzvah.*

Rabbi Yosef Haim, aka the Ben Ish Hai (Baghdad, 1835-1909), writes that the women knew that the construction of the Mishkan comes to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf. They did not sin, so they dedicated their work to redeem their men from the punishment of transgression. To make the men feel that they took active part in the work, the women wove the curtains before shearing the wool, and then let the men shear the final product.

\* Torah VeAhava (now SephardicU.com). Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD) and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school).

---

## Absence of Fire

By Rabbi Ezra Seligsohn \*

Shabbat shalom. I wanted to talk with you this week about fire.

In the beginning of this week's parsha, Moshe gathers the people and teaches them about Shabbat. "Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day, you shall rest" (Ex. 35:2). What is unique in this week's parsha is that we have the introduction of one of the primary categories of work, lighting a fire, that's prohibited on Shabbat. The pasuk states "Lo teva'aru esh bechol moshvateichem beyom hashabbat," You shall not kindle any fire in all of your dwellings on the day of Shabbat (Ex. 35:3). The Rabbis offer many explanations as to what is unique about this mitzvah that the action of lighting needs to be singled out amongst the types of work that one is supposed to refrain from on Shabbat. I wanted to pick up on one literary connection that I think points towards the nature of Shabbat.

This phrase of "Lo teva'aru esh," you shall not kindle a fire, has the roots of boer and esh, of lighting and fire. These roots only show up one other time before this in the Torah. When Moshe arrives on the mountaintop with the burning bush, at the very beginning of his journey, the Torah says "Vehineh hasneh boer baesh vehasneh einenu ucal," that this bush was burning but it was not being consumed (Ex. 3:2).

We realize that this moment, when Moshe comes face-to-face with God for the first time and begins his conversation with God, manifests in this bush that is boer baesh. A bush that is being kindled with fire. Fire from that point on comes to signify God's presence. The fire that leads them in the desert, that protects them from the Egyptians. The fire on the top of Har Sinai. It all harkens back to this original bush that is boer baesh.

When the Torah says you may not use fire on Shabbat, it is also telling us that you don't need fire to feel the presence of God. So much of Sefer Shemot is about the Jewish people experiencing God as fire. God as the destructor, the punisher of Egypt. God as the fiery flame above Har Sinai.

The meaning of this halakha, of this law, is saying that you can have Shabbat, you can have God even without that fire and intensely felt heat, warmth, and presence that's evoked by fire. You can still have a Shabbat, you can still have a feeling and a connection with the Divine, but it's not one that comes through that intense presence. Rather it's one that comes through absence, through resting, through stepping back, through a lack of work, a lack of fire.

It's this powerful metaphor to say that on the Shabbat, we're not going to have fire. We're not going to be dependent on God's explicit presence. We are going to seek presence through absence. We will find the gaps, the spaces where there is no fire, no productivity, no intensity, and say yes, God is here too. This is our Shabbat.

\* Associate Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, "The Bayit."

\*\* From Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah: Friends, it has been my true privilege these many years to share with you my thoughts on the parsha, both in written form and more recently as videos. Now the time has come to pass the baton over to our amazing rabbis in the field. I know that we will be enriched by their insights and unique and distinct perspectives, as they bring the Torah, refracted through the lens of their rabbinates and the people they are serving, to all of us. We start with Rabbi Gabe Greenberg, executive director of Penn Hillel.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2022/02/vayakhel22/>

---

## **Tabernacles and The Modern Gym**

By Rabbi Moshe Rube \*

Once when checking out a certain gym in Birmingham, I asked the owner to show me his pricing for different gym membership and personal training plans. He took out a laminated sheet which had all the information.

I looked over all the options and knowing I wouldn't remember it all, asked the owner if he had a sheet I could take out with me. He shook his head no, and said he doesn't give it out. When I asked why, he said, "Because people have taken the sheets, gone to other gyms and asked them to match our prices."

I agreed that that wasn't right and succeeded in making him laugh when I remarked, "Yeah there are a lot of gyms here in Alabama. Almost as many as there are churches."

Modern gyms are funny places. I laugh whenever I think about it too much. Having them around reminds us that our bodies were not built for this century. If I were designing the human body for 2022, I'd design it that it gets healthier whenever it sits down and looks at a computer screen. (Not to mention making brownies and ice cream as healthy as kale.)

Many of us don't work careers anymore that require us to perform the type of arduous movement that our bodies are designed for and that help keep it healthy.

So we've improvised and created a contrivance like the gym or the treadmill where we can imitate the actions that our body wishes to do. Instead of using our bodily capabilities to earn our daily bread, we spend our daily bread so we can use our bodies the way they were meant to be used.

And it works! "Getting your sweat on" feels good and feeds us those lovely endorphins which keep us happy and alert. In this way we can pursue other worthy pursuits even if they are sedentary while feeling the sense of vitality and strength that exercise can provide. We can have our kale and eat it too. (And of course in Judaism, we have a special mitzvah to keep our bodies healthy. Health of body, mind, and soul are all one.)

Life in 2022 is full of these little paradoxes. It would be more efficient nowadays if sitting would be as healthy as walking. It would be more efficient if a facebook like satisfied our human need for social interaction. It would be more efficient if we could satisfy our need for sacred belonging only through a screen.

But we're human. We do have needs that we can't just wish away just because it's a different century. Humanity does not change as quickly as time.

As the construction of the Tabernacle commences in our Torah portion this week, we can remember what Hashem said in Parshat Terumah. "Build the Tabernacle so I can dwell amongst Israel." The point of the Mishkan was never to rein God in to just that place, but provide us an allowance so we can exercise our human need for a place of sacred belonging. This provides the way to the human heart where God truly wishes to reside.

So why do we need the Mishkan? Why do we need this Godly gym? Would it not be more efficient to just carry God in our hearts while we're sitting and staring at our screens at home or at work?

Yes, but we're humans and that's what we need. That's a lesson that God "learned" last week when we stumbled and made an error as humans do. So even though a more efficient way could have been contrived, God gives us what we need because He recognizes the human condition.

And it's more fun this way. As I said, to consider all these paradoxes of modern life makes me laugh. I believe some author called this all too human life a "Divine Comedy." No wonder King David said that God sits and laughs in heaven. Maybe we're finally starting to get the humor.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rabbi Moshe Rube

P.S. Even looking at it through a strict evolutionary lens, religion/sacred belonging is beginning to be recognized as a necessary part of what made us human and a crucial step for living in a healthful way. See *The Righteous Mind* by Jonathan Haidt Phd and *The Spiritual Child* by Lisa Miller Phd.

With this in mind, could our distinctions between body and spirit be just a contrivance of language? Do they even exist or do those words just point to different ways humans experience themselves? Can the study of neuroscience provide any clues? What Torah sources can you think of that may help shed light on this? And on a personal level, where does your mind go when you start considering this?

\* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

---

## **Rav Kook Torah** **Vayakheil: Technology and the Sabbath**

The Torah forbids 39 different categories of activity on the Sabbath. Yet only one — lighting fire — is explicitly prohibited in the Torah. Why?

And why does the Torah qualify the prohibition of lighting fire with the phrase, "in any of your dwellings"? Is it not forbidden to start a fire in any location?

### **Guidelines for Technology**

The control and use of fire is unique to humanity. It is the basis for our advances in science and innovations in technology. Even now, fuel sources for burning, coal and oil, are what power modern societies. In short, fire is a metaphor for our power and control over nature, the fruit of our God-given intelligence.

What is the central message of the Sabbath? When we refrain from working on the seventh day, we acknowledge that God is the Creator of the world.

One might think that only the pristine natural world is truly the work of God. Human technology, on the other hand, is artificial and perhaps alien to the true purpose of the universe. Therefore, the Torah specifically prohibits lighting fire on the Sabbath, emphasizing that our progress in science and technology is also part of creation. Everything is included in the ultimate design of the universe. Our advances and inventions contribute towards the goal of creation in accordance with God's sublime wisdom.

Along with the recognition that all of our accomplishments are in essence the work of God, we must also be aware that we have tremendous power to change and improve the world. This change will be for a blessing if we are wise enough to utilize our technology within the guidelines of integrity and holiness.

### Fire in the Temple

This caveat leads to the second question we asked: why does the Torah limit the prohibition of lighting fire on the Sabbath to “your dwellings”? The Talmud (Shabbat 20a) explains that lighting fire is only forbidden in private dwellings, but in the Temple, it is permitted to burn offerings on the Sabbath. Why should fire be permitted in the Temple?

The holy Temple was a focal point of prophecy and Divine revelation. It was the ultimate source of enlightenment, for both the individual and the nation. The fire used in the Temple is a metaphor for our mission to improve the world through advances in science and technology. We need to internalize the message that it is up to us to develop and advance the world, until the entire universe is renewed with a new heart and soul, with understanding and harmony. Permitting the technological innovation of fire in Temple on the Sabbath indicates that God wants us to utilize our intellectual gifts to innovate and improve, in a fashion similar to God’s own creative acts.

We need to be constantly aware of our extraordinary potential when we follow the path that our Maker designated for us. At this spiritual level, we should not think that we are incapable of accomplishing new things. As the Talmud declares, “If they desire, the righteous can create worlds” (Sanhedrin 65b). When humanity attains ethical perfection, justice will then guide all of our actions, and scientific advances and inventions will draw their inspiration from the source of Divine morality, the holy Temple.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 164-165. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. III, p. 53.)

<http://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAYAK62.htm>

---

### Where does the Divine Presence live? (Vayakhel/Pekude 5770)

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

Finally the long narrative of the construction of the Tabernacle – to which the Torah devotes more space than any other single subject – is at an end. The building, its frame, drapes and sacred furniture, were complete. Moses inspects the finished project. We then read:

*The Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Moses saw all the work, and behold – they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. So Moses blessed them.*  
Ex. 39:43

Like many other passages in the description of the making of the Tabernacle, this echoes a line from the creation narrative: “God saw all that He had made, and behold – it was very good” (Gen. 1:31 – the words in common are Vayar, “he saw,” et kol, “all” and ve-hineh, “and behold”).

The literary parallels between the Divine creation of the universe and the Israelites’ construction of the Tabernacle are intentional and consequential. The Tabernacle was a micro-cosmos, a universe-in-miniature. In creating the universe, God made a home for humanity. In building the Sanctuary, humanity made a home for God. And just as, at the beginning of time, God had blessed creation, so Moses blessed those who had a share in its human counterpart.

What, though, was the blessing Moses gave? The Torah itself is silent on this point, but the Sages supplied the missing information.

With what blessing did Moses bless them?

*He said to them: “May it be God’s will that His Presence rests in the work of your hands.” They responded: “May the pleasantness of the Lord our God be upon us. Establish for us the work of our hands, O establish the work of our hands” (Psalm 90:17). Sifre to Bamidbar, 143*

The Midrash is based on the following stream of thought. One, and only one, psalm is attributed to Moses: Psalm 90, which bears the superscription, "A prayer of Moses, the man of God." It ends with the verse cited above, "May the pleasantness (noam) of the Lord our God be upon us." The reference in the verse to "the work of our hands" must surely refer to the Tabernacle – the only "work," in the sense of constructive achievement, the Israelites performed in Moses' day. Hence the phrase "a prayer of Moses" must be understood as the prayer/blessing he pronounced on the completion of the Tabernacle.

The question then arises as to the meaning of the words "the pleasantness of the Lord." Another Psalm (27:4) uses an almost identical phrase: "One thing I ask of the Lord, only this do I seek: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the pleasantness (noam) of the Lord and worship in His Temple." This suggests that both psalms are a reference to the Sanctuary (in the Wilderness, the Tabernacle; in a later era, the Temple), and that "the pleasantness of the Lord" is a poetic way of describing the cloud of glory that filled the Tabernacle ("Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle," Ex. 40:34) – in other words, the Divine Presence. Thus when Moses said, "May the pleasantness of the Lord our God be upon us," he meant: "May it be God's will that His Presence rests in the work of your hands."

It is a beautiful idea. Is it, though, something more? There is a hint here of a principle that has immense implications for the entire structure of Judaism. We can summarize it simply: **It is not objects that are holy. It is human action and intention in accordance with the will of God that creates holiness.** [emphasis added]

Consider the following ruling of the Sages (see Gittin 45b; Mishneh Torah, Yesodei ha-Torah 6:8; Tefillin 1:13): A Torah scroll, or tefillin, or a mezuzah, written by a heretic, is to be burned. Normally, to destroy a document containing God's name is absolutely forbidden. However, in this case, as Maimonides explains: "Since the person who wrote it does not believe in the sanctity of the name of God, and therefore did not write it with the requisite intent but merely as any other [secular] text, the [document containing] God's name is not sanctified [and may be destroyed]. Indeed it is a mitzvah to burn it so as to leave no record of heretics and their works."

Imagine two Torah scrolls, one written with the requisite intention and sanctity, the other written by an atheist. Physically, they may be indistinguishable. One cannot imagine any scientific test that – by examining the scrolls themselves – would establish which was holy and which not. Yet one is to be held in the highest possible sanctity, and the other to be burned. Holiness is not a property of objects. It is a property of human acts and intentions.

It is this idea that lies behind the very precise formula we use when we recite a blessing over the performance of a command: "Blessed are You . . . who has sanctified us by His commandments, and has commanded us to . . ." It is the commandments that make us holy: nothing else. When God said to the Israelites, before the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, "You shall be to Me a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6), He meant that the Israelites would become holy through their performance of the commands he was about to reveal to them, not that there was anything intrinsically holy about them, prior to and independent of the commands. As Issi ben Judah said:

*"When God enjoins a new mitzvah on Israel, He endows them with new holiness."* Mechilta, Massechta de-Kaspa, 20

The great commentator and halachist R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843-1926, often known by the name of one of his commentaries, Ohr Sameach) was tireless and forceful in stressing the point. Mount Sinai was – as the site of the greatest ever revelation of God – momentarily the holiest place on earth, yet as soon as the revelation was over, even animals were permitted to graze on it (Meshech Chochmah to Ex. 19:13). The first Tablets Moses brought down the mountain were supremely sacred. They had been hewn and written by God himself. Yet Moses broke them to show the Israelites that nothing is holy except in the context of fulfilling God's will (Meshech Chochmah to Ex. 32:19). We endow objects and places with holiness, through our intentions, our words and our deeds. There is no such thing as ontological holiness, intrinsic sanctity.

Returning to the Sanctuary, the very idea that there can be a "house of God" – that we can create, in finite space, a home for the Infinite – seems a contradiction in terms. Indeed, Israel's wisest King, Solomon, and one of the greatest of its Prophets, Isaiah, said so explicitly. On dedicating the Temple, Solomon said: "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain You. How much less this Temple I have built." (I Kings 8:27). Likewise

Isaiah said, “This is what the Lord says: Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. Where is the House you will build for Me? Where will My resting place be?” (Isaiah 66:1).

The answer was given by God to Moses at the very outset, before the construction of the Tabernacle was begun:

“Let them make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell in them” – not “in it” but “in them” — not in the building but its builders, not in wood and metal, bricks or stone, but in those who build and those who worship. It is not objects, buildings, or places that are holy-in-themselves. Only acts of heart and mind can endow them with holiness.

That is the deep meaning of Moses’ blessing to the Israelites: “May it be God’s will that His Presence rests in the work of your hands.” God does not inhere in things – not in Mount Sinai, not in the Tablets, not in the Tabernacle. His Presence (the word *Shechinah*, Divine Presence, comes from the same root as *Mishkan*, Sanctuary or Tabernacle) lives in “the work of our hands” – whatever we do in accordance with His will. There was nothing grand about the Tabernacle. It was small, fragile, portable. What made it holy was one thing only, that the Israelites “had made it just as the Lord had commanded”.

The simplest human act, if done for the sake of God, has more sanctity than the holiest of holy objects. That, to me, is a remarkable principle of faith.

[Note: For early Devrei Torah, including this one, footnotes are no longer available.]

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/pekudei/where-does-the-divine-presence-live/>

---

### **Braveheart or Wiseheart?**

By Yossi Goldman \* © Chabad 2022

I think Jack Benny was quoting Mark Twain when he said, “Age is mind over matter. If you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter.”

In Jewish thought, however, we seem to focus more on ‘mind over heart’ than ‘mind over matter.’

In 1812, Napoleon and his French army invaded Russia. Despite his promises of liberty and equality for the Jews, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi was opposed to Napoleon, in contrast to many other Russian Jewish leaders at the time. He understood that Napoleon’s way would lead to much assimilation, and, despite highly prevalent Czarist antisemitism, he supported the Russian campaign against France.

He even sent one of his senior chassidim, Rabbi Moshe Meisels, to work as an interpreter at French military headquarters so he could pass on vital military secrets to the Russians. One day, Napoleon himself burst into the military command and spotted Meisels. Immediately, he accused him of being a spy and put his hand on his chest to see if his heart was beating furiously, which would reveal his fear and expose the truth. But Moshe Meisels remained completely calm and replied to Napoleon that he was simply serving as a translator since he was fluent in both Russian and French. The danger passed.

Rabbi Moshe would later say that the fundamental Chassidic principle — the mind rules the heart — literally saved his life.<sup>1</sup>

In his foundational treatise, the *Tanya*, Rabbi Schneur Zalman insists that all humans have the innate natural capacity to control their feelings and desires if they make a genuine attempt.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this seems to be a fundamental principle of our faith, as we must believe that, ultimately, we will all face accountability for our decisions.

But how can we be held accountable if we are overcome by the desire for wrongdoing? As hard as it may be in the moment, we always ultimately have the freedom to choose how we will respond. The mind has the strength to control the heart and its desires.

This can help us understand a phrase repeated throughout this week’s Torah reading. Concerning the instructions to build the Tabernacle, the very first House of G d, we come across the phrase *chacham lev* – wise hearted. “Every wise-hearted person among you shall come and make everything which G d has commanded.”<sup>3</sup> We are also told that the wise-hearted

women spun the goats' hair needed for the Sanctuary in their own uniquely talented way.<sup>4</sup> The phrase wise-hearted recurs again and again throughout the parshah.

But wise-hearted sounds contradictory. Wisdom is a faculty of the rational mind, our intellect. The heart, on the other hand, is the seat of our emotions, which are often anything but rational. In life, mind and heart are often at loggerheads. G d gave intellect to be able to discern good from bad, right from wrong. The heart, though, makes us creatures of habit, unable or unwilling to exercise rational judgment when making decisions.

Aren't we all too familiar with our own constant inner struggles between mind and heart? The heart pushes us to schmooze with our neighbor in shul. The mind interrupts and tells us the rabbi is speaking. The heart says, "That's a nice smartphone." The head says, "It's not yours." The heart says, "She's gorgeous." The mind tells us, "She's married."

Isn't that why every Yom Kippur we klop "Al Chet" by beating our chests over our hearts when recounting and confessing our sins of the past year? We pound our hearts because it was most likely the heart that got us into trouble in the first place. Had we followed our rational minds instead, we would have been far less likely to make those mistakes and commit those very sins.

So how are we to understand the paradoxical phrase, wise-hearted?

In the context of our Biblical storyline, we are discussing the gracious and generous contributions of the people who helped build the Sanctuary. Whether by their material contributions or by their sheer hard work, they demonstrated their commitment to doing good by giving of themselves. They were truly wise-hearted people.

We all know the famous "wise son" from the Pesach Seder night. He's the clever boy, the sharp one, the ever-favorite son. The world admires smart people. They are respected and revered in academia; they command hefty salaries in the corporate world.

I remember reading how in the dark days of pre-glasnost Communist Russia, when there was no such thing as free enterprise, there was a completely different system of one-upmanship. How did ambitious people flaunt their achievements? How did they outdo their peers? Not with money, property portfolios, or stocks and bonds, but with university degrees and doctorates. He who has the most degrees, wins.

But doctorates, degrees, dissertations, and scholarly papers don't guarantee that one is honest, decent, upright, or caring. For that we need, not a good brain, but a good heart! We need people who are not only clever, but kind. The wise ones must have heart too.

The "wise son" may be very smart, but he can also be shrewd, spiteful, manipulative, and downright dangerous. Do you really think Kim Jong Un is an idiot? He may look like a ridiculous cartoon character, but he's no fool. He is toying with presidents and prime ministers and controls an arsenal of military hardware threatening all the free world. Iran's Ayatollahs may look like pathetic relics of an ancient empire, but they may well be laughing all the way to nuclear power, G d forbid. We need truly wise men and women, not mischievous 'wise guys.'

The term wise-hearted is also used to describe Betzalel, the talented architect and designer of the Sanctuary.<sup>5</sup> Unlike other brilliant individuals from whom the world sees no benefit, Betzalel shared his wisdom. He taught his juniors the intricacies of the sacred projects and shared his knowledge liberally and generously.

So, I would submit that wise-hearted is an exceptionally good turn of phrase after all. A mind without a heart may be cold, sterile, and even evil. And a heart needs a mind to guide and direct it correctly. The wise-hearted have both intelligence and empathy, a truly admirable combination.

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. Letter from 1935, printed in Igrot Kodesh Rayatz, vol. 3, pg. 312.
2. Tanya, Chapter 12.
3. Exodus 35:10.

4. Exodus 35:25.

5. Exodus 36:1.

\* Founding director of the first Chabad in South Africa (1976). Now New Life Rabbi Emeritus, Sydenham Shul, and President of the South African Rabbinical Association.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/5402604/jewish/Braveheart-or-Wiseheart.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5402604/jewish/Braveheart-or-Wiseheart.htm)

---

## Window or Mirror

By Menachem Feldman\* © Chabad 2022

The Jewish people were eager to donate. The project, the building of the Tabernacle in the desert, was a symbol that, despite the pain of betrayal with the Golden Calf, the relationship had been restored and strengthened. G d desired to dwell in the midst of the Jewish camp.

The people donated enthusiastically: bracelets; earrings; rings; blue, purple and crimson wool; linen; goat hair; red-dyed ram skins; tachash skins; silver and copper were some of the items that were gifted.

There was, however, one item that Moses refused to accept.

The Torah describes that the women contributed even more than the men. They even brought their mirrors to be used in the sanctuary. But Moses refused to accept the mirrors. A mirror, he argued, is the antithesis of the sanctuary. A mirror is used to adorn the externality of the person; it intensifies a person's pride and narcissism. A mirror is pure vanity and superficiality, a tool for self-worship. It has no place in the service of G d.

Moses saw the mirror as an enemy. Here was a tool designed to, at best, focus attention on the self rather than on the Divine, and at worst, a tool to create destructive lust and seduction.

Moses sought to create a transparent "window"; he sought to teach people how to view the world as a window through which one can see the awesome power of the Creator. The mirror, blocking the light and reflecting the vision back to the viewer, was the polar opposite of everything Moses stood for.

G d disagreed.

The Midrash describes how G d explained to Moses that not only should the mirrors be accepted, but indeed they were more precious than all the other gifts. For it is precisely the mirror that represents the purpose of creating the sanctuary, and more broadly, the purpose of creation itself.

G d explained to Moses that the mirror could be just as holy as it could be destructive. Desire and temptation could be, not ego-driven, but rather an expression of intense holiness. As Rashi explains:

*Even these [mirrors] they did not hold back from bringing as a contribution toward the Mishkan, but Moses rejected them because they were made for temptation [i.e., to inspire lustful thoughts]. The Holy One, blessed is He, said to him, "Accept [them], for these are more precious to Me than anything because through them the women set up many legions [i.e., through the children they gave birth to] in Egypt." When their husbands were weary from back-breaking labor, they [the women] would go and bring them food and drink and give them to eat. Then they [the women] would take the mirrors and each one would see herself with her husband in the mirror, and she would seduce him with words, saying, "I am more beautiful than you." And in this way they aroused their husbands desire and would copulate with them, conceiving and giving birth.<sup>1</sup>*

Every creation on this earth has a soul, an energy, which can be used for both good or evil. Ironically, the more potential this energy has for good, the more destructive it can be. The reverse is just as true: the more destructive the force, the deeper the goodness and enlightenment can be when it is transformed or channeled.



The mirror captures a deep truth. When glass is covered with a layer of silver that obstructs the transparency, the result is more profound. Looking at a mirror, while one cannot see forward, one is able to see behind. One will see the unexpected.

The mirror does not completely obstruct the light, as do other objects. Instead, it reflects the light that shines upon it. It symbolizes how the creation itself can reflect and express the Divine light.

Moses preferred clarity of vision. He was drawn to transparency, to a place where holiness is obvious. G-d explained that the purpose of the Tabernacle, which reflects the purpose of the creation of the world, was to be mirror-like, to see the holiness where it is least expected, to understand that desire can be an expression of transcendence and spirituality. The mirror reminds us that in order to experience the true profundity of the infinite G-d, one should look not directly upward to the transparent heavens, but rather one should look down here on earth, where the concealment of the material creates a deeper reflection of the oneness of G-d.<sup>2</sup>

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Rashi on Exodus 38:8.

2. Likkutei Sichot, Ki Tisa, vol. 6, sichah 1.

\* Scholar, writer, editor and anthologist, living in Jerusalem.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/4650917/jewish/Window-or-Mirror.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4650917/jewish/Window-or-Mirror.htm)

---

### **Vayakhel: Unity of the Jewish People**

By Chabad of Greater Dayton, OH

This week we read two Torah portions: Vayakhel, the regular weekly reading; and Shekalim, an additional reading for the beginning of the month of Adar II.

Vayakhel begins with Moses gathering all the Jews and sharing G-d's instructions for building a sanctuary. Vayakhel actually means "he gathered."

The second portion, Shekalim, is read at the end of the Torah reading, and describes the commandment for every Jew to donate a half-shekel coin, to be counted and used as the first official census of the Jewish people.

Both readings allude to the overall need for Jewish unity. Sure, we have our differences; no two Jews are alike. But at the same time, we have one important thing in common: the Jewish soul.

Coming together as one reminds us of this, and so does the identical donation of a half-shekel coin — regardless of their status, nobody gave more and nobody gave less. Everyone checked their differences at the door, so to speak. Everyone counted equally and was equally needed.

May we experience the ultimate Jewish unity, with the coming of Moshiach, very soon!

---

### **What it Means to Make Shabbat**

By Rabbi Moshe Wisniewsky \* © Chabad 2022

#### **What it Means to Rest on Shabbat**

*Moses told the Jewish people, "Work may be done for six days, but the seventh day must be holy for you, a complete rest from work": (Exodus 35:2)*

Spiritually, every week is a repetition of the week of Creation: G-d re-creates the world during the six workdays and "rests" every Sabbath. G-d "rests" by re-experiencing the original idea that gave rise to the creation of the world.

During the six original days of Creation, G-d attended to the details of executing His designs; after the master architect completed His masterpiece, He surveyed it and reviewed it as the fulfillment of His plan.

Thus, during the six workdays, the world is re-created by G-d's "creative" energy, whereas on the Sabbath, the world is created by G-d's "resting" energy.

Therefore, our task on the Sabbath is not to labor in rectifying creation, but to experience creation as the Divine dwelling we have worked to make it into during the week. We enter into this state of consciousness by refraining from the 39 categories of creative work we do in our weekday lives.

\* — from *Daily Wisdom*

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
Kehot Publication Society  
291 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

---

To receive the complete D'Vrai Torah package weekly by E-mail, send your request to [AfisherADS@Yahoo.com](mailto:AfisherADS@Yahoo.com). The printed copies contain only a small portion of the D'Vrai Torah. Dedication opportunities available. Authors retain all copyright privileges for their sections.

# Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah  
via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

Volume 28, Issue 22

Shabbat Shekalim - Parashat Vayakhel

5782 B"H

## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### The Spirit of Community

What do you do when your people have just made a Golden Calf, run riot, and lost its sense of ethical and spiritual direction? How do you restore moral order – not just then in the days of Moses, but even now? The answer lies in the first word of today's parsha: Vayakhel. But to understand this, we have to retrace two journeys that were among the most fateful in the modern world.

The story begins in the year 1831 when two young men, both in their twenties – one from England, the other from France – set out on voyages of discovery that would change both of them, and eventually our collective understanding of the world. The Englishman was Charles Darwin. The Frenchman was Alexis de Tocqueville. Darwin's journey aboard the Beagle took him eventually to the Galapagos Islands where he began to think about the origin and evolution of species. Tocqueville's journey was to investigate a phenomenon that became the title of his book: Democracy in America.

Although the two men were studying completely different things, the one zoology and biology, the other politics and sociology, as we will see, they came to strikingly similar conclusions – the same conclusion God taught Moses after the episode of the Golden Calf.

Darwin, as we know, made a series of discoveries that led him to the theory known as natural selection. Species compete for scarce resources and only the best-adapted survive. The same, he believed, was true of humans. But this left him with serious problem: If evolution is the struggle to survive, if the strong win and the weak go to the wall, then all ruthlessness should prevail. But this is not the case. All societies value altruism. People esteem those who make sacrifices for the sake of others. This, in Darwinian terms, doesn't seem to make sense at all, and he knew it.

The bravest, most sacrificial people, he wrote in *The Descent of Man* "would on average perish in larger number than other men." A noble man "would often leave no offspring to inherit his noble nature." It seems scarcely possible, he wrote, that virtue "could be increased through natural selection, that is, by survival of the fittest." [1]

It was Darwin's greatness that he saw the answer, even though it contradicted his general thesis. Natural selection operates at the level of the individual. It is as individual men and women that we pass on our genes to the next

generation. But civilisation works at the level of the group.

As he put it: A tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to give aid to each other and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes; and this would be natural selection."

How to get from the individual to the group was, he said, "at present much too difficult to be solved." [2]

The conclusion was clear even though biologists to this day still argue about the mechanisms involved. [3] We survive as groups. One person versus one lion: lion wins. Ten people against one lion: the lion may lose. Homo sapiens, in terms of strength and speed, is a poor player when ranked against the outliers in the animal kingdom. But human beings have unique skills when it comes to creating and sustaining groups. We have language: we can communicate. We have culture: we can pass on our discoveries to future generations. Humans form larger and more flexible groups than any other species, while at the same time leaving room for individuality. We are not ants in a colony or bees in a hive. Humans are the community-creating animal.

Meanwhile in America, Alexis de Tocqueville, like Darwin, faced a major intellectual problem he felt driven to solve. His problem, as a Frenchman, was to try to understand the role of religion in democratic America. He knew that the United States had voted to separate religion from power by way of the First Amendment, the separation of church and state. So religion in America had no power. He assumed that it had no influence either. What he discovered was precisely the opposite:

"There is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America." [4]

This did not make any sense to him at all, and he asked various Americans to explain it to him. They all gave him essentially the same answer. Religion in America (we are speaking of the early 1830s, remember) does not get involved in politics. He asked clergymen why not. Again they were unanimous in their answer. Politics is divisive. Therefore if religion were to become involved in politics, it too would be divisive. That is why religion stayed away from party political issues.

Tocqueville paid close attention to what religion actually did in America, and he came to some fascinating conclusions. It strengthened marriage, and he believed that strong marriages were essential to free societies. He wrote: "As long as family feeling is kept alive, the opponent of oppression is never alone." [5]

It also led people to form communities around places of worship. It encouraged people in those communities to act together for the sake of the common good. The great danger in a democracy, said Tocqueville, is individualism. People come to care about themselves, not about others. As for the others, the danger is that people will leave their welfare to the government, a process that ends in the loss of liberty as the State takes on more and more of the responsibility for society as a whole.

What protects Americans against these twin dangers, he said, is the fact that, encouraged by their religious convictions, they form associations, charities, voluntary associations, what in Judaism we call chevrot. At first bewildered, and then charmed, Tocqueville noted how quickly Americans formed local groups to deal with the problems in their lives. He called this the "art of association," and said about it that it was "the apprenticeship of liberty."

All of this was the opposite of what he knew of France, where religion in the form of the Catholic Church had much power but little influence. In France, he said: "I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country." [6]

So religion safeguarded the "habits of the heart" essential to maintaining democratic freedom. It sanctified marriage and the home. It guarded public morals. It led people to work together in localities to solve problems themselves rather than leave it to the government. If Darwin discovered that man is the community-creating animal, Tocqueville discovered that religion in America is the community-building institution.

It still is. Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam became famous in the 1990s for his discovery that more Americans than ever are going ten-pin bowling, but fewer are joining bowling

To sponsor an issue of Likutei Divrei Torah:  
Call Saadia Greenberg 301-649-7350  
or email: [sgreenberg@jhu.edu](mailto:sgreenberg@jhu.edu)  
<http://torah.saadia.info>

clubs and leagues. He took this as a metaphor for a society that has become individualistic rather than community-minded. He called it Bowling Alone.[7] It was a phrase that summed up the loss of “social capital,” that is, the extent of social networks through which people help one another.

Years later, after extensive research, Putnam revised his thesis. A powerful store of social capital still exists and it is to be found in places of worship. Survey data showed that frequent church- or synagogue-goers are more likely to give money to charity, regardless of whether the charity is religious or secular. They are also more likely to do voluntary work for a charity, give money to a homeless person, spend time with someone who is feeling depressed, offer a seat to a stranger, or help someone find a job. On almost every measure, they are demonstrably more altruistic than non-worshippers.

Their altruism goes beyond this. Frequent worshippers are also significantly more active citizens. They are more likely to belong to community organisations, neighbourhood and civic groups, and professional associations. They get involved, turn up, and lead. The margin of difference between them and the more secular is large.

Tested on attitudes, religiosity as measured by church or synagogue attendance is the best predictor of altruism and empathy: better than education, age, income, gender, or race. Perhaps the most interesting of Putnam’s findings was that these attributes were related not to people’s religious beliefs but to the frequency with which they attend a place of worship.[8]

Religion creates community, community creates altruism, and altruism turns us away from self and toward the common good. Putnam goes so far as to speculate that an atheist who went regularly to synagogue (perhaps because of a spouse) would be more likely to volunteer or give to charity than a religious believer who prays alone. There is something about the tenor of relationships within a community that makes it the best tutorial in citizenship and good neighbourliness.

What Moses had to do after the Golden Calf was Vayakhel – turn the Israelites into a kehillah, a community. He did this in the obvious sense of restoring order. When Moses came down the mountain and saw the Calf, the Torah says the people were pru’ah, meaning “wild,” “disorderly,” “chaotic,” “unruly,” “tumultuous.” He “saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies” (Ex. 32:25). They were not a community but a crowd. He did it in a more fundamental sense as we see in the rest of the parsha. He began by reminding the people of the laws of Shabbat. Then he instructed them

to build the Mishkan, the Sanctuary, as a symbolic home for God.

Why these two commands rather than any others? Because Shabbat and the Mishkan are the two most powerful ways of building community. The best way of turning a diverse, disconnected group into a team is to get them to build something together.[9] Hence the Mishkan. The best way of strengthening relationships is to set aside dedicated time when we focus not on the pursuit of individual self interest but on the things we share, by praying together, studying Torah together, and celebrating together – in other words, Shabbat. Shabbat and the Mishkan were the two great community-building experiences of the Israelites in the desert.

More than this: in Judaism, community is essential to the spiritual life. Our holiest prayers require a minyan. When we celebrate or mourn we do so as a community. Even when we confess, we do so together. Maimonides rules: One who separates himself from the community, even if he does not commit a transgression but merely holds himself aloof from the congregation of Israel, does not fulfil the commandments together with his people, shows himself indifferent to their distress and does not observe their fast days but goes on his own way like one of the nations who does not belong to the Jewish people – such a person has no share in the world to come.[10]

That is not how religion has always been seen. Plotinus called the religious quest, “the flight of the alone to the Alone”.[11] Dean Inge said religion is what an individual does with his solitude. Jean-Paul Sartre notoriously said: hell is other people. In Judaism, it is as a community that we come before God. For us the key relationship is not I-Thou, but We-Thou.

Vayakhel is thus no ordinary episode in the history of Israel. It marks the essential insight to emerge from the crisis of the Golden Calf. We find God in community. We develop virtue, strength of character, and a commitment to the common good in community. Community is local. It is society with a human face. It is not government. It is not the people we pay to look after the welfare of others. It is the work we do ourselves, together.

Community is the antidote to individualism on the one hand and over-reliance on the state on the other. Darwin understood its importance to human flourishing. Tocqueville saw its role in protecting democratic freedom. Robert Putnam has documented its value in sustaining social capital and the common good. And it began in our parsha, when Moses turned an unruly mob into a kehillah, a community.

[1] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, Princeton University Press, 1981, pp. 158-84.

[2] Ibid., p. 166.

## Likutei Divrei Torah

[3] This is the argument between E. O. Wilson and Richard Dawkins. See Edward O. Wilson, *The Social Conquest of Earth*, New York: Liveright, 2012. And the review by Richard Dawkins in *Prospect Magazine*, June 2012.

[4] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, abridged with an introduction by Thomas Bender, (New York: Vintage Books, 1954), I:314.

[5] Ibid., I:340.

[6] Ibid., I:319.

[7] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

[8] Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010.

[9] See Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together*, (London: Continuum), 2007.

[10] Maimonides, *Hilchot Teshuvah* 3:11.

[11] Andrew Louth, trans., *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 50.

---

### Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

---

“Take for yourselves an offering to the Lord. Let everyone whose heart moves him bring an offering to the Lord, gold and silver and copper... for the sanctuary and its tents and its coverings” (Exodus 35:5-11)

The last two portions of Exodus seem to repeat the two previous portions of Terumah and Tetzaveh, listing the precise dimensions, materials and furnishings of the desert sanctuary. Why is such a reiteration necessary?

Before responding, we must recall that the two portions which initially commanded the construction of the sanctuary are separated from Vayakhel and Pekudei, which repeat those instructions, by last week’s portion of Ki Tisa, which records the tragic incident of the Golden Calf. When we realize that according to most commentaries and midrashim, the idolatrous act with the calf occurred before the command to construct the sanctuary our problem becomes compounded. Why interrupt the story about the construction of the sanctuary with the account of the calf, and why repeat the instructions?

An analogy comes to mind: Picture an excited, engaged couple who spend the period before their wedding carefully choosing their marital home and shopping for its furnishings. Then the young groom-to-be leaves on a short business trip and is unexpectedly delayed. In his absence, his fiancée has an all-night tryst with a former boyfriend. If after the accusations, confession and breast-beating subsides, the couple resumes the search for an apartment and its accoutrements with the same enthusiasm they had before, we can feel assured that all has been forgiven and they are opening a new chapter in their relationship.

This is a metaphor for the biblical account of the Golden Calf and the construction of the sanctuary; the biblical groom is the Almighty and the bride is the People of Israel.

Our analogy may well explain the repetition as well as the placing of the calf story between the two accounts of sanctuary construction. But it leaves us with a profound religious problem. The Bible itself forbids a married (or betrothed) woman who commits adultery from returning to her betrothed/husband (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Why does God take Israel back after the Golden Calf? I believe it was because of Moses. In his defense of the Jewish people before God, he initially presents three arguments: First, You [God] redeemed them paternalistically with Your great power and strong hand before they were religiously capable of dealing with independence; second, Egypt will think You only took them out to kill them in the desert, and not because You wish every human being to be free; and third, You made an irrevocable covenant with the patriarchs that their seed will live in the Land of Israel (Ex. 32:11-14).

But it is only after Moses makes another, final plea; crying out, “And now if You would only forgive their sin! But if not, erase me now from this book that You have written” (Ex. 32:32) that God actually commands Israel to go up to the Land and conquer it – proving not only that He has forgiven them, but also that His covenant with them remains intact.

The great classical commentator Rashi interprets these words along the lines of Targum Yonatan Ben Uziel: “If You would forgive their sin, it would be good and I would not ask to be erased; but if You will not forgive them, then erase me from the entire Torah, that it not be said by future generations that I was not worthy to merit Divine compassion for them.” The Rashbam explains, “Erase me from the Book of Life” and the Ibn Ezra and Sforno have “Erase me from the Book of Eternal Life... and grant my merits to the Israelites so that they be forgiven.” The Ramban maintains, “...If You will forgive their sins out of Your compassion, it would be good; but if not, erase me instead of them from the Book of Life.”

For me, however, the interpretation truest to the plain meaning of the text comes from the Mateh Yosef, a disciple of the Hatam Sofer. Based on the Talmudic axiom (B.T. Shabbat 54b, 55a) that a leader must be held responsible for the transgressions of his “flock,” Moses tells the Almighty, “How is it possible that the nation could have transgressed in so egregious a manner? Clearly, I am not worthy to be their leader. Hence, whether or not You forgive their sin, You must erase me from Your book. You must remove me from leadership, because I have been proven to be ill-prepared...”

God responds that He only punishes the actual transgressors, not their “minister,” and God determines that Moses is still the best qualified to lead the nation. However, God also understands that Moses has expressed a

profound truth. Perhaps Moses’ flaw was that he was too much a man of God and too little a man of the people, unable to rouse and reach the Israelites in a way that would have prevented their transgression.

Nevertheless, God forgives us, as we see from the repetition in Vayakhel and Pekudei even after our idolatry. After all, it was God Himself, apparently realizing that the highest priority for covenantal Israel was a leader who would convey His eternal Torah, who cajoled Moses into accepting the leadership of Israel in the first place.

---

### **The Person in the Parsha** **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersch Weinreb**

---

#### **Culture, Counter-culture, and Creativity**

It was quite a few years ago that I spent almost every Sunday afternoon in one of the great museums of the city in which my family then lived. I no longer remember what first stimulated my interest in art, and specifically in the type of art known as Impressionism. But I know that I relished those Sunday afternoons, as did my youngest daughter, then no more than six or seven years old.

The museum we frequented possessed the most extensive collection in the world of the paintings of the French artist, Henri Matisse. My daughter became so familiar and so fond of the works of Matisse, particularly his colorful “cutouts”, or paper cut collages, that when we once ventured into a new museum, she saw some Matisse works at a distance and gained the admiration of everyone in the crowded gallery by shouting excitedly, “Matisse, Matisse.” I glowed with pride as the others present exclaimed, “What a precocious child!”

It was on that occasion that I first encountered a most fascinating gentleman. I’ll call him Ernesto. Ernesto was a tall hulk of a man, who, I later learned, was a brilliant Talmud student before the war, but who had given up the all religious observance, and indeed almost all connection with the Jewish people. He had totally lost his faith as a result of his horrible experiences during the Holocaust.

With my black velvet yarmulke I was readily identifiable as an Orthodox Jew, so I was easy prey for Ernesto. “Jews know nothing about art,” he bellowed. “Matisse! How can you glorify Matisse? His art is only decorative. All Jewish art is nothing but decoration.”

I must confess that I had no clue as to what he was talking about.

We soon sat down together at a nearby bench and he began to share his story with me. Over the subsequent years I came to know him better and discovered that he had many “bones to pick” with Judaism and was in a perpetual rage against God. But that morning he confined his remarks to his disappointment

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

with what he saw as the absence of fine art in the Jewish culture.

Frankly, I had never given much thought to the subject of the place of art in Judaism. The best I could do was to refer to the person of Bezalel, mentioned in this week’s Torah portion, Parshat Vayakhel (Exodus 35:1-38:20).

I quoted these verses to him: “...See, the Lord has singled out by name Bezalel, son of Uri son of Hur... He has endowed him with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft and has inspired him to make designs for work in gold, silver and copper.”

“Surely,” I argued. “The figure of Bezalel, so prominent at the very beginning of our history, is evidence that art has a central place in our tradition.”

Not only was he unimpressed, but he responded with a rant that seemed as if it would go on forever. “Bezalel was no more than a Matisse,” he insisted. For him, Matisse was the epitome of a bankrupt artist, one who could produce colorful designs but who had no message for the culture at large. He contrasted Matisse with Picasso, who had lot to say, in his art, about the political world in which he lived. He concluded his tirade by shouting: “Besides pretty decorations for the Tabernacle, what did Bezalel have to teach us? What did he have to say to the human race?!”

For the many years since that first encounter with Ernesto, who by the way, passed away sixty years to the day after his release from Auschwitz in 1945, I have struggled with that challenging question: “What can we learn from Bezalel?”

I have since concluded that Bezalel had a lot to teach us all, especially about the creative process. He was able to do what so many others who are blessed with great creative talents have not been able to do.

Most creative geniuses throughout history, and I say this fully expecting some of you to object with examples to the contrary, have either been misfits in society, or have, in one way or another, rebelled against society. Creativity often sees itself as in opposition to conformity. The place of the artist is rarely in the contemporary culture; rather it is in the counter-culture. The creative artist, whatever his medium, typically sees himself as the creator of a new culture, one which will replace the current culture and render it obsolete.

Bezalel’s genius lay in his ability to channel his substantial artistic gifts to the cause of the culture that was being constructed around him. He was not rebellious and certainly not withdrawn. He participated in a national project as part of the nation, and not as one

whose role was to find fault. He was able to combine creativity with conformity, and that is no mean feat.

One lesson that he taught all subsequent artists is that they need not limit their role to critical observation of society. Quite the contrary, they can cooperatively partner with society and bring their skills to bear in the service of what is going on around them.

This is the deeper meaning of the passage in the Talmud which reads: “Bezalel knew how to combine the mystical primeval letters from which heaven and earth were created (Berachot 55a).” Bezalel’s art was an art that “combined” letters, joining them together harmoniously. His was not the art that tears asunder the constituent elements of the world which surrounds him. His was the art that blends those elements into a beautiful whole.

Bezalel’s lesson is not just a lesson for artists. It is a lesson for all gifted and talented human beings. Somehow, the best and the brightest among us are the ones who are most cynical and most critical of the societies in which we live. We see this today in the harsh criticism that is directed at Israel precisely from the world of the academe, and sadly, especially from the Jewish intelligentsia. There is something pernicious about great intelligence that makes one unduly and unfairly critical of the world within in which one resides.

Bezalel, on the other hand, was able to demonstrate that one can be highly gifted, indeed sublimely gifted, and use those gifts in a positive and constructive fashion, cooperating with others who are far less gifted, and participating in a joint venture with the rest of society.

This is a lesson in leadership which all who are blessed with special talents must learn. Special talents do not entitle one to separate oneself from the common cause. Quite the contrary: They equip one to participate in the common cause, and in the process elevate and inspire the rest of society.

---

#### **Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

#### **The Name a Person Gives Himself Is His Most Important Name**

There is an interesting Medrash on the pasuk in Parshas Vayakhel “And Moshe said to the Children of Israel, ‘See Hashem has called by name, Bezalel son of Uri son of Chur of the Tribe of Yehudah.’” [Shmos 35:30] The Medrash says that every person has three names: The name that his parents call him; the name that his friends and peers give him; and one that he creates for himself. The best of these names is the one he acquires for himself.

What does it mean that every person has three names? I saw a fundamental idea in the sefer Milchamos Yehudah that we have mentioned in the past. The pasuk mentions in Sefer Bereshis “...And all that Adam called them,

every living soul; that became its name.” [Bereshis 2:19] Adam gave names to all the animals. Chazal say that this demonstrated tremendous wisdom, to be able to name appropriately each creature. We have said in the past that when Chazal say that Adam named all the animals, they do not mean that Adam merely looked at an ox and said “Well, I will call this a shor; this is a donkey I will call it chamor; this is a dog I will call it kelev.” Rather, Adam was capable of coming up with names that defined the essence of the animal.

The English word ‘ox’ has nothing to do with the essence of an ox. It is a linguistic convention. Similarly, the English word ‘cow’ does not define a cow. However, in the Holy Tongue, when Adam gave names to the animals, he was able to perceive their essence and define them. That is what the Hebrew word ‘shem’ means. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch relates the word ‘shem’ to ‘shom’ [there]. ‘Shom’ means I know where it is, I know its place. It is ‘There.’

This is what Chazal mean. After a person is born, his parents raise him. His parents form the character traits and middos that he possesses for a part of his life. This is the ‘name’ that his parents designate for him. That does not mean that the name Reuven or Shimon or Avraham or Yitzchak that baby boys are given defines their essence. The Medrash is trying to say that the ‘Shem’ which represents the qualities of the soul implanted in a child during his formative years by his parents is the first ‘Name’ a child is given. A child’s parents, values and aspirations profoundly shape the first 10-15 years, or whatever amount of time, of his life.

Any of us who have raised teenagers know that there comes a time where parents’ influence on their children begins to wane and the child is more influenced by his peer group. Therefore, the Medrash says “what his friends call him” is a ‘shem’ that determines a part of his essence. Again, this does not mean that if the fellow’s name is Yisroel and his friends call him ‘Sruly’ that the name ‘Sruly’ defines him. What it means is that the influence the friends have on the essence of the person’s personality, values, and way of thinking is critical. They too, at a certain stage in his life, largely define who he is.

But then the Medrash says that all of this only goes so far. Ultimately, a person defines who he is for himself. A person ultimately defines his own essence – the ‘shem’ he gives himself, which represents what becomes and how he develops. It is the definition of what he does with the gifts and talents and building blocks that he has acquired during the early part of his existence. The Medrash says that the most important ‘shem’ a person has is the ‘shem’ he gives himself, representing who he becomes.

Ultimately, a person must take responsibility for himself. His parents have a role and

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

society has a role and a person can say that he received certain personality characteristics from his parents or his friends – for bad or for good – but ultimately you are responsible for who you become.

This helps us understand a Rashi in this week’s parsha. On the aforementioned pasuk [Shmos 35:30], Rashi comments “Chur was Miriam’s son.” The question is that the Torah already introduced Bezalel back in Parshas Ki Sisa [Shmos 31:2]. There too, it mentions that Bezalel was the son of Uri who was the son of Chur. Why did Rashi not tell us back there that Chur was the son of Miriam? Why does Rashi wait until Parshas VaYakhel to give us this information?

The answer is perhaps that in Parshas Ki Sisa when we the Torah first introduces Bezalel, he has not accomplished yet. He was given the mandate and he was given the talents but at that point in time, the Mishkan was still on the drawing boards. It was a *davar shelo bah l’olam* [a matter which has not yet come into existence]. It was still a dream.

In Parshas VaYakhel, Bezalel has already built the Mishkan. Bezalel has now taken the mantle and the glory that he received from his father and his grandfather and from his great grandmother. Now Bezalel can wear that mantle of respect that he is the great grandson of Miriam. As long as a person has not accomplished yet, he can have the greatest *yichus* – he can be the *Einekel* [grandson] of the holiest Rebbe or Rosh Yeshiva – that is all fine and good. However, unless you do something with it, unless you demonstrate that you are worthy to be the grandson of such a distinguished personage, it does not mean anything.

If you want to wear the heritage of your lineage proudly, you need to do something with it. In Parshas Ki Sisa, Bezalel is still undefined so Rashi does not tell us who he really was. Now that we see what Bezalel has done, now is the appropriate time to say Bezalel can indeed proudly claim his *yichus* and say “I am an *oor-Einekel* [great grandson] of Miriam the prophetess.”

---

#### **Dvar Torah**

#### **Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

Why is Shabbat so important for every Jewish community? Parashat Vayakhel commences with an extraordinary statement ‘Vayakhel Moshe et kol adat b’nei Yisrael’ – ‘Moshe congregated the entire assembly of the children of Israel’. Now we have in the Torah two different terms which are used for a group of people; ‘*kehilla*’ which is a congregation, and ‘*eidah*’ which is an assembly, and here both terms are used in the same verse. We are told ‘Vayakhel Moshe et kol adat’ – ‘Moshe congregated the whole assembly’. But why did he congregate the assembly and not assemble the congregation? What is the difference

between these two terms?

You see, 'Eidah' is a group of people who happen to be together in one place, at one time, for one purpose. It comes from the root 'eid' – a witness – indicating that they're there for a particular purpose; that they might never have come together before and they might not ever come together again.

'Kehilla' is something very different. It's a group of like-minded individuals who bond together out of a deep sense of commitment. They enjoy each other's company and they have a shared vision for life. When the Israelites left Egypt – we were an eidah, a loosely connected entity of families who happened to have been enslaved together. But once the Torah was given to us, the greatness of Moshe was 'Vayakhel Moshe et kol adat' – he congregated the assembly! Out of an eidah he created that wonderful Kehilla. Thanks to Torah and Mitzvot, we could exist as a bonded and connected nation.

Then, in the very next verse, the Torah yet again gives us the mitzvah of Shabbat! 'Sheishet yamim ta'aseh melacha' – 'On six days you shall perform creative activity and on the seventh you shall rest'. Why is this mitzvah mentioned again? This is because the Torah wants us to know that Shabbat is crucial to the life and success of the Kehilla. It is primarily through Shabbat that we can bond together and appreciate the shared vision we have for life.

Remarkably the power of Shabbat goes beyond the physical kehilla of a particular area. The Torah wants us to know that there is a global congregation. If I am alone in some remote area on Shabbat, and I am keeping Shabbat, I know that I am in touch, I feel a connection with my entire people and it's not only with those people around the world keeping Shabbat at that moment, it's all those in previous times and in future times who are engaging with Shabbat. This is why Shabbat is so crucial and so central to every Jewish community and also to every Jewish soul.

This coming Shabbat, parashat Vayekhel, will be ShabbatUK. Throughout the country, tens of thousands of people will be keeping Shabbat, engaging with Shabbat, enjoying Shabbat and discovering how the power of Shabbat gives us meaning and Simcha in life. Wherever we might be, we are privileged to be part of the global Jewish Kehilla.

---

**Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel**  
**Encyclopedia of Jewish Values\***

---

**Vayakhel – This Week Is Shabbat Hagadol**

At the beginning of our Parsha, after three Parshiot discussing the Mishkan-Tabernacle, and two more afterwards on the same theme, God commands the entire Jewish people to keep the Shabbat, which was already commanded in the Ten Commandments. Why? Rashi (commentary to Exodus 35:2) explains. Nearly every religion has holiness of place including Judaism (Mishne Kelim 1:6). But Judaism also has holiness of time. The Torah is telling us that the holiness of time, Shabbat,

supersedes the holiness of place (Mishkan-Tabernacle), and, thus, it is forbidden to construct the Mishkan on Shabbat. Later on, only the minimal part of the daily service was permitted in the Holy Temple on Shabbat. And the first mention of holiness in the Torah was related to time (Genesis 2:3), i.e., the Shabbat, not place. But we ask again, why? Why is the Shabbat so special? What are the ideas behind shabbat that make it unique to Judaism?

Although the Torah generally refrains from giving reasons or explanations for observing the commandments, the Torah does specify two different explanations for Shabbat observance. The Torah records the Ten Commandments in two separate places: those that were given at Mount Sinai and those later repeated by Moses, almost word for word, forty years later. One of the main differences between the two versions is the explanation for the Shabbat. In the first set of Ten Commandments in the Torah, it says (Exodus 20:8-11) to remember the Shabbat day and keep it holy because God created the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh. Thus, it seems, on the simple level, that because God "worked" so hard for six days and rested on the seventh, we should do the same. However, cessation from physical activity cannot imitate God at all, since God is not a physical being and could not have been "exhausted" after six days and in need of a rest. And we certainly do not achieve holiness intended by refraining from physical labor. Therefore, this explanation must be understood on a different level.

Another more satisfying understanding of this verse is that man must acknowledge God as creator in keeping the Shabbat. After all, if man denies the Shabbat on philosophical grounds, he is basically denying God's existence, or at least the Jewish concept of God. If God did create the universe and "rest" on the Shabbat, a person keeping the Shabbat acknowledges this. This might be the meaning of the Talmudic statement (Eruvin 69b) that violation of the Shabbat is like idol worship. This is not a mere philosophical concept. Jewish law ties the reliability of a butcher for Kashrut to his observance of the Shabbat. A Jew who openly denies or violates the Shabbat calls into question his basic belief and cannot be trusted in matters of Jewish ritual law (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 2:5), even if everything seems to be kosher in his shop. How does observing the Shabbat specifically demonstrate the Jew's relationship to God?

What is it that a Jew may not do on Shabbat? The Torah simply says that Melacha is prohibited (Exodus 20:9). This word is often mistranslated to signify "work." This cannot be the intention - that work, manual labor, is prohibited since the Hebrew word for manual labor or work is Avodah and not Melacha. What then is Melacha that is prohibited and what does it symbolize? The word Melacha is found in the Torah in only two contexts

## Likutei Divrei Torah

besides Shabbat. One is at the very end of the Creation story (Genesis 2:1-3). God finished all the Melacha that he did and rested from all His Melacha. Thus, it is clear that Melacha is that activity which God did during the first six days of the world, i.e., creation itself or creative activity. This, then, is what is prohibited on Shabbat, and not work. Only what is purposeful is Biblically forbidden on Shabbat. Therefore, one may not destroy a home if the intention is to build upon it, since this is a creative act (Maimonides, Hilchot Shabbat 1:18). (Of course, the Rabbis came along and said that any type of destruction is Rabbincally forbidden, since we cannot always know a person's true intention, and people may get the wrong idea.)

The only other Torah reference to Melacha is in our Parsha and the last five Parshiot of Shemot – nineteen times. All in the context of building of the Tabernacle. This, too, is related to creative and purposeful activity, and building of the Tabernacle has been compared to a microcosm of the original creation itself. Thus, the thirty-nine categories of forbidden creative activity are derived from those activities performed in building and maintaining the Tabernacle (Shabbat 49b). The implications for a Shabbat observer is that part of the task of man is that he, like God, is supposed to create on the six days of the week (Exodus 20:9). That is why God did not create "bread trees," even though every society needs and uses a form of bread. It is man's role to perform the creative activities necessary to make bread (Midrash, Tanchuma, Tazria 5).

However, the danger of man acting like God and creating in the world is that man may easily come to think of himself as God. Thus, Shabbat comes along each week to remind man that he is not God and that it is only God who created the world, not man. Man must remind himself each week that though he creates, dominates the planet, and acts God-like (which he should), he is not the Almighty. This theme and message of Shabbat is especially significant in the twenty first century. In prior centuries, when man was restricted by his environment, he easily realized his limitations and the gap separating himself from God. But today, after conquering the air with planes, the sea with submarines, space with rockets on now-weekly basis, and developing the mechanisms to control his environment (air conditioners, electric lights at night, etc.), man might easily believe that he is indeed in control of his life and of the planet. The Shabbat then reminds man that it is God, not man, who created the universe and Who is really in control.

### Another Explanation of Shabbat Is Freedom

In the repetition of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy, the explanation for keeping Shabbat is for the Jew to remember that he or she was a slave in Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15). This means that the Jew, through Shabbat, should appreciate that now he is no longer a

slave and has freedom. Thus, Shabbat is a day of freedom. But how can this be so? One has only to look at the hundreds of restrictive laws of Shabbat to realize that this is a day where a Jew usually feels freedom denied. How can a person feel more free when he or she is not permitted to perform so many everyday activities?

Prior to the 21st century it may have been difficult to convince anyone that "turning off one's devices, man's greatest inventions" leads to freedom. But today? How many people can even go even five minutes without looking at one's smartphone, with emails, messages, Youtube, etc. The observant Jew who does not look at his or her phone for 25 hours a week is demonstrating a true sense of freedom -- freedom from society and all its pressures making daily demands on people. By stopping one's daily routine and "shutting out the world" and its pressures one day a week, the Jew is saying I am totally free and not psychologically addicted to those everyday habits to which we routinely are conditioned.

Thus, through observance of the laws and restrictions one places upon oneself, each person demonstrates a sense of freedom. This is precisely the intention of the Mishna (Avot 6:2) which connects the Hebrew word Cherut, freedom, with the similar word Charut, engraved. When the Torah says (Exodus 32:16) that the hand of God was engraved on the tablets of the Ten Commandments, one should read freedom, not engraved. Based on these two separate explanations of Shabbat, i.e., man realizes he is not God and also that he attains freedom, we have an interesting irony. On the one hand, man must acknowledge that he lacks control over the world and is not "calling the shots." But, on the other hand, through Shabbat, he does take control of his inner life, his routine, and attains freedom. He does not truly control his environment, but he should control his body, emotions, and psychological well-being.

#### Shabbat Is Great- How?

Ask almost anyone who has been observant from birth when and in which context they heard the words "Shabbat HaGadol" they will almost always tell you "Shabbat before Pesach". However, that is incorrect. Jewish children first hear these words "Shabbat Hagadol-the Great Shabbat" through the words every week in Birkat Hamazon-Grace After Meals" on Shabbat. Each week, in the extra paragraph recited for Shabbat, we always say the words "HaShabbat HaGadol Vehakadosh Hazeh-This great and holy Shabbat". According to these words, EVERY Shabbat is Shabbat Hagadol. If so, why do we call the only the Shabbat before Pesach by this name?

To answer this question, we must define the word "Gadol-great" and explain how and why it is included on Shabbat. Gadol can mean many things in every language. In the Torah, the verse first says that Moses grew up, using

the word "Gadol"- he became physically large or older. Then, in the very next verse, it again describes Moses in the same way ("Vayigdal Moshe") and Rashi (on Exodus 2:11) explains this "greatness" refers to Moshe's great qualities. The Gadol is the essence of the word in Judaism. It is spiritual greatness, character and qualitiveness. This idea helps answer another question. In the Psalm 92, which we say specifically for the day of Shabbat, there is no mention of anything about Shabbat except in the first identifying verse – this is a Psalm to Shabbat. What does this Psalm have to do with Shabbat?

Every other day of the week in Tefillah, we recite the verse (Psalms 104:24) "Ma RABU Maasecha Hashem". How vast and large is the universe. Only on Shabbat (In Psalm 92) do we say "Ma GADLU Maasecha Hashem". On Shabbat, we admire the quality, not quantity of the universe that God created, its specialness. Thus, the weekdays are about quantity of life and appreciating it, while Shabbat is about Gadol, admiring how special and unique God is, His universe is and each of us is. This one-word change is vast. And for 2450 years, God made the Shabbat, and no one appreciated it or the qualitative aspects of the universe. Only on the last Shabbat in Egypt did the Jewish people begin to appreciate God's qualitative component. THAT is why every Shabbat is called Shabbat HAGADOL And with it came another change that most Jews do not notice.

Every Tefillah of the year, whether daily or holiday, has the very same Amidah-Shmoneh, (with some minor word changes) whether it is the morning, afternoon, or evening Amidah (Each Musaf Tefillah is vastly different). Thus, it the same Amidah is on Yom Kippur at night, in the morning and for Mincha. So too, on Sukkot, the daily Amidah and every other prayer service stays the same, except for one: Shabbat. Shabbat is the ONLY time the Amidah changes drastically from Arvit on Shabbat to Shacharit on Shabbat, to Mincha on Shabbat. Why? The Shabbat and its relationship to man indeed also changed, unlike any other holiday. For the first 2450 years, God created the Shabbat for the entire world and this universality is reflected in the words of the evening Shabbat service. But then the Jews in Egypt acknowledged God's qualitative superior world on the last Shabbat they we in Egypt, and, because of this acknowledgment, the Jewish people now were given the gift of Shabbat, culminating a Mount Sinai. This change is reflected in the words of the Amidah on Shabbat morning. And because that Shabbat was the very first time in history that people understood God's qualitative world, that Shabbat became known as Shabbat HaGadol for all time. The Mincha Shabat Amidah reflects the future changes when the entire world will accept God and the Shabbat. Thus, this unique appreciation of the world by Jews that we recite every Shabbat, is why we call EVERY Shabbat the Shabbat Hagadol.

## Likutei Divrei Torah

*\*This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com*

---

### Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

---

#### Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky - Maintaining the True Beauty of the Mishkan

The construction of the Mishkan is the culmination of Sefer Shemos. As the Ramban notes in his introduction to Shemos, this is the Book of Redemption. Once the presence of Hashem rests upon the Jewish People through the vehicle of the Mishkan, the redemptive process of yetziasMitzrayim is complete. The role of the Mishkan was already mentioned as the miracles associated with yetzias Mitzrayim came to an end. Following krias Yam Suf, the song composed by Moshe and the Jewish people ends with the words, "You Hashem will establish your sanctuary." As fundamental to yetzias Mitzraim as the Mishkan is, there is another institution in Jewish life that is also integral to yetzias Mitzrayim and even has greater significance than the Mishkan. Parshas Vayakhel begins with the commandment to observe Shabbos. By introducing the actual construction of the Mishkan with a reference to Shabbos, we are taught that the Mishkan cannot be built on Shabbos. Shabbos is a zecheh L'yetzias Mitzrayim and the Mishkan culminates yetzias Mitzraim, yet Shabbos takes precedence over Mishkan. How do we understand the relationship between these two pillars of Jewish life?

The Mishkan is not only mentioned at the end of the Az Yashir, but it is also referenced in the beginning. "Zeh Keli V'anvehu" opens the song celebrating the miracle of krias Yam Suf. There are several interpretations of the ambiguous word, "V'anvehu." Chazal in Meseches Shabbos interpreted it as referring to hiddur mitzvah, the beautifying of the objects used for mitzvah observance. The Targum interprets the word as relating to constructing the Mishkan. These interpretations complement one another. Hiddur mitzvah of the highest order was practiced in the construction of the Mishkan. The elaborate details that encompass the parshios that deal with the Mishkan help create Hiddur Mitzvah of the highest order was practiced in the construction of the Mishkan. The elaborate details that encompass the parshios that deal with the Mishkan help to create a beautiful structure. The Mishkan and later the Beis Hamikdash were stunning works of art, a true expression of hiddur mitzvah. Why is hiddur Mitzvah so important? Why can't we simply perform mitzvos in a way that satisfies all halachik requirements, but not necessarily in a beautiful fashion? Hiddurmitzvah is an expression of ahavas Hashem. A gift that is presented to someone who one loves is done so with special



care and attention to detail that expresses that love. When we don't want to do something, we do it in a way to simply get by. Hiddur mitzvah is one way we show our love for Hashem and the mitzvos He has given us.

There is a third interpretation of the word "v'anvehu" that encompasses the feelings that the Jewish people had for Hashem at the time of krias Yam Suf. Chazal in meseches Shabbos suggest that "v'anvehu" is related to the words, "Ani V'hu", "I and him." The Jewish people praised Hashem by saying that they wanted to emulate him. By following in Hashem's ways, we express our complete love and devotion towards Him. We imitate those whom we admire. There are many ways we emulate Hashem, such as being kind, patient, and forgiving. There is one mitzvah that the very essence of which is to follow in Hashem's ways. We observe Shabbos just as Hashem observed the first Shabbos, following yetzias Mitzrayim, as we became His Nation. What greater way to express our following in His ways than to observe His Shabbos. As we construct a beautiful Mishkan for Hashem's Presence to dwell in, our ultimate goal is to express our love for Him. What greater way to declare this love than by observing His Shabbos? A Mishkan that would be built on Shabbos would be nothing more than a fancy man-made structure that did not demonstrate our love for Hashem. As we build an exquisite Mishkan to fulfill "V'anvehu," we reach the culmination of yetzias Mitzrayim. We do so by first observing Shabbos as we follow the model of our Beloved who rested on Shabbos. By doing so, our beautiful Mishkan is truly our expression of Ahavas Hashem.

### OTS Dvar Torah

#### Transitioning from Individuals to a Whole Rabbanit Devorah Evron

In this week's Parsha, Vayakhel, Moshe and the nation who had been sojourning in the desert begin to build the Mishkan, in accordance with the instructions set out in the previous weekly portions. The Mishkan, which was a tent of sorts, was made of panels, rings, hooks and beams. Upon reviewing the instructions for the construction of the Mishkan in Parshat Terumah, we discover that the expression *isha el achota*, literally meaning, "a woman to her sister," recurs five times. The first four instances appear at the beginning of the chapter, and the last instance appears later in the text:

"Five panels shall be attached one to each other, and five panels attached, a woman to her sister, and five panels attached, a woman to her sister. You shall make loops of turquoise wool at the edge of one panel at the end of one grouping, and so shall you make at the edge of the outermost panel on the second grouping. Fifty loops shall you make on one panel and fifty loops shall you make on the end of the panel that is on the second grouping; the loops shall be a woman to her sister. You shall make

fifty golden hooks, and you shall attach the panels a woman to her sister, with the hooks, so that the Mishkan-spread shall become one... Two tenons for each beam, rung-like, a woman to her sister, so shall you do for all the beams of the Mishkan." (Exodus 26: 3-6, 17)

Biblical commentators have grappled with the expression "a woman to her sister" and how it is used in the text. It appears once more in the Torah, in Leviticus, in connection with the prohibition against a man marrying his wife's sister while his wife is still alive. This case, though, concerns a flesh-and-blood woman and her real-life sister, while in our case, regarding the Mishkan, the expression is metaphorical.

Moreover, in this week's Torah portion, another expression is used in the description of the links between the components of the Mishkan:

"He attached five panels one to the other, and five curtains he attached one to the other. He made loops of turquoise wool on the edge of one panel at the end of one grouping, so did he at the edge of the outermost panel on the second grouping. He made fifty loops on the one panel and fifty loops he made at the end of the panel that was on the second grouping, the loops opposite each other. He made fifty golden hooks and attached the panels on to the other with the hooks – so the Mishkan-spread became one." (Exodus 36:10-13)

What do each of these expressions mean; and why is each one used specifically in that particular context?

The text in the Torah commentary written by Ovadiah Seforno, a 16th-century Italian sage, reads as follows: "The five panels shall be connected: the decorative weaving patterns of these curtains should match each curtain to its counterpart."

What R. Seforno meant was that there were cherubs or other angels drawn on these curtains, and parts of these drawings would align with corresponding parts in the other panels, forming one contiguous pattern.

Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (the Netziv), one of the greatest 19th-century Eastern European Torah scholars who wrote a Torah commentary called *Haamek Davar*, writes the following: "...A woman to her sister: the use of the language 'her sister' in reference to objects is only done where the objects must be facing each other, as in the case of the cherubs or the boards, specifying that they must face each other like two sisters. The Netziv continues: "A woman to her sister – one minimized itself to accept the other, like two sisters."

In other words, the expression "a woman to her sister" is a metaphor for a pair of sisters that are positioned so that they face each other. The two are even prepared to minimize themselves on behalf of each other. Thus, the panels of the Mishkan were set up so that they

## Likutei Divrei Torah

faced each other, and together, they created one contiguous work of art. Even the loops had effectively "made room" for each other, so that they could fit together.

The use of the expression a woman to her sister amplifies the dimension of connectivity. The Mishkan is where connections occur. It represents the connection between God and the People of Israel, and connection between the different Israelite tribes, even as each tribe was performing its designated role. We could also say that once it enters the Promised Land, the Mishkan connects the entire area that was to be settled, because it was located at one spot that people would come to, as pilgrims, from all over the country.

If so, why not use the same expression of connection in the actual construction of the Mishkan? Instead of the metaphor, the text uses another expression – *achat el achat* – literally meaning "one against the other." Why was the metaphor replaced?

Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah on the book of Numbers asks why the verses describing the construction of the Mishkan end with the words "and the Mishkan was one." It suggests the following answer: "... since it would connect each and every one... it would connect them, making them as one." It would seem that according to the Midrash, all of the loops were connected at the exact same time, such that the Mishkan was constructed all at once, as a complete structure.

This Midrash can also help us understand the use of the expression "a woman to her sister" when describing the planning of the Mishkan, and the use of the expression "one against the other" when describing the actual construction.

The path to building the Mishkan requires us to focus, and requires various artisans – each with various artistic approaches and methods of execution – to join forces. Listening to each other is a vital condition we must meet as we work towards building the Mishkan. This is the stage when we realize that there are many people working together to achieve a common goal. The activity requires direction and minimization, and providing space for both men and women. Just like sisters. Once the Mishkan is assembled – once the loops have been linked – the Mishkan becomes one unit. That is what we must focus on. The actual construction of the Mishkan emphasizes the fact that we are one nation, using one Mishkan, built as per the instructions of God, who is one.

This shift from the recognition that we are all individuals striving to create bonds of camaraderie between us, to the understanding that we are a whole and unified nation, is a transition that has been with us from the time we were wandering in the desert and until today.

### Backed Up by Action

And Moshe called the whole community of the Children of Israel to assemble, and he said to them: “These are the things that HASHEM commanded to make. (Shemos 35:1)

And he made the dividing curtain of blue, purple, and crimson wool, and twisted fine linen; the work of a master weaver he made it, in a [woven] cherubim design. And he made for it four pillars of acacia wood, and he overlaid them with gold, their hooks [were] gold, and he cast for them four silver sockets. And he made a screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue, purple, and crimson wool, and twisted fine linen the work of an embroiderer, and its five pillars and their hooks, and he overlaid their tops and their bands with gold, and their five sockets were copper. (Shemos 36:35-38) Too many times to mention the term “he made” and “they made” crowns the beginning of a verse. There is something great about this doing, this making of the Mishkan with precision. What is it?

The Talmud Brochos queries, “Which is more important, learning or doing?” The answer offered is: “Learning, because it leads to doing!” It seems the question is answered and not. Doing seems to be the more important value. The Mishne affirms, “The main thing is not the discussion but the action!” (Pirke Avos 1:17) If Talmud Torah is so great that it is equivalent to all the Mitzvos then how can “doing” be considered greater?

An elderly father called out with his weakened voice to his three boys who were in another room, “Can someone please fetch me a glass of water!” Right away a big discussion erupted. The older son seemed ready to jump into action but his two younger brothers challenged him. “Why should you have the honor to get Abba a glass of water?” He responded emphatically, “Because I am the oldest!”

The other two insisted that they find a more fair way of deciding. In the meantime the father called out again for a glass of water. The youngest proposed that that they have auction as they would in Shul for a great honor or an Aliya. The bidding began immediately for the high honor of getting Abba a glass of water. The numbers climbed quickly and finally the middle son won. He opined, “If I would earn such an honor like Maftir Yona, I would not keep it for myself. I would share the honor and

give it to one who is truly deserving of the honor. I would give it to our dear Abba. Abba, get yourself a glass of water!”

The story is so absurd on many levels, I know, but it also illustrates that all the talk in the world does not substitute for action. Especially in the case of the building of the Mishkan which was the way to fix the horrific event of the Golden Calf. There is a phrase I saw from Steven Covey that rings so true, “You can’t talk your way out of a problem you acted your way into!” The solution requires action because action demonstrates sincerity.

I was witness to a scene where a father was called into the tuition office because his first five tuition checks bounced. Half the year passed and he had effectively not paid any tuition. He bowed his head and apologized. I felt bad for him. The comptroller asked what his plan was. So he took out his check book. It was comical and tragic. After four bounced checks a fifth didn’t seem more promising.

Actions are like money in the bank and words are comparable to checks. There was an old show tune with words that went like this, “Don’t talk of love show me!” A man can say to his wife all day and with passion, “I love you!”, but his words will ring hollow if they are not backed up by action, if the garbage is not taken out, the carpool is dodged, the homework with the kids is not done, and other requests are denied. It’s like writing a big check with little money in the bank. It bounces. Words are only as valuable as there is money in the bank.

The sin of the Golden Calf was a major break in trust. Trust must be built slowly and with action. It cannot be demanded or expected with urgency. The greatest proof that the repentance of the Children of Israel about the Golden Calf was sincere was in their doing. Sure words can work but only when backed up by action.

### Bar Ilan University: Dvar Torah

#### How many times was the Tabernacle

inaugurated? By Haim Burgansky<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. The commands to build the Tabernacle

Two weekly readings in the book of Exodus deal with the commands about building the Tabernacle: *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*. *Parashat Terumah* describes a tabernacle in which the main functionary is Moses. It is he who is commanded to make the implements of the Tabernacle, and it is he who ministers in it.<sup>2</sup> At the very center of the Tabernacle is the place where the Holy One, blessed be He, and

## Likutei Divrei Torah

Moses convene: “There I will meet with you, and I will impart to you—from above the cover (*kaporet*), from between the two cherubim that are on top of the Ark of the Pact—all that I will command you concerning the Israelite people” (Ex. 25:22).

Apparently, before the Israelites were to leave Mount Sinai on their way to the land of Canaan, the Holy One, blessed be He, asked for a Tabernacle to be built to serve as a place where the Lord would speak face to face with Moses, as He had done with him on Mount Sinai. At the center of the Tabernacle, in *Parashat Terumah*, stands the Ark, housing the Tablets of the Pact handed down from Mount Sinai, and the *kaporet* covering it, where the Lord would deliver additional commands to Moses.<sup>3</sup> Such a Tabernacle has no need of priests, just as the place where Moses convened with the Holy One, blessed be He, on Mount Sinai had no priests, as it says, “No one else shall come up with you” (Ex. 34:3).

This picture changes in *Parashat Tetzaveh*, which ignores Moses and places the priests in the center. Indeed, from the numerous repetitions of the fact that Aaron was to carry on him the names of the Israelite tribes when he came to minister in the Tabernacle<sup>4</sup> it appears that the priestly service did not stand on its own, but derived its basis from its connection with the Israelites, even though they themselves did not minister in the Tabernacle. As a necessary consequence of the priestly characterization of the Tabernacle in *Parashat Tetzaveh*, that weekly reading suggests another place for convening with the Lord, beyond the one given in *Parashat Terumah*:

Now this is what you shall offer upon the altar: two yearling lambs each day, regularly...a regular burnt offering throughout the generations, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting before the Lord.

For there I will meet with you, and there I will speak with you, and there I will meet with the Israelites, and it shall be sanctified by My Presence. I will sanctify the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and I will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve Me as priests. I will abide among the Israelites, and I will be their Gd (Ex. 29:38, 42-45).

The altar, situated “at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting before the Lord,” would be the place where the Holy One, blessed be He, convenes with the Israelites, thus fulfilling the object of the Tabernacle as the place where the Holy One, blessed be He, would abide among the Israelites.

<sup>1</sup> In this regard, see Nahmanides’ remarks on Ex. 25:2.

<sup>2</sup> See Ex. 28:12, for example, regarding the shoulder-pieces of the *ephod*, and preceding verses on the same. Also see v. 29, with respect to the breastpiece, v. 30 with respect to the *Urim* and *Thummim*, and v. 38 with respect to the frontlet.

<sup>3</sup> The question of when were the days of installation and when was the eighth day has aroused major controversy among Jewish scholars throughout the generations. Cf., for example, Ibn Ezra on Ex. 40:2, and Nahmanides on the same verse.

<sup>4</sup> Nahmanides, in his commentary on Exodus 40:34, notes the great similarity between the depiction of the Divine Presence dwelling in the cloud over the Tent of Meeting and the way the Divine Presence appeared on Mount Sinai. This can be supplemented by a comparison of the concluding verses of chapter 40 with Exodus 24:15-18. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the designated purpose of the Tabernacle was not fully realized here, for Moses remained outside and could not hear the Holy One, blessed be He, speaking from above the *kaporet*. This would happen only after the inauguration was completed by the tribal chieftains (Num. 7:89).

This can also explain the sanctification of the altar and the priests during the days of their installation, as described in the first part of chapter 29. This sanctification is connected with what the Tabernacle signified according to *Parashat Tetzaveh*, for Moses appears as the one who performs the sanctification of the priests and the altar, but he himself does not need to be sanctified, nor has he need of priestly vestments. Also the Tabernacle in *Parashat Terumah*—the Tabernacle where Moses stands at the center—does not require sanctification. Just as Moses entered the cloud at Mount Sinai without any prior preparation or anointing, so his actions in the Tabernacle and his entering it required no special preparation.

Clearly the Torah never had in mind that there would be two Tabernacles existing side by side; rather, its intention was that the same Tabernacle serve both the purpose reflected in *Parashat Terumah* and the purpose in *Parashat Tetzaveh*. In this co-shared Tabernacle, Moses would enter to hear the Lord's commands, and Aaron would enter the sanctuary to minister on behalf of the Israelites. Moses would hear the Lord's words from above the *kaporet*, and Aaron would be answered by the Holy One, blessed be He, in the fire on the altar.

**2. The account of setting up the Tabernacle, according to *Parashat Pekudei*** - The readings of *Va-Yakhel* and *Pekudei* are to a large extent a recapitulation of *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*, respectively. Not everything, however, is repeated, for the entire passage from *Parashat Tetzaveh*, on sanctifying the Tabernacle and the priests in a seven-day period of installation, does not appear in *Pekudei*. Instead, a different command is given Moses, to anoint the Tabernacle and its implements, and the priests (Ex. 40:9-15).

In general, the exclusive role played by Moses in setting up the Tabernacle, according to the end of *Parashat Pekudei* (ch. 40) is most prominent; the Holy One, blessed be He, commands Moses to set up the Tabernacle, and this is followed by extensive repetition, stressing all the things Moses did. Aaron and his sons receive mention, but are presented as if they were part of the furnishings of the Tabernacle (Ex. 40:12-15), whereas the patently "priestly" tasks, such as setting up the candelabra and arranging the show-bread, and offering sacrifices on the altar, are done by Moses. The exclusivity given Moses, the absence of any days of installation, and the marginal place accorded the priests gives the impression that the Torah wishes to stress erection of the Tabernacle as it is presented in *Parashat Terumah*. The Tabernacle as presented in *Parashat Tetzaveh* is given no place here.

The account of the result of setting up the Tabernacle also fits in with this bias. The concluding verses of the *parashah* bring us back to the first six days when Moses ascended Mount Sinai: setting up the Tabernacle led to

the Glory of the Lord descending in a cloud over the Tabernacle, while Moses stood outside the cloud and all the Israelites beheld the cloud and the fire from afar. Just as in Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai, where the Lord called to him from within the cloud, so, too, at the beginning of Leviticus the Lord calls to Moses and speaks to him from the Tent of Meeting, enveloped in cloud.

**3. Inauguration of the altar in *Parashat Shemini*** - Leviticus begins with the laws of sacrifice (chapters 1-7), and immediately following, in chapter 8, is an account of the seven days of installation during which Moses sanctified the priests and the altar, as commanded in *Parashat Tetzaveh*. When these seven days of installation were over, a special command appeared regarding the order of the sacrifices to be given on the eighth day of installation, accompanied by a promise that on this day the Lord would reveal Himself to the Israelites (Lev. 9:1-4):

On the eighth day Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel. He said to Aaron: "Take a calf of the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, without blemish, and bring them before the Lord. And speak to the Israelites, saying: Take a he-goat for a sin offering; a calf and a lamb, yearlings without blemish, for a burnt offering; and an ox and a ram for an offering of well-being to sacrifice before the Lord; and a meal offering with oil mixed in. For today the Lord will appear to you."

Indeed, after the priests finished laying out the sacrifices, the Lord appeared to the Israelites in the fire that consumed the offering, and thus the promise from *Parashat Tetzaveh*, to commune with the Israelites from above the altar, was fulfilled: "Fire came forth from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat parts on the altar. And all the people saw, and shouted, and fell on their faces" (Lev. 9:24). The connection with *Parashat Tetzaveh* is all the more prominent after the death of Nadab and Abihu by the fire that came forth from before the Lord, for then Moses said: "This is what the Lord meant when He said: Through those near to Me I show Myself holy (*ekadesh*), and gain glory (*ekaved*) before all the people" (Lev. 10:3). Sanctity (*kedushah*) and glory (*kavod*) appear here as well as in the promise from *Parashat Tetzaveh*: "and there I will meet with the Israelites, and it shall be sanctified by My Presence (*ve-nikdash bi-khevodi*)" (Ex. 29:43). So we see that the readings of *Tsav* and *Shemini* from the book of Leviticus complete what is absent from *Parashat Pekudei*, and describe the erection of the Tabernacle from *Parashat Tetzaveh*.

The reason for separating the account of inauguration of the Tabernacle into two separate accounts in different books of the Pentateuch appears to be related to the bias of the two books. In Exodus, the Theophany at Mount Sinai is the focus, and the relationship between Moses and the Holy One, blessed be

## Likutei Divrei Torah

He, plays an important part. Therefore the Torah incorporates into the end of that book a description of the Tabernacle being erected by Moses, and of the Presence of the Lord resting over the Tent of Meeting in a cloud and speaking to Moses from the Tent of Meeting. In contrast, Leviticus is the Priestly Code, and in the code of the priests the Tabernacle is the place of Divine worship, the place where the person bringing a sacrifice meets with the Holy One, blessed be He. Therefore, the book of Leviticus, not Exodus, is the fitting place to describe the sanctification of the Tabernacle and the priests, and the inauguration of the altar through the offering of sacrifices, even though the commandment pertaining to this aspect of the Tabernacle is to be found in the book of Exodus.

**4. Inauguration of the altar in *Parashat Naso*** - This, however, does not bring to a close the issues of inauguration of the Tabernacle. In Numbers (chapter 7) there is another inauguration account, by the tribal chieftains, beginning on the first of the month of *Nisan*, the day the Tabernacle was erected according to this week's reading, and lasting for twelve days. It must be stressed that even though this narrative speaks of sacrifices being offered, the priests are not mentioned here and it appears that the Israelite tribal chieftains were the ones making the sacrifices in this inaugural festivity. This third inauguration appears to be connected with the function of the Tabernacle in the book of Numbers. While Exodus emphasizes the Tabernacle as connected to Moses and Mount Sinai, and Leviticus emphasizes its priestly role as the place where sacrifices are offered, the book of Numbers, the book of the census and the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness, connects the Tabernacle with the Israelite encampment. As described in the first few chapters of Numbers, this encampment was arranged in a sort of double square: in the outer square the twelve tribes encamped, and in the inner square, the priestly and levitical families. At the heart of this double square was the Tabernacle. This structure created a tight bond between the Israelite encampment and the Tabernacle, with the tribes as the Lord's hosts encamped around it. This was not just any nomadic encampment in the wilderness, but the camp of the Holy One, blessed be He, with His Presence in the center, surrounded by all the hosts of Israel, bearing His standard. In this respect, the Tabernacle actually was tied specifically to the tribes of Israel, not to Moses or the priests, who were no more than individual parts of the greater encampment of all Israel; hence, only the tribal chieftains, the commanders of the encampment, could carry out this inauguration.

Thus we see the Tabernacle in a number of different aspects, and from these different aspects we have three descriptions of how the Tabernacle was completed, a different account in each of three books of the Pentateuch.

*Translated by Rachel Rowen*

## Weekly Parsha VAYAKHEL 5782

### Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Rashi points out that the opening portion of this week's Torah reading was transmitted by Moshe to the entire Jewish people in public, when they were all gathered. These laws of the Sabbath that represent one of the core pillars of Judaism – the observance of the Sabbath day as a day of rest and spirituality – were communicated to everyone in a public venue. No one was obligated to hear it second hand, and take the word of anyone else, regarding the proper method of observance of the Sabbath day.

Everyone heard the instructions simultaneously and clearly, publicly, and definitively. The observance of the Sabbath day has, to a great extent, been counted by other cultures as faith at its essence and remains a uniquely Jewish idea and code of behavior. The idea of a day of rest from the toil of the week has certainly been adapted by most of human civilization. However, the methodology of defining and implementing such an abstract idea as a day of rest into reality remains wholly within the purview of Jewish tradition and Torah observance.

There is, perhaps, no more striking mark of absolute Jewish identity that exists in our society than that of observing, sanctifying, and enjoying the Sabbath day. It is a truism said by a Jewish 19th century popular thinker, that more than the Jews guarded and preserved the Sabbath, the Sabbath guarded and preserved the Jewish people. To emphasize this point, the Torah teaches us that the Shabbat not only preserves the sanctity and spirit of the individual Jew, but, since it was given publicly with everyone gathered to hear its message, it is also the guarantor for the preservation of all Jewish society and the people of Israel throughout the ages.

The fact that the Sabbath was so publicly explained and detailed, teaches us another important lesson regarding Jewish life in Jewish society. There are commandments in the Torah that can rightfully be described as private and personal. The Sabbath, however, has not only a private face to it, but a public one as well. The Jews are commanded to keep the Sabbath in their private homes, but there must also be a public Sabbath, so to speak. It must be apparent on the Jewish Street that the Sabbath as arrived and is present.

Public desecration of the Sabbath by individual Jews was a far more damaging sort of behavior than the violation of other precepts in the privacy of one's home. Part of the struggle here in the State of Israel is for the growth and influence of the public Sabbath to be maintained, as part of the Jewish identity for all Jews who live here in our ancient home. Denying the concept of Shabbat to maintain total freedom of each individual is like a person who drills a hole under his or her seat on a ship and claims it will not affect anyone else. It is the public Sabbath as much as the private one that guarantees the survival of Jewish society and the Jewish state as well.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

---

### The Spirit of Community

#### VAYAKHEL • Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

What do you do when your people have just made a Golden Calf, run riot, and lost its sense of ethical and spiritual direction? How do you restore moral order – not just then in the days of Moses, but even now? The answer lies in the first word of today's parsha: Vayakhel. But to understand this, we have to retrace two journeys that were among the most fateful in the modern world.

The story begins in the year 1831 when two young men, both in their twenties – one from England, the other from France – set out on voyages of discovery that would change both of them, and eventually our collective understanding of the world. The Englishman was Charles Darwin. The Frenchman was Alexis de Tocqueville. Darwin's journey aboard the Beagle took him eventually to the Galapagos Islands where he began to think about the origin and evolution of species.

Tocqueville's journey was to investigate a phenomenon that became the title of his book: Democracy in America.

Although the two men were studying completely different things, the one zoology and biology, the other politics and sociology, as we will see, they came to strikingly similar conclusions – the same conclusion God taught Moses after the episode of the Golden Calf.

Darwin, as we know, made a series of discoveries that led him to the theory known as natural selection. Species compete for scarce resources and only the best-adapted survive. The same, he believed, was true of humans. But this left him with serious problem: If evolution is the struggle to survive, if the strong win and the weak go to the wall, then all ruthlessness should prevail. But this is not the case. All societies value altruism. People esteem those who make sacrifices for the sake of others. This, in Darwinian terms, doesn't seem to make sense at all, and he knew it.

The bravest, most sacrificial people, he wrote in *The Descent of Man* "would on average perish in larger number than other men." A noble man "would often leave no offspring to inherit his noble nature." It seems scarcely possible, he wrote, that virtue "could be increased through natural selection, that is, by survival of the fittest." [1]

It was Darwin's greatness that he saw the answer, even though it contradicted his general thesis. Natural selection operates at the level of the individual. It is as individual men and women that we pass on our genes to the next generation. But civilisation works at the level of the group.

As he put it:

A tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to give aid to each other and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes; and this would be natural selection."

How to get from the individual to the group was, he said, "at present much too difficult to be solved." [2]

The conclusion was clear even though biologists to this day still argue about the mechanisms involved. [3] We survive as groups. One person versus one lion: lion wins. Ten people against one lion: the lion may lose. Homo sapiens, in terms of strength and speed, is a poor player when ranked against the outliers in the animal kingdom. But human beings have unique skills when it comes to creating and sustaining groups. We have language: we can communicate. We have culture: we can pass on our discoveries to future generations. Humans form larger and more flexible groups than any other species, while at the same time leaving room for individuality. We are not ants in a colony or bees in a hive. Humans are the community-creating animal.

Meanwhile in America, Alexis de Tocqueville, like Darwin, faced a major intellectual problem he felt driven to solve. His problem, as a Frenchman, was to try to understand the role of religion in democratic America. He knew that the United States had voted to separate religion from power by way of the First Amendment, the separation of church and state. So religion in America had no power. He assumed that it had no influence either. What he discovered was precisely the opposite:

"There is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America." [4]

This did not make any sense to him at all, and he asked various Americans to explain it to him. They all gave him essentially the same answer. Religion in America (we are speaking of the early 1830s, remember) does not get involved in politics. He asked clergymen why not. Again they were unanimous in their answer. Politics is divisive. Therefore if religion were to become involved in politics, it too would be divisive. That is why religion stayed away from party political issues. Tocqueville paid close attention to what religion actually did in America, and he came to some fascinating conclusions. It strengthened marriage, and he believed that strong marriages were essential to free societies. He wrote:

“As long as family feeling is kept alive, the opponent of oppression is never alone.”[5]

It also led people to form communities around places of worship. It encouraged people in those communities to act together for the sake of the common good. The great danger in a democracy, said Tocqueville, is individualism. People come to care about themselves, not about others. As for the others, the danger is that people will leave their welfare to the government, a process that ends in the loss of liberty as the State takes on more and more of the responsibility for society as a whole.

What protects Americans against these twin dangers, he said, is the fact that, encouraged by their religious convictions, they form associations, charities, voluntary associations, what in Judaism we call chevrot. At first bewildered, and then charmed, Tocqueville noted how quickly Americans formed local groups to deal with the problems in their lives. He called this the “art of association,” and said about it that it was “the apprenticeship of liberty.”

All of this was the opposite of what he knew of France, where religion in the form of the Catholic Church had much power but little influence. In France, he said:

“I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country.”[6]

So religion safeguarded the “habits of the heart” essential to maintaining democratic freedom. It sanctified marriage and the home. It guarded public morals. It led people to work together in localities to solve problems themselves rather than leave it to the government. If Darwin discovered that man is the community-creating animal, Tocqueville discovered that religion in America is the community-building institution.

It still is. Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam became famous in the 1990s for his discovery that more Americans than ever are going ten-pin bowling, but fewer are joining bowling clubs and leagues. He took this as a metaphor for a society that has become individualistic rather than community-minded. He called it Bowling Alone.[7] It was a phrase that summed up the loss of “social capital,” that is, the extent of social networks through which people help one another.

Years later, after extensive research, Putnam revised his thesis. A powerful store of social capital still exists and it is to be found in places of worship. Survey data showed that frequent church- or synagogue-goers are more likely to give money to charity, regardless of whether the charity is religious or secular. They are also more likely to do voluntary work for a charity, give money to a homeless person, spend time with someone who is feeling depressed, offer a seat to a stranger, or help someone find a job. On almost every measure, they are demonstrably more altruistic than non-worshippers.

Their altruism goes beyond this. Frequent worshippers are also significantly more active citizens. They are more likely to belong to community organisations, neighbourhood and civic groups, and professional associations. They get involved, turn up, and lead. The margin of difference between them and the more secular is large.

Tested on attitudes, religiosity as measured by church or synagogue attendance is the best predictor of altruism and empathy: better than education, age, income, gender, or race. Perhaps the most interesting of Putnam’s findings was that these attributes were related not to people’s religious beliefs but to the frequency with which they attend a place of worship.[8]

Religion creates community, community creates altruism, and altruism turns us away from self and toward the common good. Putnam goes so far as to speculate that an atheist who went regularly to synagogue (perhaps because of a spouse) would be more likely to volunteer or give to charity than a religious believer who prays alone. There is something about the tenor of relationships within a community that makes it the best tutorial in citizenship and good neighbourliness.

What Moses had to do after the Golden Calf was Vayakhel – turn the Israelites into a kehillah, a community. He did this in the obvious sense of restoring order. When Moses came down the mountain and saw the Calf, the Torah says the people were pru’ah, meaning “wild,” “disorderly,” “chaotic,” “unruly,” “tumultuous.” He “saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies” (Ex. 32:25). They were not a community but a crowd. He did it in a more fundamental sense as we see in the rest of the parsha. He began by reminding the people of the laws of Shabbat. Then he instructed them to build the Mishkan, the Sanctuary, as a symbolic home for God.

Why these two commands rather than any others? Because Shabbat and the Mishkan are the two most powerful ways of building community. The best way of turning a diverse, disconnected group into a team is to get them to build something together.[9] Hence the Mishkan. The best way of strengthening relationships is to set aside dedicated time when we focus not on the pursuit of individual self interest but on the things we share, by praying together, studying Torah together, and celebrating together – in other words, Shabbat. Shabbat and the Mishkan were the two great community-building experiences of the Israelites in the desert. More than this: in Judaism, community is essential to the spiritual life. Our holiest prayers require a minyan. When we celebrate or mourn we do so as a community. Even when we confess, we do so together. Maimonides rules:

One who separates himself from the community, even if he does not commit a transgression but merely holds himself aloof from the congregation of Israel, does not fulfil the commandments together with his people, shows himself indifferent to their distress and does not observe their fast days but goes on his own way like one of the nations who does not belong to the Jewish people – such a person has no share in the world to come.[10]

That is not how religion has always been seen. Plotinus called the religious quest, “the flight of the alone to the Alone.”[11] Dean Inge said religion is what an individual does with his solitude. Jean-Paul Sartre notoriously said: hell is other people. In Judaism, it is as a community that we come before God. For us the key relationship is not I-Thou, but We-Thou.

Vayakhel is thus no ordinary episode in the history of Israel. It marks the essential insight to emerge from the crisis of the Golden Calf. We find God in community. We develop virtue, strength of character, and a commitment to the common good in community. Community is local. It is society with a human face. It is not government. It is not the people we pay to look after the welfare of others. It is the work we do ourselves, together.

Community is the antidote to individualism on the one hand and over-reliance on the state on the other. Darwin understood its importance to human flourishing. Tocqueville saw its role in protecting democratic freedom. Robert Putnam has documented its value in sustaining social capital and the common good. And it began in our parsha, when Moses turned an unruly mob into a kehillah, a community.

---

### **Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayakhel (Exodus 35:1-38:20)**

#### **Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel –“Take for yourselves an offering to the Lord. Let everyone whose heart moves him bring an offering to the Lord, gold and silver and copper... for the sanctuary and its tents and its coverings” (Exodus 35:5-11)

The last two portions of Exodus seem to repeat the two previous portions of Terumah and Tetzaveh, listing the precise dimensions, materials and furnishings of the desert sanctuary. Why is such a reiteration necessary?

Before responding, we must recall that the two portions which initially commanded the construction of the sanctuary are separated from Vayakhel and Pekudei, which repeat those instructions, by last week’s portion of Ki Tisa, which records the tragic incident of the Golden Calf. When we realize that according to most commentaries and midrashim,

the idolatrous act with the calf occurred before the command to construct the sanctuary our problem becomes compounded. Why interrupt the story about the construction of the sanctuary with the account of the calf, and why repeat the instructions?

An analogy comes to mind: Picture an excited, engaged couple who spend the period before their wedding carefully choosing their marital home and shopping for its furnishings. Then the young groom-to-be leaves on a short business trip and is unexpectedly delayed. In his absence, his fiancée has an all-night tryst with a former boyfriend. If after the accusations, confession and breast-beating subsides, the couple resumes the search for an apartment and its accoutrements with the same enthusiasm they had before, we can feel assured that all has been forgiven and they are opening a new chapter in their relationship.

This is a metaphor for the biblical account of the Golden Calf and the construction of the sanctuary; the biblical groom is the Almighty and the bride is the People of Israel.

Our analogy may well explain the repetition as well as the placing of the calf story between the two accounts of sanctuary construction. But it leaves us with a profound religious problem. The Bible itself forbids a married (or betrothed) woman who commits adultery from returning to her betrothed/husband (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Why does God take Israel back after the Golden Calf? I believe it was because of Moses. In his defense of the Jewish people before God, he initially presents three arguments: First, You [God] redeemed them paternalistically with Your great power and strong hand before they were religiously capable of dealing with independence; second, Egypt will think You only took them out to kill them in the desert, and not because You wish every human being to be free; and third, You made an irrevocable covenant with the patriarchs that their seed will live in the Land of Israel (Ex. 32:11-14).

But it is only after Moses makes another, final plea; crying out, “And now if You would only forgive their sin! But if not, erase me now from this book that You have written” (Ex. 32:32) that God actually commands Israel to go up to the Land and conquer it – proving not only that He has forgiven them, but also that His covenant with them remains intact.

The great classical commentator Rashi interprets these words along the lines of Targum Yonatan Ben Uziel: “If You would forgive their sin, it would be good and I would not ask to be erased; but if You will not forgive them, then erase me from the entire Torah, that it not be said by future generations that I was not worthy to merit Divine compassion for them.” The Rashbam explains, “Erase me from the Book of Life” and the Ibn Ezra and Sforno have “Erase me from the Book of Eternal Life... and grant my merits to the Israelites so that they be forgiven.” The Ramban maintains, “...If You will forgive their sins out of Your compassion, it would be good; but if not, erase me instead of them from the Book of Life.”

For me, however, the interpretation truest to the plain meaning of the text comes from the Mateh Yosef, a disciple of the Hatam Sofer. Based on the Talmudic axiom (B.T. Shabbat 54b, 55a) that a leader must be held responsible for the transgressions of his “flock,” Moses tells the Almighty, “How is it possible that the nation could have transgressed in so egregious a manner? Clearly, I am not worthy to be their leader. Hence, whether or not You forgive their sin, You must erase me from Your book. You must remove me from leadership, because I have been proven to be ill-prepared...”

God responds that He only punishes the actual transgressors, not their “minister,” and God determines that Moses is still the best qualified to lead the nation. However, God also understands that Moses has expressed a profound truth. Perhaps Moses’ flaw was that he was too much a man of God and too little a man of the people, unable to rouse and reach the Israelites in a way that would have prevented their transgression.

Nevertheless, God forgives us, as we see from the repetition in Vayakhel and Pekudei even after our idolatry. After all, it was God Himself, apparently realizing that the highest priority for covenantal Israel was a

leader who would convey His eternal Torah, who cajoled Moses into accepting the leadership of Israel in the first place.

Shabbat Shalom!

---

### **Rabbi Yochanan Zweig**

This week’s Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Avraham Yitzchak ben Alter Lieb. “May his Neshama have an Aliya!”

### **Making Sense Out of Dollars**

every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the Lord’s offering [...] (35:21).

The Torah uses an unusually long and verbose description of the motivations behind Bnei Yisroel’s bringing gifts for the creation of the Mishkan. The Torah could have simply said that the people brought their donations. The word donation in and of itself implies a free will desire to give. Why does the Torah use the elongated language of “whose heart stirred” and “whom his spirit made willing”?

Most people have a very complicated relationship with money. On one hand, money is something they try to acquire and hold on to, on the other hand it is something that needs to be spent on life’s essentials. Therefore, one always has to weigh the costs and benefits of spending versus saving. In addition, because money gives people the ability to have what they want, it represents an acquired sense of power – sometimes real, sometimes an illusion. Consequently, a person begins perceiving his own sense of self-worth as tied inextricably to how much money he has managed to accumulate. Inevitably, an unhealthy relationship with money leads to conflict within family, coworkers, and society at large.

A healthy relationship with money is therefore achieved by seeing money for what it really is: potential – nothing more, nothing less. When one understands this concept it becomes clear that the mindless pursuit of the collection of money is as pointless as it is useless. The only proper approach to money is to begin by deciding for what one needs money. One may then begin to anticipate how much one needs to accumulate in order to have a meaningful and fulfilling life.

Money earned is therefore not an end goal; it is only to be perceived as a product of our efforts. This is why the Gemara says that a person would prefer to have his own earned portion than to receive nine portions from his friend. A person always wants the work product of his own efforts because it represents personal achievement.

This concept also explains a very difficult Gemara. The Talmud (Chullin 91a) says that by a righteous person his money is more precious than his own body. This seems very strange. What kind of shallow person sees his money as more precious than his body? How can a righteous person possibly feel this way? The answer is really quite simple: A righteous person is the one who understands that we are put on this earth to achieve and justify our existence. His physical body is something he was given, but his money represents the accomplishment of his work product and that represents something that he alone accomplished. His achievements are far more precious to him than what he was given.

This brings us to the most important (and enjoyable) part of having money; how we spend it. When a person has a healthy understanding of money, he begins to understand that spending money should be extremely fulfilling in that one is actualizing their efforts into something concrete. In other words, all your hard work is now transformed into a house or a car or clothes or food for your children. That is something that you alone created. Much like a work of art is precious to an artist because it is an expression of who he is, actualizing your efforts into something concrete is an expression of who you are.

The same is true about giving a gift. When one gives a gift he isn’t merely giving over potential; he is actually giving his heart and soul. That is, he is actually giving all his hard work and efforts that went into acquiring that money. This is what the Torah is saying here. Bnei Yisroel weren’t just giving materials to the Mishkan, they were actually giving an expression of their hearts and spirits.

### **A Lesson in Leadership**

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

Rashi (ad loc) explains that the word ראשי (heads) is written missing a letter yud because they were criticized for their approach to giving a gift to the Mishkan: The heads of the tribes announced that Bnei Yisroel should give whatever they wanted to contribute to the Mishkan and they (the heads of the tribes) would make up the difference of whatever was still needed. This is the first instance of a “capital campaign” in Jewish history and they were offering to make sure that it came to a successful completion. This is seemingly a very generous offer.

Remarkably, not only was it the shortest capital campaign in Jewish history (Chazal teach us that it only lasted two days), those who were in charge of collecting for the Mishkan had more resources than they knew what to do with. The heads of the tribes didn’t have much to contribute so they were only able to participate in a modest way – by giving some of the stones.

Yet, Rashi says that they were punished for their approach. This is very difficult to understand. The offer to deficit fund a project is an incredibly generous offer. Making such an offer exposes a donor to the entire cost of the project. There is no fundraiser or executive director in the world who wouldn’t be thrilled to receive such an offer. How can the heads of the tribes possibly be criticized for making this offer?

What the tribal heads failed to recognize was that their job as leaders wasn’t merely to make sure that a community project was completed. A leader’s responsibility, first and foremost, is to get everyone to do what they’re supposed to do. A leader has to educate and show his followers what they’re supposed to do.

By waiting around to see what people were going to contribute to the Mishkan, the tribal leaders caused a two-fold problem: firstly, they weren’t exhibiting leadership in showing people how to give and secondly, and possibly much worse, they marginalized all of Bnei Yisroel’s gifts. That is, if someone promises to deficit fund something, when someone else contributes to the campaign he is essentially not giving to the campaign because the money is already pledged by the person who is deficit funding. In other words, in that situation, giving to the campaign is merely saving money for the original donor who offered to deficit fund the project. Thus, this approach marginalized all the future gifts. That is why they were criticized even though they made such a seemingly generous offer.

---

**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights**

*For the week ending 26 February 2022 / 25 Adar Alef 5782*

**Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - [www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com)**

**Parshat Vayakhel**

**Churchill and the Jews**

*“These are the things...” (35:1)*

The relationship between Winston Churchill (1874–1965) arguably the greatest Englishman of the twentieth century, and the Jewish People is a subject of debate. Churchill opposed anti-Semitism (as in 1904, when he was fiercely critical of the proposed Aliens Bill severely restricting Jewish immigration from Czarist Russia). However, in “Zionism versus Bolshevism,” an article written by Churchill in the Illustrated Sunday Herald in 1920, he makes a distinction between “national” Jews — who Churchill said supported Zionism — and “international” Jews — such as Karl Marx, Trotsky, Béla Kun, Rosa Luxemburg and Emma Goldman, who Churchill said supported a Bolshevik “world-wide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilization and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of arrested development, of envious malevolence, and impossible equality.” The article was criticized by the Jewish Chronicle at the time, calling it “the most reckless and scandalous campaign in which even the most discredited politicians have ever engaged.” The Chronicle said Churchill had adopted “the hoary tactics of hooligan anti-Semites” in his article.

However, Sir Martin Gilbert (1936–2015), himself a Jew and Churchill’s official biographer, argues in “Churchill and the Jews” that Churchill was overwhelmingly sympathetic to the Jews and Jewish causes: In that

same 1920 article, Churchill writes, “We owe to the Jews... a system of ethics which, even if it were entirely separated from the supernatural, would be incomparably the most precious possession of mankind, worth in fact the fruits of all other wisdom and learning put together. On that system and by that faith there has been built out of the wreck of the Roman Empire the whole of our existing civilization.”

“These are the things...” In the Torah portion called Vayakhel, the mitzvahs of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, are preceded by yet another injunction to keep Shabbat. And from the juxtaposition of the work of the Mishkan to the next two verses that deal with Shabbat, our Rabbis derive the thirty-nine categories of creative labor that are forbidden on Shabbat.

One of the messages of this juxtaposition is that the same creative labors that build the material world are precisely those that are needed to create an abode for sanctity. If “a system of ethics which, even if it were entirely separated from the supernatural, would be incomparably the most precious possession of mankind, worth in fact the fruits of all other wisdom and learning put together,” how much more when that system is connected to the spiritual world is it “incomparably the most precious possession of mankind.”

© 2020 Ohr Somayach International

---

**chiefrabbi.org**

**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

**Dvar Torah Vayakhel: What will you be doing on the day after?**

**23 February 2022**

Parshat Vayakhel commences (Shemot 35:1),

*“Vayakhel Moshe et kol adat Bnei Yisroel.” – “Moshe congregated the entire assembly of the People of Israel.”*

Rashi comments,

*“Lemacharat Yom Hakippurim,” – “This took place on the day after Yom Hakippurim.”*

Which yom Kippur is Rashi referring to and why is it important for us to know this? Rashi continues, “Kesheyarad min hahar,” – “When Moshe came down from the mountain.” Now we see that he was referring to that original Yom Kippur when we received the second tablets of the Ten Commandments.

You will recall that after initially spending 40 days and nights on Mount Sinai, Moshe received the first tablets and then, when he came down and witnessed the nation worshipping the golden calf, he smashed them. On the first of Elul, Moshe ascended the mountain again and 40 days later, on the 10th of Tishrei, he received the second set of tablets.

Timing

Why did Moshe not wait? Why was he so keen to gather the people together immediately after the receipt of the second tablets? The answer is surely that Moshe Rabbeinu recognised that on the previous day, the nation had had the most extraordinary, uplifting experience, a transformational day for one and all. And he wanted to guarantee that there would be follow-up.

He didn’t want that to be a one day memory. Rather, he wanted it to genuinely change their lives for the better, and so he purposefully, proactively created an event to guarantee that the inspiration which they had received would now continue well into the future.

Follow-up

We can learn so much from Moshe Rabbeinu’s lesson. For example, immediately following a Bar Mitzvah or a Bat Mitzvah, we can’t just leave it up to chance that our children will remain connected to our people and our tradition. We need to proactively create programmes of study and engagement for them to continue their commitment. Similarly, after many years of immersive Jewish education, it’s important for us to create opportunities for ongoing Jewish education and commitment well into adulthood. I find all this to be of great relevance right now. The pandemic has provided us with an extraordinary, unprecedented, long opportunity for cheshbon hanefesh, introspection. During Covid we’ve been reassessing our lives and now we have fresh priorities. As we now emerge from the pandemic towards a more regular rhythm of life, let’s



learn that lesson from Moshe Rabbeinu – let's do something proactively to guarantee that all our Covid resolutions will be translated into action, to ensure that the inspiration that we have received will continue for the rest of our lives.

*Shabbat shalom.*

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

---

### **Drasha Parshas**

#### **Parshas Vayakhel - Going the Extra Smile**

#### **Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

Building a sanctuary is difficult enough. Getting people to donate has been, historically, even more difficult. That, however, was not the case concerning the Mishkan. The Torah in this week's portion tells us that everyone contributed to the cause. Men and women brought gold and silver. They brought personal items and family items. Copper mirrors were donated as well as bracelets, bangles and baubles. Those who had wool and linen came and those who had dyes donated.

Before the pledges began arriving, the Nesseim (the heads of the tribes) were so confident that the goals would not be met, that they pledged to fill the gap of any missing funds. They were shocked to learn that there was almost nothing for them to contribute! So much of every item was donated that an announcement was made, ordering the entire nation to halt their generosity. (It may have been the first and last of its kind!)

But what interests me is one other group of people that the Torah mentions as contributors. "And all those who Hashem inspired with wisdom to do the work. They took in front of Moshe the donations that the Jews brought for the work of the Mishkan, and the brought an additional offering each morning" (Exodus 36:2-4).

Why did the Torah single out that these people brought something to the Mishkan? Didn't everybody?

The daughter of Rabbi Zusia of Anipol's was engaged. As poor as he was, Reb Zusia and his wife scraped together enough money for a seamstress to sew a beautiful gown for the bride-to-be. After a month the gown was ready, and Reb Zusia's wife went with her bundle of rubles to the home of the seamstress to get the finished gown.

She came home empty-handed. "Where is the gown?" asked both the Rebbe and his daughter, almost in unison.

"Well," said his wife, "I did a mitzvah. When I came to pick up the gown, I saw tears in the eyes of the seamstress. I asked her why she was crying and she told me that her daughter, too, was getting married. Then she looked at the beautiful gown that she had sewn for me and sighed, 'if only we could afford such beautiful material for a gown.'"

Reb Zusia's wife continued. "At that moment I decided to let the seamstress have our gown as a gift!"

Reb Zusia was delighted. The mitzvah of helping a poor bride was dear to him and he longed for the opportunity to fulfill it. But he added one question to his wife. "Did you pay her for the work she did for us?"

"Pay her?" asked the wife, "I gave her the gown!"

"I'm sorry," said the Rebbe. "You told me the gown was a gift. We still owe her for the weeks of work she spent for us." The rebbitzin agreed and, in addition to the gift of the gown she compensated the seamstress for her work.

The men and women who toiled laboriously could have said that they had done their share. After all, they crafted and wove the beautiful utensils and tapestries of the Mishkan. Yet that was not enough for them. In addition to the work they did, Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (1786-1829) explains, they contributed too! They did not stop their commitment with their work for the Mishkan. The Torah tells us that they, too, gave each morning. The efforts of individuals were crowned by their relentless generosity. In addition to their time and their skills, they gave their possessions. In a generation that looks to abdicate responsibility and commitment, it is wonderful to read about men and women who searched for more ways to give — and found them!

*Good Shabbos*

*Dedicated in memory of George Fisch by Mr. and Mrs. Lionel Fisch*

*Copyright © 1996 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc.*

*Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.*

*Drasha © 2020 by Torah.org.*

---

### **Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayakhel**

#### **Why No Praise for the Acacia Wood Schleppers?**

Parshas Vayakhel contains a review of the process of constructing the Mishkan and its furnishings, beginning with the solicitation of donations for the various building materials necessary for this construction. Among the significant items brought was Atzei Shittim (Acacia wood). The pasuk says, "...anyone with whom there was found shittim wood for any work of the labor brought it." (Shemos 35:24). In fact, there was a significant need for Shittim wood, which was both long and heavy. The Medrash in Shir HaShirim speaks of the central beam (Beriach haTichon) that wrapped around the walls of the Mishkan being 32 cubits long.

Where did they find such long beams? They were hidden in Egypt (Mitzrayim) from the days of Yaakov Avinu. Chazal teach that Avraham Avinu originally planted the trees for the wood for the Mishkan in Be'er Sheva, and when Yaakov Avinu relocated to Mitzrayim, he took the wood from those trees and brought it with him to Mitzrayim. The people took this wood with them when they left Mitzrayim. They carried it into the Midbar and eventually they used this "wood with a pedigree" for the beams of the Mishkan. This is referenced in the above-cited pasuk.

The sefer Darash Mordechai by Rav Mordechai Druk brings a question from his own son: We know that Chazal spend a lot of time praising Moshe Rabbeinu for the fact that he spent his final hours in Mitzrayim locating and retrieving the bones of Yosef which he took with him. (Shemos 13:19) Chazal praise Moshe by noting that the rest of the Jewish people were occupying themselves with collecting "the booty of Egypt" while Moshe occupied himself with Mitzvos, quoting the pasuk "The wise in heart, will take Mitzvos..." (Mishlei 10:8) The son of the Darash Mordechai asked his father: "Why is there no praise given to the people who made it their business to gather up the Acacia wood that Yaakov brought down to Mitzrayim and schlep it out with them?" If we consider that the central beam (Beriach haTichon) was approximately 64 feet long (32 Amos) then that was certainly a cumbersome task, to say the least. There is no doubt that it was much harder to take responsibility for all that wood than to take responsibility for Yosef's bones. The wood schleppers also did a very noble act. What is the difference between Yosef's bones and Avraham and Yaakov's Acacia wood?

The Darash Mordechai suggested an answer to his son, and then his son responded with an answer of his own.

Rav Mordechai Druk answered that the praise bestowed upon Moshe was not merely for the fact that he schlepped, but rather for the fact that he did it while everyone else was busy collecting money. What does someone do when he is confronted with the following choice: On the one hand, there is a mitzvas aseh from the Ribono shel Olam to collect money—go into the vault and take out gold and silver, no strings attached! Who will hesitate to fulfill a mitzvah and get rich in the process?

On the other hand, what did Moshe Rabbeinu do? Forget the money. Forget the riches. I am just going to do the mitzvah of taking Yosef's bones. The praise bestowed on Moshe is not for the weight he had to carry. If we would bestow praises based on pounds or kilograms carried, the wood carriers should be considered far greater heroes. Rather, Moshe was praised for forgoing the mitzvah with which he could acquire great wealth for himself, and instead focusing on a pure unadulterated mitzvah with no "matan sechara b'tziddah" (immediately accompanying reward).

Rav Druk's son offered another answer: Moshe saw the distinction being between a mitzvah bein Adam l'Makom (between man and G-d) and a mitzvah bein Adam l'Chaveiro (between man and his fellow-man). Work to build a shul is an attractive mitzvah. People will come to shul and see the wood that I broke my back schlepping. It is a mitzvah that



will bring me praise and social accolades from my friends and neighbors. It is not hard to find people anxious to work for such a mitzvah.

However, it is not so easy to find people willing to do a private kindness for someone else. A personal mitzvah bein Adam l'Chaveiro has neither the glory nor the publicity of a mitzvah involving public worship in a Mishkan of the Ribono shel Olam. Such a public mitzvah is actually less of a mitzvah than a private chessed to an individual. Yosef haTzadik had children and grandchildren. Really, it should have been their responsibility to take care of their grandfather's bones. Let them do it! The fact that Moshe Rabbeinu chose a Mitzvah bein Adam l'Chaveiro has value and superiority that trumps even a Mitzvah bein Adam l'Makom.

I heard an interesting incident that bears this out.

Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein has a sefer in which he brings interesting incidents related to Chodesh Nissan and to Pesach. His first story concerns the mitzvah of Birkas Ilanos (making a bracha on the first blooming fruit trees of the spring season). There is a Kabbalistic concept which emphasizes the preference of making this Bracha specifically over two trees.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt"l, was walking down the street in Chodesh Nissan and he passed a house with a fruit tree. He paused in front of that house and prepared to recite the bracha. Another Jew passed by and said to the respected sage, "If you go two blocks down the street, you will find a house with two blossoming fruit trees in front of it. Why don't you wait two blocks and fulfill the mitzvah in accordance with the Kabbalistic preference?"

Rav Shlomo Zalman pointed out to this Jew the window of the house in front of which he was now standing. "Do you see the woman in the window? She is a widow. She is standing in the window and is bursting with pride that I, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, posek of the generation, am making my Birkas Ilanos on her tree! It is better to do a chessed by bringing pleasure to a widow, even if it means making the bracha on just one tree, rather than adding the dimension of the Zohar's preference of making the Birkas Ilanos on two trees."

This is again an example that if a person can combine into his Man-God mitzvos a dimension of a Man-Man mitzvah, that is indeed preferable. Thus too, the private chessed that Moshe Rabbeinu performed with the bones of Yosef haTzadik was an even bigger mitzvah than schlepping the wood for the Mishkan.

*Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com*

*Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD [dhoffman@torah.org](mailto:dhoffman@torah.org)*

*Rav Frand © 2020 by Torah.org.*

---

### **Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz**

#### **Parashat Vayakhel – 5782 :: The Mishkan of the Heart**

Parashat Vayakhel describes the creation of the Mishkan (the Tabernacle, the temporary temple that accompanied the Jewish nation on its desert journey) and the utensils within it. The last utensil described is the copper washstand situated in the Mishkan's courtyard. This was the sink in which Aaron and his sons, the kohanim (priests), as well as the kohanim who followed them, washed their hands and feet and purified themselves as preparation for their avodat Hashem, service of G-d, in the Mishkan.

Interestingly, the Torah mentions not only the material from which the washstand was made – copper – but also the source of the material.

*And he made the washstand of copper and its base of copper from the mirrors of the women who had set up the legions, who congregated at the entrance of the tent of meeting. (Exodus 38, 8)*

Based on this description, the washstand was made of copper as shiny as the mirrors used by the women to beautify themselves for their husbands.

Rashi, according to midrash (Tanchuma, Pekudei 9), explains that the contribution of the women led to an argument between Moses and G-d. Moses initially refused to accept the donation. He felt it was

inappropriate to use mirrors meant for such an earthly need as feminine self-adornment as material for creation of a Mishkan utensil.

But G-d answered with an incredible response:

*The Holy One, blessed is He, said to him, "Accept [them], for these are more precious to Me than anything because through them the women set up many legions [i.e., through the children they gave birth to] in Egypt." When their husbands were weary from back-breaking labor, they [the women] would go and bring them food and drink and give them to eat. Then they [the women] would take the mirrors and each one would see herself with her husband in the mirror, and she would seduce him with words, saying, "I am more beautiful than you." And in this way, they aroused their husbands desire and would copulate with them, conceiving and giving birth there, as it is said: "Under the apple tree I aroused you" (Song 8:5).*

The women wisely awakened the love of their partners and thus built the Jewish nation.

But how did they do so with the use of a mirror?

Rabbi Shnuer Zalman of Liadi (founder and first Rebbe of Chabad, 1745 – 1812) reveals a wonderful secret in his book, the Tanya:

*There is yet another good way for a man, which is suitable for all and "very high" indeed, to arouse and kindle the light of the love that is implanted and concealed in his heart, that it may shine forth with its intense light, like a burning fire, in the consciousness of the heart and mind...This [way] is: to take to heart the meaning of the verse: "As in water, face answers to face, so does the heart of man to man." This means that as [in the case of] the likeness and features of the face which a man presents to the water, the same identical face is reflected back to him from the water, so indeed is also the heart of a man who is loyal in his affection for another person, for this love awakens a loving response for him in the heart of his friend also, cementing their mutual love and loyalty for each other, especially as each sees his friend's love for him. (Likutei Amaraim, 46)*

The Jewish women saw their partners collapsing from the burden of hard labor in Egypt. They would come home and fall into bed exhausted. In their wisdom, the women understood that the way to rekindle love was by looking into a mirror together. When the husband looked into the mirror and saw his wife's loving glance, his old love was rekindled.

The waters of the washstand served the same purpose. A man looking into the water would see his own image. "As in water, face answers to face." That same shared look of the husband and wife at their image reflected back at them rekindles their love and creates peace between them.

Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa (Poland, 1765 – 1827) raises another question: Why does it say "As in water, face answers to face so does the heart of man to man" and not "as in a mirror"?

And he explains – In order to see one's face in water, you must bend down, while to look in a mirror, one stands upright.

In order to arouse love, it is not enough to have a loving look that comes from a position of firmness or arrogance. Only when a person looks at another with humility, concession and acceptance, then, "as water, face answers to face," love is rekindled also by the other side.

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

---

### **Rav Kook Torah**

#### **Vayakhel: Technology and the Sabbath**

#### **Rabbi Chanan Morrison**

*"Do not ignite fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath." (Exod. 35:3)*

The Torah forbids 39 different categories of activity on the Sabbath. Yet only one — lighting fire — is explicitly prohibited in the Torah. Why?

And why does the Torah qualify the prohibition of lighting fire with the phrase, "in any of your dwellings"? Is it not forbidden to start a fire in any location?

Guidelines for Technology

The control and use of fire is unique to humanity. It is the basis for our advances in science and innovations in technology. Even now, fuel sources for burning, coal and oil, are what power modern societies. In short, fire is a metaphor for our power and control over nature, the fruit of our God-given intelligence.

What is the central message of the Sabbath? When we refrain from working on the seventh day, we acknowledge that God is the Creator of the world.

One might think that only the pristine natural world is truly the work of God. Human technology, on the other hand, is artificial and perhaps alien to the true purpose of the universe. Therefore, the Torah specifically prohibits lighting fire on the Sabbath, emphasizing that our progress in science and technology is also part of creation. Everything is included in the ultimate design of the universe. Our advances and inventions contribute towards the goal of creation in accordance with God's sublime wisdom.

Along with the recognition that all of our accomplishments are in essence the work of God, we must also be aware that we have tremendous power to change and improve the world. This change will be for a blessing if we are wise enough to utilize our technology within the guidelines of integrity and holiness.

Fire in the Temple

This caveat leads to the second question we asked: why does the Torah limit the prohibition of lighting fire on the Sabbath to "your dwellings"? The Talmud (Shabbat 20a) explains that lighting fire is only forbidden in private dwellings, but in the Temple, it is permitted to burn offerings on the Sabbath.

Why should fire be permitted in the Temple?

The holy Temple was a focal point of prophecy and Divine revelation. It was the ultimate source of enlightenment, for both the individual and the nation. The fire used in the Temple is a metaphor for our mission to improve the world through advances in science and technology. We need to internalize the message that it is up to us to develop and advance the world, until the entire universe is renewed with a new heart and soul, with understanding and harmony. Permitting the technological innovation of fire in Temple on the Sabbath indicates that God wants us to utilize our intellectual gifts to innovate and improve, in a fashion similar to God's own creative acts.

We need to be constantly aware of our extraordinary potential when we follow the path that our Maker designated for us. At this spiritual level, we should not think that we are incapable of accomplishing new things. As the Talmud declares, "If they desire, the righteous can create worlds" (Sanhedrin 65b). When humanity attains ethical perfection, justice will then guide all of our actions, and scientific advances and inventions will draw their inspiration from the source of Divine morality, the holy Temple.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 164-165. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. III, p. 53)

Copyright © 2022 Rav Kook Torah

---

**Shema Yisrael Torah Network**

**Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Vayakhel**

**פרשת ויקהל תשפ"ב**

**ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה וביום השביעי יהיה לכם קדש**

**On six days work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you. (35:2)**

*Shabbos* is much more than one of the 613 *mitzvos*. It attests to Hashem as the Creator of the world. We rest in recognition of Hashem's "resting" from Creation. We tend to gloss over another element of *Shabbos*. *Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 2) relate: "The *Shabbos* came before Hashem and said, 'Everyone has a partner, but I do not.' Hashem replied, 'Knesses Yisrael is your partner.' When *Klal Yisrael* stood at *Har Sinai*, Hashem said to them, 'Remember the *Shabbos* to keep it holy.'" Each of the six days of the work week is considered a "work day," a day of creative mundane activity. Each of these days was

assigned the adjunct of a working day. It required *kedushah*, holiness, another day to complement it, a day to help it to actualize its potential, establishing three sets of partnerships. *Shabbos*, however, was bereft of a partner. Its potential could not be realized thoroughly in order to grow in sanctity. Only *Klal Yisrael* could achieve this goal.

One does not turn his back on a partner. It is a relationship of mutual sharing in which two people (entities) enhance and complete one another. This concept should define our relationship vis-à-vis *Shabbos*. One might conjecture that laxity in *Shabbos* observance is a deficiency to be found in those who do not practice *mitzvos*. Specifically, because *Shabbos* is the soul-mate of *Klal Yisrael*, even the observant have difficulty doing justice to one aspect of *Shabbos* observance.

*Horav Yaakov Galinsky*, זל, relates that one *Erev Shabbos*, he noticed his neighbor walking into the apartment building carrying two heavily-laden shopping bags. He was certain that he was transporting delicacies for his *Shabbos* meal. This was confirmed (he thought) when the man smiled to him, and said, "My *Oneg Shabbos*, *Shabbos* delights." Since the man practically invited him to look in the bag, *Rav Galinsky* peeked to see what types of goodies his friend had bought. He was shocked to see that this man's idea of *Oneg Shabbos* was newspapers and magazines. While it is not *halachically* inappropriate (*Shabbos* should be a day for Torah and *tefillah*), it is a sad commentary concerning this man's perception of *Oneg Shabbos*.

In his inimitable manner, the *Maggid* presents an analogy to describe the man's obtuseness. On the day of a king's coronation, the future monarch sought to do something for the benefit of his kingdom. He met with his advisors and suggested that every citizen be allowed one wish/one request which he would fulfill. His advisors countered that would break the royal treasury. Instead, they suggested that for one hour each week on a specific day, whoever presented his wish, would see it fulfilled. Two days prior to the designated day, the lines were forming. People slept on the street. They would do anything to get in during that hour – which would allow for only so many people. Once the hour passed, regardless of the length of the line, the king's benevolence would halt.

The awaited moment had arrived, and the gates to the palace were opened as the people edged forward. Suddenly, out of nowhere, someone pushed through and went to the head of the line. How did he do it? He was the town leper, afflicted with the contagious, dread disease, covered from head to toe with pus-filled boils emitting a noxious odor. Everyone was careful to give the intruder a wide berth. The guards were not prepared to permit this man, with his decrepit soiled clothes and foul-smelling body, to enter the palace. They scrubbed him from head to toe, gave him clean clothes and sprayed him with a powerful deodorizer. He was now as ready as he would ever be to greet the king.

"How can I help you?" the king asked. "My master, the king, I have a miserable life," the man began. "My wounds are painful; their odor drives people away from me. The only food that I eat is derived from the scraps that I find in the garbage. I do not enjoy anything in life, except for one thing: When I scratch my skin, I have some pleasure. I wait for that moment. There is, however, a problem. I am unable to reach my back. I ask that the king arrange for me to obtain two long brushes with which I will be able to scratch my back." The king agreed and had the royal scribe enter the leper's order for two brushes.

When the king saw the smiles on his advisors' faces, he asked them why they were laughing at this wretched man. They replied, "This man had a one-time opportunity, a chance of a lifetime, to ask the king to provide him with a specialist that would heal his pain and restore his body to its original healthy self. Instead, he asked for brushes. How pathetic!" The leper looked at them and raised his voice, "No one tells me what to do. I want brushes! You will not deprive me of my two brushes."

*Shabbos* is Hashem's gift to His People, a gift which provides us with the opportunity to be with Hashem through prayer and study. Instead,

this man's notion of *Oneg Shabbos* is reading a newspaper. He would rather have the brushes than the cure.

ויבאו האנשים על הנשים

**The men came with the women. (35:22)**

The *Ramban* interprets *al ha'nashim*, with the women, as indicating that the men were ancillary, secondary to the women. The jewelry detailed in this *pasuk* was primarily women's jewelry. As soon as they heard the call for donations, the women came to donate. *Targum Onkeles* translates *al ha'nashim* as, on the women, implying that the women came bedecked in their expensive jewelry, removed it there, and donated it to the *Mishkan*. Why did they remove their jewelry only after they arrived at the area designated for donations? *Horav Moshe Feinstein*, *zl*, explains that the women sought to convey the message that despite the fact that they liked their jewelry, and they would otherwise be more than happy to hold on to it, Hashem's *Mishkan* took precedence. They were not donating old, worn-out clothes that no one wore anymore. They were contributing their updated, fashionable jewelry, because they wanted to give their best to Hashem. Furthermore, they brought the jewelry themselves, to demonstrate that it was their decision – not something their husbands forced them to do.

This is the manner in which we should give *tzedakah*, charity: because one wants to share his best, his most loved – not something that he wants to rid himself of. Likewise, with regard to Torah study. One should not regret the worldly pleasures that he is relinquishing in order to learn Torah. The time he devotes to Torah study should be his most prized time, which he happily defers to what is most important to him – Torah study.

I just came across an inspiring *dvar Torah* from *Horav Mordechai Gifter*, *zl*, which expresses a similar point. We read in the *Haftorah* for the first day of *Rosh Hashanah* about Chanah and her supplications for a child. Chanah's pleas for a child were not unusual; every woman wants to be a mother. While the reasons behind their maternal passion may vary – every woman wants to have a child to love, to establish a legacy, a bond with the future. Human nature dictates that someone who has waited a long time for the blessing of a child to be realized will want to smother her child with extraordinary love and never let him/her out of her sight. This is natural, and the rationale is obvious. Concerning Chanah, we notice an anomaly. She asserts that if Hashem were to bless her with a child, she will give him up to Hashem! Chanah did not want a child simply to satisfy her maternal instinct. She desired a child so that she could honor Hashem! She wanted to glorify the Almighty, to elevate His Name in the world. *Rosh Hashanah* is the day that we coronate Hashem as *Melech Malchei ha'Melachim*, King of Kings. How fitting is the *Haftorah* that tells us about the woman that wanted a child just so that she could better serve Hashem. Incidentally, Chanah's prayer was answered on *Rosh Hashanah*. Something to think about.

ראו קרא ד' בשם בצלאל בן אורי בן חור למטה יהודה

**See, Hashem has called by name, Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur from the tribe of Yehudah. (35:30)**

The *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Vayakhel* 1) teaches: "Every time a man increases his good deeds (and *mitzvos*), he adds to his good name. You find that a man is known by three names: the name which his father and mother call him; the name by which other men call him; and the name he earns for himself. Proof of this is Betzalel, who was granted the privilege of building the *Mishkan* because he had earned a good name. What is the source of this idea? From the name He called him: 'See, Hashem has called by name, Betzalel.' (Which can be read as *b'tzeil Keil*, 'in the shadow of G-d')." An intriguing statement which begs elucidation. What is special about the name that one earns from himself? Why is it better than the name he was given at birth or the name by which his friends call him?

*Horav Eliezer Kahanov*, *zl* (*Rosh Yeshivah*, Torah Vodaas) explains the concept of *shem she'kanah l'atzmo*, "The name that he earns for himself," as the name by which he is recognized, to the point that it becomes a synonym for his birth name. For example, Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah became synonymous for one who is *mekadesh*

*shem Shomayim b'rabim*, "publicly sacrifices himself for the glory of the Almighty." Thus, when the name of one these three is mentioned, one immediately thinks of *Kiddush Shem Shomayim*.

Anyone who devotes himself whole-heartedly to serving Hashem becomes a symbol of the greatness that he has achieved, and he is ultimately identified with that symbol, that specific characteristic. When one mentions the *Gaon* of Vilna, we think of brilliance, unparalleled diligence and assiduousness in Torah. The *Chafetz Chaim* is the symbol of righteousness and devotion, as he was the individual who altered our *halachic* appreciation of *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* with his *Mishnah Berurah*. He also transformed how we think and speak concerning others through his *Shemiras Halashon*. These are but a few examples but the idea of a person symbolizing his unique quality applies to many. A *shem tov* is an identity; it is the name that we earn.

This is *Chazal's* message concerning Betzalel's good name. Betzalel – *b'tzal Keil* – in Hashem's shadow: Betzalel's name was the identity which he earned as a result of his devotion to Hashem.

ראו קרא ד' בשם בצלאל בן אורי בן חור

**See, Hashem has proclaimed by name, Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur. (25:30)**

As the result of his attempt to prevent the nation from their treasonous act of creating and worshipping the Golden Calf, Chur, son of Miriam and grandfather of Betzalel, the worshippers of the Golden Calf murdered him. For his unequivocal act of *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, Chur received a posthumous reward to see his grandson be chosen as the architect of the *Mishkan* – which incidentally atoned for the sin of the Golden Calf. This explains why Hashem selected Chur, but why was Moshe Rabbeinu not selected to oversee the building of the *Mishkan*? Moshe had toiled for forty days and nights to understand every aspect and nuance of the Torah. Was anyone more deserving to erect the *Mishkan* than Moshe? He was *Klal Yisrael's* most erudite member, who had no peer. Furthermore, he wanted to do it! Hashem told Moshe, "Sorry. The position of honor is being transferred to Betzalel." Clearly, Moshe wanted to build the *Mishkan* because he felt most qualified, and, therefore, the one who would best enhance the glory of Hashem. It certainly was not for his personal prestige.

*Horav Shmuel Berenbaum*, *zl*, explains that Moshe understood Hashem's selection of Betzalel to be temporary. Betzalel would commence the project out of deference to Chur's *mesiras nefesh*, but Moshe would execute the conclusion, the finishing touches. After all, he was *Klal Yisrael's* quintessential leader, the *Rabban Shel Kol Yisrael*. Who was better suited to execute this mission than he? Hashem explained, "True, you are the leader, the scholar without peer who devoted himself to every aspect of the *Mishkan*. Clearly, you are most appropriate for this task. From a pragmatic perspective, you should be constructing the *Mishkan*. I, however, created Betzalel, specifically for this task! Consequently, he is more worthy than anyone."

We derive from here that Hashem selects some people – regardless of their background, ability, acumen – for a project, and, as a result, He grants them Heavenly grace to succeed in a manner that is almost mind-boggling. Everyone knows or has heard of, an individual who has been blessed with an inordinate amount of *siyata d'Shmaya*, which enabled him to succeed beyond realistic expectations.

For example, the *kiruv*, Jewish outreach, movement, is comprised of many individuals who have devoted countless years to its success, but it all began through heroic efforts of a few "chosen" individuals. I will not name them, lest I forget someone. This applies to every aspect of Jewish life. Hashem places specific people in situations and grants them the opportunity to "carry the ball." Some run with it, while others convince themselves that the task is too difficult, or they do not have the time, etc.

Once a student of Kaminetz, who was very close with its *Rosh Yeshivah*, *Horav Baruch Ber Leibowitz*, *zl*, the *Bircas Shmuel*, presented *Horav Moshe Feinstein*, *zl*, with an intricate *shailah*, *halachic* query, which involved life and death issues. *Rav* Moshe immediately replied, rendering his *p'sak*, decision, to the query. The *Rav*, however, did not agree. "Is this the way one responds to a *shailah*?" he screamed. "This is

a very profound and intricate *shailah* that requires much thought and research. How can you render an off-the-cuff decision? My *Rebbe*, the revered *Rav* Baruch Ber, would never respond to a *shailah* of such importance in such a manner. He would spend hours researching every aspect of the *shailah* and every source of *halachah* before he would render his decision!”

*Rav* Moshe listened patiently to the man’s harangue, and respectfully, calmly, he replied, “*Rav* Baruch Ber was a great *Rosh Yeshiva*, but he was not a *posek*, *halachic* arbiter. This was not his purpose in life. It is mine.” End of story. *Rav* Moshe was the *posek hador*, the greatest *halachic* arbiter of his time. He was blessed with extra-ordinary *siyata d’Shmaya* with regard to *p’sak*. He knew who he was and what his function in life was. *Rav* Baruch Ber might have been a greater *Rosh Yeshiva*, a more analytical *lamden*, scholar; his lectures might have been more profound. He was, however, not a *posek*. *Rav* Moshe was. Thus, he had the uncanny power to render the *halachah* like no one else. This was his *siyata d’Shmaya*.

The *Rosh Yeshiva* cites another incident which took place concerning one of the greatest *poskim* of all times, the *Chasam Sofer*. An *agunah* (woman who was either abandoned by her husband, or her husband went missing and she had no irrefutable proof that he was dead) came before *Horav Akiva Eiger*, זל, *Rav* of Posen and one of the greatest *Talmudic* scholars, to render her permissible to remarry. Apparently, her husband had been gone for some time, and she had some proof that he was never going to return alive. The *Gaon* listened and rendered his decision on the condition that she present the query to his son-in-law, the *Chasam Sofer*. The *Chasam Sofer* concurred with his father-in-law’s decision. He asked, however, that nothing be done for one week. He conjectured that before she were to move on and remarry, it was best that they allow for a week to pass. That week, her husband appeared!

*Rav* Akiva Eiger later explained that he specifically sent the query to his son-in-law, because he was the *posek hador*. As such, the *Chasam Sofer* enjoyed a unique *siyata d’Shmaya*. Hashem designated him for this position, which he filled to the expected capacity. *Rav* Akiva Eiger might have been the greater scholar of the two, but the *Chasam Sofer* was the Heavenly-designated *posek hador*. With regard to *halachic* decisions, this is what matters.

**יעש בצלאל את הארון**

**Betzalel made the Aron. (37:1)**

*Rashi* makes an insightful comment which gives us pause, “Because Betzalel put himself out for this task more than the others, it bears his name.” *Chazal* teach that the origins of Betzalel’s devotion, his *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, were in his character, in his DNA, transmitted from his grandfather, Chur. The acts of Betzalel and Chur appear to be token varied expressions of *mesiras nefesh*: Chur giving up his life to prevent the Golden Calf from achieving fruition; Betzalel’s punctilious devotion to the building of the Sanctuary in which the Divine Presence would repose. These acts qualified each of them for the designation of *mesiras nefesh* designation. How are we to understand the connection between the grandfather’s life sacrifice and the grandson’s devotion to building the *Mishkan*?

*Horav Tzvi Kushelevsky, Shlita*, explains this based on a *Talmudic* passage (*Berachos* 20a): “*Rav* Papa asked Abaye, ‘Why did the previous generations merit miracles, while we do not? It clearly was not because the previous generation achieved a greater level of scholarship, since *Rav* Papa’s generation was proficient in all six orders of the *Mishnah*, which was greater than the previous generation.’

“Abaye replied, ‘It is because the early generation exhibited *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, as in the case of *Rav* Ada bar Ahava, who noticed a woman dressed immodestly (calling attention to herself by her flamboyant attire). He thought that she was Jewish and immediately tore the outer garment (that was the cause of the ruckus) off of her. It turned out that he had erred, and actually the woman was a gentile.’” [As a result, he compensated her handsomely for her humiliation.]

According to *Chazal*, the barometer of *mesiras nefesh* is a function of one’s intolerance of a woman’s flaunting herself immodestly in public.

The fact that this distinguished sage was willing to ignore public opinion and act zealously indicated his *mesiras nefesh*. Does this mean that *mesiras nefesh* is measured on the yardstick of our zealotry – even if it means that people will think negatively of us? The *Rosh Yeshiva* explains that we see from here that *mesiras nefesh* means that when someone acts in an affronting manner against Hashem (or His devotees), one feels personally aggrieved. One views this as a personal issue, an attack against his person. He is troubled and expresses his displeasure with action against the perpetrator. This is why *Rav* Ada bar Ahava acted impulsively. To him, this was self-defense. He was being assaulted.

Such a response, however, carries a downside. At times, we become so heated that we react rashly, without weighing the situation from all vantage points. *Rav* Ada reacted before he confirmed the identity of the perpetrator.

Betzalel exhibited this same core quality of *mesiras nefesh*. Veritably, he did not give up his life for the *Mishkan*, but he made certain that Hashem’s Name and honor were priority number one. Indeed, Hashem’s honor and Betzalel’s personal wishes became one and the same. It is for this *mesiras nefesh* that the *Mishkan* is attributed to him.

**Va’ani Tefillah**

**נפילת אפים – תחנון. Nefillas apayim – Tachanun. Falling on the face – supplication.**

*Chazal* (*Bava Metzia* 59a) teach that one who submissively places his head down in fervent prayer effects a positive response. This supplication is a heartfelt plea to Hashem that He have mercy on us. The original source for this supplication heralds back to Moshe *Rabbeinu*, Aharon *HaKohen* and Yehoshua who cast themselves down before Hashem in times of stress and tragedy.

When we recite *Shemoneh Esrai*, we stand erect before Hashem. This is an extraordinary privilege, since, when we petition His favor, we should really be cringing in total subjugation. Avraham *Avinu* stood when he prayed to Hashem. We take our “cue” from our Patriarch and act likewise. However, when we arrive at the conclusion of *Shemoneh Esrai*, we realize the enormity of what we have just done: We stood before Hashem, pleaded with Him and even argued that we should be blessed. In great humiliation, we fall on our faces and surrender to Him. *Tachanun* is, thus, a more realistic prayer, a more appropriate manner of praying to the Almighty. I heard in the name of *gadol echad* that: *Shemoneh Esrai* and *Tachanun* are two sides of the same coin. In the *Shemoneh Esrai*, we acknowledge by the way we stand and the manner in which we pray that the human being is potentially great. Thus, he is worthy of being a “partner” with Hashem in Creation. On the other hand, the *Tachanun* prayer reveals the true reality about ourselves: how dependent we are on Hashem’s mercy and grace.

Sponsored by Jeffrey and Jane Belkin

On the occasion of his grandfather’s *yahrzeit*

יעקב צבי בן פינחס ז"ל - ב' אדר א' תרע"ט - February 20, 1919 - ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved

prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

<https://www.theyeshiva.net/jewish/926/athens-vs-jerusalem>

**Athens Vs. Jerusalem**

**G-d Dwells in the Gulf Between Your Dreams and Your Reality**

**Rabbi YY Jacobson**

The School of Athens, by Raphael (1509-10). In the center is the artist’s depiction of Plato pointing upward, to the abstract and the universal.

Question: Did your life, your marriage, your career, your family, work out the way you dreamt it would?

The story is told of a famous child psychologist who spent many hours constructing a new driveway at his home. Just after he smoothed the surface of the freshly poured concrete, his small children chased a ball across the driveway, leaving deep footprints. The man yelled after them with a torrent of angry words. His shocked wife said, “You’re a psychologist who’s supposed to love children.”

The fuming man shouted, "I love children in the abstract, not in the concrete!"

#### A Vision of Duality

Plato, one of the greatest philosophers of ancient Greece (428-347 B.C.E.), was driven by the search for truth. How, in this world of chance and change, can we arrive at knowledge that is beyond chance and change? His answer was that reality is not the chaotic profusion of things we see, feel and touch; the thousands of different kinds of chairs, houses, or trees. The truth of reality lies in what is common to each: the ideal form of a chair, house, or tree.

Plato argued that the substantive reality around us is only a reflection of a higher truth. Truth, he believed, is the abstraction; ideas are more real than things. Things are particular; truth is universal. The Greek philosopher developed a vision of two worlds: a world of unchanging ideas and a world of changing physical objects.

For example, a particular tree, with a branch or two missing, possibly alive, possibly dead, and with the initials of two hikers carved into its bark, is distinct from the abstract form of Tree-ness. Tree-ness is the ideal that each of us holds in our mind which allows us to identify the imperfect reflections of trees all around us. (1)

It is hard to describe how deeply this idea of Plato impacted Western thought and civilization. For one, it taught that truth can be found only in universalism, not in the particulars of reality. The more universal a culture is the closer to truth it comes. Truth is abstract, perfect, uniform.

In addition, Plato's vision embraced duality, conferring truth upon the perfect, spiritual ideal universe and corruption and falsehood upon the flawed, physical and concrete universe.

It is equally difficult to exaggerate how deeply the Chassidic tradition of Judaism dismissed this seemingly compelling idea. To be sure, Jewish mysticism discusses in great detail how each physical existence originates in the pristine world of the spirit, where it can be encountered in a far more wholesome and complete manner. In the Midrashic literature, the two realities are known as the "heavenly Jerusalem" vs. the "earthly Jerusalem"—the latter is frail, vulnerable, and destructible, while the former is eternal. Still, the teachings of Chassidism have dismissed Plato's conclusions, in which he shunned the physical in favor of the spiritual, ignored the particular in favor of the universal, scorned at the concrete in favor of the abstract.

Our sages knew how to compress profound philosophical ideas in concise and seemingly simple phrases. "G-d promised that He would not enter into the heavenly Jerusalem until he did not enter into the earthly Jerusalem (2)." This was the Rabbis' way of dismissing the dramatic conclusion of Platonic Idealism.

In this essay, we will explore the ramifications of these two conflicting world views within the psychological arena of human existence.

#### Two Lives

Richard Nixon was reported to have once explained why the American people were infatuated with Kennedy and filled with animosity toward Nixon. "When they gaze at Kennedy," he reportedly said, "they see what they'd love to be; when they look at me, they see who they are."

Most of us own two lives—the life of our dreams and the life of our reality, the life we wished for, and the life we ended up with.

Many people can speak about, at least, two marriages: the marriages they dreamt of having, and the marriages they ended up with.

This is true concerning most issues in life—children, careers, relationships, psychological serenity, and physical health. As innocent children, idealistic youngsters, and newlyweds flying high, we harbor a particular vision of what life, romance, family, and success might be like.

Then we grow up and we are called to the task of translating this magical vision into a concrete reality. We are confronted with the challenge of constructing lives of wholesomeness and happiness in a world of stress, anxiety, pain, and disillusionment. Many of us grow frustrated and downtrodden by the broken and flawed realities we must confront. We yearn to escape to Plato's idealistic world, where all flawed objects are transformed into perfect ideas.

#### Preserving a Letter

There is something very intriguing about this week's Torah portion (Vayakhel & Pekudei). Anybody even slightly familiar with the Bible is aware of its unique conciseness. Complete sagas, rich, complex, and profound, are often depicted in a few short biblical verses. Each word in the Bible literally contains layers upon layers of interpretation.

For the sages and rabbis over the past 3,000 years, it was clear that there is nary a superfluous word or letter in the Bible, and large sections of the Talmud are based on this premise. If a verse is lyrically repetitive, if two words are used where one would suffice or a longer word is used when a shorter word would suffice, there is a message here, a new concept, another law (3).

It is thus astonishing to observe that two entire sections in the Torah are seemingly superfluous!

These are the final two sections of the book of Exodus—Vayakhel and Pekudei (4)—telling the story of how the Jewish people constructed the portable Tabernacle (Mishkan) that would accompany them during their 40-year journey in the desert.

In the previous sections of this book, Terumah, and Tetzaveh (5), the Torah gives a detailed account of G-d's instructions to Moses regarding the construction of the Sanctuary. With meticulous description, G-d lays out to Moses every detail of the Tabernacle—every piece of furniture, item, article, and vessel that should become part of the Sanctuary. Nothing is left out, from the Holy Ark, the Candelabra and the Altar to the pillars, wall panels, curtains, ropes, bars, hooks, and pegs, all specified with their exact shapes and dimensions. In these portions, G-d also presents Moses with the exact instructions of how to weave the priestly garments—down to the last tassel—worn by those who would perform the service in the Sanctuary.

Then, a few chapters later in Vayakhel and Pekudei, in the story of how the Jewish people carried out these instructions, the previous two portions are repeated almost verbatim. The Torah records, once again, every nook and cranny of the Sanctuary and tells of the actual building, carving, and weaving of every pillar, wall-panel, peg, hook, bar, tapestry, piece of furniture and vessel that comprised the Sanctuary. For a second time, we are informed of every decorative form and artistic design sculpted in each article of the Tabernacle and every single shape, design, and dimension of each and every article (6).

Now, a single sentence, something like "The Jewish people made the Sanctuary exactly as G-d had commanded Moses," would have spared the Torah more than a thousand words! Why the need for hundreds of sentences that are purely repetitive of facts that have been stated earlier? One of the worst mistakes a speaker or writer can make is to be repetitive. "You made your point," the crowd says to itself. "Time to move on." This is true in regard to anybody who speaks or writes. How much more so, concerning the Torah, a divine document well known for its extraordinary briefness. Yet, in this instance, the Torah apparently shows not even the slightest attempt to avoid repeating itself hundreds of times!

#### Two Sanctuaries

The truth of the matter is that the Torah is not repeating itself at all; it is discussing two distinct sanctuaries: a heavenly model and a terrestrial edifice.

The first two portions outline the structure and composition of the Sanctuary as it was transmitted from G-d to Moses. This was a conceptual, celestial Tabernacle; it was a heavenly blueprint, a divine map for a home to be built in the future.

In His instructions to Moses on how to construct the Sanctuary, G-d says (7), "You shall erect the Tabernacle according to its laws, as you have been shown on the mountain." In other words, on the summit of Mount Sinai Moses was shown an image, a vision, of the home in which G-d desired to dwell. This image was, obviously, ethereal and sublime; it was a home created in heaven, by G-d himself and presented to one of the most spiritual men in history, Moses.

Plato would describe it as "the ideal tabernacle," the one that can be conceived only in our minds.



In contrast to this first celestial Sanctuary come the last two portions of Exodus, in which Moses descends from the glory of Sinai and presents the people of Israel with a mission of fashioning a physical home for G-d in a sandy desert. Here the Jewish people are called upon to translate a transcendental vision of a spiritual home into a physical structure comprised of mundane cedar and gold, which are, by their very definition, limited and flawed.

This second Sanctuary that the Jews built may have resembled, in every detail, the spiritual model described several chapters earlier, but in its very essence, it was a completely different Sanctuary. One was "built" by an infinite and absolute G-d; the other by mortals of flesh and blood. One consisted entirely of nebulous spirit, the other of gross matter. One was designed in heaven, the other on earth. One was perfect, the other was flawed.

In our personal lives, these two Sanctuaries reflect the two lives most of us must deal with throughout our years. Each of us owns his or her heavenly "Sanctuary," envisioned atop a summit of spiritual and psychological serenity and representing a vision and dream for a life and marriage aglow with love, passion, and endless joy. This is the ideal home, the ideal family, the ideal marriage. Then we have our earthly Sanctuary, a life often filled with trials, challenges, battles, and setbacks, and yet one in which we attempt to create a space for G-d amidst a tumultuous heart and a stressful life.

#### G-d's Choice

Astonishingly, at the end of this week's portion, we are told (8) that it was only in the second Sanctuary that the divine presence came to reside. He wished to express His truth and eternity within the physical abode created by mortal and fragmented human beings on barren soil, not in the spiritual Sanctuary atop Mount Sinai (9).

In which one of these two did G-d choose to dwell? In the physical Sanctuary!

If the Bible had not repeated the story of the Sanctuary, just leaving it at "The Jewish people made the Sanctuary exactly as G-d had commanded Moses," we might have entertained the notion that our Sanctuary below is valuable insofar as it resembles the Sanctuary above. The primary Sanctuary, we may have thought, is the perfect one designed by G-d in the spiritual realms and that the beauty of the earthly abode depends on how much it is capable of mirroring the heavenly abode.

It is this notion, the Platonic notion if you will, that the Torah was attempting to banish by repeating the entire Sanctuary story a second time. G-d did not desire a duplication of the spiritual Sanctuary on earth. The value of the earthly abode was not in how much it mirrored its heavenly twin. The Bible is, in its own inimitable fashion, teaching us that G-d wished for a second, distinct Sanctuary, one that would mirror the design of the spiritual one but would remain distinct and unique in its purpose; to fashion a dwelling place for the divine in a coarse universe, to light a candle of truth in a world of lies, to search for the spark of truth in a broken heart. It is in this struggle-filled abode where G-d allows Himself to be found!

So if the Torah had not repeated the story of the Sanctuary, it would have saved itself hundreds of sentences but robbed us of perhaps its most powerful message: that man, in living his or her ordinary, flawed, and fragmented day-to-day life permeated with the morality and spirituality of the Torah and its mitzvos, can create heaven on earth.

"You Were Never As Beautiful"

A story (10):

A young Chassidic boy and girl from Krakow were engaged and deeply in love when the transports to Auschwitz began. Their entire families were decimated and they both assumed that their life's partner-to-be was also dead.

One night, close to the end of the war, the groom saw his bride standing on the women's side of the fence. When the Russians came and liberated them, they met and went for a stroll. They entered a vacant home, where they spent, for the first time in years, some moments together.

Suddenly, the young woman came upon a mirror and saw herself for the first time in years. A dazzling beauty had turned into a skeleton. She had no hair, her face was full of scars, her teeth were knocked out and she was thin as a rail.

She cried out to him, "Woe, what has become of me? I look like the Angel of Death himself! Would you still marry such an ugly person?"

"You never looked more beautiful to me than right at this moment," was his response.

#### Two Types of Beauty

Which beauty was this young man referring to? It was not the external attractive beauty of a healthy and shapely body. It was the internal, sacred, and deep beauty emerging from human dignity and courage, from a spirit who faced the devil himself and still chose to live and love.

Perhaps this is why G-d chose the second, and not the first, Sanctuary as His abode. On the surface, the Sanctuary in heaven is far more beautiful and perfect than the Sanctuary on earth. The truth is, however, that beauty and depth exist in our attempt to introduce a spark of idealism in a spiritual wasteland that a palace built in heaven can never duplicate.

When G-d sees a physical human being, filled with struggle and anxiety, stretching out his hand to help a person in need or engaging in a mitzvah, G-d turns to the billions of angels filling the heavens, and says: "Have you ever seen anything more beautiful than that (11)?"

(This essay is based on an address delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shabbas Vayakhel-Pekudei 5718, March 15, 1958 (12)).

1) See Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, The Dignity of Difference, for a detailed explanation of this idea of Plato and its impact on Western thought.

2) Talmud Taanis 5a. Zohar Vayikra 15b.

3) The Chumash ("Five Books of Moses") contains 79,976 words and 304,805 letters. The Talmud states that Rabbi Akiva would derive "mounds upon mounds of laws from the serif of a letter" in Torah (Menachos 29b).

4) Exodus chapters 35-40.

5) Exodus chapters 25-30

6) This redundancy is reflected very clearly in the most basic and fundamental commentary to the Bible, written by Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki. From among all the 53 Torah portions, these two portions have the newest explanations of Rashi on them. Why? Rashi makes it clear in the beginning of Vayakhel: "I have already explained the contribution to the Tabernacle and its construction in the verses where their commands were presented." No need to repeat that which has been stated already.

7) Exodus 26:30. Cf. Exodus 25:40; 27:8.

8) Exodus 40:34-38.

9) "G-d desired a dwelling in the lowly realms" (Midrash Tanchuma, Nasso 16); "This is what man is all about, this is the purpose of his creation and of the creation of all worlds, supernal and ephemeral" (Tanya, chapter 36).

10) I once read this story; I do not know its original source.

11) See Midrash Rabah on the verse Hayosheves Baganim (Song of Songs).

12) Likkutei Sichot, vol. I, pp. 195-198.

## **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'raitah 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?

\* laDa'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 Yeshayahu 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'eresheet 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 vat'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'aseh 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).

Text Copyright © 2014 by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom and Torah.org. The author is Educational Coordinator of the Jewish Studies Institute of the Yeshiva of Los Angeles.

## 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 Yetziat 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 Luchos (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 Leviyim 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 Leviyim, 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 Canaan.

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 egl. 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, LIMNINAL 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 mechtza/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

## 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 moed** - 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 mizbeiach - 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 moed** 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 ktoret (from misc. above)

**Chatzer** (chapter 38)

- \* the mizbeiach
- \* 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'alot 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 **mizbeiach**. [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: menorah=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 'orot 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 (Yetziat 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 Yetziat 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) Yetziat 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.