

Potomac Torah Study Center

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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 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. 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 Copy of Dr. Matsas' book also at Beth Sholom library. The Jewish and world communities failed to save the Greek Jewish community during World War II. Let us all do what we can to help the Jews in Ukraine now, before it is too late for them.

As we prepare for this Shabbat, our prayers go out to fellow Jews in danger during a brutal Russian attack on Ukraine. There have been Jews in the Ukraine for a thousand years. Little more than a hundred years ago, Odessa had the third largest Jewish population of any city in the world (after New York and Warsaw). After pogroms, out migration before World War I, and the murder of many Jews under the Nazis and Stalin, the Jewish population of Odessa fell from half the city population to only six percent by the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Other heavily Jewish areas in the Ukraine had similar declines in their Jewish populations.

Chabad has been serving Jews in the Ukraine since 1990. Currently 200 Chabad families serve an estimated 350,000 Jews in the Ukraine. These families are in great danger now, with the brutal Russian attack. None of the Chabad families have left the Ukraine. See the final pages (below) for an article from the New York Times from February 22 about the situation in Odessa and an update from this week from Rabbi Mendel Bluming of Chabad of Potomac, MD. Every Jewish organization in our country is collecting and sending funds to assist our fellow Jews in the Ukraine. Hopefully our prayers and chesed will help our fellow Jews survive.

Pekudei is one of the high points in the Torah. After Egel Zahav, Moshe bargained for a new covenant for B'Nai Yisrael, one based on Divine Mercy rather than Divine Justice. With the new covenant, God added the concept of teshuvah (repentance) and forgiveness for sins. When the Jews gave generously to finance the Mishkan and prepared it precisely as God instructed Moshe, the result was God returning His presence to the Mishkan as the climax of the dedication. Indeed, Moshe was able to spend forty days and nights on Har Sinai speaking directly with God – but His presence was so strong at the Mishkan that even Moshe could not approach unless God called and permitted him to do so. Rabbi Yeoshua Singer adds that the purity of the Jews who built the Mishkan was so great that the Mishkan survives (hidden under ground in Israel, to be recovered when the Mashgiach eventually comes) – a contrast to both the Temples in Jerusalem, both of which were destroyed because the builders were not sufficiently holy.

In two weeks, we reach Purim, a holiday full of miracles. As Rabbi Marc Angel notes, one miracle of Purim is that all the Jews in Shushan knew that Queen Esther was Jewish – but neither the King nor Haman knew. If the king had known that Esther was Jewish, he would not have selected her to be his Queen, or he would have dismissed her. In either case, Esther would not have been able to be Hashem's agent to save the Jews. Rabbi Angel recognizes a lesson from economics. One cannot have successful collusion involving a large number of people. With thousands of Jews knowing that Esther was Jewish, it would have been impossible to keep that secret from the non-Jews – but they did keep the secret. The unity of the Jews, which we see in the Megillah from all the Jews fasting for three days, is one of the greatest

miracles of Purim. We see this unity among Jews today in the outpouring of support of Jews all over the world for Jews in the Ukraine. Current events give us a new insight into Purim for this year.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, organized a protest of Rabbis in front of the Soviet Embassy many years ago – and made certain to be arrested – to protest the refusal of the Soviet government to let Jews leave and emigrate to Israel. He spent two weeks in prison rather than pay a fine of \$50 – also to gain publicity for Jews under Soviet control. Today we have 350,000 Jews in the Ukraine, 200 Chabad families, and numerous Jews from Israel in danger from Russian bombs, tanks, and guns. Our parsha teaches us to help our fellow Jews with pure hearts, and Purim teaches us to stay unified in our support. As Rabbi Angel teaches, Hazak – if we strengthen ourselves, then Hashem will give us the courage and strength that we need to survive our trials.

Shabbat Shalom; Hodesh Tov,
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. 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

Lifeline: Pekudei: When Everything Fits by Rabbi Yaakov Menken © 2002

"Like all that G-d commanded Moshe, so the Children of Israel did all of the work. And Moshe saw all the labor, and behold, they had done it, in accordance with what G-d had commanded, so they did, and Moshe blessed them." [39:42-43]

The verses clearly seem repetitive.

The Chasam Sofer explains: "labor," or melacha in Hebrew, refers to what they actually did with their hands, while "work," or avoda, refers to the effort, the motivation in their heart, even without action. Avoda can also be translated as "service," which makes this dichotomy easier to understand. In the Shema, we read that we are to "love the L-rd your G-d and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul." [Deut. 11:13] Our Sages ask [Talmud Ta'anis 2a]: "What is the 'service' that is in the heart? This refers to prayer."

The verse says, "Like all that G-d commanded Moshe, so the Children of Israel did all of the work." They did it as HaShem wanted it: they "put their hearts into it." They did the work with a full heart.

How did Moshe know this? How did he know what was in their hearts? How could he tell that they gave of themselves with a full heart? The verse tells us: "And Moshe saw all the labor, and behold, they had done it, in accordance with what G-d had commanded..." He saw that the work had been done to perfection, without any omissions or defects. From this, he recognized that they obviously gave of themselves with a pure heart, with purest intent, as HaShem desired.

Had they lacked this purity of heart, they would not have merited such success. They would not have produced such perfection. "In accordance with all that HaShem commanded, so they did." As our Sages say, if the one who leads the prayers is able to say them fluently, it is a good sign for the congregation. It means that they came with good hearts. And for this, Moshe blessed them.

This message from the Chasam Sofer can be understood on a metaphysical level — that since despite all of our efforts, it is HaShem who grants success, it is perfectly logical that He would give perfection only to those who came with perfect hearts.

But I think, even so, that we can look upon this as a very pragmatic and practical lesson. If a person's entire agenda is to produce something perfect for G-d, then he or she will be concentrating entirely upon the product. But if, on the other hand, a person also has an individual agenda, for self-glorification, fame or reward, then this can lead down the path of destruction. All of a sudden, I'm not looking for perfection — I'm looking to be better than everyone else. Perfection is where everything fits together. But in order to be superior, bigger, greater, then my product cannot be identical to someone else's, and cannot mesh with his.

The result cannot be perfect. The result will fall apart.

There are tremendous projects to be done, tremendous opportunities to help others. But if we go about them thinking about our own honor and glory, we risk seeing our efforts fall apart. If our entire focus, on the other hand, is to do good — then, we can even reach perfection!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/lifeline-5760-pekudei/>

Beyond the Polls

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2022

One of the most fascinating aspects of the Mishkan was the center pole which went "from one end of the Mishkan structure to the other." The Talmud (Shabbos 98b) tells us that a miracle was required for this center pole to work. What exactly was the miracle?

Rashi explains: "This pole is what held the northern, southern, and western upright beams together. The craftsmen bored a hole into the center of each beam, and then this center pole was inserted through the beams. When the pole finished going through the northern beams, it bent miraculously, and continued through the western beams, bent again, and then went through the southern beams. This is something that an ordinary craftsman cannot do."

Although this pole was hidden within the beams and was not noticed by most people, it played a most important function in holding the Mishkan together. The qualities of this pole- Bending, Adaptable, and Hidden- are considered a significant miracle in the building of the Mishkan.

What is the lesson and symbolism in this intriguing miracle?

The commentaries explain that this pole symbolizes the quiet leaders of the Jewish people. They operate and impact the community by influencing in a hidden way. Their greatness is that they put their own biases and politics aside, bending and adapting themselves for a higher good. They do not live life in the limelight and therefore do not preface every move with the question, "What will people say?" Instead, they proceed quietly and effectively to hold the community together.

I once witnessed how an old man was trying to cross a busy street, but he couldn't, because the turning cars weren't giving him the right of way. It was a catch-22. He was too old and scared to walk into the intersection until the cars stopped, and the cars would not stop because he had not set his foot into the intersection. I watched things unfold from across the street where I was stopped in my car at a red light, wishing that somehow, I could do something for the man.

Suddenly, a young boy sized up the situation and placed himself into the crosswalk. The turning cars stopped for him. The old man crossed, and, with a cheery wave, the young boy continued on his way. The act of kindness that was to this young man's credit was small and innocuous. But it is the kind of advocacy and kindness that sustains the very fabric of society.

Helping someone cross the street is relatively easy. Sometimes an act of kindness may be a bit more challenging, as it may require delivering the bad news, possibly unsolicited, that a person is headed in the wrong direction. Often such kindness and advice are not taken well. In fact, sometimes the response, from otherwise sensible people, is downright abusive. Faced with such a situation, a quiet and hidden leader will do well to remember the lesson of the Brisker Rov.

The Brisker Rov was a quiet leader living in Israel in the mid-1900s. He did not hold a public leadership or political position, but he was a recognized teacher and a revered personality.

On a particular occasion, the municipality made a decision that was perceived by many as severely compromising to public safety. The Brisker Rov was asked to intercede. The Rabbi approached the municipality official who had made the provocative and compromising decision. Although the official greeted the Rabbi's objections with screaming and curses, the Rabbi surprisingly maintained his composure and repeated his objections in a level voice. Eventually the man calmed down and reversed his decision.

People who observed the exchange later asked the Rabbi how he managed to maintain his composure in the face of such abusive cursing. The Rabbi looked up surprised, "Cursing?! I didn't really hear what he was saying during that part of the conversation. I guess I was just too focused on the task of advocacy that was before me."

This is the role of the middle pole of the Mishkan. It may be quiet and hidden. Yet it is so focused and so influential.

Sometimes we only recognize noticeable and well-known leaders. We pay little attention to the many who are so quiet, so focused, and so influential. The Torah teaches that an equal and sometimes greater appreciation goes to those who are represented by the hidden pole.

Modern wisdom is catching up to the Torah perspective. In the words of John Kotter, a Harvard professor, and an expert on organizations, "Beyond the yellow brick road of naivete and the mugger's lane of cynicism, there is a narrow path, poorly lighted, hard to find, and even harder to stay on once found. People who have the skill and the perseverance to take that path serve us in countless ways. We need more of these people. Many more."

Wishing you and yours a wonderful Shabbos!

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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 and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Be Strong: Thoughts for Parashat Pekudei **

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Many years ago, a young lady came to my office to discuss the possibility of her conversion to Judaism. She was raised in Saudi Arabia to American parents in the American military. She grew up hating Israel and hating Jews — although she had never met either an Israeli or a Jew.

When she reached college age, she came to the United States to study here. She met Jewish students and found that they were nice people, not at all like the stereotypical Jews she had learned to hate as a child. She began to study Judaism. She learned about Jewish history and about modern Israel. She eventually met, and fell in love with, an Israeli man.

In due course, she converted to Judaism, married the Israeli, established a religiously traditional household, and had children who attended Jewish day schools when they came of age.

We discussed the remarkable transformation of her life...from a hater of Jews and Israel, to an actively religious Jew, married to an Israeli Jew. In one of our conversations, she mused: "Wouldn't it be wonderful if all haters could suddenly find themselves in the shoes of the ones they hate? If only people really understood the hated victims by actually living as one of them!"

She came to this insight through her personal experiences. She overcame blind hatred by literally becoming one of those she had previously despised. She wished that all haters would at least try to see their victims as fellow human beings rather than as unhuman stereotypes. If only people could replace their hatred with empathy!

While this is an important insight, it obviously eludes many people. Our societies are riddled with racism, anti-Semitism, anti-nationality x or anti-ethnicity y. It seems that many people prefer to hate rather than to empathize. They somehow imagine that they are stronger if they tear others down. In one of his essays, Umberto Eco suggests that human beings need enemies! It is through their enemies that they solidify their own identities.

Yet, if we truly want to be strong individuals, we need to define ourselves by our own values — not by who we hate or who we see as our enemies. A person with inner strength is a person who can empathize with others, can overcome hatred, and can find fellowship even with those of different religion, race or nationality. Hatred is a sign of weakness, a defect in our own souls.

This week's Parasha brings us to the end of the book of Exodus. It is customary in some congregations for congregants to call out at the conclusion of the Torah reading: "Hazak ve-nit-hazak, hizku ve-ya-ametz levavhem kol ha-myahalim la-do-nai." Be strong, and let us strengthen ourselves; be strong and let your heart have courage, all you who hope in the Lord. This is a way of celebrating the completion of a book of the Torah, and encouraging us to continue in the path of Torah study so we may complete other books as well.

I think that a phrase from the above-quoted text can be interpreted as follows: hizku – strengthen yourselves, be resolute; ve- ye-ametz levavhem – and God will give courage to your hearts. First, you need to strengthen yourselves, develop the power of empathy and love. Then, God will give you the added fortitude to fulfill your goals. If we strengthen ourselves, we may trust that the Almighty will give us added strength.

Be strong, unafraid, empathetic; if we hone these values within ourselves and our families, we may be hopeful that the Almighty will grant us the courage to succeed in our efforts.

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

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/be-strong-thoughts-parashat-pekudei>

** 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

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A Purim Miracle: Thoughts for Purim

by Rabbi Marc Angel * (© 2012, 2022)

Esther the Jewess marries King Ahashverosh. Her Uncle Mordecai tells her not to reveal that she is Jewish. The Jews throughout the 127 provinces of the Empire know Esther is Jewish. But not one of them gives away the secret. Ahashverosh, Haman and the entire royal court are kept in the dark about the Queen's true identity.

This, commented Rabbi Haim David Halevy (late Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv), was an amazing phenomenon, a veritable miracle. Not one Jew in the entire empire betrayed the secret. The Jewish people were united, discreet, and disciplined to an extraordinary degree.

Let us imagine how this story would play out if it occurred today.

Jewish reporters would fiercely try to outcoop each other to report about a Jewish Queen.

Wikileaks would put an image of Esther's birth certificate on the internet, with the indication that she was born Jewish.

The Hareidim would demonstrate worldwide at the travesty of a Jewish woman marrying a non-Jewish king, a wicked one at that.

The Chief Rabbinate of Israel would issue a statement that Esther's Jewishness was in question, and that she would need a "giyyur le-humra" (a conversion to be on the safe side) if she wanted to be considered Jewish for purposes of aliyah.

The Zionists would point to Esther and say: you see, the Jews of the diaspora are assimilating; they all should make aliyah before they totally disappear.

The zealous Litvaks would say: Esther is merely a Persian Jewess and doesn't have our fine Ashkenazic pedigree. We wouldn't want our sons to marry such a woman.

Chabad would send another shaliah to Shushan, to re-enforce the staff already there at the Chabad House. Cholent (Persian style) would be dished out each Shabbat morning along with prayers for the Queen's prompt release from bondage in the palace.

The Sephardi Federations around the globe would glow with quiet satisfaction that one of their own made the big time.

The peaceniks would say: this whole crisis could have been avoided if Mordecai simply bowed to Haman and would not have been so stubborn. If Jews simply gave everything away, we wouldn't have to worry about anti-Semitism.

The kabbalists would manufacture a new batch of red strings for bracelets, and sell them at a suitable price to those who wanted to provide mystical salvation to Esther and the Jewish people.

The secularists would blame the fanaticism of the religious community; the religious would blame the secularists for their innumerable sins which surely brought on God's wrath.

Jewish newspapers would be filled with spicy attacks and accusations, op ed pieces and letters to the editor. Everyone would have an opinion, invariably wrong. All the commotion within the Jewish community would catch the attention of the non-Jewish media.

It would not take too long for Queen Esther's hidden identity to be revealed. Esther would have then been ejected from the throne; Haman would have had full sway; the Jews would have had no powerful person to intercede on their behalf. The Purim story would have ended in disaster. The joyous holiday of Purim would never have come to be.

The Jews of the ancient Persian Empire demonstrated remarkable intelligence and restraint. They understood what was at stake and they rose to the occasion with admirable self-control. They surely had differing opinions and ideologies among themselves; but when faced with national crisis, they knew enough to set their differences aside, to refrain from destructive gossip and back biting.

While we modern Jews cannot hope to achieve the unity and self-control of the ancient Persian Jewish community, we can strive to act and speak with discretion, courtesy, and respect for the views of others. We can avoid vitriolic attacks on those with whom we disagree. We can focus on the really big issues which confront the Jewish people, and think how each of us can be constructive members of our community. We can know when to speak and when to remain silent. We can know when action is necessary and helpful, and when action is counter-productive and misguided.

Rabbi Halevy thought it was miraculous that the Jews of ancient Persia acted so wisely and so discreetly. Perhaps it is too much to expect such miraculous behavior from us. But perhaps — with intelligence, compassion, discretion and respectfulness — we can be part of a new Purim miracle for our generation.

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

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/purim-miracle-thoughts-purim>

Pekudei - The Gift of the Pure by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

The parsha begins with an accounting of the donations given for the construction of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle in the desert. Before it begins the accounting, though, the Torah reviews which Mishkan we are discussing, "These are the accountings of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of the Testimony, which was charged through Moshe, the service of the Levi'im in the hands of Isamar son of Aharon the Kohein. And Betzalel son of Uri son of Chur of the tribe of Yehuda did all that Hashem had commanded Moshe. And with him Oholi'av son of Achisamach of the tribe of Dan, carpenter and craftsman, and weaver with the blue dyed wool, and with the purple dyed wool, and with the scarlet thread and with the linen." (Shemos 38:21-23) All of these details have already been repeated in the previous sections. Why is the Torah repeating this information again now?

The Sforno explains that as we are now reviewing the details of the materials used in the construction, the Torah wants to highlight unique aspects of that construction which together resulted in the creation of something so pure and holy that it was never destroyed. Until King Solomon built the first Beis Hamikdash, the Mishkan that Moshe had built was still in use. Once they no longer needed it, King Solomon hid it away by burying it in the ground. (See Rash"i Kings I 8:4) Although, both the first and second Beis Hamikdash were eventually destroyed and their vessels were plundered by our enemies, the Mishkan remains safe buried in Israel. The Tana d'vei Eliyahu (Ch. 25) adds that the holiness and sanctity of the Mishkan is also still intact, and at the time of Moshiach, the Mishkan will be brought out from where it was hidden, and Hashem's Presence will again dwell in the Mishkan. What was it that made the Mishkan uniquely holy?

The Sforno says the Torah is listing four components. First, the Mishkan housed the Testimony of our bond with G-d — the Ten Commandments. Second, it was built under direction of Moshe Rabbeinu. Third, it was cared for and served by the Tribe of Levi, overseen by Isamar the son of Aharon HaKohein. Fourth, it was constructed by Betzalel and Oholi'av. These four factors combined to create a structure of such inherent holiness that it is not subject to normal physical wear and tear, and that it could never be allowed to be captured by our enemies. The people directing, overseeing and constructing the Mishkan were all individuals of great piety and sanctity, who carried within them a commitment to our illustrious ancestry and heritage. With this motivation and passion in their hearts while they built a sanctuary to house the Ten Commandments, and thereby a dwelling place for G-d's Presence, they were able to reach a level of commitment and devotion and purity of intent beyond that which existed in the construction of either Beis Hamikdash. It was this purity of

intent which imbued holiness and sanctity into the Mishkan. As the Tana d'vei Eliyahu writes, "And why was the Mishkan hidden away until this day? Because pure people made it with the generosity of their heart."

The Sforno concludes by contrasting this with the first Beis Hamikdash. He says the first Beis Hamikdash had three of the four factors – the Ten Commandments were there, it was under Shlomo Hamelech's direction and the Levi'im served in it. Therefore, Hashem's Presence rested there. However, it did not have the final factor. It was built by non-Jews who didn't have these emotions and heritage, and therefore did not have that purity of intent in their work. Therefore, it was able to be destroyed and its vessels captured.

This contrast highlights something very important for us. G-d values holiness and purity of heart even when the emotion is not complete and the result is not perfect. The first Beis Hamikdash had some of these factors and that also was able to imbue holiness into stone and metal. When we engage in serving G-d, whether through prayer, Torah study of mitzvos, whatever emotion we can imbue into our actions is cherished by G-d. Even when we fall short, G-d cherishes and values the emotion and the devotion that we do feel.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Parshat Pekudei

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

Parashat Pekudei concludes the detailed description of the construction of the Mishkan, which stretches over 14 chapters and 550 verses. The Mishkan served the Israelites in the desert and then wandered with them into and inside The Promised Land. The Mishkan moved from place to place until King Solomon finally built a permanent structure, the Temple. That was almost 3,000 years ago, so people often ask how a Mishkan long gone can be relevant to our daily life in the 21st Century.

Well, we believe that the Torah is eternal and that God is omnipresent and omniscient, so we must seek those lessons. Here is my list:

Generosity and Wisdom

There are two qualities required of the builders of the Mishkan – generous heart and wise heart. That teaches us that we must give wisely and in a constructive way.

Symbolic Measurements

The measurements of the table, which represents material needs, are in whole units - 2X1 cubits. Those of the ark, which represents spiritual growth, are in half units - 2.5X1.5. That teaches us that we should feel that all of our material needs are met, while always aspiring to complete what is missing spiritually.

Genuine Character Traits

The Torah emphasized several times that the Menorah should be made of one chunk of gold. The adornments were not melded but rather carved out from the body of the Menorah. The adornments represent our character traits. We talk of personality in terms of light and darkness: this person shines, they glow, a guiding light, a bright star, dark thoughts etc. The Menorah encourages us to have our own light and shining qualities traits. They cannot be artificial or superficial, glued to us from the outside. We cannot pretend to have them. We must genuinely acquire them and make them part of us.

Mishkan and Home

The Mishkan resembles a home. It has a light and a table, and in its center, there is the Holy of Holies. In the Holy of Holies, the Torah is found. The message is that our home is our sanctuary. Sanctity is created through daily acts of loving kindness, hospitality, mutual respect, and unity. The center of Jewish life is the home, and at its center the Torah is found, the Torah as a guide for life.

Mishkan and Paradise

The Mishkan also resembles the Garden of Eden. In both of them we can find the Cherubim protecting the Tree of Life. The Torah describes the placement of the Cherubim in Gan Eden with verb שָׁן – of the same root as the word מִשְׁכָּן – Mishkan. Adam lived in the Garden of Eden, and the poles of the Mishkan were held together by a peg called Adan. The Mishkan has its own serpent, just like the Garden. The bolts holding the poles together are called Bariah, a biblical synonym for the serpent. If the Mishkan resembles both Gan Eden and our home, it means that we can turn our home not only into a sanctuary, but into a paradise.

Beware of OCD

The many details of the Mishkan also come to satisfy our need for detailed and quantified rituals. Only the mitzvot related to the Mishkan are so detailed. That includes the number and age of sacrificial animals and the quantity of liquids libated on the altar for each sacrifice. By contrast, the everyday laws are much more general and fluid. That Shows us that we must be careful not to turn our spiritual life into a succession of obsessive-compulsive acts. Religion easily lends itself to OCD, especially with acts such as chanting, counting, and cleansing. There is a special term for religious OCD – scrupulosity. Since in ancient Israel people did not have many opportunities to visit the Mishkan, they learned to live a more flexible religious life most of the year. But now things are different. In my years as a pulpit rabbi, I met many people who would recite every word in the siddur and shake the Lulav with the accuracy of a Swiss watch but did not apply that scrupulosity to their relationships with family and friends.

Coat of Faith

In ancient times, cutting a corner of a garment meant casting doubt on the authority and integrity of the wearer. People in high positions, such as kings and prophets, tended to wear tight clothes to prevent such attacks. By contrast, the High Priest wears an extravagant coat with colorful fringes which even have bells on them. The High Priest was the only one, beside Moshe, who was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies. That was where Moshe would receive his prophecy, and so the colorful and vocal coat of Aharon is a declaration of faith in Moshe's prophecy.

The Torah says that the coat will never be torn, meaning that no one can cast doubt on the prophecy. The terms it uses to describe the coat's seam are the same used to refer to language and mouth, hinting at the prophecy which is delivered by words coming out of the prophet's mouth. Though all those things are gone today, we have the Tallit we wear during prayers. The fringes of the Tallit, which some dye with royal purple, are a declaration that we believe in the veracity of the Torah.

Introvert and Extrovert

The fringes of the coat were decorated with a pattern of a golden bell and a wool pomegranate. The purpose of the bells was to make Aharon's voice sound when he comes to the Holy of Holies. I would like to suggest that those two adornments represent the personalities of Moshe and Aharon, the only two people who were allowed to visit the Holy of Holies. The bell is highly visible, and it announces its existence and arrival. Similarly, Aharon's service is clearly displayed on the outside. He wears magnificent clothes and performs the rituals in the Temple for all to see. He also has an outgoing personality and tries to please all. Moshe is like the pomegranate, whose true beauty and value lie inside. Moshe communicates with God and no one else can hear him. His tent is outside the camp and when his face glows with divine light, he covers it with a mask.

When Aharon comes into the Holy of Holies, his voice, or that of his bells, is heard. When Moshe comes into that holy place, he hears a voice talking to him, and he is the only one who can hear it. The adornments of the High Priest's coat represent those two personalities. They are displayed in a pattern – a bell and a pomegranate, a bell and a pomegranate. This comes to tell us that we should maintain a certain balance of those two qualities. Aharon's outgoing personality led him to compromise with the people when they wanted to worship idols because he did not want to confront them. Moshe's tendency to keep everything locked inside caused him to explode in anger several times. We should strive to apply the right approach to our spiritual life and relationships, and to know when to keep it in and when to let it out.

Heavenly Equality

In the first chapter of Bereshit, we read about the simultaneous creation of man and woman. In the second chapter, the woman is created from Adam's rib as an afterthought. R. Aryeh Kaplan explains that the first chapter is the ideal world of

God, a world that never existed, and in which men and women are equal. The second chapter is man's world, in which there is discrimination and inequality. The increasing awareness of that discrimination and the movement towards changing it are a sign of the coming of Mashiah and return to the Garden of Eden, says R. Kaplan. During the construction of the Mishkan, which was a replica of Gan Eden, there was a rare moment of equality. The men and the women came together to bring their contribution, and as a matter of fact, the women came first. The women were also among the artisans who created the Mishkan. They are called wise women and women whose heart raised them above the rest with wisdom. The women wove the curtains for the Mishkan. Weaving is an art associated with creativity, creation, language, and storytelling, and was traditionally entrusted to women. The message to us is to continue building our contemporary Mishkan and Gan Eden by working towards the equality of the first chapter of Bereshit.

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Moshe's Transformation: Empowering a Nation

By Rabbi Ezra Seligsohn *

What does it feel like to give responsibilities to others? To cede control over a project?

In this week's Parasha, Pekudei, the Mishkan is completed. What becomes clear from a close read of the Pesukim is how nervous Moshe was about the project and, ultimately, how surprised, satisfied, and impressed he was with the work of Betzalel and the craftsmen and builders of the Mishkan. The Torah tells us "According to all that Hashem had commanded Moshe, so the children of Israel did all the work. And Moshe saw all of the work and they did it just as Hashem commanded. And Moshe blessed them" (Ex. 39:42-43).

When I read this, I imagine Moshe standing agape at the Mishkan, with a feeling of disbelief that they actually completed it. There were no Ikea instructions, diagrams, or visual blueprints. All Moshe had was the language that God had expressed to him. The Midrashim recount that Moshe turned to Hashem and asked, how am I supposed to convey all of this to the Jewish people? I don't even know what it's supposed to look like. In the Midrash's projects, Hashem shows Moshe various images portrayed in various colored fires. Finally, there is the recognition that Moshe has to do his best with the information given to him, and moreover, there's going to be a degree of discretion and autonomy given to Betzalel and his workers to carry out these commandments and to create something beautiful.

The verses are explicit about how the Jewish people come together, offering their various skills and expertise to build the Mishkan. This is an incredible transformation from the beginning of Sefer Shemot until the end. The book begins with Moshe being solely responsible for the welfare of the people and their leaving of Egypt. While Hashem encouraged and enabled him to share the burden with Aharon, ultimately everything fell on Moshe to execute what God had commanded. At the end of this week's parashah, we bear witness to Moshe stepping back, impressed, feeling in love, and choosing to bless the people after they picked up that mantle – the nation beginning to share in the responsibility of God's commandments.

Pekudei is the culmination of an important moment for Moshe: he handed off this project, not knowing how it would turn out. The Pesukim emphasize that in fact, they did exactly what was commanded. And for that, they are blessed.

Shabbat shalom.

* 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/2022/03/pekudei22/>

Let's Talk About The Ukraine

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

I can't for the life of me figure out why, but my mind has been focusing on the Ukraine this week.

So let's talk about it.

But let's not talk about the current events. Let's not talk about the savagery of an unprovoked war. Let's not talk about the heroism of the Ukrainian Jewish president.

Of course we should talk about these things but for this brief email, let us instead search for hope in the annals of Ukrainian Jewish history.

Just by acquainting ourselves with this topic we can build an even greater empathy towards all those suffering in this conflict, Jewish or not. And by the end, we will have encountered a specific event that gives us a precedent for hope.

The first thing that usually comes to mind when talking about the history of Ukrainian Jewry is the famous Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, the famous Baal Shem (Kabbalistic healer) employed by the town of Medzhiboz, whose charismatic teachings and emphasis on ecstatic worship spawned the birth of modern Chassidism.

But let's go back further.

The Jews have had a presence in the Ukraine since around the 12th century. The Jewish population exploded in the sixteenth century due to the economy shifting from one based on agriculture to one based on trade. The nobility who owned the land imported Jews from outside countries to serve as the middlemen (money lenders, merchants, traders, etc.) to bolster their economy while not having to give up their lands and the peasant serfs bound to them. Jews were particularly active in the liquor trade, which consumed increasing amounts of Poland's grain production.

With these new economic opportunities, Jews flooded into the area. (As a modern parallel, think of the early 20th century Jewish immigration to America or the modern immigration to South Florida.) By the year 1648, the Jewish population had grown from 10,000 to almost a quarter million.

However, the Khmelnytsky massacres changed everything. The tensions between the peasantry and the nobility boiled over into an uprising of the Cossacks led by Bogdan Khmelnytsky in 1648. Their revolt was against the feudal regime, but Jews were a main target as well. They murdered 20,000 Jews in this first phase of the revolt, and most others became refugees. The Muscovite and Swedish invasions (1654-1655) caused thousands more to lose their lives and homes.

All of these tragedies were subsumed in the popular imagination under the name Gezeirot Tach Vitat (literally: the decrees of 48 and 49), and many Jews still observe remembrances with fasts in commemoration of them. Most Jewish communities say Kinnot on Tisha B'av for these pogroms.

But here's what happened after. We came back. We overcame all the economic and political tragedies and returned to the Ukraine. We returned to our homes, and many even managed to salvage the wealth they accumulated.

For example, most of the Jews of Pinsk had fled before the Cossack uprising in 1648. But by December, two months after the attack, Jews returned, reestablished their businesses, and rebuilt their communal institutions and homes. This pattern repeated itself all over the Ukraine.

On a more personal note, we have the case of a Jew named Yehuda Ben Nissan Katz. Katz had fled the Volynian community of Ostrog to Krakow where the famous Rabbi Tom Tov Lipman Heller arranged for him to be paid a living stipend. Katz eventually assumed a rabbinical post in Western Poland. But on her deathbed, Katz's wife made him promise that he would return the family to the Ukraine -- which he did.

Even in the face of unprovoked brutality, Ukrainian Jewry came back.

The history does not end there of course. But maybe as we pray and hope this week for all the people of Ukraine, we can focus on this precedent for hope.

We can recognize the modern counterparts of the 17th Century when we see things like the Ukrainians fighting for their lives and homes, rabbis helping shepherd refugee orphans to safety, and an inspiring leader refusing to leave his people behind.

May Hashem protect the people of the Ukraine. May Hashem help all who have been displaced from their homes come back and dwell in safety and security under their own democratically chosen leaders. May Hashem protect us because a threat of this kind against even one country is a threat against the world.

Shabbat Shalom,

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Rav Kook Torah VaYakheil: Stars in the Tabernacle

There is an interesting tradition concerning the beautiful tapestries covering the Tabernacle. The covering was comprised of ten large tapestries with patterns of cherubs woven into them. These colorful tapestries were sewn together in two sets of five, and the two sections were then fastened together with fifty gold fasteners.

We know that the structure of the Tabernacle corresponded to the entire universe. What did these metal fasteners represent?

Like the Stars

The Talmud (Shabbat 99a) tells us that from inside the Tabernacle, the gold fasteners would sparkle against the background of the rich tapestries like stars twinkling in the sky.

This analogy of fasteners to the stars requires further examination. Stars and constellations represent powerful natural forces in the universe, influencing and controlling our world. "Good are the luminaries that our God has created... He granted them strength and power, to be dominant within the world" (from the Sabbath morning prayers).

The Tabernacle fasteners, however, indicate a second function of the stars. The fasteners held the tapestries together. In fact, they emphasized the overall unity of the Tabernacle. By securing the two sets of tapestries together, they would "make the Tabernacle one" (Ex. 36:13).

Holding the Universe Together

In general, the design of the Tabernacle reflected the structure of the universe and its underlying unity. For example, the Tabernacle building consisted of wooden beams with pegs that slid into silver sockets, called adanim. The precise interlocking of the Tabernacle's supporting base of adanim with the upright beams symbolizes the harmonious synchronization of the universe's foundations with the diversified forces and mechanisms that regulate and develop the world. When we reflect on the beautiful harmony of the different parts of the Tabernacle, we begin to be aware of the fundamental unity of the universe and all of its forces. This insight allows us to recognize that everything is the work of the Creator, Who unites all aspects of creation in His sublime Oneness.

For all of their grandeur and apparent autonomy, the true function of the stars is to act like the Tabernacle fasteners. They hold together the great canopy of the cosmos, in accordance with the Divine plan of creation. Like the sparkling fasteners, the stars "are filled with luster and radiate brightness" on their own accord. Yet their true function is to bind together the forces of the world, making the universe one.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 168-169. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, p. 245.)

Encampments and Journeys (Pekudei 5768)

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

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

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

And Moses finished [vayechal] the work [hamelachah].

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

The next verse states the result:

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

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

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

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

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

When the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, the Israelites went onward in all their journeys, but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out until the day it lifted. 38 So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel in all their journeys.

There is a small but significant difference between the two instances of the phrase bechol mas'ehem, "in all their journeys." In the first instance the words are to be taken literally. When the cloud lifted and moved on ahead, the Israelites knew they were about to travel. However in the second instance they cannot be taken literally. The cloud was not over the Tabernacle in all their journeys. On the contrary: it was there only when they stopped travelling and instead pitched camp. During the journeys the cloud went on ahead.

Noting this, Rashi makes the following comment:

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

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

*The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

To be a Jew is to travel, and to know that here where we are is a mere resting place, not yet a home. It is defined not by the fact that we are here, but by the knowledge that eventually – after a day, a week, a year, a century, sometimes even a millennium – we will have to move on. Thus, the portable Tabernacle, even more than the Temple in Jerusalem, became the symbol of Jewish life.

Why so? Because the Gods of the ancient world were gods of a place: Sumeria, Memphis, Moab, Edom. They had a specific domain. Theology was linked to geography. Here, in this holy place, made magnificent by ziggurat or temple, the gods of the tribe or the state ruled and exercised power over the city or the empire. When Pharaoh says to Moses: “Who is the Lord that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go” he means – here, I am the sovereign power. Egypt has its own gods. Within its boundaries, they alone rule, and they have delegated that power to me, their earthly representative. There may indeed be a God of Israel, but his power and authority do not extend to Egypt. Divine sovereignty is like political sovereignty. It has borders. It has spatial location. It is bounded by a place on the map.

With Israel an old-new idea (it goes back, according to the Torah, to Adam and Cain, Abraham and Jacob, all of whom suffered exile) is reborn: that God, being everywhere, can be found anywhere. He is what Morris Berman calls the “wandering God.” Just as in the desert His cloud of glory accompanied the Israelites on their long and meandering journey, so – said the rabbis – “when Israel went into exile, the Divine presence went with them.” God cannot be confined to a specific place. Even in Israel, His presence among the people depended on their obedience to His word. Hence there is no such thing as physical security, the certain knowledge that here-I-am-and-here-I-stay. As David said in Psalm 30:

*When I felt secure, I said,
“I will never be shaken.”
. . . but when You hid Your face,
I was dismayed.*

Security belongs not to place but to person, not to a physical space on the surface of the earth but to a spiritual space in the human heart.

If anything is responsible for the unparalleled strength of Jewish identity during the long centuries in which they were scattered throughout the world, a minority everywhere, it is this – the concept to which Jews and Judaism gave the name galut, exile. Unique among nations in the ancient or modern world, with few exceptions they neither converted to the dominant faith nor assimilated to the prevailing culture. The sole reason was that they never mistook a particular place for home, temporary location for ultimate destination. “Now we are here,” they said at the beginning of the seder service, “but next year, in the land of Israel.”

In Jewish law (Yoreh Deah 286: 22) 7, one who hires a house outside Israel is obliged to affix a mezuzah only after thirty days. Until then it is not yet regarded as a dwelling-place. Only after thirty days does it become, de facto, home. In Israel, however, one who hires a house is immediately obligated mishum yishuv eretz Yisrael, “because of the command to settle Israel.” Outside Israel Jewish life is a way, a path, a route. Even an encampment, a place of rest, is still called a journey.

There is a marvellous scene in the 19th chapter of the First Book of Kings. The aged Elijah encounters God on the

mountain, in the “still small voice” that follows the wind, the earthquake and the fire. God tells him that he must appoint Elisha as his successor. He does so:

So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. “Let me kiss my father and mother good-by,” he said, “and then I will come with you.”

“Go back,” Elijah replied. “What have I done to you?”

So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the ploughing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.

Elisha was not expecting the call. Yet without delay, he abandons everything to follow Elijah. Almost as if terrified at the sheer starkness of the demand he is making of the younger man, Elijah seems to change his mind at the last moment: “Go back. What have I done to you?” (There is an echo here of an earlier passage in which Naomi tries to persuade Ruth not to follow her: “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home . . . Return home, my daughters, why would you come with me?” In both cases, Ruth and Elisha prove their calling by refusing to be dissuaded). At the end of his essay, The Lonely Man of Faith, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik gives a deeply moving analysis of the encounter:

Elisha was a typical representative of the majestic community. He was the son of a prosperous farmer, a man of property, whose interests were centred around this -- worldly, material goods such as crops, livestock, and market prices . . . What did this man of majesty have in common with Elijah, the solitary covenantal prophet, the champion of God, the adversary of Kings, who walked as a stranger through the bustling cities of Shomron . . . What bond could exist between a complacent farmer who enjoyed his homestead and the man in the hairy dress who came from nowhere and to finally disappeared under a veil of mystery? [Yet] he bade farewell to father and mother and departed from their home for good. Like his master, he became homeless. Like his ancestor Jacob he became a “straying Aramean” who took defeat and humiliation with charity and gratitude . . . Elisha was indeed lonely, but in his loneliness he met the Lonely One and discovered the singular covenantal confrontation of solitary man and God who abides in the recesses of transcendental solitude.

That scene was repeated time and again during the years 1948-51 when one after another of the Jewish communities in Arab lands – the Maghreb, Iraq, Yemen – said goodbye to homes they had lived in for centuries and left for Israel. In 1990, the Dalai Lama, who had lived in exile from Tibet since 1951, invited a group of Jewish scholars to visit him in North India. Realising that he and his followers might have to spend many years before they were allowed back, he had pondered the question, “How does a way of life sustain itself far from home?” He realised that one group above all others had faced and solved that problem: the Jews. So he turned to them for advice (the story is told in Roger Kamenetz’ book, *The Jew in the Lotus*).

Whether the Jewish answer – which has to do with faith in the God of history – is applicable to Buddhism is a moot point, but the encounter was fascinating none the less, because it showed that even the Dalai Lama, leader of a group far removed from Judaism, recognised that there is something unparalleled in the Jewish capacity to stay faithful to the terms of its existence despite dispersion, never losing faith that one day the exiles would return to their land.

How and why it happened is contained in those simple words of Rashi at the end of Shemot. Even when at rest, Jews knew that they would one day have to uproot their tents, dismantle the Tabernacle, and move on. “Even an encampment is called a journey.” A people that never stops travelling is one that never grows old or stale or complacent. It may live in the here-and-now, but it is always conscious of the distant past and the still-beckoning future. “But I have promises to keep / and miles to go before I sleep.”

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

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/pekudei/encampments-and-journeys/>

The Clouds of Glory: What Were They?

By Levi Avtzon * © Chabad 2022

One of the most significant holidays on the Jewish calendar—Sukkot—commemorates the Clouds of Glory, which protected the Jewish people as they sojourned in the desert. But what exactly do we know about these supernatural clouds?

The Clouds' Function

The clouds that surrounded the camp fulfilled a four-fold purpose:

1. to protect the people from the searing desert sun;¹
2. to keep their clothing fresh and free of wrinkles;²
3. to lead the way through the desert;³ and
4. to assure a safe and comfortable journey by flattening mountains and raising up valleys, and killing serpents and scorpions in their path.⁴

In Whose Merit

When Aaron passed away on the 1st of Av⁵ in the year 2487, the Clouds of Glory departed. From here our sages infer that for the almost 40 years that the Jews were accompanied by the clouds, it was in his merit.⁶ They then returned in the merit of Moses.⁷

How Many Clouds Were There?

Sifri⁸ offers a few opinions on this matter:

- There were seven clouds in total: one on each side, one above, one below and another guiding cloud in the front.
- According to Rabbi Yehuda, there were 13 clouds: two on each side, two above, two below and another guiding cloud in the front.
- According to Rabbi Yoshiya, there were four clouds.
- According to Rebbi, there were only two clouds.

Two Types of Clouds

Based on careful analysis of the text, the Lubavitcher Rebbe inferred that the People of Israel were surrounded by two types of clouds in the desert: (1) functional clouds, which protected and guided the people; and (2) clouds that served merely as a badge of prestige and respect (and also laundered their clothing, which was not a necessity but rather a sign of honor). The "Clouds of Glory" referred to this second type of cloud.

The regular clouds never left the Jewish people even after Aaron's death, for their function was still needed. It was the Clouds of Glory that didn't return after Aaron's passing.⁹

(The Rebbe's explanation sheds light on a fascinating question posed by the commentaries:¹⁰ if the holiday of Sukkot commemorates the Clouds of Glory, and we follow the accepted tradition that there were seven clouds, then why aren't we required to build a six-sided sukkah [6 walls + 1 covering = 7], instead of a minimum of two and a half walls?¹¹

However, once we understand that some of the clouds weren't Clouds of Glory, but rather clouds of function, we can

understand that we don't need to commemorate all the clouds; we just celebrate the idea of some of the clouds being Clouds of Glory.)

Note that some, however, understand that all clouds were Clouds of Glory.

Other Amazing Tidbits About the Clouds

- The cloud that led the way in front is called the Pillar of Cloud in the Torah because it looked like a long pillar from the ground to the heavens.¹² This was the cloud that blocked the arrows the Egyptians shot at the Jews at the Red Sea.¹³ (At night they were accompanied by a Pillar of Fire.)
- The clouds gave personal attention to every individual based on his or her specific needs.¹⁴
- The clouds created such illumination that one could see through a barrel.¹⁵

The Tabernacle Cloud

There was also a special cloud that appeared above the Tabernacle—the same cloud that had been atop Mount Sinai at the Giving of the Torah.¹⁶ Here are a few interesting details about this cloud, referred to as the Cloud of the Shechinah:¹⁷

- When the Jews were meant to travel, the cloud would roll up into a thin pillar. When they were meant to rest, the cloud would blossom out like a palm tree at the place they were intended to camp.¹⁸
- According to one opinion, when the cloud would depart, it was a sign that G d was “leaving” them, and they had to return to the right path through repentance.¹⁹
- A voice would come out from within the cloud, telling the Jews which direction to travel.²⁰

On a mystical level, this cloud is now “atop the home of the wise and pious,” surrounding them with glory and honor.²¹ Today, we commemorate the miracle of the clouds by sitting in a sukkah during the holiday of Sukkot. The sukkah reminds us of G d's loving, protective embrace during our 40-year journey to the Promised Land.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Shulchan Aruch Harav, Orach Chaim, ch. 625, Isaiah 4:6. See also Psalms 105:39.
2. Rashi on Deuteronomy 8:4, quoting Shir Hashirim Rabbah and Pesikta Derav Kahana.
3. Exodus 13:21.
4. Rashi on Numbers 10:34, quoting Sifri ad. loc., and Mechilta and Yalkut Shimoni to Beshalach.
5. Numbers 33:38.
6. Talmud, Taanit 9:1.
7. According to one way of understanding the text based on Rashi, it seems that the clouds of function did not return after Aaron's passing, even though the well, which had been provided to the Jews in the merit of Miriam and had departed four months earlier, had returned in the merit of Moses.
8. Behaalotecha 83.
9. Ibid.
10. Re'em on Numbers 10:35.

11. Talmud, Sukkah 6b.
12. Ibn Ezra on Exodus 13:21.
13. Mechilta on Exodus 14:20.
14. Baal Haturim on Deuteronomy 1:31.
15. Braisa Dimleches Hamishkan, p. 84.
16. Yalkut Shimoni, Numbers 9:723.
17. Midrash Tanchuma, Numbers 10.
18. Rashi on Numbers 9:18.
19. Alshich on Numbers 9:17.
20. Midrash Hagadol on Numbers 2:34.
21. Radak on Isaiah 4.5.

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https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4305087/jewish/The-Clouds-of-Glory-What-Were-They.htm

Don't Wait For the Right Time!

By Aharon Loschak* © Chabad 2022

Once there was a millionaire who had a collection of live alligators, which he kept in a pool at the back of his mansion.

He decided to throw a huge party, during which he announced, "My dear guests, I have a proposition to everyone here. I will give one million dollars to whoever can swim across this pool full of alligators and emerge unharmed!"

As soon as he finished his last word, they all heard a large splash. A man was in the pool swimming as fast as he could! They cheered him on as he paddled at a furious pace. Astonishingly, he made it to the other side unscathed.

"That was incredible!" exclaimed the millionaire. "Fantastic! I didn't think it could be done! Well, I must keep my end of the bargain. How would you like me to pay you?"

"Listen," replied the swimmer, "I don't want your money. I just want to get my hands on the nitwit who pushed me into that water!"

Sometimes all it takes is for someone or something to give us that push, and only then do we discover that we can actually hack it.

Inverted Construction

Parshat Pekudei wraps up the book of Exodus, detailing the events around the inauguration of the Tabernacle. All of the many parts and pieces we have read about over the past few weeks are finally put into place, and Moses himself oversees the project's completion.

With the structure erect, Moses's attention turns to the courtyard, the busiest part of the Tabernacle, where the sacrificial altar stood. Moses first sets up the altar, offers sacrifices upon it, and only afterwards does he put up the curtains around it to mark the space of the courtyard. Take a look:

The altar of the burnt offering he placed in front of the entrance of the Mishkan of the Tent of Meeting, and he offered up the burnt offering . . . He set up the courtyard all around the Mishkan and the altar, and he put up the screen at the entrance to the courtyard; and Moses completed the work.¹

Essentially, Moses did things backwards. He first put up the inside and only thereafter erected the enclosure.

Would you set up your bed in a construction site, sleep on it, and only then build the walls around it? That's absurd, of course. So why did Moses effectively do the same thing?

In fact, Betzalel, the main contractor of the entire Tabernacle, took issue with Moses about this very matter. When he heard about this, he pushed back, "It is common practice to first make a house and then to put furniture into it!"²

"Common Practice" isn't Always Common

Therein lies the answer: Betzalel was right that "common practice" dictates "structure first, contents second." The thing is that metaphorically speaking, "common practice" is precisely what Moses was trying to bypass.

You see, "common practice" is the mentality that demands proper order and a natural progression. If you want to approach something as large and spiritual as building a house for G d, you must first work on the big, structural things and build from the ground up. Once you have that squared away, you can progress to the more euphoric and intense specific practices such as offering a sacrifice to G d.

But to go backwards? To jump straight to the intense stuff before squaring away the basics? That's crazy. That's just not how things work.

But Moses knew that "common practice" isn't always the way to go. Normative methods are, well, normal, but sometimes, normal doesn't work. The close and fervent connection to G d achieved through the sacrificial rite cannot be the exclusive property of those who build elaborate structures of sanctity, i.e., those who check all their spiritual boxes.

So, Moses torpedoed the process and offered sacrifices even before the walls even went up, thereby broadcasting the message that you don't always need to be a spiritual professional to be close to G d.

Bucking "Common Practice"

Let's talk about it in more practical terms.

Many parents take a "common practice" approach with their children. "I don't want to overwhelm them with anything over the top or too intense, so I'll leave it to them to discover religion slowly, without pressure." And so, they are shielded from anything their parents deem too extreme or fanatic.

Teach them some Hebrew, a little about Israel, and rituals around the holidays. That's nice. Who doesn't like apples in honey and Afikomen treats? That's great.

But asking them to pray at age 10? To not watch TV for a whole Shabbat every week? To really not eat non-kosher candy? Relax, let's take it easy, they're just kids! Let's not scare them off with too much too soon.

You're forgiven for thinking so. But Moses teaches us that sometimes, you must buck the "common practice" and leapfrog a couple steps. Pile it on early without worry. On the contrary, doing so will ensure that even when the walls of whatever holiness they have come down, they'll still be strong with the values and passion you imbued within them before the walls went up.

And as it is with children, so it is with us. Who wants to go crazy and bite off more than they can chew? You think to yourself, "I've got to take this slowly and methodically. This is a process, and I shouldn't take on too much too soon."

You're right and you're wrong. You're right on an average day. But not every day is average. Sometimes, you must get on the express train. Don't wait until you've built an entire building of Jewish infrastructure before signing on for that all-night Shavuot learnathon, getting your own pair of tefillin, or committing to monthly mikvah visits.

Taking the cue from Moses, who offered a sacrifice even before the walls went up: You, too, can take the plunge right now. You're not ready? That's OK—the Jews in the desert weren't either. Moses did what he did anyway—and it worked.

Be like Moses. It'll work for you, too.³

FOOTNOTES:

1. Exodus 40:29-33.

2. Rashi, Exodus 38:22.

3. This essay is based on Likutei Sichot, vol. 31 p. 224-225.

* Writer, editor, and rabbi, who lives in Brooklyn, N.Y.; editor of JLI's popular Torah Studies program

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5410538/jewish/Dont-Wait-For-the-Right-Time.htm

Pekudei: Torah Thought

From Chabad of Greater Dayton, OH

Dear Friends,

My heart and mind is with the Jewish communities in Ukraine, who have been living in a war zone for more than a week. My fellow Chabad emissaries serve dozens of communities with hundreds of schools, synagogues, yeshivas, social service organizations, orphanages, and more, all mostly built over the last 30 years.

This week's Torah portion describes the accounting Moses took of the donations from the Jews towards the construction of the desert sanctuary. We read about how every single donation was accounted for, and by extension, every single Jew was included in one way or another.

This reminds us that every person's contribution, no matter how big or small, is needed for G-d's home, and today G-d's home can be found everywhere — from Panama to Ukraine. Sustaining Jewish communities and supporting Jews wherever they are, is how we continue Moses' legacy of ensuring that every single Jew is included and no detail is ever overlooked.

May the merit of building G-d a home in their communities stand by and protect our brothers and sisters in Ukraine, and may we see an immediate end to the conflict.

With prayers for the ultimate redemption with the coming of Moshiach,

Good Shabbos

Positive Stubbornness

By Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky * © Chabad 2022

The artisans made the Forehead-plate, and inscribed upon it: "Holy unto G-d" (Exodus 39:30).

The high priest was required to wear the Forehead-plate because the forehead represents stubborn determination. We all naturally wrinkle our forehead muscles whenever we resolve to see something through despite all odds.

Stubbornness can be positive or negative. Brazen nerve or arrogance in showing contempt for G-d's law is negative. It is no coincidence that the stone thrown from David's slingshot hit and killed Goliath in the forehead, for Goliath brazenly and openly defied G-d. We are therefore taught that the high priest's Forehead-plate atoned for the sin of arrogance.

An example of positive stubbornness is the resolve that enables us to stay true throughout the day to the spiritual awakening that we feel during our morning prayers. As we go about our daily business, it may be difficult to maintain the heightened Divine consciousness that we aspire to in prayer.

But we can certainly maintain the attitude toward life implicit in this heightened awareness: that our Divine mission is our primary concern and the purpose of our involvement in the material world is to elevate it by using it for G-dly purposes. Our goal of making everything "Holy unto G-d" was therefore inscribed on the Forehead-plate..

* — from *Daily Wisdom* # 1

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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* * * *

Note: Starting here is some material from the New York Times and Chabad of Potomac, MD concerning the situation for Jews in the Ukraine:

For Ukraine's Jews, the Threat of War Stirs Memories of Past Horrors *

The Barland family came from Ukraine. My grandparents were from a town called Proskurov that was renamed Khmelnytskyi in 1954 during the Stalin era. It is a couple of hundred miles southwest of Kyiv and about the same distance northwest of Odessa. They left for America several years before the 1917 revolution. My parents traveled to Russia in the early 1980s when it was still the USSR. My father paid a driver quite a bit of gelt to take him to Khmelnytskyi. They found the Jewish cemetery there, my father wanted to see if he could find any trace of the family. All the headstones had been tipped over and broken. I am very thankful that my grandparents left when they did.

For Ukraine's Jews, the Threat of War Stirs Memories of Past Horrors. In Odessa, Jewish leaders are preparing for the worst: hiring security guards, scoping out bomb shelters and making plans to evacuate if Russia invades the country.

In Odessa, Rabbi Avraham Wolff is preparing for war. He has bought enough sugar, macaroni and canned goods to feed his congregation for a year, he said. He has hired about 20 Israeli security guards in case rioting and looting break out. And if the Russians do invade, he said he has mapped out the city's bomb shelters and has enough buses on standby to evacuate 3,000 people from the Black Sea port city of Odessa.

"This is why I'm gray at 50," said Rabbi Wolff, the leader of one of the two main Jewish congregations in Odessa. "God willing, there will be no war, but we don't have the right to not be prepared."

Throughout the country, many Ukrainians have been slow to get ready for the gathering threat posed by the estimated 190,000 Russian troops at their borders <<https://www.nytimes.com/news-event/ukraine-russia>>, partly out of exhaustion from eight years of grinding war with Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine. But some Jewish communities are alarmed, particularly here in Odessa, where successive waves of violence, from Jewish pogroms in the early 20th century to mass executions by the Nazis in World War II, have left indelible scars.

Kruskal, who runs a number of orphanages and Jewish schools in Odessa and said he, too, had hired Israeli security guards and secured evacuation buses. "There are people who have seen it, who have been through it, especially the elderly," said Rabbi Kruskal, whose father and father-in-law survived concentration camps. "So I think that's why Jewish communities are more worried, more concerned or more prepared than others."

Last week, Ukraine's representative for the United Hatzalah, the Israel-based volunteer emergency medical service, visited Odessa to check on preparations for evacuations, and confirm the availability of medical equipment like defibrillators. The director of Odessa's Holocaust museum said he was taking first aid courses and learning how to shoot a gun.

Svetlana Lisytsina, who is 80 and has faint memories of the horrors her family endured during World War II, said her daughter had asked her to pick up a carrier for their peach-colored cat, Persik, should they have to make a hasty escape.

"I try not to watch TV because when they show all those bodies in Donetsk and everywhere and now they show how they're shelling Ukraine," she said. "I try to turn off my internal fear."

Ms. Lisytsina said that most of all she feared that a war could tear apart her family as happened during World War II. Her grandfather and aunt were killed at Babyn Yar outside Kyiv, one of the most horrific mass executions of Jews during the war. One of her uncles and her father were killed fighting Nazis at the front. She worries that her grandson, Danil, who will turn 18 in March and be eligible for the army draft, will be called to war. [ed: Russian bombs destroyed the Holocaust memorial at Babyn Yar on March 2.]

But there is another menace many Jews fear lies hidden in their community, symbolized by the swastika that someone recently scrawled in black marker on the wall enclosing Ms. Lisytsina's courtyard. Though anti-Semitic violence is relatively rare in Odessa, some Jews are fearful that it could be unleashed by the chaos of war.

"This worries me more than anything," said Semyon Abramovich, 72, the senior researcher at the Museum of the Holocaust and a lifelong Odessan.

The tragedy of Odessa's Jews is compounded by the fact that they were once so prosperous.

At the end of the 19th century, Odessa, then a jewel of the Russian Empire, had the third largest Jewish population in the world, after New York and Warsaw. There were Jewish universities and schools, Jewish-owned factories and theaters and about 40 synagogues, said Njusia Verkhovskaya, a sixth-generation Odessan, who runs the city's Jewish history museum.

The author Isaac Babel, whose short stories brim with the city's peculiar assortment of aristocrats, artists and swindlers, reserved a special fondness for its "poor Jews" whose refusal to give up their old ways, he wrote, "has created an atmosphere of lightness and clarity that surrounds Odessa."

The start of the 20th century, though, began a period of rapid decimation, first through anti-Jewish pogroms under the Russian czars, and then with Stalin's purges in the Soviet Union, which saw many of the city's most prominent figures, including Mr. Babel, shot. During World War II, Romanian troops allied with the Nazis occupied Odessa, and started a program of extermination, hanging Jews in the streets and murdering them in basements before marching off those who remained to concentration camps. As many as a quarter of a million Jews in Odessa and the surrounding region perished.

"If you look at the map, almost the whole center of Odessa," said Ms. Verkhovskaya, "is a tomb."

By the time the Soviet Union collapsed, Jews, who once constituted nearly half the population of Odessa, made up only 6 percent. There was only one crumbling synagogue.

For the moment, Odessa is far from the rapidly gathering violence in eastern Ukraine.

The city is enjoying an unseasonably warm February, and many residents, rather than preparing for possible war, have been promenading along its cobblestone streets, browsing its funky clothing boutiques and sipping coffee in the cafes. At the 19th-century opera house, resplendent in gold leaf and crystal, Odessans settled into red velvet chairs this weekend for a ballet called "Fates," about the travails of modern urban life.

"People, if I'm speaking honestly, are a little bit disoriented and maybe this is because the days have been so sunny," said Odessa's mayor, Gennady Turhanov. "They're going to seashore, walking around and relaxing, enjoying life. They haven't fully recognized the threat."

On Saturday night, the city's main synagogue was packed with congregants who had come to break the Sabbath. Men in

black hats rocked back and forth reciting prayers, while a group of young men in kipas sat in the back row, scrolling on phones hidden behind prayer books.

“At the moment we’re not really feeling threatened, except there’s something in the air,” Isrel Viner said after Saturday’s services. “In the air there’s a tension — what if something happens? — but something could happen or it could not.”

Military officials and analysts agree that any large-scale military action against Ukraine is likely to begin in the east, yet Odessa would present a clear target. It is home to the country’s largest ports and is the headquarters of Ukraine’s Navy. It is flanked by Russian-occupied Crimea to its east and the Russian-backed separatist enclave of Transnistria, in Moldova, to its west, a region along Ukraine’s Black Sea coast that Mr. Putin has referred to using the czarist-era name, Novorossiia, or New Russia.

Odessa also sits just a few hundred miles from where Russian naval forces have been carrying out massive military exercises in the Black Sea, and some ships are close enough to reach the city in a matter of hours. Like the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, Odessa was the site of a pro-Russian separatist uprising in 2014 that sought to create an independent state. Unlike the eastern territories, the independence movement was quashed after a series of pitched street battles pitting the separatists against Ukrainian nationalists and soccer hooligans, which culminated in the torching of a trade union building on the outskirts of Odessa. At least 40 pro-Russian activists were killed.

The current conflict between Russia and Ukraine is not entirely straightforward for the Jews. Particularly in Odessa, most Jews, as well as much of the city, speak Russian rather than Ukrainian, while many Jews have family and congregational ties that stretch across borders. But while some expressed annoyance at the Kyiv government’s recent efforts to enforce laws requiring that the Ukrainian language be used in official settings, they dismissed the idea, repeated often by Mr. Putin and his subordinates, that Russian speakers, Jews or others, might need rescuing by Russian forces.

Pavel Kozlenko, the director of the Museum of the Holocaust, who lost 50 members of his family at the hands of the Nazis and their allies, accused Mr. Putin of betraying the memory of the “common victory” of World War II. Then he told a joke, as Odessans often do in dark times, about two Jews standing on the street speaking in Yiddish.

“A third comes up and says, ‘Guys, why are you speaking in Yiddish?’” Mr. Kozlenko said, “to which one of the Yiddish-speaking men replied, ‘You know, I’m scared to speak in Russian because if I do Putin will show up and try to liberate us.’”

* E-mail from Eli Strums to B. Tyson, February 22, 2022.

Following is part of an E-mail from Rabbi Mendel Bluming, Chabad of Potomac, MD, with an update as of March 3:

The situation is quite dire. I am in touch with many of the different Chabad rabbis and their main goal at this point is to sustain the community until they can get them out sooner rather than later. These Chabad rabbis are feeding 500 people per meal at least. They are providing them with medication and clothing and heat and a safe place to sleep to the best of your ability. Costs are skyrocketing by the day and money is quickly becoming useless. Through the fund that you are supporting through us (see below and please partner in this important calling) they are able to use all sorts of different currencies to assist these communities on the ground sometimes it is bitcoin and at other times it is credit with people who know them and at other times it might be euros or dollars.

The Chabad couples there are paying for hotels at the Romanian and Polish etc borders and bringing people in any way that they possibly can to get them to that border and then from there to Israel etc. Unfortunately there are many elderly and other Jews who do not want to leave and they need to be sustained and protected. Men between the ages of 18 and 60 are not permitted to leave Ukraine at this time and most of them are staying behind and not getting out yet the Chabads are finding ways to get them out if they choose to (it is risky). It is obviously very dangerous because of the Russian bombardment and the Ukrainian checkpoints and confusion. There were so many guns given out to individual citizens in Ukraine and how they use those guns is not tightly regulated, to say it mildly.

The fund that you give to through us *[all Chabads and virtually all synagogues in our country are collecting funds to go*

directly to help fellow Jews in Ukraine] carefully allocates the money as it is needed and they are on the ground knowing best which community needs which type of support/funds at that moment. By doing it through our community I am able to give you a tax receipt and the rabbis have told me that it gives them encouragement to know that our community cares about their community and is sending them urgently needed help.

The Chabad rabbis tell me that the reason that they did not get out before the war started was a combination of not really believing that the Russians would come in and just bomb their streets and because they feel a very personal responsibility toward their people who count on them. Especially the elderly and the orphans and the impoverished have nowhere to turn. Food is becoming scarce and crime rampant. Money is becoming worthless and it is because of your support and other communities around the globe that they are able to have the funds that they need to sustain thousands and thousands of Jews and most importantly get them out of Ukraine. There are some communities that cannot escape at this time because of the stranglehold created by the invading forces. It is safer for them to remain in place than to try to escape for the meanwhile.

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via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

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Shabbat Parashat Pekudei

5782 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

There is a verse so familiar that we don't often stop to reflect on what it means. It is the line from the first paragraph of the Shema, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your me'od." Deut. 6:5

That last word is usually translated as "strength" or "might". But Rashi, following the Midrash and Targum, translates it as with all your "wealth".

If so, the verse seems unintelligible, at least in the order in which it is written. "With all your soul" was understood by the Sages to mean, "with your life" if need be. There are times, thankfully very rare indeed, when we are commanded to give up life itself rather than commit a sin or a crime. If that is the case then it should go without saying that we should love God with all our wealth, meaning even if it demands great financial sacrifice. Yet Rashi and the Sages say that this phrase applies to those "to whom wealth means more than life itself."

Of course, life is more important than wealth. Yet the Sages also knew that, in their words, Adam bahul al mammono, meaning: people do strange, hasty, ill-considered and irrational things when money is at stake (Shabbat 117b). Financial gain can be a huge temptation, leading us to acts that harm others and ultimately ourselves. So when it comes to financial matters, especially when public funds are involved, there must be no room for temptation, no space for doubt as to whether it has been used for the purpose for which it was donated. There must be scrupulous auditing and transparency. Without this there is moral hazard: the maximum of temptation combined with the maximum of opportunity.

Hence the parsha of Pekudei, with its detailed account of how the donations to the building of the Mishkan were used: "These are the amounts of the materials used for the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of the Testimony, which were recorded at Moses' command by the Levites under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the Priest." Ex. 38:21

The passage goes on to list the exact amounts of gold, silver, and bronze collected, and the purposes to which it was put. Why did Moses do this? A Midrash suggests an answer:

"They gazed after Moses" (Ex. 33:8) – People criticised Moses. They used to say to one another, "Look at that neck. Look at those legs. Moses is eating and drinking what

belongs to us. All that he has belongs to us." The other would reply: "A man who is in charge of the work of the Sanctuary – what do you expect? That he should not get rich?" As soon as he heard this, Moses replied, "By your life, as soon as the Sanctuary is complete, I will make a full reckoning with you." Tanchuma, Buber, Pekudei, 4.

Moses issued a detailed reckoning to avoid coming under suspicion that he had personally appropriated some of the donated money. Note the emphasis that the accounting was undertaken not by Moses himself but "by the Levites under the direction of Ithamar," in other words, by independent auditors.

There is no hint of these accusations in the text itself, but the Midrash may be based on the remark Moses made during the Korach rebellion: "I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them." Num. 16:15

Accusations of corruption and personal enrichment have often been levelled against leaders, with or without justification. We might think that since God sees all we do, this is enough to safeguard against wrongdoing. Yet Judaism does not say this. The Talmud records a scene at the deathbed of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, as the master lay surrounded by his disciples: They said to him, "Our master, bless us." He said to them, "May it be God's will that the fear of heaven shall be as much upon you as the fear of flesh and blood." His disciples asked, "Is that all?" He replied, "Would that you obtained no less than such fear! You can see for yourselves the truth of what I say: when a man is about to commit a transgression, he says, 'I hope no man will see me.'" Brachot 28b

When humans commit a sin they worry that other people might see them. They forget that God certainly sees them. Temptation befuddles the brain, and no one should believe they are immune to it.

A later passage in Tanach seems to indicate that Moses' account was not strictly necessary. The Book of Kings relates an episode in which, during the reign of King Yehoash, money was raised for the restoration of the Temple: "They did not require an accounting from those to whom they gave the money to pay the workers, because they acted with complete honesty." II Kings 12:16

Moses, a man of complete honesty, may thus have acted "beyond the strict requirement of the law." [1]

It is precisely the fact that Moses did not need to do what he did that gives the passage its force. There must be transparency and accountability when it comes to public funds even if the people involved have impeccable reputations. People in positions of trust must be, and be seen to be, individuals of moral integrity. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, had already said this when he told Moses to appoint subordinates to help him in the task of leading the people. They should be, he said, "Men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain." Ex. 18:21

Without a reputation for honesty and incorruptibility, judges cannot ensure that justice is seen to be done. This general principle was derived by the Sages from the episode in the Book of Numbers when the Reubenites and Gadites expressed their wish to settle on the far side of the Jordan where the land provided good grazing ground for their cattle (Numbers 32:1-33). Moses told them that if they did so, they would demoralise the rest of the nation. They would give the impression that they were unwilling to cross the Jordan and fight with their brothers in their battles to conquer the land.

The Reubenites and Gadites made it clear that they were willing to be in the front line of the troops, and would not return to the far side of the Jordan until the land had been fully conquered. Moses accepted the proposal, saying that if they kept their word, they would be "clear [veheyitem neki'im] before the Lord and before Israel" (Num. 32:22). This phrase entered Jewish law as the principle that "one must acquit oneself before one's fellow human beings as well as before God." [2] It is not enough to do right. We must be seen to do right, especially when there is room for rumour and suspicion.

There are several instances in the early rabbinic literature of applications of this rule. So, for example, when people came to take coins for sacrifices from the Shekel Chamber in the Temple, where the money was kept: They did not enter the chamber wearing either a bordered cloak or shoes or sandals or tefillin or an amulet, lest if he became poor people might say that he became poor because of an iniquity committed in the chamber, or if he became rich people might say that he became rich from the appropriation in the chamber. For it is a person's duty to be free of blame before men as before God, as it is said: "and be clear

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before the Lord and before Israel,” (Num. 32:22), and it also says: “So shall thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man” (Prov. 3:4). Mishnah, Shekalim 3:2.

Those who entered the chamber were forbidden to wear any item of clothing in which they could hide and steal coins. Similarly, when charity overseers had funds left over, they were not permitted to change copper for silver coins of their own money; they had to make the exchange with a third party. Overseers in charge of a soup kitchen were not allowed to purchase surplus food when there were no poor people to whom to distribute it. Surpluses had to be sold to others so as not to arouse suspicion that the charity overseers were profiting from public funds. (Pesachim 13a.)

The Shulchan Aruch rules that charity collection must always be done by a minimum of two individuals so that each can see what the other is doing.[3] There is a difference of opinion between Rabbi Yosef Karo and Rabbi Moshe Isserles on the need to provide detailed accounts. Rabbi Yosef Karo rules on the basis on the passage in II Kings – “They did not require an accounting from those to whom they gave the money to pay the workers, because they acted with complete honesty” (II Kings 12:15) – that no formal accounting is required from people of unimpeachable honesty. Rabbi Moshe Isserles however says that it is right to do so because of the principle, “Be clear before the Lord and before Israel.” [4]

Trust is of the essence in public life. A nation that suspects its leaders of corruption cannot function effectively as a free, just, and open society. It is the mark of a good society that public leadership is seen as a form of service rather than a means to power, which is all too easily abused. Tanach is a sustained tutorial in the importance of high standards in public life. The Prophets were the world’s first social critics, mandated by God to speak truth to power and to challenge corrupt leaders. Elijah’s challenge to King Ahab, and the protests of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah against the unethical practices of their day, are classic texts in this tradition, establishing for all time the ideals of equity, justice, honesty and integrity.

A free society is built on moral foundations, and those must be unshakeable. Moses’ personal example, in giving an accounting of the funds that had been collected for the first collective project of the Jewish people, set a vital precedent for all time.

[1] A key concept in Jewish law (see, e.g., Brachot 7a, 45b, Bava Kamma 99b) of supererogation, meaning doing more, in a positive sense, than the law requires.

[2] Mishnah, Shekalim 3:2.

[3] Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 257:1.

[4] Ibid., 257:2.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

“The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of God filled the Tabernacle... When the cloud was raised up from the Tabernacle, the Children of Israel would embark on all their journeys... For the cloud of God was on the Tabernacle by days and fire would be on it by night, before the eyes of all of the children of Israel throughout their journeys” (Exodus 40:34-38)

Apparently, the cloud (ha’anan) and the “glory of God” come together as the ultimate symbol of God’s protective presence. With reference to Mount Sinai, the mountain of the two Revelations surrounding the twice-gifted Tablets of the Covenant, the Bible similarly records, “Moses ascended the mountain and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of God rested upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for a six-day period. [God] called to Moses on the seventh day from the midst of the cloud... And Moses arrived into the midst of the cloud and ascended the mountain; Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights [receiving God’s Torah]” (Exodus 24:15-18).

God’s “glory,” the Presence of God in this world (as explained by Maimonides in his Guide for the Perplexed), is what Moses is desperately seeking to understand and to effectuate when Moses says, “Show me now Your Glory” (Exodus 33:19).

Whatever that “glory” is, it is somehow to be found in our two Revelations from the mountain. The cloud as the symbol of God’s presence seems to hark back to the Divine admonition to Moses, “You will not see My face, for no human can see My face and live.” For as long as we are limited mortals in this physical world of temporariness and imperfection, our glimpse of God, and His Presence, can only be nebulous, ambiguous, “through a cloud darkly.”

Herein lies the tremendous tension within the portion of Ki Tisa, and the dialogue therein between God and Moses. Moses desperately wants the nation of Israel and God to come together (as it were) as one, with God’s ineffable Presence to be palpably felt within Israel and within the world.

If that were to happen, presumably Israel would not sin and Jewish history could assume its natural course towards redemption.

God informs Moses: “I will send an angel [messenger] ahead of you... but I shall not ascend into your midst; you are a stiff-necked people, and I may be forced to annihilate you on the way” (Exodus 33:3-5).

God is explaining to the Israelites that His presence within their midst in a palpable and apparent way would very likely be to their detriment; if the God of Truth and Judgment

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were too close, He might have to destroy Israel completely before they had a chance to properly repent! His distance from them and the world may be seen as an advantage.

After the second Revelation, however, of the God of unconditional love and forgiveness (Exodus 34:6,7), Moses repeats his earlier requests; Moses now feels empowered to ask God to enter into the midst of Israel: “And Moses said, If I have now found favor in your eyes, let my Lord walk in our midst, [precisely because Israel] is a stiff-necked nation, for You will forgive our iniquity and error and make us Your heritage” (ibid. 9). After all, that is exactly how You, God, defined Yourself to us in the Second Revelation.

This is indeed the message that God gives Moses. Israel is the nation of Covenant and permanence within a world of flux and change (Exodus 34:10); God will always dwell within His people and guarantee their survival no matter what, to the amazement (and jealousy) of all the nations. Israel will bear witness to the world about the evils of idolatry and the glories of our festivals, our Sabbaths and our righteous laws until we are ready for the ultimate redemption. In effect, God is “incarnate” within the Jewish nation (see the writings of Michael Wyschogrod).

This too, is the message at the conclusion of the Book of Exodus. In the immortal words of the Ramban (Nachmanides) in his introduction to the Book of Exodus:

Behold the exile has not ended until [Israel] returns to their place and to the exalted status of their ancestors... only when they came to Mount Sinai and constructed the Sanctuary, only when the Holy one Blessed be He returned and rested His Divine Presence amongst them... so that they rose to the status of the chariot [merkava], could they be considered redeemed. Therefore, this Book concludes with the Sanctuary filled with the glory of the Divine in the midst of Israel.

The Sanctuary is the ultimate symbol of God’s presence in Israel and the world, our promise of ultimate redemption. From this perspective, the sukkah which we build five days after the Yom Kippur of the Second Revelation represents the clouds of glory, the ultimate Sukkah-Sanctuary of world redemption. And the sukkot which likewise remind us of the huts in which we survived during our desert wanderings teach us that God remains in our midst – albeit as through a cloud darkly – even as we wander towards redemption, always forgiving and always protecting.

The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

The Way of the World

Many people have a misconception about Judaism that impedes their ability to take our religion seriously and to commit to living the Jewish way of life. Let me tell you about one

such person and about the conversation that I had with him. Let's call him Richard.

Richard was a very dedicated participant in a class I once gave for individuals with a very limited familiarity with the Jewish faith. As I recall, the title of the course was "Fundamentals of Judaism for Beginners." Besides my weekly lectures, I invited the students to meet with me for informal "conversations," during which we would discuss their personal reactions to what we were studying formally in the classroom.

Richard took me up on the invitation a week or two before the course concluded. "Rabbi," he began, "Let me get right to the point. I am a practical guy. My friends refer to me as 'the last of the great pragmatists.' I hope you don't mind my candor, but I must say that much of what you've been teaching us simply turns me off. It is all about symbolic religious practices, miracles, angels, an invisible deity, and belief in a world to come. What about this world, the real world of day-to-day living? I'm an architect by profession, married with two little children. What does the Judaism you've been teaching have to say to me?"

Richard's objections were not new to me. I had heard them many times before from quite a variety of people, and I've responded in many different ways. But in Richard's case, my impulsive self got the better of my philosophical self, so here is how I answered him:

"Richard, you are making the same mistake as did Moshe Rabbenu!"

Richard was taken aback and protested, "You mean to say that I sound like the biblical Moses? You're comparing me to him? Furthermore, I'm shocked to hear you, Rabbi, insinuating that Moses was capable of error!"

"Let me explain myself, Richard, and you will understand exactly where I'm coming from. Did you ever hear of a man named Bezalel?"

Sad to say, Richard was only familiar with the major heroes and heroines of the Bible. He had hardly any knowledge of the so-called "lesser" biblical characters. So I quickly filled him in on Bezalel's bio. I began by informing him that Bezalel too was an architect, with divinely granted gifts of wisdom and skill sufficient to qualify him as the chief architect of the Mishkan, or Tabernacle. Him and his colleague, Ahaliav.

I then went on to share with him the thought-provoking anecdote related by none other than Rashi, in his commentary on the second verse in this week's Torah portion, Pekudei (Exodus 38:21-40:38). The verse reads: "And Bezalel, son of Uri... made all that the Lord commanded Moses." Rashi notes that the verse does not read, "all that Moses commanded him [i.e. Bezalel]." Rashi, basing his words upon a passage in the Babylonian Talmud (Berachot 55a), tells of the following fascinating dispute between Bezalel and Moses:

Even with regard to those details that Moses, Bezalel's master, did not transmit to him, Bezalel was able to discern the precise instructions that Moses was given by the Almighty. Moses had commanded Bezalel to first fashion the sacred furnishings of the Tabernacle and only then to construct the Tabernacle itself. Bezalel protested that this was not "the way of the world," theminhag ha'olam. Rather, the "way of the world" was to first construct the house and only later to fashion its furnishings and place them in the finished structure. Moses responded, "You are right, Bezalel. That is precisely what I heard from the Holy One Blessed is He. Your name means, 'In the shadow of the Lord'. Indeed, you must have been in the Lord's very shadow to have intuited His divine instructions accurately, whereas I myself failed to 'get it right.'" And so, Bezalel proceeded to first complete the tabernacle itself and only then to fashion its sacred furnishings.

Courageous commentators such as the venerable Maharal of Prague insist that Moses erred and forgot what he was originally told by the Almighty. They even propose reasons for his memory lapse.

Richard was duly impressed by the story. Astute young man that he was, he immediately got my point. However, courteous young man that he was, he permitted me to elaborate in my own fashion.

I explained to Richard that Moses is described in rabbinic literature as a kind of "split personality." The upper half of his body was heavenly, and only the lower part of his body was of this earth. Moses was the only human being ever to have spent a significant number of days in heaven. He conversed with the angels and indeed debated them victoriously. He had little tolerance for human foibles, and because of his emphasis upon sublime values and spiritual priorities, he sometimes lost sight of the "real world" and its need for practical solutions to mundane challenges.

"Moses", I said to Richard, "was, in a sense, prone to the same misconception as are you and so many others. Surely, there is a component of our religion which deals with otherworldly matters, and which sounds so alien to those of us whose priorities are practical and of this world. Bezalel, on the other hand, knew of the necessity for pragmatism and practicality in everyday life. He well understood that often, the way to determine the Almighty's will is not by awaiting voices from heaven, but by ascertaining what is useful and effective in the world we live in."

I went on to remind Richard of the late Rabbi Simcha Zissel Broide, whose tutelage I was privileged to experience in person and whose writings I cherish to this very day. He devotes the last essay in his commentary on the Book of Exodus, V'sam Derech, to the subject of Bezalel's wisdom. He teaches that careful

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observation of simple facts often leads to profound knowledge.

In this essay, he makes the vital point that many of us frequently overlook: "The way of the world is also the will of the Lord."

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

We Toil and Receive Reward — For the Toil!

Parshas Pikudei concludes the construction of the Mishkan. After the construction of all the individual components of the Mishkan, the parts were brought to Moshe. Rashi quotes the Medrash Tanchuma that explains that the Mishkan was brought to Moshe because everyone else was unable to assemble it. The Mishkan was simply too heavy for anyone to lift. Since Moshe had not been personally involved in any part of the construction of the Mishkan, HaShem [G-d] reserved the privilege of final assembly for him.

When HaShem told Moshe to assemble the Mishkan, Moshe protested that it was too heavy for him to lift, as well. HaShem told Moshe to make the effort. "Make it look like you are trying to erect it." Moshe made the effort, and miraculously, it assembled itself. Since Moshe made the effort, he received the credit for having put it up.

Rav Meir Rubman explains that we can learn a very important insight regarding spirituality from this Medrash. The Medrash teaches us that regardless of the difficulty of the task, we must make the effort. In other areas of endeavor, a person only gets credit for producing. However, when it comes to Judaism, HaShem is not necessarily interested in results; He is interested in the effort.

The concept that a person receives an "A" for effort is usually a backhanded compliment. In actuality, you received a "D" — a near failing grade, but at least you received an "A" for effort. That is the way it is in other areas of life. However, by Mitzvos, all Hashem asks from us is that we make the effort. Whether the task is actually accomplished or not is often out of our control and up to Hashem.

At the conclusion of a Mesechta [tractate of the Talmud], we say the prayer "We toil and they toil. We toil and receive reward and they toil and do not receive reward." What does it mean, "they toil and do not receive reward"? This does not seem to be a true statement. People do not work without receiving payment!

The answer is that when we work (at religious tasks), we receive pay for the effort, regardless of whether or not we produce. However, 'they' only receive pay for the bottom line. In all other areas of endeavor, toil that does not produce results does not receive reward.

Not long ago (1992), I was in Atlanta for a Torah retreat. Atlanta is an amazing community. Thirty years ago, they did not have a minyan [quorum] of Sabbath observers. Today, over 300 people come to shul on Shabbos — all of them are in some stage of

having intensified, and intensifying, their observance of mitzvos.

I asked Rabbi Emanuel Feldman (Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Beth Jacob in Atlanta), “What is the key to your success?” Rabbi Feldman told me that the key is to try to plant seeds. That is all a Rabbi can do. He can try to nurture and water the seeds, but really all he can do is try. He never knows for sure whether or not his efforts will succeed.

For example, one individual who recently returned to intensive Jewish involvement and observance told Rabbi Feldman that he made his decision because of a Yom Kippur sermon that Rabbi Feldman delivered fifteen years earlier. A comment in that sermon had struck home. He did not act upon it then, but fifteen years later, he decided to become religious.

Success is not the correct measure. Kiruv Rechokim is about effort. Whether or not the Mishkan is actually erected is HaShem’s worry. We toil and we receive reward – for the effort.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What are the four meanings of the word ‘Shalom’? Shalom, of course means peace, hello and goodbye. But what’s the fourth meaning? Shalom is also one of the names of God. So central and crucial is the concept of peace in our tradition, that it is embodied within the very essence of the existence of the Almighty.

In parashat Pekudei, the Torah describes the great celebration that took place when we dedicated the new Mishkan – the Tabernacle, and the altar within it, in the Wilderness. For the Haftorah, we have a matching passage from the Prophets, in the first book of Kings, which describes King Solomon’s celebration when he dedicated the first temple. At that time, Solomon reflected on the fact that his great father King David had wanted desperately to build the temple. In fact, David saw this as his ultimate mission in life – and yet, he was denied this privilege! But why?

In the first book of Chronicles we are told that the Almighty said to David “ki ish milchamot ata v’damim shafachta”, “for you are a man of war and you have shed blood”. Now of course, the purpose of all the wars that David fought and led our people into was in order to preserve life, to protect us from our enemies who sought to destroy us. They were ‘milchemet mitzvah’, he engaged in wars through which he hearkened to the word of Hashem, to defend our people. Nonetheless, since he had blood on his hands, he was not the ideal person to build the house of God.

Instead, his son Shlomo, coming from the route ‘Shalom’ – meaning peace, was the ideal king to do it. Indeed, throughout his reign, King Solomon did not fight a single battle. We can now understand why in parashat Yitro Hashem tells us that for the purpose of a stone altar, we may not use hewn stones. And the reason is “ki charbacha heinafta aile’ha

vatechalelha”, because for that purpose you would have had to use knives or swords which can be implements of war and therefore you would be defiling that altar.

That is why Shalom is the concluding word, it’s the bottom line of all of our most important prayers. It’s the last word of our Kaddish, it’s the last word of our Bensching – grace after meals. It’s the last word of birkat Kohanim, the duchening where the priests bless us. It is the last word of the Amidah.

In Pirkei Avot, The Ethics of the Fathers, Hillel taught that we should be the disciples of Aaron the High Priest, to be ‘ohev Shalom v’rodef shalom’, to love peace and pursue peace always. Therefore the Gemorah in masechet Brachot tells us that it is so important, that every single morning in our prayers, we should praise God who is ‘Oseh Shalom u’voreh et hakol’, ‘He makes peace and He creates everything’, indicating that nothing is of any value unless there is peace.

It is therefore so suitable that ‘Shalom’ is one of the names of the Almighty. When I greet you and I say “Shalom Aleichem”, I am not just saying may peace be upon you, I am also saying may God be with you. Of course, on Shabbat we want peace in our homes, and we want the spirit of Hashem to be with us. As a result, the blessing that we give and which I say to you now, is Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Holiness in Judaism

In this week’s Parsha, in listing the placement of the holy vessels in the Mishkan-Tabernacle, one of the holy vessels is the basin, used to wash and purify one’s hands with water (Exodus 40:7). But it is in last week’s Parsha, twelve verses from the end, the Torah explains that the origin of this water basin as from “copper mirrors”, and the ensuing argument about it between Moshe and God, as described by the Midrash and Rashi (commentary to Exodus 38:8).

When the women wanted to donate their copper mirrors that they had used to beautify themselves in Egypt, Moses refused to receive such a gift for the holiness of the Mishkan, whose origin was prurient, sexual and anything but holy. God ordered Moshe to accept this gift and God stated that it was His favorite of all the donations to the Tabernacle. Why? Rashi explains that these mirrors had been used to beautify these women for a holy purpose. When the men returned home after slaving all day, they had no interest in being with their wives or in fathering children. The women used these mirrors to beautify themselves and entice their husbands to be with them, to have children. When God saw that these courageous women wanted to donate these mirrors, which could have been used for other, negative purposes, but instead were used for a Mitzvah, God then said “this is the best donation of all” for the Tabernacle. What is the argument between Moshe and God? Why did Moshe at first refuse these mirrors? This argument could

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reflect differing attitudes to the Jewish definition of what is holy in Judaism. Seven portions from now, God will command every Jew to be holy (Leviticus 19:2). Perhaps this argument between God and Moshe will shed light on what is the precise nature of this commandment.

One Definition

One approach to holiness is the one most people will claim, when asked to describe the concept. This is the view of Rashi (commentary to Leviticus 19:2) who describes holiness as abstention from illicit sexual activity. It seems from Rashi that one achieves holiness by abstaining from those things forbidden to the Jew. This is classic Christian definition of holiness as well. The more one denies the bodily pleasures, the more one becomes holy. Long before Christianity was practiced, this concept existed in Judaism. The Torah’s word for prostitute (Deuteronomy 23:18) is Kidaisha, which has precisely the same letters and seems to be derived from the same root as Kedusha, the Hebrew word for holiness. Perhaps the Torah was showing the same word could signify two opposites. Similarly, the Torah states that the purpose of the laws of Kashrut are to attain holiness (Leviticus 11:45-47). Thus, abstention from the two basic physical drives of man, sex, and food, lead a person to holiness, according to this definition of holiness. This seems to be Moshe’s view as well in our Parsha. Moshe could not accept something as holy that had any remote connection to anything sexual. Thus, he refused the Colored Mirrors as a donation from the women, no matter how noble their intentions were.

Another Definition

There is another approach to holiness that directly challenges this classical notion. To understand it, it is necessary to first understand holiness as defined by the Greeks. In the Greek culture, beauty and sanctification of the human body were the ultimate religious values in the society, not merely cultural values. Thus, holiness in that society was achieved when the body was most satisfied. Therefore, at that time, food orgies and sex orgies had as their origin and ultimate purpose as the fulfillment of the religious concept to satisfy the body to attain holiness. They were not merely the “fun” concepts that they are today. As the body became more and more satisfied, the ancient Greeks felt they were acting holier and holier. Later, Christianity reacted to this concept by insisting that what separates man from beast is his soul. What makes man similar to the beast is his body. Therefore, in classic Christianity, holiness could be achieved by denying the body totally and nourishing only the soul. Thus, the holiest men, the priest and the Pope had to abstain from sexual activity. Monks took vows of poverty and silence, denying the body as much pleasure as possible, while concentrating only on spiritual matters.

Third Definition

Judaism realized that neither the Greek or Christian paths alone could archive true holiness, as man is made up of both body and soul (Beraishit Rabbah 14:3) and each has legitimate needs. Thus, denying the body totally was not realistic and could not achieve true holiness. Yet man also could not deny his spiritual side at the same time. How could both be achieved simultaneously? This approach to Jewish holiness believes that the needs of the body should be satisfied, but only for a spiritual purpose. By using the physical enjoyment of the body as a means to honor God, the act becomes holy. This seems to be what he Almighty explained to Moshe. Specifically, those mirrors that might have been used for sin, but were turned instead into Mitzvah by these righteous women, is what makes them so holy and precious to God, more than any other gifts. Rashi himself acknowledges this when he writes about water that became holy (commentary to Numbers 5:17) only because of the basin which originated as the Colored Mirrors, used for holy, rather than unholy purposes.

Nowhere is this concept more apparent than in the Shabbat. Holiness is first mentioned in the Torah with regard to Shabbat (Genesis 2:3). One prime example of this approach is the Shabbat Kiddush. To the non-religious world, wine is the symbol of the lack of inhibition, the lack of spirituality that brings out the animalistic side of man. Yet the body's natural desire for wine can be fulfilled by drinking wine on Friday night for the one purpose of honoring the Shabbat. If it is not for this purpose, then it is not truly Kiddush-Holiness, even if it is wine that Jews drink on Friday night. Besides the Kiddush, there are other actions which man must take to make the Sabbath holy, all of which have one thing in common: they are fulfillment of physical desires performed for making Shabbat holy. Man makes Shabbat holy by preparing and eating the best food of the week and by dressing up in the finest clothes of the week. The Talmud (Shabbat 25b) says that it is a Mitzvah to wash one's body in preparation for Shabbat. This shows that the Shabbat is made holy through actions that satisfy bodily needs for a spiritual purpose.

Similarly, the ingestion of nourishment is a very basic bodily process that every being in the world shares. Judaism raises the act of eating to something holy (Leviticus 11:45) by eating only those foods as permitted by God and by acknowledging God each time a food is eaten in the form of a blessing. Of all the subjects Maimonides could have selected for his Book of Holiness, he selected only two topics: the laws of permitted and forbidden sexual activity and the laws of permitted and forbidden food. Thus, Maimonides, too, is saying that one becomes holy by satisfying man's physical needs for a spiritual purpose.

Holiness Depends on the Circumstances of an Act

Jewish holiness is achieved not based solely on

a specific action that is performed, but, rather, the proper time, place and purpose surrounding the action. The very same action can be holy or unholy, depending on factors of time, place, and purpose. In fact, Thus, the sexual act itself is neither holy nor unholy. If sex is performed with a stranger for money, it is abhorrent in Judaism and unholy. The same act with one's spouse at the correct time of the month converts a person into a partner with God in the creation process, the holiest act of all. When Ecclesiastes wrote (Ecclesiastes 3:1) that everything has its proper time, he meant precisely this. Nothing is totally forbidden in Judaism, precisely because no action in and of itself is good or bad.

Thus, every action in this world has a time and place in Judaism when it is permitted. This fact alone corroborates the postulate that it is the circumstances surrounding the act that make it good or bad, holy, or unholy. The Talmud (Chullin 109b) expands on this theme when it says that for everything forbidden in Judaism, there is a time and place that is permitted. Some of the examples cited are the taste of pork that is permitted to the Jew in the form of a Shibuta fish that is kosher and has the same pork taste. Thus, the taste itself is not forbidden. Similarly, the taste of meat and milk is not in itself forbidden and is permitted to the Jew in the form of the udder of the cow, which tastes like milk and meat together. If prepared properly, the udder is kosher meat, and yet retains the taste of the milk within it. The passage continues with other examples. Even adultery is permitted in Judaism, in the proper circumstances. Normally, a man and his sister-in-law are prohibited from cohabiting according to Jewish law, under the severe sin of adultery. However, when a husband dies childless, it is a Biblical Mitzvah for the brother of the deceased husband to marry the widow, to carry on the name of the deceased husband, not for the purpose of committing adultery, which converts this relationship into something holy.

Finally, there is yet another approach is offered by Nachmanides in defining precisely what is meant in the commandment to "be holy." (Nachmanides commentary on Leviticus 19:2). Rather than a specific action, Nachmanides writes this commandment teaches the Jew an overall approach to life. There are numerous laws that a Jew might be able to observe meticulously within the letter of the law, and yet still act in an improper manner. Nachmanides calls this "a disgusting person within permission of the Torah." The general commandment of "Be Holy" commands the Jew that even when other Torah laws do not specifically prohibit a behavior, it is forbidden under this commandment if common sense says it is not in the spirit of the law. An example given is the Jew who follows all the Kosher laws strictly and pronounces a blessing over each food, but then proceeds to gorge himself in a disgusting, animalistic manner. Holiness, according to Nachmanides, forbids this practice, even though no specific law has been violated.

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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

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OTS Dvar Torah

The Power of Responsibility - Avichai Foa

Only this week, after Bezalel had completed creating all of the priestly vestments, does the Torah inform us that the construction of the Mishkan has finally ended: "All the work of the Mishkan of the Tent of Meeting was completed; the children of Israel had done [it]; according to all that Hashem had commanded Moses, so they had done."

We would have expected the Torah to make this announcement in last week's Parsha, after Bezalel and Oheliv had finished creating the Mishkan itself and all the vessels used within. Clearly, the priestly vestments – however important they may be – are supplementary to the construction of the Mishkan; they aren't an integral part of it, like the vessels or the Mishkan itself. Moreover, the entire Jewish people had been eagerly awaiting the completion and inauguration of the Mishkan – and like anything else in life that we yearn for or aspire to, once we are able to declare that we've reached our destination, the preparations are generally considered over. No one would wait beyond what seems necessary.

If so, why does the Torah wait until the priestly garments are ready before declaring that the Mishkan has been completed?

Since the Torah does wait, we can infer that the priestly service in the Mishkan was of unparalleled importance; that it is exactly what justifies the very existence of the Mishkan. For without the priests, the vessels of the Mishkan would be meaningless. They would be useless and lack purpose. The priestly service could not be performed without these special garments: "At a time when their vestments are upon them, their priesthood is upon them; but when their vestments are not upon them, their priesthood is not upon them." If a priest were to perform priestly services wearing anything other than the priestly garments, he would have been seen as an outsider, and thus deserving of the death penalty.

Perhaps one might say that what makes these garments so important is that the service in the Temple, particularly the daily sacrifices on behalf of the nation, allows everyone to continue living their everyday lives, despite their sins. Anyone who had sinned would offer a sacrifice in atonement for their souls. Seemingly, this wasn't enough, and another person needed to take responsibility as well for

the commission of the sin. The encounter between the sinner and the priest transfers some of the responsibility to the priest. Consequently, the sin is atoned for and dissolves. All of this occurs until later when the sinner fully repents. Then, and only then, can the sin be permanently erased.

Why, however, should the priests take even partial responsibility for a private individual's sins?

This role stems from the most important, yet most obscure priestly role: to teach the Torah and its commandments to the people of Israel, a fact that Ezekiel stresses in his prophecy: "And My people shall they teach the difference between holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the impure and the pure."

Since the priests were the Jewish people's main teachers, they share the responsibility, albeit indirectly, for what the Jewish people had done. They are thus responsible, albeit indirectly, not just for their own sins, but also for the sins of the Jewish people at large. It is this requirement to assume the responsibility that requires them to partake of the sacrifices offered by the Jewish people. This act of eating isn't like any other eating; the sacrifices must be eaten in a state of holiness and purity, and they may only be eaten in one place – within the Temple courtyard. The obvious conclusion is that if they don't eat it, the sins of the sacrifice-owners will not be atoned.

Though the priests are unable to nullify the sin, they can take responsibility for the commission of that sin, and are required to do so. If so, the priests assume partial responsibility (in addition to the sinner himself, who, of course, must assume part of the responsibility), but there are circumstances under which the priests "pass" some of the responsibility onto the sacrifice itself, and in doing so, they relieve themselves of some of this heavy burden. This is what happens, for example, with the scapegoat during the Yom Kippur services. The Torah says the following about the scapegoat: "The he-goat shall thus carry upon itself all their sins to a precipitous land..."

Again, a question emerges: can sins be carried over? Does a miserable little goat really have the power to bear all of the sins of the Jewish people on its back? Can an animal like a goat, which isn't a sentient being, be responsible for the sins of an entire nation?

Perhaps this episode is there to imply that like the goat which was pushed off a cliff and into the abyss, so too human beings are "pushed" to commit transgressions, all because there is a state of evil in the world. This state of evil is what supposedly bears responsibility (which is clearly indirect) for people's sins, and it is what makes deviation and incitement to commit sins possible. Responsibility is thus borne by that little goat, which in this setting symbolizes the fact that there is evil in the world, and it is this same evil force that is pushing the goat and sending it into the abyss.

However, there is also a goat for Hashem, which symbolizes the other side of the coin. The goat that is sacrificed in the Temple symbolizes the fact that Hashem has supposedly taken personal responsibility for having allowed evil to exist in this world.

Hashem wants to give us free choice, and for that to happen, there must be a reality of evil alongside a reality of good. It follows that Hashem does not purge, remove, or purify a sin immediately after it was committed. Instead, He waits to ascertain whether the sinner willfully repent and truly regret his wrongdoings, and commit to choosing to do good in the future. If this is what actually happens, only then will Hashem completely purge the sin.

This might be the reason why the 13 attributes of mercy begin with "Hashem, Hashem, who is compassionate and gracious," continue with "forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin," and end with "yet He does not completely clear [the sin]." In other words, Hashem does not erase the sin. He waits, carries the sin with Him, and only when it becomes clear that the sinner had conclusively and clearly abandoned the sin will Hashem permanently erase it. If there were no need to take responsibility, there would also be no need for a state of evil in the world. Our lives would be much easier. They would also be rather dull, and we would be completely incapable, or not nearly as capable, of personal progress and development.

This is the great responsibility that each of us have and, as teachers charged with leading the Jewish people down the path of the Torah and the service of Hashem, the priests share in this responsibility. Every day, every hour, and every minute, we must carefully choose our actions. We must also review our actions and ourselves, and if we had sinned, we must fully repent.

The priestly service is what allows us to go through this complex process time and again, and through this process, our lives are given meaning.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

True Redemption

In 1948, when the medinah was first established, the Chazon Ish had already moved to Eretz Yisroel. He is quoted as having said that the establishment of the medinah this constitutes the end of the golus but we have not yet arrived at the geulah. Some thought that this statement was mere double-talk. I think the Chazon Ish was using the terminology of the Ramban in his introduction to Chumash Shemos.

The Ramban explains that Sefer Bereishis is a book of all beginnings: the beginning of the world, the beginning of mankind, and the beginning of the Jewish people. By the time we get to the end of Bereishis, we know about the avos and the shevotim. Sefer Shemos is all about the first galus (in Mitzrayim) and the geulah therefrom. The Ramban then asks

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on himself, we don't experience the geulah until after the passing of Moshe Rabbeinu when Yehoshua bin Nun leads Benei Yisroel into Eretz Yisroel. So how can I say that sefer Shemos completes the geulah from the first golus?

To this the Ramban responds that although the Jewish people still had not yet returned to Eretz Yisroel and the golus was still in effect, the building of the Mishkan constituted the geulah. The entire Jewish people should really live in Eretz Yisroel and the main location for observance of the mitzvos is really in Eretz Yisroel. But still, this was not the main tragedy involved in golus Mitzrayim. As long as the avos lived in Eretz Yisroel, they were zocheh to hashro'as ha'Shechina. The Ramban, paraphrasing a posuk in Sefer Iyov, coins an expression saying that the avos experienced sod Eloka alei oholeiheim. But when Yaakov Avinu went down to Mitzrayim this hashro'as ha'Shechina was missing, and this was the main tragedy in the golus Mitzrayim. By the time we reach the end of Chumash Shemos, with the four sidrahs of Teruma, Titzave, Vayakhel, and Pikudei all dealing with the construction of the Mishkan, the hashro'as ha'Shechina was restored and this is what the Ramban understands by the term "geulah". Klal Yisroel had still not yet returned to Eretz Yisroel but nonetheless they had a hashro'as ha'Shechina.

The gemarah in Rosh Hashanah quotes the view of the tanah R' Yehoshua that b'Nissan nigalu and b'Nissan asidin l'higoel. The original geulah took place in the month of Nissan and in the future, the geulah ha'asida will also take place in Nissan. People usually assume that the gemarah's reference to the geulah taking place in Nissan is with respect to yetzias Mitzrayim. But based on this comment of the Ramban, it would appear that the reference is to the completion of the construction of the Mishkan which took place on Rosh Chodesh Nissan. R' Yehishua's statement that l'osid l'vo the geulah asida will take place in Nissan as well, may possibly be based on the pesukim at the end of Sefer Yechezkel which state that starting from Rosh Chodesh Nissan, through Sukkos (six and a half months), special korbanos will be offered for the purpose of chanukas Bayis Hashlishiover and above the regular korbanos of temidim and musofim.

The novi does not tell us which year this will occur, but apparently just like Rosh Chodesh Nissan was the first day that the nesiim brought the special korbanos for chanukas ha'Mishkan, indicating that there was a clear hashro'as ha'Shechina, so too in the future, the first day of the six and an half months of bringing the special korbanos will be considered the geulah in the sense that at that time the hashro'as ha'Shechina will be apparent.

This is most probably what the Chazon Ish meant when he commented that the establishment of the medinah represents the end of the golus because the British are no longer preventing the Jews from returning back to Eretz Yisroel and there was a tremendous kibutz goliyos, but we still did not merit the hashro'as ha'Shechina which is referred to with the technical term of geulah. May we all merit to see the geulah very soon during our lifetime.

Bar Ilan University: Dvar Torah

The Tabernacle: Man-made or Descended from Heaven By Rivka Ravi¹*

The book of Exodus concludes with an impressive depiction of the inauguration of the Tabernacle and the Divine Presence resting over Israel: "The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Presence of the Lord filled the Tabernacle... For over the Tabernacle a cloud of the Lord rested by day, and fire would appear in it by night, in the view of all the house of Israel throughout their journeys" (Ex. 40:34-38). Nahmanides remarks in his preface to the book of Exodus that the process of the exodus from Egypt was only completed with the inauguration of the Tabernacle:

The exile was not over until the day they returned to their place and to the level of their ancestors; and when they left Egypt, even though they were out of the house of bondage, they were still considered exiles, for they were "in a land not theirs" (Gen. 15:13), astray in the wilderness. But when they came to Mount Sinai and made the Tabernacle, then the Holy One, blessed be He, returned and caused His Presence to rest among them. Then they returned to the level of their ancestors, for the mystery of the Lord was over their tents and they themselves were the [divine] chariot; then they were considered to have been redeemed. Therefore this book was brought to a close when the subject of the Tabernacle was concluded and the Glory of the Lord filled it permanently.²

Nahmanides' comment makes it clear why Scripture chose to conclude this book of the Penteuch, which begins with the exile to Egypt, with an account of inauguration of the Tabernacle, for the exile did not come to a close until that moment. Nevertheless, as we peruse subsequent books of the Bible we notice that parts of the description of the Tabernacle's dedication are spread among other books of the Pentateuch. Leviticus gives another description of the inauguration of the Sanctuary and the dramatic event, including the fire that came forth from heaven to the outer altar, the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, and

the events that followed in their wake (chapters 8-10). In Numbers, inauguration of the Tabernacle is mentioned again (chapter 7), and from this we learn about the donations given by the tribal chieftains immediately afterwards. On themes in the Torah being spread out among distant passages Rabbi Kuperman wrote in one of his books:

A great, central question that perplexes the intelligent scholar is: Why is everything so topsy-turvy?! Why does the Torah divide one issue among three different places, far apart from each other?... Why does it give a bit here and a bit there... when everything could be learned in an "orderly way" in a single place?³

Rabbi Kuperman was referring to the problem of halakhic material being scattered around various places in the Torah, but his question is also relevant to segments of narrative. The question of the description of the inauguration of the Tabernacle being distributed among the books that follow goes beyond the purview of our discussion, yet all the same it attests that inauguration of the Tabernacle was considered by the Torah to be an important, founding event and a major landmark in the history of the world, worthy of returning to time and again.

Indeed, examining the language the Torah uses in its account of Creation, we see a great similarity to the language used in this week's reading:⁴

Genesis	Exodus
2:1: The heaven and earth were finished , and all their array. On the seventh day Gd finished the work He had been doing . And He rested on the seventh day from all the work that He had done .	39:32: Thus was completed all the work of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting. The Israelites did so ; just as the Lord had commanded Moses, so they did .

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2:3: And Gd blessed the seventh day and declared it holy , because on it Gd ceased from all the work (<i>melakhto</i>) of creation that He had done .	39:43: And when Moses saw that they had performed all the tasks (<i>melakhah</i>)—as the Lord had commanded, so they had done —Moses blessed them. 40:9: You shall... consecrate it and all its furnishings. 40:33: Moses finished the work
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Upon the conclusion of Creation, as upon inauguration of the Tabernacle, the Torah uses similar language: completing, doing, work, blessing, sanctifying or consecrating. In a lengthy homily in Tanhuma (Pekudei 2), the homilist basis his remarks on this linguistic similarity and notes additional points of similarity between the creation of the world and the building of the Tabernacle:

These are the records of the Tabernacle... for it is the counterpart of the creation of Your world. How so? With respect to the first day, it says: "In the beginning Gd created heaven and earth," and it says, "You spread the heavens like a tent cloth" (Ps. 104:2); and regarding the Tabernacle, it says, "You shall then make cloths of goat's hair" (Ex. 26:7).

With respect to the second day, it says, "Let there be an expanse (*raki'a*)" and "that it may separate (*mavdil*)" (Gen. 1:6); regarding the Tabernacle, "so that the curtain shall serve you as a partition (*ve-hivdilah*)" (Ex. 26:33). With respect to the third day, "Let the water below the sky be gathered" (Gen. 1:9); regarding the Tabernacle, "Make a laver of copper" and "Put water in it" (Ex. 30:18). With respect to the fourth day, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky" (Gen. 1:14); regarding the Tabernacle, "You shall make a lampstand of pure gold" (Ex. 25:31). With respect to the fifth day, "Let the waters bring forth swarms" and "and birds that fly above the earth" (Gen. 1:20); regarding the Tabernacle, "The cherubim shall have their wings spread out above" (Ex. 25:20). On the sixth day man was created, as it says, "And Gd created man" (Gen. 1:27); and regarding the Tabernacle, "You shall bring forward" the High Priest.

With respect to the seventh day, it says, "The heaven and the earth were finished" (Gen. 2:1); and regarding the Tabernacle, "Thus was

¹ See his book, *Li-feshuto shel Mikra*, Jerusalem 1992, p. 7. There Rabbi Kuperman presents many explanations in response to this question, mostly from the school of the Netziv and the author of *Meshekh Hokhmah* on the Torah.

² Also cf. N. Leibowitz, *New Studies in Shemot (Exodus)*, who reviews earlier and later commentators.

³ Likewise in his commentary on the Talmud: "The Temple that we anticipate in the future, perfectly constructed, will be revealed and come from heaven, as it is said, 'The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands established' (Ex. 15:17)" (Rashi, *Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah* 41a). In any event, in his commentary on Zechariah, Rashi does not relate to this idea but explains the text according to its context, as do his followers, Rabbi Joseph Karo and Rabbi Eliezer of Beaugency and many others.

⁴ See R. Raviv, "Hazon 'Kever Enosh' be-Daniel Perek 7 be-Mesoret Sifrut Hazal," *Sidra* 29 (2014), pp. 95116.

completed all the work of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting” (Ex. 39:32). In the account of Creation it says, “And Gd blessed” (Gen. 2:3); and regarding the Tabernacle, “Moses blessed them” (Ex. 39:42). With respect to Creation it says, “[On the seventh] day Gd finished the work” (Ex. 2:1); regarding the Tabernacle, “On the day that Moses finished setting up the Tabernacle” (Num. 7:1). With respect to Creation it says, “and declared it holy (va-yekadesh)”; regarding the Tabernacle, it says, “he anointed and consecrated (va-yekadesh) it” (Num. 7:1).

Thus, with the conclusion of the book of Exodus, we see that the Israelites had created a miniature world with their own hands and had fulfilled the objective of Creation, to make “an earthly abode” for the Holy One, blessed be He: “When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, he wished that he would have an earthly abode... And it says, ‘I have come to my garden, my own, my bride’ (Song 5:1); when? At the moment that the Tabernacle was set up” (Tanhuma, Naso 16).

The similarity between the work on the Tabernacle and the work of creating the world provides a fine explanation of what lays behind the Sages deducing the 39 categories of work forbidden on the Sabbath from the work on the Tabernacle. Just as on the Sabbath the Creator ceased from His work of creating the world, so we, flesh and blood, are to cease on the Sabbath from those human tasks that epitomize human productivity, namely the ability to build the Tabernacle/world.

Looking at the last few readings in Exodus, we see that from the beginning of setting up the Tabernacle, in Exodus 35:5, until the end of chapter 40, the verb *‘asah*, “made,” occurs no fewer than 112 times with respect to making the Tabernacle. Making is always by human hands. Thus, as against the creation of the world by the Divine, we have the building of the Tabernacle by human hands, as the Israelites were commanded to do at the beginning of Parashat Terumah: “And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them” (Ex. 25:8).

In a passage in the Babylonian Talmud (Ketubbot 5a), Bar Kappara praises human actions, emphasizing that they rise above the works of Gd in creation: “Bar-Kappara expounded: The work of the righteous is greater than the work of heaven and earth, for in [regard to] the creation of heaven and earth it is written, ‘My own hand founded the earth, My right hand spread out the skies’ (Isa. 48:13), while in [regard to] the work of the hands of the righteous it is written, ‘The place You made to dwell in, O Lord, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands established’ (Ex. 17:17). The verse cited to illustrate human productivity is taken to refer to the Tabernacle. Thus, the greatness of the Tabernacle finds expression precisely in the fact of it being the fruit of the Israelites’ labors. This notion was firmly established for generations by Maimonides in *Hilkhot Beit ha-Behirah* (1.1),

which sees building the Temple as a commandment for all time: “It is a positive commandment to construct a House for Gd, prepared for sacrifices to be offered within and where celebrations are held three times a year, as [Exodus 25:8] states: ‘And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.’”

In contrast, another tradition in the literature of the Sages indicates the opposite direction in all that regards building a third Temple. Apparently there were some Sages who thought that the last Temple would be built by heaven, not by human hands. In *Tanhuma* (Ki Tissa 13) the Sages present the prophecy of Zechariah as the source for this view: “Jerusalem shall be peopled as a city without walls, so many shall be the men and cattle it contains. And I Myself—declares the Lord—will be a wall of fire all around it, and I will be a glory inside it” (Zech. 2:8-9). From this text the midrash concludes: “The Holy One, blessed be He, said: In this world you made a Tabernacle and a Temple that were enclosed by a wall; in time to come I shall build the Temple, and it will be surrounded by a wall of fire, as it is written, ‘And I Myself—declares the Lord—will be a wall of fire all around it’ (Zech. 2:9).”

Rashi picked up this idea, which also follows from his interpretation of the Song on the Sea (Ex. 15:17):

The Sanctuary here below will be exactly opposite the Divine Throne above which You have made... The Temple is an object of affection because the Universe was created by one hand—as it is stated, “My own hand founded the earth” (Isa. 48:13), whilst the Temple by two hands. And when will it be rebuilt with two hands? At the time when “the Lord shall reign for ever and ever”: at that future period when all dominion will be His.

What led the homilist in *Tanhuma* and Rashi to withdraw from the notion of the greatness of human endeavor, so prominent in the literature of the Sages, and to ascribe the making of the Temple to the Divine?

Underlying this notion it seems is the expectation that the Third Temple will be everlasting, not temporary like those that preceded it. Historical experience showed that the illustrious works of the righteous who built in the past did not prevent its destruction, so all that remained was to rely on the work of heaven. This follows, for example, from the interpretation by Rabbi Menahem of Recanati (Italy, 1250-1310), who took a kabbalistic approach (commentary on Lev. 26:44):

The House built by human hands cannot be lasting. Even Solomon knew it would not endure because it was built by human hands. Thus it was said, “Unless the Lord builds the House, etc.,” that it might endure... It is for such that we wait, not for something built by man, which does not endure.

Likutei Divrei Torah

The notion that when the time of Redemption is at hand the Temple will descend from heaven calls to mind the descent from heaven of “one like a human being,” described in Daniel 7:13-14:

As I looked on, in the night vision, one like a human being came with the clouds of heaven; he reached the Ancient of Days and was presented to Him. Dominion, glory, and kingship were given to him; all people and nations of every language must serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship, one that shall not be destroyed.

This vision was interpreted by the Sages as referring to the Messiah, who in days to come would receive kingship, and this kingship would last forever. We suggest tentatively that the vision of kingship coming down from heaven in the book of Daniel provided the inspiration for the commentaries that saw the Temple descending from heaven in days to come, and being an everlasting building. Since the vision of Daniel deals with kingship and not with the Temple, the Sages associated the vision of a divine Temple from heaven on the passage in Zechariah, since it hints at future involvement of the divine in what will happen in Jerusalem. *Translated by Rachel Rowen*

Weekly Parsha Pikudei 5782
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The basic lesson in this week's Torah reading is accountability. God demands from Moshe and the others who formulated and created the Tabernacle in the desert, to account for all the material that was donated by the Jewish people for that purpose. The last piece of silver that was donated had to be accounted for, but Moshe was distressed that he could not account for 1000 measures of the silver. He finally remembered that this donation of silver was used for constructing hooks that bound the tapestries of the Tabernacle together.

The hooks must "shout" to remind us of their presence, and to make Moshe's accounting complete and accurate. Accounting is a very painstaking project. Most people view it as bordering on boring. Nevertheless, there is no commercial enterprise that can successfully exist without good and accurate accounting practices.

The financial accounting in our Parsha regarding the materials that were used in the construction of the Tabernacle is a template for proper human behavior concerning the use of resources in all areas of life. This is especially true in matters that border on religious institutions that are held to the highest of all standards and are to be above any suspicion of corruption. The Priest of the Temple wore garments that had no pockets and could not conceal any hidden items of value that might be removed from the Temple.

This overriding meticulous standard and value of accountability is not limited to financial matters. Judaism teaches us that we are all accountable for our actions - behavior, speech, attitudes and even thoughts. We were created as being responsible creatures - responsible to the creator and to the other creatures that exist with us on this planet. We are given talents that are unique to each one of us. The challenge that is put before us is how those talents and abilities can be used for good and noble causes.

There are many who think that the gifts that they have been given are for their exclusive use, and that there is no need or obligation to share them with others. They are sadly mistaken in this view. People are accountable for what they have, as they were for the supposedly insignificant amount of silver that was used to construct hooks that kept the tapestries together.

King Solomon states in Kohelet that one should realize that all actions and behavior will eventually be weighed on the scales of heavenly justice. We live in a time when accountability, to a great extent, has been replaced by excuses, social engineering, economic and psychological theories. All of these are used only to avoid the issue of accountability. To be human is to be responsible, and that is the message not only of this week's Parsha, but of everything in Judaism.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

Covenant & Conversation
Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l
PEKUDEI - Integrity in Public Life

Golden coins money wealth rich finance savings

There is a verse so familiar that we don't often stop to reflect on what it means. It is the line from the first paragraph of the Shema, Deut. 6:5

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your me'od."

That last word is usually translated as "strength" or "might". But Rashi, following the Midrash and Targum, translates it as with all your "wealth".

If so, the verse seems unintelligible, at least in the order in which it is written. "With all your soul" was understood by the Sages to mean, "with your life" if need be. There are times, thankfully very rare indeed, when we are commanded to give up life itself rather than commit a sin or a crime. If that is the case then it should go without saying that we should love God with all our wealth, meaning even if it demands great

financial sacrifice. Yet Rashi and the Sages say that this phrase applies to those "to whom wealth means more than life itself."

Of course, life is more important than wealth. Yet the Sages also knew that, in their words, Adam bahul al mammon, meaning: people do strange, hasty, ill-considered and irrational things when money is at stake (Shabbat 117b). Financial gain can be a huge temptation, leading us to acts that harm others and ultimately ourselves. So when it comes to financial matters, especially when public funds are involved, there must be no room for temptation, no space for doubt as to whether it has been used for the purpose for which it was donated. There must be scrupulous auditing and transparency. Without this there is moral hazard: the maximum of temptation combined with the maximum of opportunity.

Hence the parsha of Pekudei, with its detailed account of how the donations to the building of the Mishkan were used: Ex. 38:21

"These are the amounts of the materials used for the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of the Testimony, which were recorded at Moses' command by the Levites under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the Priest."

The passage goes on to list the exact amounts of gold, silver, and bronze collected, and the purposes to which it was put. Why did Moses do this? A Midrash suggests an answer: Tanchuma, Buber, Pekudei, 4.

"They gazed after Moses" (Ex. 33:8) - People criticised Moses. They used to say to one another, "Look at that neck. Look at those legs. Moses is eating and drinking what belongs to us. All that he has belongs to us." The other would reply: "A man who is in charge of the work of the Sanctuary - what do you expect? That he should not get rich?" As soon as he heard this, Moses replied, "By your life, as soon as the Sanctuary is complete, I will make a full reckoning with you."

Moses issued a detailed reckoning to avoid coming under suspicion that he had personally appropriated some of the donated money. Note the emphasis that the accounting was undertaken not by Moses himself but "by the Levites under the direction of Ithamar," in other words, by independent auditors.

There is no hint of these accusations in the text itself, but the Midrash may be based on the remark Moses made during the Korach rebellion: Num. 16:1

"I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them."

Accusations of corruption and personal enrichment have often been levelled against leaders, with or without justification. We might think that since God sees all we do, this is enough to safeguard against wrongdoing. Yet Judaism does not say this. The Talmud records a scene at the deathbed of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, as the master lay surrounded by his disciples: Brachot 28b

They said to him, "Our master, bless us."

He said to them, "May it be God's will that the fear of heaven shall be as much upon you as the fear of flesh and blood."

His disciples asked, "Is that all?"

He replied, "Would that you obtained no less than such fear! You can see for yourselves the truth of what I say: when a man is about to commit a transgression, he says, 'I hope no man will see me.'"

When humans commit a sin they worry that other people might see them. They forget that God certainly sees them. Temptation befuddles the brain, and no one should believe they are immune to it.

A later passage in Tanach seems to indicate that Moses' account was not strictly necessary. The Book of Kings relates an episode in which, during the reign of King Yehoash, money was raised for the restoration of the Temple: II Kings 12:16

"They did not require an accounting from those to whom they gave the money to pay the workers, because they acted with complete honesty."

Moses, a man of complete honesty, may thus have acted "beyond the strict requirement of the law." [1]

It is precisely the fact that Moses did not need to do what he did that gives the passage its force. There must be transparency and accountability when it comes to public funds even if the people involved have impeccable reputations. People in positions of trust must be, and be

seen to be, individuals of moral integrity. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, had already said this when he told Moses to appoint subordinates to help him in the task of leading the people. They should be, he said, Ex. 18:21

"Men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain."

Without a reputation for honesty and incorruptibility, judges cannot ensure that justice is seen to be done. This general principle was derived by the Sages from the episode in the Book of Numbers when the Reubenites and Gadites expressed their wish to settle on the far side of the Jordan where the land provided good grazing ground for their cattle (Numbers 32:1-33). Moses told them that if they did so, they would demoralise the rest of the nation. They would give the impression that they were unwilling to cross the Jordan and fight with their brothers in their battles to conquer the land.

The Reubenites and Gadites made it clear that they were willing to be in the front line of the troops, and would not return to the far side of the Jordan until the land had been fully conquered. Moses accepted the proposal, saying that if they kept their word, they would be "clear [veheyitem neki'im] before the Lord and before Israel" (Num. 32:22). This phrase entered Jewish law as the principle that "one must acquit oneself before one's fellow human beings as well as before God." [2] It is not enough to do right. We must be seen to do right, especially when there is room for rumour and suspicion.

There are several instances in the early rabbinic literature of applications of this rule. So, for example, when people came to take coins for sacrifices from the Shekel Chamber in the Temple, where the money was kept:

They did not enter the chamber wearing either a bordered cloak or shoes or sandals or tefillin or an amulet, lest if he became poor people might say that he became poor because of an iniquity committed in the chamber, or if he became rich people might say that he became rich from the appropriation in the chamber. For it is a person's duty to be free of blame before men as before God, as it is said: "and be clear before the Lord and before Israel," (Num. 32:22), and it also says: "So shall thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man" (Prov. 3:4).

Mishnah, Shekalim 3:2.

Those who entered the chamber were forbidden to wear any item of clothing in which they could hide and steal coins. Similarly, when charity overseers had funds left over, they were not permitted to change copper for silver coins of their own money: they had to make the exchange with a third party. Overseers in charge of a soup kitchen were not allowed to purchase surplus food when there were no poor people to whom to distribute it. Surpluses had to be sold to others so as not to arouse suspicion that the charity overseers were profiting from public funds. (Pesachim 13a.)

The Shulchan Aruch rules that charity collection must always be done by a minimum of two individuals so that each can see what the other is doing. [3] There is a difference of opinion between Rabbi Yosef Karo and Rabbi Moshe Isserles on the need to provide detailed accounts. Rabbi Yosef Karo rules on the basis on the passage in II Kings – "They did not require an accounting from those to whom they gave the money to pay the workers, because they acted with complete honesty" (II Kings 12:16) – that no formal accounting is required from people of unimpeachable honesty. Rabbi Moshe Isserles however says that it is right to do so because of the principle, "Be clear before the Lord and before Israel." [4]

Trust is of the essence in public life. A nation that suspects its leaders of corruption cannot function effectively as a free, just, and open society. It is the mark of a good society that public leadership is seen as a form of service rather than a means to power, which is all too easily abused. Tanach is a sustained tutorial in the importance of high standards in public life. The Prophets were the world's first social critics, mandated by God to speak truth to power and to challenge corrupt leaders. Elijah's challenge to King Ahab, and the protests of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah against the unethical practices of their day, are classic texts in this tradition, establishing for all time the ideals of equity, justice, honesty and integrity.

A free society is built on moral foundations, and those must be unshakeable. Moses' personal example, in giving an accounting of the funds that had been collected for the first collective project of the Jewish people, set a vital precedent for all time.

[1] A key concept in Jewish law (see, e.g., Brachot 7a, Brachot 45b, Bava Kamma 99b) of supererogation, meaning doing more, in a positive sense, than the law requires.

[2] Mishnah, Shekalim 3:2.

[3] Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 257:1.

[4] Ibid., 257:2.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Pekudei (Exodus 38:21-40:38)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of God filled the Tabernacle... When the cloud was raised up from the Tabernacle, the Children of Israel would embark on all their journeys... For the cloud of God was on the Tabernacle by days and fire would be on it by night, before the eyes of all of the children of Israel throughout their journeys" (Exodus 40:34-38)

Apparently, the cloud (ha'anan) and the "glory of God" come together as the ultimate symbol of God's protective presence. With reference to Mount Sinai, the mountain of the two Revelations surrounding the twice-gifted Tablets of the Covenant, the Bible similarly records, "Moses ascended the mountain and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of God rested upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for a six-day period. [God] called to Moses on the seventh day from the midst of the cloud... And Moses arrived into the midst of the cloud and ascended the mountain; Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights [receiving God's Torah]" (Exodus 24:15-18).

God's "glory," the Presence of God in this world (as explained by Maimonides in his Guide for the Perplexed), is what Moses is desperately seeking to understand and to effectuate when Moses says, "Show me now Your Glory" (Exodus 33:19).

Whatever that "glory" is, it is somehow to be found in our two Revelations from the mountain. The cloud as the symbol of God's presence seems to hark back to the Divine admonition to Moses, "You will not see My face, for no human can see My face and live." For as long as we are limited mortals in this physical world of temporariness and imperfection, our glimpse of God, and His Presence, can only be nebulous, ambiguous, "through a cloud darkly."

Herein lies the tremendous tension within the portion of Ki Tisa, and the dialogue therein between God and Moses. Moses desperately wants the nation of Israel and God to come together (as it were) as one, with God's ineffable Presence to be palpably felt within Israel and within the world. If that were to happen, presumably Israel would not sin and Jewish history could assume its natural course towards redemption.

God informs Moses: "I will send an angel [messenger] ahead of you... but I shall not ascend into your midst; you are a stiff-necked people, and I may be forced to annihilate you on the way" (Exodus 33:3-5).

God is explaining to the Israelites that His presence within their midst in a palpable and apparent way would very likely be to their detriment; if the God of Truth and Judgment were too close, He might have to destroy Israel completely before they had a chance to properly repent! His distance from them and the world may be seen as an advantage.

After the second Revelation, however, of the God of unconditional love and forgiveness (Exodus 34:6,7), Moses repeats his earlier requests; Moses now feels empowered to ask God to enter into the midst of Israel: "And Moses said, If I have now found favor in your eyes, let my Lord walk in our midst, [precisely because Israel] is a stiff-necked nation, for You will forgive our iniquity and error and make us Your heritage" (ibid. 9). After all, that is exactly how You, God, defined Yourself to us in the Second Revelation.

This is indeed the message that God gives Moses. Israel is the nation of Covenant and permanence within a world of flux and change (Exodus 34:10); God will always dwell within His people and guarantee their survival no matter what, to the amazement (and jealousy) of all the nations. Israel will bear witness to the world about the evils of idolatry and the glories of our festivals, our Sabbaths and our righteous laws

until we are ready for the ultimate redemption. In effect, God is “incarnate” within the Jewish nation (see the writings of Michael Wyschogrod).

This too, is the message at the conclusion of the Book of Exodus. In the immortal words of the Ramban (Nachmanides) in his introduction to the Book of Exodus:

Behold the exile has not ended until [Israel] returns to their place and to the exalted status of their ancestors... only when they came to Mount Sinai and constructed the Sanctuary, only when the Holy one Blessed be He returned and rested His Divine Presence amongst them... so that they rose to the status of the chariot [merkava], could they be considered redeemed. Therefore, this Book concludes with the Sanctuary filled with the glory of the Divine in the midst of Israel.

The Sanctuary is the ultimate symbol of God’s presence in Israel and the world, our promise of ultimate redemption. From this perspective, the sukkah which we build five days after the Yom Kippur of the Second Revelation represents the clouds of glory, the ultimate Sukkah-Sanctuary of world redemption. And the sukkot which likewise remind us of the huts in which we survived during our desert wanderings teach us that God remains in our midst – albeit as through a cloud darkly – even as we wander towards redemption, always forgiving and always protecting.

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week’s Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Sarah bas Mazal.

“May her Neshama have an Aliya!”

Forgive or Forget?

This is the accounting of (all the things of) the Mishkan, the Mishkan of Testimony [...] (38:21).

Rashi (ad loc) explains why it is called the Mishkan of Testimony: “It’s a testimony to the Jewish people that Hashem overlooked the incident of the Golden Calf, for he rested his Shechina among them (in the Mishkan).” This teaching is based on a Midrash Tanchuma (Pekudei 6) that says that the Mishkan was a “testimony to all of mankind that Hashem forgave them for the sin of the Golden Calf.”

Many achronim (Maharal, Taz) are bothered by this. Why is the Mishkan the proof that Hashem forgave them? Wasn’t the actual proof that Hashem gave them a second set of luchos? Rashi, it seems, was bothered by the very same question. Perhaps it is for this reason that he changes the language of the Midrash from “Hashem forgave them for the sin” to “Hashem overlooked the sin.”

Rashi is teaching us a remarkable life lesson in managing relationships. There is a well-known maxim “women can forgive, but they will never forget that they forgave.” When someone hurts another person, even if forgiveness is granted, there is always some degree of discomfort. The reason for this is understandable; not only did they hurt them but the injured party then freely gave the kindness of forgiveness – giving the perpetrator the feeling of indebtedness to the magnanimous injured party. Therefore, all interactions between the two become, at best, a little uncomfortable. In such a situation, the guilty party often feels like he’s walking on eggshells and basically avoids interaction whenever possible.

In life, we often find ourselves in situations where we have been hurt or otherwise mistreated. By far and away, the best way to deal with the offending party who is asking for forgiveness (particularly when we are dealing with close family members) is to make them feel that it didn’t really bother us. After all, they already feel bad enough and understand their transgression. Introducing the debt of forgiveness into the relationship will only serve to make them more uncomfortable in the future and avoid interaction.

Hashem is bringing his presence to reside within the Jewish people. The only way to get past the sin of the Golden Calf and the subsequent forgiveness is for Hashem to give Bnei Yisroel the feeling that he is “overlooking” the sin. In other words, he wants to be close to us and wants us to feel close to him. The fact that Hashem is coming to stay in “our house” is a sign that he overlooked the sin because he wants us to be comfortable in his presence.

Give or Get?

All the gold that was used for the work [...] was twenty nine talents, and seven hundred and thirty shekels [...] (38:24).

Ibn Ezra, quoting Rav Saadia Gaon, points out that while we have an exact accounting of how much gold was given to the Mishkan, the Torah omits what exactly, it was used for. However, by the accounting of both the silver and the copper the Torah gives us both an exact accounting of how much was given and a detailed description of how the silver and copper were used. Why did the Torah not give a complete accounting for the different uses of all the gold?

There is a fascinating Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 51:6) that explains why Moshe wanted a complete audit for everything given. The Midrash explains the reasoning based on the possuk, “And it would be, when Moshe went out to the tent, that all the people rose up and stood, every man at his tent door, and gazed after Moshe [...].”

The Midrash explains that there were three schools of thought on the trustworthiness of Moshe: 1) The group that didn’t suspect him at all and simply thought, how fortunate is a human to have such a close relationship with Hashem; 2) The group who suspected him of stealing from the donations; 3) The group that felt that he was taking money from the donations but that it wasn’t stealing because he deserved it since he had undertaken the massive responsibility of building the Mishkan. When Moshe heard of these groups he insisted that at the end a full accounting of everything be made.

Da’as Zekanim in Parshas Terumah explains that gold, silver, and copper represent the three different types of givers. Gold represents people who give when they are healthy. In other words, they give purely and are not expecting anything in return; they give because they believe in the cause. Silver represents those who give while sick, hoping that in return they will get healed. However, even if he isn’t healed he doesn’t regret giving the charity (see Tosfos Pesachim 8b). Copper represents those who only gives after death; their giving is only in a situation where they won’t be negatively affected by the giving.

The Talmud (Kiddushin 70a) teaches the following rule: One who suspects another of wrongdoing is basing his suspicions on what he himself would do in such a situation. Based on this, we can now understand the three groups of givers. The group who gave the gold looked up to Moshe and didn’t suspect him of any wrongdoing. The group who gave the copper suspected Moshe of stealing because they are incapable of giving freely. They could not understand why anyone would do what Moshe had undertaken; therefore he must be stealing from the donations. The group who gave the silver understood that while there is some element of giving, it isn’t purely altruistic. In other words, Moshe could work hard for the Mishkan, but should rightfully be compensated.

Now we can understand why the Torah didn’t account for how the gold was used, yet had to still account for the uses of the copper and the silver. The silver and copper came from those without complete altruism and they suspected Moshe. The gold came from those who believed in the cause and trusted Moshe, therefore they never suspected him of taking any of it.

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For the week ending 5 March 2022 / 2 Adar Bet 5782

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parshat Pekudei

A World of Kindness

“Betzael ben Uri ben Hur of the tribe of Yehuda did everything that Hashem commanded Moshe. With him was Oholiav ben Achisamach of the tribe of Dan.” (38:22-23)

Imagine a world where everyone looked the same.

Same eyes. Same expressions.

Same height. Everything the same. Wouldn’t that be a great world? We’d all get along so well!

And yet, Hashem created the exact opposite: a world where everyone is different from everyone else.

We're all different heights. We all have different interests. We all have different personalities, different character traits, different strengths and different weaknesses. Plus, we all have different opinions.

But all these differences can (and sometimes do) lead to discord, harmful speech and hatred for the other. So why did Hashem create so many differences? The Chafetz Chaim said that the blessing of "borei nefashot rabbot v'chesronon" means that Hashem created a myriad of different people, and each one of us has our own strengths — but, more importantly, our own weaknesses.

The doctor can't farm, so the farmer will help make his food. The farmer never went to medical school. So the doctor will help the farmer. Hashem desired a world of kindness, so He created a giant tapestry of different people who all need each other. That's the meaning of "Olam Chesed Yiboneh" — "The world will be built on kindness."

"Betzael ben Uri ben Hur of the tribe of Yehuda did everything that Hashem commanded Moshe."

The tribe of Yehuda was the most elevated of the tribes. From Yehuda came the kings of the Jewish People. In spite of the fact that Betzael "did everything that Hashem commanded Moshe," nevertheless, Betzael needed a partner — Oholiav ben Achisamach from the tribe of Dan. Dan was the lowest of the tribes, and despite this, or maybe because of this, Betzael needed him. The Mishkan was a microcosm of the world. And just as the world is built on kindness, so too the Mishkan needed to be built on kindness. Maybe we can find a hint to this in Oholiav's name: For he is called Oholiav ben Achisamach. "Achisamach" could be read as, "My brother depended." In other words, even though Oholiav came from the lowest of the tribes, without him Betzael could not create the microcosm of the world of kindness that was the Mishkan.

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah - A late Purim teaches us an important lesson

Why is Purim celebrated in the second month of Adar and not the first?

In this Jewish leap year we are now commencing the second month of Adar and fascinatingly, in the Gemara (Megillah 6b), there is a debate as to which Adar Purim should be in. Rav Eliezer's view, which many of us can identify with, is, "Ein ma'avirim al hamitzvot," — "We shouldn't delay a mitzvah," particularly the celebration of a happy mitzvah. Don't put it off — once you've got the chance, go for it! Therefore he advocates that Purim should be celebrated in the first month of Adar.

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel however differs and we follow his view in halacha. What's his rationale? He says that Purim should be in the second Adar in order not to separate one geula from the next, one celebration of redemption from the next celebration, that is to say that Purim and Pesach should be as close as possible on our calendar. Every year they're just one month apart and so too, that should be the case in a leap year. Now I might have thought that the opposite would be the case. If we've got two, major happy festivals, let's separate them. Why cluster them together?

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel here identifies something which we as Jews are passionate about. Having endured so much tragedy, hardship and sorrow over the ages, to be able to celebrate redemption is something very special for us and we don't just want it to be a one-off celebration. We want to be on a roll. We want to go from happiness to happiness and have none-stop happiness at long last for our people! That's why the joy of Purim is always linked on our calendar to the joy of Pesach.

We are exceptionally privileged and fortunate in our age to be able to celebrate yet other festivals of redemption: from Adar we go to Nissan and from Nissan we go to Iyar, during which we have the new festivals of Yom Ha'Atzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim. Therefore on our calendar today thanks to the inspiration we've received from our rabbis, we guarantee that indeed when it comes to celebrations we are on a roll. And in this spirit may Hashem bless our people with continuous joy, not

to suffer great tragedies as we have in the past but to only go from one simcha through to the next.

Shabbat shalom.

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

Drasha Parshas Pekudei - Unlimited Partnership

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The Mishkan was finally complete. The nation looked at the magnificent work with great joy, and Moshe was proud. So proud, in fact, that he did something that he only did once more— just before his death: he blessed the entire nation.

Actually, the erection of a Mishkan was the greatest blessing in itself. Hashem had promised the Jewish nation in Parshas Terumah, "Build me a Mishkan — and I will dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). But Moshe felt that he, too, would add a blessing.

Rashi tells us what Moshe told the people: "May Hashem rest His presence in your handiwork."

At first it seems that Moshe is reiterating the promise that Hashem Himself made. Hashem had promised to dwell in the midst of the Sanctuary that the Jewish nation would build. Why, then, did Moshe repeat G-d's promise as a blessing? Is he blessing them that Hashem should keep His word? Or is he perhaps bestowing a more powerful message?

A man once approached Rabbi Yehuda Assad for advice. "There is an old, run-down store in the downtown area of the city. I can get it a very reasonable price. I think that with my marketing skills I may be able to turn that location into a profitable venture. Do you think I should buy it?"

Rav Assad made a face. "I don't think that it would be prudent to enter that part of the city for a business venture." The man left somewhat dejected.

A few days later another man entered the Rabbi's study with the identical question about the same property. "There is an old, run-down store in the downtown area of the city. I can get it a very reasonable price. I think that with my marketing skills, and of course with Hashem's help, I may be able to turn that location into a profitable venture. Do you think I should buy it?"

This time Rabbi Assad nodded in approval. "I think you should make a go of it. I have no doubts that it will be a success."

When word got out that the Rabbi was behind this new endeavor, the first man stormed into his study quite upset. "Why did the you tell me not to buy the property and then tell my friend just the opposite?" he demanded.

"My dear student," answered the Rabbi, "there is a great difference. Your friend took in a partner. He said that with the help of Hashem he could make a go of it. When someone includes Hashem in his plans, I am sure that he will succeed!"

For the first time since the exodus the Jews had become accomplished craftsman, artisans, tailors, and contractors. They built a magnificent edifice in the wilderness. Moshe knew that a feeling of self-gratification might accompany their accomplishments. Perhaps they may begin to think that it was their wisdom, their skills and only their abilities that made this beautiful Mishkan possible. So he blessed them with words that were meant to dissuade any such delusion.

"May Hashem's presence rest in your handiwork." Of course Hashem promised that he would dwell in the Mishkan. Moshe's question was, "would the Jews let him in?" Would they make him a partner? Would they recognize Hashem as a significant factor even in the physical handiwork that they themselves had wrought? To that end, Moshe's blessing incorporated the standard for every action, accomplishment, and success that anyone achieves. May Hashem be a part of your success. May the Shechina rest upon your handiwork.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Pekudei
We Toil and Receive Reward — For the Toil!

Parshas Pikudei concludes the construction of the Mishkan. After the construction of all the individual components of the Mishkan, the parts were brought to Moshe. Rashi quotes the Medrash Tanchuma which explains that the reason why the Mishkan was brought to Moshe was because everyone else was unable to assemble it. The Mishkan was simply too heavy for anyone to lift. Since Moshe had not been personally involved in any part of the construction of the Mishkan, HaShem [G-d] reserved the privilege of final assembly for him.

When HaShem told Moshe to assemble the Mishkan, Moshe protested that it was too heavy for him to lift as well. HaShem told Moshe to make the effort. "Make it look like you are trying to erect it." Moshe made the effort and miraculously, it was assembled by itself. Since Moshe made the effort, he received the credit for having put it up.

Rav Meir Rubman explains that we can learn a very important insight regarding spirituality from this Medrash. The Medrash teaches us that regardless of the difficulty of the task, we must make the effort. In other areas of endeavor, a person is only given credit for producing. However, when it comes to Judaism, HaShem is not necessarily interested in results; He is interested in the effort.

The concept that a person receives an "A" for effort is usually a backhanded compliment. In actuality, you received a "D", a near failing grade, but at least you received an "A" for effort. That is the way it is in other areas of life. But regarding Mitzvos, Hashem merely asks that we make the effort. Whether the task is actually accomplished or not is often out of our control and up to Hashem.

When we conclude a Mesechta (tractate of the Talmud), we say the prayer "We toil and they toil. We toil and receive reward and they toil and do not receive reward." What does it mean "they toil and do not receive reward"? This does not seem to be a true statement. People do not work without receiving payment!

The answer is that when we work (at religious tasks), we are paid for the effort, regardless of whether or not we produce. But 'they' are only paid for the bottom line. In all other areas of endeavor, toil that does not produce results does not receive reward.

Not long ago (1992), I was in Atlanta for a Torah retreat. Atlanta is an amazing community. Thirty years ago, they did not have a minyan of Sabbath observers. Not so many years later, over 300 people were coming to shul on Shabbos—all of them are in some stage of having intensified, and intensifying, their observance of mitzvos.

I asked Rabbi Emanuel Feldman (Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Beth Jacob in Atlanta), "What is the key to your success?" Rabbi Feldman told me that the key is to try to plant seeds. That is all a Rabbi can do. He can try to nurture and water the seeds, but really all he can do is try. He never knows for sure whether or not it will work.

For example, one individual who recently returned to intensive Jewish involvement and observance told Rabbi Feldman that he made it decision because of a Yom Kippur sermon that Rabbi Feldman delivered fifteen years earlier. A comment in that sermon had struck home. He did not act upon it then, but fifteen years later he decided to become religious.

Success is not what it's all about. Kiruv Rechokim is about effort. Whether or not the Mishkan is actually erected is HaShem's worry. We toil and we receive reward—for the effort.

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https://www.torahweb.org/torah/2022/parsha/ryud_pikudei.html

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin
Revere, Then Hold Dear

In Parshas Pekudei we learn of the actualization of the Divine project to build a sanctuary to G-d. The Ramban teaches that the Mishkan was a continuation of Mount Sinai; at Sinai we received some of the 613 commandments and the process of receiving the rest of Torah was to be through Hashem's communication with Moshe at the Mishkan. As we are taught (Shemos 25:22), "It is there that I will set My meetings with

you, and I shall speak with you from atop the Cover, everything that I shall command you to the children of Israel." Now that this most holy endeavor of creating an Abode for the Divine, one would imagine that the book of Shemos would conclude with the actualization of the Divine promise. We would expect that we would read of Moshe's entering the Sanctuary and receiving communication from Hashem.

To our surprise, this is not the way the book ends. Instead, almost to our dismay, the Torah teaches us at the very end of Pekudei (40:34) that, "The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of Hashem filled the Tabernacle." Yet the very next verse tells us, "Moshe could not enter the Tent of Meeting, for the cloud rested upon it and the glory of Hashem filled the Tabernacle." How strange and difficult to understand. The whole purpose of the Mishkan was for Moshe to enter; and indeed in next week's parsha, Hashem summons Moshe to the Mishkan and gives him the detailed laws of korbanot. Why then could not Moshe immediately enter the Mishkan upon its completion? Moreover, we find the identical situation at the completion of the first Beis HaMikdash by Shlomo Hamelech. On the day of its dedication, right before the very lengthy prayer of the king, we find the very similar language in (Melachim 1, 8:10-11). "And it was as the Kohanim left the Sanctuary that the cloud filled the Temple of Hashem. The Kohanim could not stand and minister because of the cloud, for the glory of Hashem filled the Temple of Hashem." Once again, the very purpose of the Beis HaMikdash, which is, among other privileges, the place for man to offer sacrifices to Hashem, why could the Kohanim not actualize their function and potential?

Rav Nevenzal shlita suggests a most profound response. The Sanctuary is clearly the manifestation and outpouring of love between Hashem and the Jewish people. We are taught that the donations came from those who were "nediv lev - generous of heart", meaning that the majority of the donations were voluntary in nature, and the Torah describes that the response to the appeal for the construction of the Sanctuary was so overwhelming that Moshe had to stop the collection because it exceeded the needs. This is a manifestation of man's love for Hashem. The very building of a Sanctuary ordained by G-d is truly a manifestation of His love for the Jewish nation, as we find in (Shir HaShirim 3:10) "Tocho rotzuf ahava - its foundation was overlaid with love." The Mishkan was a fulfillment of G-d's desire to have an abode in this world demonstrating again His great love for the Jewish people.

However, ahava - love by itself, unbridled, unchecked, without limitations, can be most detrimental. Proof, the tragic sin of Nadav and Avihu is characterized by the Torah (Vayikra 16:1) as "Vikarvasam lifnai Hashem - they approached Hashem", motivated by their abundant love which led them to offer an offering that was not commanded by Hashem. Rav Nevenzal suggests that it is for this reason that together with the love there had to be a commensurate measure of yirah for the Sanctuary which in effect kept the love in check, and together reverence and love provide the perfect atmosphere and environment for the Divine. The purpose of the Mishkan, as stated above, was a continuation of Sinai. Note that at the giving of the Torah at Sinai, we find (Shemos 19:10-15) several laws that needed to be implemented to ensure and maintain the reverence of the occasion. Among these enactments include: the need for all to go to mikvah, to abstain from relations with their spouse for three days prior to the Revelation and, finally, to set boundaries surrounding the mountain lest anyone, motivated by their incredible love for the Shechinah, would attempt to ascend the mountain. The giving of the Torah is a manifestation of His great love for the Jewish people, as we recite daily in our prayers in the second blessing before the recitation of the Shema, "With an abundant love have You loved us Hashem... You taught the decrees of life." Your giving of the Torah reflects Your faith and trust in us. But this needed to be preceded and safeguarded by the infusion of the decrees reflecting reverence for the occasion. Similarly, regarding both the Mishkan and the first Beis HaMikdash, even Moshe, the most modest man, was unable to enter, teaching us man's inadequacy and lack of true worthiness to enter His holy abode. Only when man appreciates this

sense of the incredible divide that exists between Hashem and man can he enter and communicate with Hashem.

We are familiar with the practice of taking three steps backwards before we begin the recitation of the Shemoneh Esrei, and then taking three steps forward and beginning to pray. The commentary Tehila LeDavid (111:1) notes that this is not considered a hefsek between geula and tefila as the stepping backward, according to the Sefer Rokeach, is a sign of man's humility and total subjugation to the Almighty and only then is he in the proper framework to address Hashem. In addition, the very recitation of the verse (Tehillim 51:17), "Hashem Sefasai tiftach" is a further indication of man's inadequacy and needs Divine assistance to pray.

We see clearly from the above that the blending of the two emotions of reverence and love is a prerequisite for entering the Mikdash. It is interesting to note that ahava, which comes from the root hav - to give, is very often accompanied by an object. One selects a beautiful esrog or other mitzvah object as a demonstration of their love of Hashem. Yirah, on the other hand, is not characterized most often by restricting oneself and abstaining from certain behavior. Thus eating in the Sukkah might be a demonstration of ahava for Hashem but not eating or drinking even that which is halachically permissible to so do, and refraining from even drinking a glass of water outside of the Sukkah, would be an indication of yirah. An individual taking upon themselves a more stringent observance of the law is a demonstration of yirah. The Chazon Ish (Sefer Emunos U'Bitachon 1:13) posits that one who is desirous of improving and enhancing his character traits should begin with sur mayrah - abstaining from that which is negative as it is relatively easy for man to do acts of goodness, but to curb one's behavior is exceedingly challenging. It is for this reason that King David (Tehillim 34:15) writes "Turn from evil and do good", putting yirah before ahava, as we find as a prerequisite for Hashem to dwell in the Mikdash. Interestingly, when we are taught at the beginning of Terumah (25:8), "make for me a Sanctuary that I may dwell in them". Our Rabbis note it doesn't say that I may dwell in it, rather that I may dwell in them. I'd like to suggest that each person aspires to have a Divine presence in them and, therefore, each individual has to strive to constantly improve their yiras Shomayim to accompany their love for G-d, making oneself the proper receptacle for His Divine provenance.

The Gemara (Berachos 20B) teaches that whoever is obligated in shamor (abiding by the restrictions of Shabbos) is equally obligated in the zachor (positive remembrance and enjoyment of Shabbos). Note, however, that this Talmudic teaching begins with the restrictions of Shabbos, teaching that commensurate with one's meticulous observance of the many details of the thirty nine prohibitions of Shabbos will be one's appreciation of the oneg of Shabbos. It begins with the reverence of Shabbos and then one enjoys the love of Shabbos. There are a few practical examples of implementing yiras Shomayim.

It is understandable that one is not to talk during davening in shul. Yiras Shomayim is the understanding that one does not speak in shul other than prayer and the study of Torah even when they are not actually praying in shul. How one conducts themselves in shul before and after davening is a demonstration of their reverence for the shul. Refraining from speaking matters unrelated to prayer or Torah study while one is wearing their tefillin reflects their reverence for the tefillin and the relationship it engenders. Placing filters on technological devices helping one to refrain from exposure to negative sites and sights is an outgrowth of yiras Shomayim. Even one's careful reciting of bentching and beracha achrona from a text, as opposed to reciting it by heart, reflects yiras Shomayim.

We are all distraught and nervous over the Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We not only are worried for the many thousands of Jews in the Ukraine, but we are also reminded of the tenuous state of stability in our world. The Talmud (Yevamos 63a) teaches that, "Misfortune - calamities, including wars, come to the world only on account of Israel." This is substantiated by the prophet Tzechaniah (3:6) who says in the name of Hashem, "I have eliminated nations...I have destroyed their streets... their cities have become ruins" and in the next verse "I said just fear Me

(oh Israel) - tikchi musar - learn the lesson." Rashi understands this to mean that when Jews see punishment and devastation brought upon other nations, they will learn the lesson to be fearful lest they too will be punished, and this should move them to repent and improve their ways. Rashi is referring to yiras ha'Onesh - fear of retribution, which is one expression of yirah. May this latest catastrophe quickly come to an end but hopefully leave us with greater yiras Shomayim.

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Pekudei – 5782 - Just As You Were Told

After two months of a huge and complicated construction project, while encamped in the heart of the desert, the children of Israel completed the detailed instructions for building the Mishkan (Tabernacle) that they received from G-d and turned to dedicating the temporary temple that was to accompany them through their desert journeys. This week's Torah portion – Parashat Pekudei – concludes the description of the building of the Mishkan, a description that's spread over five parshiyot of the Torah.

At the end of the description of the construction work, the Torah states: (Exodus 39, 42-43)

In accordance with all that the Lord had commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel do all the work. Moses saw the entire work, and lo! they had done it-as the Lord had commanded, so had they done. So Moses blessed them.

Three times, the Torah repeats and emphasizes the fact that the children of Israel did not change any of the detailed instructions given by G-d. Moses, amazed by this fact, blessed them with a special blessing mentioned in the book of Psalms: (Psalms 90, 17)

And may the pleasantness of the Lord our God be upon us, and the work of our hands establish for us, and the work of our hands establish it.

We note that over the last two parashot, the Torah emphasizes again and again that things were done exactly "as the Lord had commanded Moses."

Why was Moses so excited by the children of Israel doing just as they had been commanded to do? And why does the Torah see the need to emphasize this? It should be an obvious thing, to follow the directions just as they were given by G-d, especially for something as lofty as building the Mishkan.

Again, at the beginning of Beha'alotcha in the book of Numbers, we find something similar. The Torah describes G-d's request of Moses to instruct Aaron to light the menorah in the Mishkan. Immediately following this, the Torah says: (Numbers 8, 3)

Aaron did so; he lit the lamps toward the face of the menorah, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

The great biblical commentator, Rashi, illuminates the emphasis insinuated by the language of the Torah:

This shows Aaron's virtue that he did not deviate [from G-d's command].

Again, we see a sense of wonder about Aaron not changing any of the detailed instructions given to him by G-d regarding lighting the menorah in the Mishkan. And again, we must ask: What is so special about this?

The answer lies in an understanding of human nature. As humans, we find it very difficult to do exactly as we are told. We like to do "about" as we are told. Why? Because if we do things exactly as we are told, we are seemingly negating our own independence and personality for the sake of the directions we were given. We want to feel like we contributed to the story. So, we like to do things "about," and not "exactly," as we are told.

In building the Mishkan, G-d asks the children of Israel to follow His instructions exactly, and they did so. They took themselves out of the equation and fulfilled G-d's will as it was, and for this they deserved praise.

But a difficulty arises by the Torah emphasizing this. Usually, with everything related to holiness and spirituality, we feel an even greater need to express our individuality. We sense our inner spirit that tells us how to act. We want to be connected and feel part of the spiritual act.

But in the building of the Mishkan, we see that G-d wanted us to remove ourselves from the picture and do exactly as He commanded, to make G-d's will – our will. As Chazal said, "...do His will as though it were your will, so that He will do your will as though it were His" (Chapters of the Fathers 2,4).

At many crossroads in our private or religious life, we might face a dilemma: Should we interject our own will into the picture, or should we concede to G-d's will. At such times, we should remember the great blessing inherent in following G-d's will as it is. Exactly as it is.

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Rav Kook Torah

Shabbat Mevarchim Rosh Chodesh: Our Prayers for the New Month Rabbi Chanan Morrison

On the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh, the new Hebrew month, we announce the new month with a special prayer, called Birkat HaChodesh. We pray that the coming month will be a time of good health, peace, and blessing.

The first paragraph of Birkat HaChodesh is an ancient prayer composed by third-century scholar Abba Arikha ('Rav'), founder of the famed Babylonian academy of Sura. Here is the text of Rav's prayer, as recorded in the Talmud: (Berakhot 16b)

"May it be Your will, the Eternal our God, to grant us long life,

a life of peace,

a life of good,

a life of blessing,

a life of sustenance,

a life of vigor of the bones,

a life marked by reverence of Heaven and dread of sin,

a life without shame and embarrassment,

a life of riches and honor,

a life in which we may be filled with love of Torah and awe of Heaven,

a life in which You will fulfill all of our hearts' desires for good."

While the prayer does mention love of Torah and awe of Heaven, most of the requests appear to refer to life's material aspects: sustenance and physical vigor, riches and honor. Were these wishes foremost in the prayers of that pious scholar?

The True Meaning of Rav's Prayer

Rav Kook taught that we should be careful not to understand the requests of Rav's prayer in a superficial way. The focus is not on material blessings but spiritual goals. Each request relates to some aspect of spiritual growth and reaching our life's higher mission.

"May it be Your will... to grant us long life" - חיים ארוכים. A long life does not mean long in years, but long in content and accomplishments. This is a preamble for the requests that follow.

"A life of peace" - חיים של שלום. This refers, not only to peaceful relations with others, but to our own inner peace and harmony. We should not be stymied by internal qualities - flawed character traits, confusion, intellectual blunders - which undermine our efforts to grow spiritually.

"A life of good" - חיים של טובה. No, this is not a request for good times and affluence. This is a spiritual request, a prayer that all external factors which affect us, should influence us in good directions and positive ways.

"A life of blessing" - חיים של ברכה. Not blessings that we receive, but blessings that we give. May we bring blessings to the world through our actions: helping the needy, consoling the broken-hearted, and providing moral leadership and direction.

"A life of sustenance" - חיים של פרנסה. A prayer that all our needs be met - physical, psychological, and spiritual.

"A life of vigor of the bones" - חיים של חלוץ עצמות. In a Talmudic discussion in Yevamot 102b, Rabbi Elazar surprisingly noted, "This is the best blessing of all!" Physical vigor and energy are important in life; but is this the most important blessing that one can ask for?

Rav Kook explained that chilutz atzamot refers to our mindset and outlook. We pray that we should be willing and eager to undertake our spiritual mission, our special service of God. We should not feel that

avodat Hashem is a burden. This is the ultimate blessing, for the goal of all blessings is the path itself: our service of God. As the Sages wrote, we should seek "God's mitzvot, and not the reward for observing His mitzvot."

"A life without shame and embarrassment" - חיים שצאין בקדם ביושה וקלקמה. No one is perfect. We all have shortcomings and weaknesses, a source of embarrassment. But our lives as a whole - the choices we make and the actions we take - should be without shame, a reflection of our better qualities. We should be able to look at our lives with pride and satisfaction.

"A life of riches and honor" - חיים של עשר וקבוד. Sometimes wealth can change a person, undermining his integrity, befuddling his values, blinding him to his true goals. Therefore we ask that our wealth be bound with true honor, namely, our values and higher goals.

And finally, we ask for "a life in which You will fulfill all of our hearts' desires for good" - חיים שצמלא ה' משאלות לבנו לטובה. Why tack on at the end, "for good"? Sometimes people wish for things - personal gain, material wealth - which they think will be good. We pray that our hearts' desires will be for that which truly is good, complementing the ultimate goal and the greatest good.

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Pekudei

פרשת פקודי תשפ"ב

אלה פקודי המשכן

These are the reckonings of the Mishkan. (38:21)

What appears to be a sad commentary on the nature of people is actually Hashem's way of rewarding the righteous. The *parsha* begins with Moshe Rabbeinu's accounting of all the precious metals and jewelry that Klal Yisrael donated for the construction of the *Mishkan*. Why did Moshe do such an accounting? Was he not trustworthy? Unquestionably, Hashem trusted Moshe, knowing that his integrity and devotion were impeccable. Some disturbed people in every community have nothing else to do but denigrate their leaders. This is, unfortunately, the product of envy which is espoused by insecure individuals who look at themselves and see a wretched example of someone who could have been a successful person. Regrettably, as noted in the *Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 51:6)*, Moshe heard some scoffers speaking behind his back, claiming that he had become wealthy through the contributions to the *Mishkan*. They asserted in a not-so-subtle manner that he had skimmed off the top.

What is most shocking about this is that Hashem Himself had attested to Moshe's integrity. *Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlit'a*, suggests that specifically because of Moshe's greatness, Hashem orchestrated this slander to reward him. The *Sefarim (Maggid Meishaim, Vayakhel)* contend that when one speaks evil, slanderous speech against his fellow, the victim receives all of the *z'chuyos*, merits, that the offender possessed, and the offender, in turn, receives all of the victim's sins. *Orchos Tzaddikim (Shaar Anavah)* relates that a person once slandered a righteous man. The victim sent a gift to the offender in return for the merits that he had just received – which had once been the slanderer's merits. When the *Yom HaDin* – the day in which we will all stand before the Heavenly Tribunal to give an accounting of our lives – arrives, we will be surprised at the many merits that have accrued from those who have spoken derogatorily of us. Likewise, we will be shocked by the many sins that have resulted when the coin is flipped, and we have been the slanderers.

The *Satmar Rebbe, z'l*, notes the *Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (6:1)* which delineates the many benefits garnered by one who studies Torah, among them *mochel al elbono*, one who forgives the individual who shames/slanders him. This implies that one who has achieved a lofty level of Torah scholarship, who has accrued a reputation of piety and devotion to Hashem, can (and will) still be slandered by a malcontent. Despite a person's spiritual achievements, scoffers and slanderers, jealous people who cannot tolerate his success and will do everything in their power to take him down, will always exist. After all, if they were

capable of speaking audaciously against Moshe, what would prevent men of such execrable character from attempting to destroy a contemporary Torah scholar?

Rav Shternbuch cites the *Chasam Sofer* (*Teshuvos* II pg. 590) who explains *Chazal's* (*Sanhedrin* 14) teaching that Heaven absolves the sins of one who ascends to a leadership position. The *Chasam Sofer* asserts that when one achieves distinction, when he rises above his peers, some people will always be ready to speak *lashon hora* against him. After all, his sins will be absolved and transferred to them.

אלה פקודי המשכן

These are the reckonings of the Mishkan. (38:21)

Building a “home” for the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence, here on earth was apparently top priority for the nascent Jewish nation. They had received the Torah at Sinai amid a Revelation unparalleled in history. The *Mishkan* was to be the continuum of that Revelation, a place where Jews could relate to Hashem “dwelling” in their midst. Hashem commands us to make a Sanctuary for Him, after which He will reside within us. If our lives outside the Temple environs are consecrated by the understanding, purity and devotion taught within the Sanctuary, then the *Mishkan* serves as the source for the *Mishkan* within ourselves. In this manner we seek the presence of Hashem not only in the Temple but among and within us wherever we go. Having said this, basking in Hashem’s Presence would seem to be the apex of spiritual achievement in this corporal world. *Chazal*, however, inform us that the *mitzvah* of *hachnosas orchim*, hospitality to those in need, takes precedence over receiving the *Shechinah*. Indeed, Hashem was in the midst of visiting Avraham *Avinu*, when he was compelled to excuse himself to attend the guests that had arrived at his tent. The question is obvious: What is so special about hospitality that it overrides receiving the *Shechinah*?

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, *zl*, quotes the *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* (4:2), “One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is worth more than a life of eternity in the World-To-Come.” This teaches us that Hashem places us in this world for a purpose: to serve Him. Service means action, and action supersedes any spiritual revelation to be attained in this world, or even in the next. If an opportunity to fulfill a *mitzvah* presents itself during a period that we have dedicated to Torah study, or in which we are involved in any other spiritual endeavor (other than active *mitzvah* performance), one must take off from his present endeavor/purpose and hasten to perform the *mitzvah*.

The bottom line is: All spiritual ascendancy encounters have one ultimate goal: action. Revelations are wonderful only if they lead to performance. *Horav Yisrael Salanter*, *zl*, was once reciting *Krias Shema* when he heard two men disputing which one of the two was obligated to bury a deceased. *Rav Yisrael* removed his *tallis* and *tefillin* in middle of *Krias Shema* – and scurried to bury the deceased. It was not his responsibility; he was wearing his *tallis* and *tefillin*; he was in the midst of reciting *Krias Shema*, but a *mitzvah* had surfaced and he, being a man of action, jumped at the opportunity to serve his Master.

Action, pro-activity, applies to all areas of Jewish life. We live with a purpose; we are a people on a mission. While our goals may vary – some focus on erudition, others on goal-oriented, financial success – our ultimate goals are Torah dissemination and acts of lovingkindness. Yet others devote themselves to the arena of Jewish education or the rabbinate. They all have one principal recipe for success: action. The premier architect of Torah *chinuch*, education, in America was *Horav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz*, *zl*. A complete treatment of his life and legacy would require a volume (of which we have a well-written one) just to peruse his daily schedule. His life story is an inspiration which should galvanize us to action.

Rav Shraga Feivel arrived in the *Bais Hamedrash* each morning before *Shacharis*. He followed this with a breakfast of hot cereal and a cup of milk at home. He would return to the *Mesivta* with exuberance, having thought of new approaches he wanted to try. He would then stand by the door, with his pocket watch in hand, to greet each student. When a boy arrived late, *Rav Shraga Feivel* stared at his watch in disbelief (so to speak). His *gut morgen*, good morning,

rendered curtly, was all the rebuke the student required. He had conveyed his message. *Rav Shraga Feivel* could not fathom how anyone, student or *rebbe*, could be late for Torah study. He would declare to his students, “If we are striving to build *Yiddishkeit*, how can we afford to waste a minute?” Time was very important to him, and he communicated his feelings to his students. He would admonish his students to learn, and, if they did not want to learn, they should at least play ball – anything but sit around doing nothing.

Rav Shraga Feivel visited every classroom daily, always issuing carefully chosen comments to encourage or subtly rebuke the students. When his words went over the students’ heads; they were directed towards the *rebbe*. He set aside part of each day for private discussions with individual boys. He spoke to each student at least twice annually. He maintained an extremely close relationship with his *rebbeim*, lauding their achievements and encouraging them to grow to even higher heights.

Late afternoon was when *Rav Shraga Feivel* taught his select *shiurim*, lessons. On most nights, he returned for night *sefer*, evening study programs. His day did not end with his classes. When he went home, he began anew his work on behalf of the *klal*, community at large. He was a man who did not live for himself. This was his recipe for success.

אלה פקודי המשכן משכן העדות

These are the reckonings of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of Testimony. (38:21)

Rashi notes the double use of the word *Mishkan*. He explains that it alludes to the two *Mishkanos* which were taken as a *meshkon*, collateral, until that day in which we repent and become deserving of having our collateral returned to us, with the building of the *Bais Hamikdash Ha'Shilishi*, Third Temple. *Horav Yosef Chaim Sonenfeld*, *zl*, asks a powerful question. The Torah provides for a lender to take collateral from someone to whom he lends money. Otherwise, he has little to no assurance that his money will be returned. The Torah, however, presents one stipulation: If the debtor is poor, and the collateral that he had given is something he needs at night, for example a pillow or a blanket, the lender must return it to him at night and retrieve it the following morning. If this is the case, how is it that Hashem has taken our *Batei Mikdash* and not returned them? We need them back as soon as possible! Veritably, our spiritual lives depend on it.

Rav Yosef Chaim responds with an answer that indicates the critical importance of increasing the Jewish nation’s sense of yearning for *Moshiach*. He explains that the idea behind returning the collateral is based upon the premise that the poor man requires it for his existence: i.e., he cannot sleep without it. Can we truthfully assert that we cannot function without the *Bais HaMikdash*? Do we feel the “pain” of the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence, in *galus*, exile, with us? Do we think that Hashem does not want to return the *Bais HaMikdash* as soon as we demonstrate a craving, an eagerness to have it back? We are all too complacent with our lives. We have become accustomed to not having a *Bais HaMikdash*, as is expressed by the popular idiom of the state of potentiality and ambiguity: “It is what it is” – and we do nothing about it.

Horav Zalmen Volozhiner, *zl*, advances that although *Klal Yisrael* as a whole, in its entirety, has not merited the return of the *Bais HaMikdash*, it does not mean that each individual who sincerely yearns for its rebuilding is not to be considered as if he himself had the *Bais HaMikdash*. In other words, both a general cumulative component and an individual component exist concerning the rebuilding of the *Bais HaMikdash*. Each individual Jew who truly pines for the *Bais HaMikdash*, who agonizes over its exile and the dismal state of *Klal Yisrael* without it, merits to some extent that the *Shechinah* will repose within him. He will enjoy the return of the “collateral,” albeit on an individual basis.

In previous generations (perhaps because they were exposed to much less materialism), Jews – even the simple unschooled Jew of the *shtetl*, far removed from the citadels of scholarship – were more focused on the advent of *Moshiach* and would talk about it with a realistic sense

of expectation each day. The arrival of *Moshiach* was imminent and, therefore, often the thrust of their conversations. *Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita*, relates that his mother had purchased a new dress. It was a special dress which her family expected her to wear for a special occasion. She agreed, “Yes, it will be put aside for a special occasion, a day of extreme joy and rejoicing: when *Moshiach Tziddkeinu* will arrive!”

Horav Shmuel Aharon HaLevi Pardes, zl, visited Poland in the beginning of 1932, and he made a point to travel to Radin to receive the blessing of the *Chafetz Chaim*. Following *Tefillas Maariv*, the evening prayer, he walked over to the *Chafetz Chaim* who greeted him warmly. “From where to you hail?” the sage asked. “From America,” *Rav* Pardes replied. The *Chafetz Chaim* continued his conversation: “Here in Radin, we are anxiously awaiting the arrival of *Moshiach* at any moment. Does this yearning prevail as well in America?” *Rav* Pardes did not want to respond. Clearly, American sentiment was different than what was manifest in Radin. Nonetheless, he answered, “Yes, in America we, too, are anxiously awaiting his arrival.”

As the conversation ended, *Rav* Pardes overheard the *Chafetz Chaim* “speaking” to Hashem (this was not unusual), as if he were expressing a personal prayer: “Hashem, the Jews in Poland suffer from deprivation and extreme poverty. It is, thus, understandable that they are waiting for *Moshiach* to come and redeem them from their physical afflictions. In contrast, however, Jews of America have a surplus of material comforts and wealth. Yet, despite their material indulgence, they still yearn and wait for *Moshiach*. If so, Hashem, why are You holding us back from finally greeting *Moshiach*?”

ויבס הענן את אהל מועד... ולא יכל משה לבא אל אהל מועד כי שכן עליו הענן
וכבוד ד' מלא את המשכן

And the cloud covered the *Ohel Moed*... and Moshe was unable to enter the *Ohel Moed* because the cloud resided there, and the glory of Hashem filled the *Mishkan*. (40:34,35)

Sefer Shemos concludes with a description of Hashem’s *Shechinah*, Divine Presence, entering the *Mishkan*. All of the work of *Klal Yisrael* in planning, gathering the materials and building the *Mishkan* achieved fruition at that moment. They had succeeded in building a “home/Sanctuary” for Hashem in this world. The first *pasuk* of *Sefer Vayikra* begins with Hashem calling/summoning *Moshe Rabbeinu* from within the *Ohel Moed*. Our quintessential leader, who was involved in every aspect of the creation of the *Mishkan*, remained outside its environs. He would not yet enter. *Chazal* (*Vayikra Rabbah* 1:15) explain that juxtaposition of the closing words of *Sefer Shemos* upon the opening words of *Sefer Vayikra* teaches us a critical lesson concerning *derech eretz*, manners, decency. They say that a *neveilah*, animal carcass, is better than a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, who has no *daas*, wisdom/knowledge. We see this from the model of *Moshe*, who was the *avi ha’neviim*, father/greatest of all the prophets; he had been the conduit for the performance of miracles and giving of the Torah, yet he was not able to enter the *Mishkan* until he was summoned by Hashem.

In this vein, *Daas* applies to the scholar’s ability to incorporate his Torah knowledge into himself. The Torah does not remain a superficial discipline from which he studies and amasses knowledge. The Torah transforms him into a Torah personality, whose every nuance is inculcated with and guided by the Torah. Having said this, the mere idea of asserting that a *talmid chacham* who lacks *daas* is worse than an animal carcass is incredible. He may be a flawed scholar, but should he be likened to a carcass?

Horav Tzvi Kuschlevsky, Shlita, explains this based upon the division of the various elements of our world. *Chazal* distinguish between inanimate and animate as falling into one of four categories: *domeim*, *tzomeach*, *chai*, *medaber*. A *domeim* is an inanimate object – a stone. A *tzomeich* is a living/growing organism – a plant/produce. A *chai* is a living, breathing creature whose life qualities are on a higher plane than that of a plant. Last is the *medaber*, human being, who has the power of speech. A *talmid chacham* is in a league unto himself because his life has purpose – true purpose as Hashem has dictated. As

such, he rises above the ordinary *medaber*. The distinction between them is apparent when each is bereft of his unique identifying distinction. When a *chai*, living creature, loses its life, it becomes a carcass. Without its defining quality of life, it is nothing. The distinguishing quality of the *talmid chacham* which distinguishes him from all other *medabrim* is his unique capacity of *daas*. The *talmid chacham* is a repository of Torah, which is his identity. If the Torah he imbibes is a mere discipline or a source of mental gymnastics to develop his cognitive qualities, then he is no longer a *talmid chacham*. He may well still be erudite, but if he does not possess *daas* – the Torah has done nothing for him.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that the “transition” resulting from a loss/lack of *daas* – from *talmid chacham* status to ordinary *medaber* -- is so great that he is worse off, has sustained a greater loss than an animal that has lost its life. The descent from *chai* to *domeim* is not merely as severe as from *talmid chacham* to *medaber*. Torah should refine its student – or he is not a student.

Accordingly, the greater the scholar, the more knowledge with which he is blessed, his *daas* should grow commensurately. *Horav Ovadiah Yosef, zl*, was a *talmid chacham* without peer, whose *daas* and human decency paralleled his level of erudition. The stories which abound about his sensitivity to people, the respect he gave to everyone, regardless of status in life, are legendary. I found one story that I feel is especially inspiring. During the last twenty years of his life, the *Chacham* lived in a large apartment in Har Nof together with his son, his daughter-in-law and their family. He had a massive *sefarim* library which included over 40,000 *sefarim*. His *Rebbeitzin* once remarked that no new volume made its way onto a shelf until after he had learned through it from cover to cover. Furthermore, he did not just peruse the volume; he annotated and added his own commentary to almost every volume that he learned. He would point out areas in which the author had missed some point, noting where else this topic was discussed. The bookshelves were all over the house, even in the hallways. Indeed, the *Chacham’s* criterion for selecting an apartment was the height of the ceilings, which would allow him more space to store his precious *sefarim*. [I daresay anyone realizes the magnitude of 40,000 *sefarim*.]

During his early days in the apartment in which he lived, as he aged and the number of *mispallelim*, worshippers, increased, the *kehillah* moved his *Bais HaKnesses, shul*, to an apartment on a different floor. When asked why he did not make it easier on himself and keep the *shul* where he lived and studied all day (after all, less walking meant less pain), he replied, “First of all, some notes have recently gone ‘missing’ from my desk. Some of the people who join us in prayer do not realize that each note is precious to me. (They think that they can take it as a souvenir.) More importantly, however, when I write comments on the margin of a *sefer*, I am writing this for myself. It is not for public consumption. At times, these comments may be viewed as derogatory to the author, when, in fact, no offense was intended. Recently, the author of a treatise told me that a friend of his was *davening* in my apartment and noticed his *sefer* on the shelf. He took it down and perused it. He noted that I had written a comment that might be misconstrued as a criticism of his *sefer*. The author was hurt and came to speak to me about it.

“It is worthwhile for me to leave my home for every *tefillah*, rather than take a chance of slighting the feelings of an author.” This should provide the reader with a perspective on the meaning of *daas*.

Va’ani Tefillah

רחום וחנון חטאתי לפניך - *Rachum v’chanun chatasi lefanecha. O compassionate One gracious One, I have sinned before You.*

Nefillas apayim, falling down on one’s face, is a special prayer recited following *Shemoneh Esrai* during which we supplicate Hashem, affirming that we acknowledge our sinful behavior and pray for forgiveness. Originally, this prayer was recited while the supplicant was actually face-down to the ground. Now, we bend our head, leaning it on our arm, covering our face. It should be recited sitting. [*Rivash* opines that sitting is arbitrary; one may stand.] We place our head on the right arm, since the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence, is opposite a person, on his right side. The *Bais Yosef* quotes his brother, *Horav Binyamin*, who

contends that one should rest his head on his left arm, thereby facing the *Shechinah* which is on the right side. If he were to rest on the right side, he would have his back to the *Shechinah*. *Ohr Tzaddikim* quotes the *Shulchan Aruch* which is of the opinion that, during *Shacharis* when one is wearing his *Tefillin* on his left arm, he should rest his head on his right side, out of respect for the *Tefillin*.

In memory of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents
ר' נפתלי מנחם בן נחמאל ז"ל & מרת שרה רייבע בת ר' יעקב מאיר הכהן ע"ה

The Rothner Family

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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

Forgetting Shabbos Candles

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Since we derive the laws of Shabbos from the construction of the Mishkan, this topic is unquestionably in order.

Question #1: Missed One

"After Shabbos began, I noticed that I had forgotten to light one of my candles. Must I light an additional candle in the future?"

Question #2: Unable to Light

"I was unable to light my Shabbos lights because of circumstances beyond my control. Must I begin lighting an additional candle every week in the future?"

Question #3: Already Add

"My mother lights only two candles all the time, but I have been lighting three. One week, I missed lighting; do I now need to light an additional one, for a total of four, even though I already light more than my mother does?"

Question #4: Electrified

"I did not light my Shabbos candles, but there was plenty of electric light in the whole house. Must I add an additional light in the future?"

Introduction

An accepted custom is that a woman, who misses lighting Shabbos candles one week, adds to her future lighting, either by kindling more lights, by adding more oil to her lamps, or by lighting longer candles. The basis for this practice is recorded relatively late in halachic literature. It is not mentioned anywhere in Chazal, nor in the period of the ge'onim or early rishonim. The source for this custom is the Maharil (Hilchos Shabbos #1), the source of most early Ashkenazic customs, particularly those of western Germany (sometimes called *minhag bnei Reinus*, those who lived along the Rhine River). Although the Rema refers to this custom as a *chumra rechokah*, an excessive stringency (Darchei Moshe, Orach Chayim 263), he notes that women observe this practice and, therefore, he rules this way in his glosses to the *Shulchan Aruch* (Orach Chayim 263:1), where he mentions the practice of adding a light.

In this instance, the custom reported by the Maharil was accepted and became established not only over all of Ashkenaz, including the eastern European world, but also by the Edot Hamizrah, the entire world of Sefardic Jewry. So, halachically, this has the status of a *minhag Klal Yisroel*. It is uncommon to find such a relatively late custom that has become so well established.

It is also curious that, although we would consider this a relatively minor custom, the halachic authorities devote much discussion to understanding its halachic ramifications, complete with many applications.

Lamp or candle

An important technical clarification is required. Although most women fulfill the mitzvah of kindling Shabbos lights with candles, we should be aware that the word "ner," which today means "candle," in the time of Tanach and Chazal meant the lamp in which you placed oil to light. Although candle manufacture goes back to antiquity, it was not commonly used in Eretz Yisroel and Bavel until long after the era of Chazal. In their day, unless the term *ner shel sha'avah* (wax lamp; i.e., a candle) or similar term is used, it should be assumed that the word *ner* refers to a lamp. Thus, the *posuk*, *ki ner mitzvah veTorah* or (Mishlei 6:23), means that a mitzvah functions as a lamp and the lights that burn inside it is the Torah.

Man or woman

Another introduction is in order. Technically speaking, the mitzvah of kindling Shabbos lights is incumbent on every member of a household. To quote the Rambam: "Everyone [emphasis is mine] is required to have a lamp lit in his house on Shabbos" (Hilchos Shabbos 5:1). Although it is usually only the lady of the house who kindles the Shabbos lights, she does so as the agent of the rest of the family and their guests (Levush 263:3; Graz, Kuntros Acharon 263:2). In other words, they have implicitly appointed her a *shaliach* to fulfill their mitzvah for them, just as they have appointed the man of the house to recite kiddush on their behalf.

The custom, going back to the time of the Mishnah (Shabbos 34a), is that a woman kindles the lights. The Zohar mentions that the husband should prepare the lights for her to kindle. Rabbi Akiva Eiger, in his glosses to the Mishnah, notes that the Mishnah also implies this when it states that a woman is responsible for kindling the lamp (Shabbos 31b), implying that someone else prepared it for her to kindle. The Magen Avraham, quoting the Arizal, notes that preparing the lamps for kindling is specifically the responsibility of the husband (Magen Avraham 263:7).

Thus, if there is no woman in the house, or she is unavailable to kindle the Shabbos lights at the correct time, a different adult should kindle the lamps and recite the bracha when doing so. (Some have the practice that the husband kindles the Shabbos lamps on the Shabbos after a woman gives birth, even when his wife is home [Magen Avraham 263:6; Mishnah Berurah 263:11 and Aruch Hashulchan 263:7].)

If a man was supposed to light candles -- for example, he is unmarried -- and forgot to light them one week, is he now required to kindle an extra light every week because of the custom mentioned by the Maharil? This question is disputed by late halachic authorities.

Kindled less

If a woman kindled less than the number of lamps that she usually does, is she required to add more lamps in the future?

This matter is the subject of a dispute between achronim; the Pri Megadim rules that she is required to add more lamps or more oil in the future, whereas the Biur Halacha concludes that there is no such requirement.

Two or three

The Rema raises the following question about the custom of kindling an extra light: Although the Gemara makes no mention of kindling more than one lamp for Shabbos use, common custom, already reported by the rishonim, is that people kindle two lamps every Friday night. Many reasons are cited for this custom of lighting two lights; the rishonim mention that one is to remind us of *zachor* and the other of *shamor*. (Other reasons for this custom are mentioned in other prominent seforim, such as Elyah Rabbah [263:2]; Elef Lamateh [625:33]; and Halichos Beisah [14:57].) The Rema asks that when a woman kindles three lights, because she forgot once to light and is now adding an extra one to fulfill the Maharil's minhag, it seems that she is preempting the custom of kindling two lights because of *zachor* and *shamor*.

The Rema responds to this question by quoting sources in rishonim (Mordechai, Rosh Hashanah #720; Rosh, Rosh Hashanah 4:3) that, in general, when a halacha requires a certain number, this is a minimum requirement, but it is permitted to add to it. Thus, for example, when we say that reading the Torah on Shabbos requires seven people to be called up, this means that we should call up at least seven people, but it is permitted to call up more, which is indeed the accepted halachic practice (see Mishnah Megillah 21a).

Based on these rishonim, the Rema explains that the custom is to kindle at least two lamps, and that adding extra because a woman forgot once to light is not against the custom (Darchei Moshe and Hagahos, Orach Chayim 263). This is why the fairly common practice of adding one lamp for each child of the household is not a violation of the custom of lighting two lamps for *zachor* and *shamor*. Furthermore, the custom that some have to kindle seven lights or ten lights every Erev Shabbos, mentioned by the Shelah Hakodosh and the Magen Avraham, does not violate the earlier custom of the rishonim of lighting two.

The prevalent custom is that a woman who kindles more than two lamps when at home kindles only two when she is a guest (She'arim Hametzuyanim Bahalacha 75:13). Some late authorities discuss whether a woman who lights extra lights because she once forgot should do so also when she is a guest (Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasa, Chapter 43, footnote 31; see She'arim Hametzuyanim Bahalacha 75:13, who is lenient).

Why do we light Shabbos candles?

Prior to answering our opening questions, we should clarify a few other issues basic to the mitzvah of kindling lights for Shabbos. The Gemara explains that kindling Shabbos lights enhances shalom bayis, happiness and peace in the household. Specifically, the authorities provide several ways that lighting increases the proper Shabbos atmosphere.

(1) A place of honor is always properly illuminated, and, therefore, there should be ample lighting for the Shabbos meal (Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 30:5; Rashi, Shabbos 25b).

(2) Not only is there more kavod for the Shabbos meal when it is properly lit, but it also increases the enjoyment of that meal (She'iltos #63). It is not enjoyable to eat a meal when it is difficult to see what you are eating.

(3) It also makes people happy to be in a well-lit area. Sitting somewhere that is dark conflicts with the Shabbos atmosphere (Rashi, Shabbos 23b).

(4) If the house is dark, someone might stumble or collide with something and hurt himself, which is certainly not conducive to enjoying Shabbos (Magen Avraham, 263:1).

There are circumstances when some of the reasons mentioned above apply and other reasons do not. For example, according to the first two reasons -- to treat the Shabbos meal with honor and to enjoy it -- one is required to have light only where one is eating; however, one would not necessarily need to illuminate an area that one traverses. On the other hand, the fourth reason, preventing a person from hurting himself, requires illuminating all parts of the house that one walks through on Shabbos. Since these reasons are not mutually exclusive, but may all be true, one should make sure that all areas of the house that one uses in the course of Shabbos are illuminated (Magen Avraham 263:1).

Husband does not want

What is the halacha if a woman would like to kindle extra lamps, more than her custom, but her husband objects, preferring that she light the number of lamps that is her usual custom. I found this exact question discussed in Shu't Tzitz Eliezer, who rules that she should follow her husband's directive, noting that the reason for kindling Shabbos lamps is to increase shalom bayis, which is the opposite of what this woman will be doing if she kindles lamps that her husband does not want (Shu't Tzitz Eliezer 13:26).

Atonement, Reminder or Compensation?

At this point, we can return to our specific discussion about someone who forgot to kindle Shabbos lights. The acharonim discuss the purpose of adding an extra lamp because a woman once forgot to light Shabbos lights. The Machatzis Hashekel (Orach Chayim 263:1) suggests three different reasons for the custom:

Reminder

The reason mentioned by the Bach and other acharonim for the custom is that kindling an extra light every week provides a permanent reminder to kindle Shabbos lamps (Bach, Orach Chayim 263; Magen Avraham 263:3).

Atonement

The Machatzis Hashekel suggests another reason, that kindling the extra light is atonement, kaparah, for not having fulfilled the mitzvah.

Compensation

Yet another reason is that not kindling Shabbos lights one week caused a small financial benefit. To avoid any appearance that we benefit from a halachic mishap, the extra lamp is kindled to make compensation.

(Yet another reason for the custom of adding an extra light is suggested by the Pri Megadim, Eishel Avraham 263:7).

Do any halachic differences result from these reasons?

Yes, they do. If the reason is because of "reminder," it is appropriate only if she forgot to kindle, but if she was unable to light, she would not require a "reminder" for future weeks (Magen Avraham 263:3). The example chosen by the Magen Avraham is that she was imprisoned, although we could also choose an example in which a life-threatening emergency called her away from the house right before Shabbos.

On the other hand, if the reason is because of compensation, she should add extra lamp.

The Magen Avraham and the Machatzis Hashekel conclude that we may rely on the first reason, that it is to remind her for the future, and that the minhag applies, therefore, only when she forgot to kindle, but not when she was unable to.

Unable to light

At this point, let us address the second of our opening questions: "I was unable to light my Shabbos lights because of circumstances beyond my control. Must I begin lighting an additional candle every week in the future?"

It would seem that it depends on what she meant by "circumstances beyond my control." If she needed to be with one of her children in the emergency room at the time that Shabbos began and no one else in the house kindled lights, I would consider that a situation in which she is not required to light an additional lamp. On the other hand, if she ran out of time and suddenly realized that it is too late to light, this is clearly negligence and she is required to kindle an extra light in the future. Specific shaylos should be addressed to one's rav or posek.

Already add

At this point, we can address one of our opening questions: "My mother lights only two candles, all the time, but I have been lighting three. One week, I missed lighting; do I need to light an additional one, for a total of four, even though I already light more than my mother does?"

The answer is that you are required to add one because of the custom quoted by the Maharil, in addition to the three that you already light (Elyah Rabbah 263:9).

Electric lights

It should be noted that all four reasons mentioned above for lighting Shabbos lights would be fulfilled if someone turned on electric lights. Notwithstanding that universal practice is to kindle oil or candles for Shabbos lights, most authorities contend that one fulfills the mitzvah of kindling Shabbos lights with electric lights (Shu't Beis Yitzchok, Yoreh Deah 1:120; Shu't Melamed Leho'il, Orach Chayim #46, 47; Edus Le'yisrael, pg. 122). There are some authorities who disagree, because they feel that the mitzvah requires kindling with a wick and a fuel source that is in front of you, both requirements that preclude using electric lights to fulfill the mitzvah (Shu't Maharshag 2:107). The consensus of most authorities is that, in an extenuating circumstance, one may fulfill the mitzvah with electric lights (Shu't Yechaveh Daas 5:24; Shu't Kochavei Yitzchak 1:2). It is common practice that women who are hospitalized, or in similar circumstances where safety does not permit kindling an open flame, may rely on the electric lights for Shabbos lamps. When one needs to rely on this heter, at candle-lighting time, she should turn off the electric light she will be using for Shabbos, and then turn it on for use as her Shabbos light.

Lighting in an illuminated room

The contemporary availability of electric lighting adds another interesting dimension to the mitzvah of lighting Shabbos lamps, which requires a brief introduction. The rishonim discuss whether one is allowed to recite a bracha over Shabbos lights in a room that is already illuminated, when the reasons for the mitzvah are accomplished already. Some maintain that, indeed, you cannot recite a bracha on the Shabbos lamps when they are basically unnecessary, whereas others rule that the extra light enhances the joyous Shabbos atmosphere and one is therefore allowed to recite a bracha on the candles (see Beis Yosef 263). After quoting both opinions, the Shulchan Aruch (263:8) rules that one should not recite a bracha in this situation because of "safeik brachos lehakeil," whereas the Rema explains that minhag Ashkenaz allows reciting a bracha.

One of the practical halachic ramifications of this disagreement is whether one may recite a bracha over the Shabbos candles in a room that has electric lights. It would seem that, according to the opinion of the Shulchan Aruch, one should not, while the Rema would permit it. Contemporary poskim suggest avoiding the question by having the lady of the house turn on the electric lights in the dining room in honor of Shabbos immediately before lighting the Shabbos candles and recite the bracha, having in mind to include the electric lights (Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah 43:34). (The Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah suggests other options that accomplish the same thing.)

At this point, we can address the fourth of our opening questions: "I did not light my Shabbos candles, but there was plenty of electric light in the whole house. Must I add an additional light in the future?"

The question germane to our subtopic is: what is the halacha if a woman forgot to light Shabbos lights, but there were electric lights that were left burning anyway; does the penalty of the Maharil apply in this instance? I

discovered a dispute in this matter among late halachic authorities, in which Rav Shmuel Vozner ruled that she is required to kindle another lamp in the future (Shu't Sheivet Halevi 5:33), whereas Rav Ovadyah Yosef ruled that she is not (Yalkut Yosef 263:43; see also Shu't Melamed Le'ho'il, Orach Chayim #46; Shu't Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 3:14:6; Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah Chapter 43, footnote 30; Shu't Avnei Yoshfeih, Orach Chayim 1:55:6.)

Conclusion

The Gemara states that one who is careful to use beautiful "neiros" for Shabbos will merit having children who are talmidei chachomim (Shabbos 23b). Let us hope and pray that in the merit of observing these halachos correctly, we will have children and grandchildren who light up the world with their Torah!

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה

Parshas Pekudei: Siyyum on Sefer Sh'mot

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

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

I. AN OVERVIEW OF SEFER SH'MOT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I. DETAIL AND REPETITION

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

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

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

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

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

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

III. FROM THREE THEMES TO TWO

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

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

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

- * Just as God had spoken to the B'nei Yisra'el at Mount Sinai, so too does He continue to speak to them (via Mosheh) from the Kodesh haKodoshim (Holy of Holies), through the K'ruvim (Cherubim) atop the Aron (Ark) (25:22);
- * The Luchot Ha'eidut (Tablets of Testimony) which Mosheh will receive (24:12) on Mount Sinai, serve as a testimony to the giving of the Torah and thus, will be kept in the Aron, the focal point of the Mishkan (25:21);
- * The Cloud created by the Incense Altar (30:1-10) symbolizes the Cloud that covered Mount Sinai (19:9, 24:15-18);
- * The Fire on the Altar (Vayyikra 6:6) symbolizes the Fire that descended on Mount Sinai (Sh'mot 24:17). The laws of the Altar reflect the Covenant ceremony that took place just before Mosheh ascended Mount Sinai (see 24:4-5).

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

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

IV. RETURN TO THE GARDEN

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

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

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

I will place my Mishkan in your midst, and I shall not abhor you. V'hit'halakhti b'tokhakhem (And I will walk among you – (same word as Mit'halekh)), and will be your God, and you shall be my people. (Vayyikra 26:11-12) Just as Adam's accountability was higher when in the Garden (=nearness to God), so too the level of purity and sanctity which must be maintained within the Mishkan is higher.

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

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

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

V. V'ELE SH'MOT B'NEI YISRA'EL

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

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

This introduction is difficult on two counts:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let's look back at the stated purpose of the Mishkan: "Let them build for Me a Mikdash, that I may dwell among them" (25:8). The Mishkan was to be a vehicle through which God would manifest His Presence among the B'nei Yisra'el. Aharon's job – as the great Ohev Yisra'el (lover of Israel) – was to be the "shadkhan" (matchmaker) between God and His people. He was to bring the B'nei Yisra'el back to God, by bringing them into the Mishkan. Carrying their names at all times was a reminder to Aharon of his task. He was not in the midst of the holiest possible place on his own merit, rather, he was there as a representative of two sides – God and the B'nei Yisra'el. This explains why there was one garment with their names – but why both the Hoshen and the Ephod? In addition, why did the Hoshen carry each name on its own stone, whereas the Ephod combined them into two onyx stones?

VII. THE GOAL OF DIVINE WORSHIP

Avodat Hashem – the worship of God -demands a delicate balance between individual expression and communalism. Although there is a great deal to be said for communal worship, as the members stand as one unit and in common practice, nonetheless, it is not the Torah's goal to obliterate the individual talents, needs, creative urges or expressions found in each member of the community. Some religions maintain an ideal of group worship, where the individual submerges and negates his or her own needs into the expression of the group (perhaps the strongest and most frightening examples of this extreme are contemporary "cults"). Others (such as some schools of Zen) place the entire emphasis on individual expression – paying little or no heed to the power of the community. In both Halakhic and extra-Halakhic literature, the sensitive balance between individual and community is addressed. On the one hand, we pray the most central prayer – T'fillah – silently. On the other – it is (during the day) followed by a public repetition, known as T'fillat haTzibbur – the prayer of the community.

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

The Mishkan is the nexus of our worship of God. Even worship which takes place outside of the Mishkan is oriented around it (note what direction we face when saying T'fillah). Aharon's job was to bring the B'nei Yisra'el back into encounter with God – on two almost opposing levels. He was to (help Mosheh) lead them as a nation, as a community, as a group. He was also to lead each of them – in his or her own way – into a more sincere and honest encounter with God. Thus, he had to carry their names as individuals (represented by the individual tribes), each in his own glory (represented by a different precious stone) – and as a group. Note that the two stones on the ephod shoulder-pieces were both onyx – and (following Rambam's approach – see MT K'lei Mikdash 9:9) the names were listed in birth order, alternating between the right and left shoulder-pieces. This is clearly a statement about the unification of the families into one unit. The third component – the Tzitz – was the focus through which this worship was able to unify the people. Note that the individual representation of the names sat on Aharon's breast; moving up towards his head (where the Tzitz rested) were the two shoulder-pieces which unified their names. The message is fairly self-explanatory: **The method by which the tribes of Ya'akov properly unite is in their common focus upward towards God.**

VIII. THE MISHKAN AS A COMMEMORATION OF THE EXODUS

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

We now understand why the Torah places such an emphasis on detail in building the Mishkan – because, as the very focus of our relationship with God, we need to remember that every step in the Mishkan must be exact and deliberate (note what happens to Nadav and Avihu when they fail to comply); just as the standards in the Garden of Eden were very

exacting, so too in this Dwelling Place for God. Whereas other Mitzvot serve as vehicles of worship, the Mishkan is the nexus of that worship and must be guarded and cared for much more scrupulously.

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

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

IX. POSTSCRIPT: KODESH YISRA'EL L'YHVH

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

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

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

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

HAZAK HAZAK V'NIT'HAZEK

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Parshat Pekudei: Summing up Shemot, Introducing VaYikra

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

TRANSITION: SEFER SHEMOT / SEFER VAYIKRA

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

SEFER SHEMOT, IN 481 WORDS:

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

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

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

OK, SO WHAT?

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

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

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

BUT:

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

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

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

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

THE KEYS:

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

SHEMOT 33:15-16 --

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

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

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

STAGES:

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

STAGE 1:

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

STAGE 2-A (responsibility of the people):

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

STAGE 2-B (response of Hashem):

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

EXAMPLE: MOSHE AFTER THE EGEL:

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

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

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

IN CLOSING, A SHORT SERMON:

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

The lowest level of relationship between Hashem and ourselves is that His name is identified with us. This makes us responsible not to behave in ways which reflect poorly on Hashem and means that sometimes Hashem will do us a favor

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

THE CHALLENGE OF SEFER VAYIKRA:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

message.

THE STRUCTURE OF SEFER VAYIKRA:

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

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

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

Perek Topic
(chap.)

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

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

- 1) Laws of korbanot:
 - a) Under what circumstances are various korbanot offered?
 - b) How to properly offer each type of korban.
- 2) Purity and impurity:

- a) What animals, birds, etc. may be eaten?
- b) Giving birth and how it affects purity.
- c) Tzara'at.
- d) Genital and menstrual discharges.
- e) Repurifying the Mishkan (Yom Kippur).

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

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

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

A WORD ON "TA'AMEI MITZVOT":

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

'BONUS': THE RAMBAM ON IMPURITY

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

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

RAMBAM, HILKHOT MIKVA'OT 11:12 --

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

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

- 1) If the Rambam's point is that we have no access to the rationale, why does he seem to connect this with the fact that

matters of purity "depend on the intent of the heart"? There seems to be little connection between the claim that these laws are beyond our understanding and the halakha that in order for ritual immersion to 'work,' it must be done with the conscious intent of the immersee to become pure.

2) We know very well (if we have indeed read through all of the Rambam's halakhot of purity until this final halakha) that immersion in the mikvah has nothing to do with physical cleaning and that impurity is not some sort of dirt. How does asserting this strengthen or somehow explain further what the Rambam means when he says that these matters are "decrees of Scripture"?

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

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

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

GUIDE TO THE PERPLEXED, 3:35 --

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

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

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

GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED 3:47 --

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

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

Of course, there is a lesson behind this demand by the Torah, a lesson we will examine more carefully as we move

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

Shabbat Shalom

PESHAT AND DERASH IN MEGILLAT ESTHER[1]

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

INTRODUCTION

Elisha ben Avuyah said: one who learns as a child, to what is he compared? To ink written upon a new writing sheet; and one who learns [when] old, to what is he compared? To ink written upon an erased writing sheet. (Avot 4:20)

Megillat Esther is among the most difficult biblical books to study anew, precisely because it is so familiar. Many assumptions accompany us through our study of the Megillah, occasionally clouding our perceptions of what is in the text and what is not.

Any serious study of the peshat messages of the Megillah must begin with a clear sense of what is explicitly in the text, what can be inferred legitimately from the text, and what belongs primarily in a thematic exposition, using the text as a springboard for important religious concepts. This chapter will consider some pertinent examples from Megillat Esther.

PESHAT CONSIDERATIONS IN THE MEGILLAH

A. THE SAUL-AGAG REMATCH

On five occasions in the Megillah, Haman is called an “Agagite.”[2] Several early traditions consider this appellation a reference to Haman’s descent from King Agag of Amalek, whom Saul defeated (I Sam. 15).[3]

Similarly, several midrashic traditions identify the Kish of Mordecai’s pedigree (2:5) with Saul’s father (I Sam. 9:1).[4] From this vantage point, Mordecai’s recorded pedigree spans some five centuries in order to connect him and Esther to Saul. If indeed Haman is of royal Amalekite stock, and Mordecai and Esther descend from King Saul, then the Purim story may be viewed as a dramatic rematch of the battle between Saul and Agag.

However, neither assumption is rooted in the text of the Megillah. The etymology of “Agagite” is uncertain; while it could mean “from King Agag of Amalek,” it may be a Persian or Elamite name.[5] Had the author wanted to associate Haman with Amalek, he could have dubbed him “the Amalekite.” The same holds true for Mordecai and Esther’s descent from King Saul. If the Megillah wished to link them it could have named Saul instead of “Kish” (Ibn Ezra). It is possible that the Kish mentioned in the Megillah is Mordecai’s great-grandfather rather than a distant ancestor.[6]

Regardless of the historical factuality of the aforementioned identifications, a strong argument can be made for a thematic rematch between the forces of good and evil which runs parallel to Saul’s inadequate efforts to eradicate Amalek. In this case, the association can be inferred from the text of the Megillah itself.[7] The conflict between Mordecai and Haman as symbolic of a greater battle between Israel and Amalek is well taken conceptually, but it is tenuous to contend that the biological connections are manifest in the text. However, if the midrashim had received oral traditions regarding these historical links, we accept them—ve-im kabbalah hi, nekabbel.

B. ASSIMILATION

It is sometimes argued that the turning point in the Megillah is when the Jews fast (4:1–3, 16–17; 9:31), thereby repenting from earlier assimilationist tendencies demonstrated by their sinful participation in Ahasuerus’ party. According to this reading, Haman’s decree was direct retribution for their communal sin. However, the text contains no theological explanation of why the Jews “deserved” genocide; on the contrary, the sole textual motivation behind Haman’s decree is Mordecai’s refusal to show obeisance to Haman (3:2–8). By staunchly standing out, Mordecai jeopardizes his own life and the lives of his people.[8]

Moreover, there is no indication in the Megillah that the Jews ever did anything wrong. On the contrary, the references to the Jews acting as a community display them mourning and fasting,[9] first spontaneously, and then at Mordecai’s directive (4:1–3, 16–17; 9:31). They celebrate their victory by sending gifts to each other and giving charity to the poor (9:16–28).

Consider also Haman’s formulation of his request to exterminate the Jews: “Their laws are different from every nation” (3:8). Several midrashim find in Haman’s accusation testimony that the Jews observed the commandments and stood

distinctly apart from their pagan counterparts.[10]

Curiously, the only overt indications of foreign influence on the Jews in the Megillah are the names Mordecai and Esther, which likely derive from the pagan deities Marduk[11] and Ishtar.[12] However, the use of pagan names need not indicate assimilation of Mordecai and Esther, nor of the community at large.[13]

Not only is there no textual evidence of Jewish assimilation—on the contrary, the Megillah consistently portrays Jews positively—but there is no rabbinic consensus on this matter either. The oft-quoted Gemara used to prove assimilation states:

R. Shimon b. Yohai was asked by his disciples, Why were the enemies of Israel [a euphemism for the Jews] in that generation deserving of extermination? He said to them: Answer the question. They said: Because they partook of the feast of that wicked one. [He said to them]: If so, those in Shushan should have been killed, but not those in other provinces! They then said, answer the question. He said to them: It was because they bowed down to the image. They said to him, then why did God forgive them [i.e., they really deserved to be destroyed]? He replied: They only pretended to worship, and He also only pretended to exterminate them; and so it is written, “For he afflicted not from his heart.” (Megillah 12a)

R. Shimon b. Yohai’s students suggested that the Jews deserved to be destroyed because of their willing participation in Ahasuerus’ party, but they did not state what was wrong with this participation. Song of Songs Rabbah 7:8 posits that the Jews sinned at the party by eating nonkosher food. Alternatively, Esther Rabbah 7:13 considers lewdness the primary sin at the party.[14]

A contrary midrashic opinion is found in Midrash Panim Aherim 2, which relates that the Jews specifically avoided the party. Related sources describe that the Jews cried and mourned over Ahasuerus’ festivities.[15]

Within the aforementioned rabbinic opinions, we find controversy over what was wrong with the party and the extent of the Jews’ participation (if any). But this entire discussion becomes moot when we consider that R. Shimon b. Yohai rejects his students’ hypothesis on the grounds that only Shushan’s Jewry participated; the Jews in other provinces never attended either of Ahasuerus’ parties.[16]

R. Shimon b. Yohai then submits his own opinion: the Jews bowed to “the image.” Rashi avers that the image refers to the statue of Nebuchadnezzar erected and worshipped generations earlier (see Daniel chapter 3), while Meiri (Sanhedrin 74b) quotes an alternative reading of our Gemara, which indicates that the “image” was an idol that Haman wore as people bowed to him.[17]

Both possibilities present difficulties: According to Rashi, the Jews were to be punished for the transgression of their ancestors, though there is no evidence that they perpetuated this sinful conduct. According to Meiri’s alternative reading, the question of R. Shimon b. Yohai to his students simply becomes more acute: only the members of the king’s court in Shushan bowed to Haman. Most Jews of Shushan, and all Jews from the outer provinces, never prostrated before Haman.

In any case, the Gemara concludes that the Jews bowed without conviction. God “externally” threatened the Jews in return, that is, the threat was perceived, not real. The Gemara never resolves the theological question of why the Jews deserved such a harsh decree. The text of the Megillah consistently portrays the Jews in a favorable light, and the Gemara’s ambivalence over the theological cause of the Purim story only supports this positive assessment. In light of these factors, we must relegate discussions of assimilation to the realm of *derekh ha-derash*, that is, assimilation is something to be criticized, but the Megillah is not engaged in this condemnation—rather, it is concerned with other religious purposes.

C. RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

The Megillah makes no mention of the distinctly commandment related behavior of the heroes, nor of the nation. Other than the term *Yehudi(m)*, there is nothing distinctly Jewish in the Megillah. Most prominent is the absence of God’s Name. Also missing are any references to the Torah or specific commandments. In this light, the holiday of Purim could be viewed as a nationalistic celebration of victory. The only sign of religious ritual is fasting; but even that conspicuously is not accompanied by prayer. The omission of God’s name and prayer is even more striking when we contrast the

Masoretic Text with the Septuagint additions to the Megillah—where the Jews pray to God and God intervenes on several occasions. In the Septuagint version, God's Name appears over fifty times.[18] It appears unmistakable that the author of the Megillah intended to stifle references to God and Jewish religious practice. The second section of this chapter will address the question of why this is so.

D. MORDECAI'S DISOBEDIENCE

Mordecai's rationale for not prostrating himself involves his Jewishness (3:4), but the Megillah does not explain how. Many biblical figures bow to kings and nobles as a sign of respect, not worship; notably Esther bows to Ahasuerus in 8:3.[19] The text suggests that Mordecai did not want to honor the king and his command (see 3:2–4), but this explanation seems puzzling. Would Mordecai endanger his own life and the lives of all Jews[20] for this reason? Esther Rabbah 6:2 finds it unlikely:

But Mordecai did not bow down nor prostrate himself before him (3:2). Was Mordecai then looking for quarrels or being disobedient to the king's command? The fact is that when Ahasuerus ordered that all should bow down to Haman, the latter fixed an idolatrous image on his breast for the purpose of making all bow down to an idol.[21]

Other rabbinic sources contend that rather than wearing an idol, Haman considered himself a deity.[22]

Nevertheless, the text never alludes to idolatry in regard to Haman, nor anywhere else in the Megillah.[23] It appears that technical idolatry did not figure into Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman. In the second section of this chapter, we will consider alternative responses to this question.

To conclude, certain midrashic assumptions are without clear support in the biblical text, and there often is disagreement in rabbinic sources. Both Mordecai and Esther's biological connection to Saul and Haman's descent from Agag of Amalek are debatable. There is no evidence of Jewish assimilation, nor is there testimony to overtly Jewish religiosity. Finally, it is unclear why Mordecai refused to bow to Haman, which is surprising given the centrality this episode has in the narrative.

Although these ambiguities make an understanding of the Megillah more complicated, they also free the interpreter to look beyond the original boundaries of explanation and to reconsider the text and its messages anew.

THE CENTRAL MESSAGES OF THE MEGILLAH

A. AHASUERUS AS THE MAIN CHARACTER

In determining the literary framework of the Megillah, Rabbi David Henshke notes that, viewed superficially, chapter 1 only contributes Vashti's removal, making way for Esther. However, the text elaborately describes the king's wealth and far-reaching power. This lengthy description highlights the fact that there is a different plot. The king's power is described in detail because it is central to the message of the Megillah. Moreover the Megillah does not end with the Jews' celebration. It concludes with a description of Ahasuerus' wealth and power, just as it begins. The bookends of the story point to the fact that the Purim story is played out on Ahasuerus' stage.[24]

The other major characters—Esther, Mordecai, and Haman—are completely dependent on the good will of the king. For example, the political influence of Esther and Mordecai ostensibly contributed significantly to the salvation of the Jews. However, their authority was subject to the king's moods. Esther knew that Vashti had been deposed in an instant. The king even held a second beauty contest immediately after choosing Esther as queen (2:19). When the moment to use her influence arrived, Esther was terrified to confront the king to plead on behalf of her people. The fact that she had not been summoned for thirty days reminded her of her precarious position (4:11).

Mordecai, who rose to power at the end of the Megillah, likewise must have recognized the king's fickleness. Just as the previous vizier was hanged, Mordecai never could feel secure in his new position.

Rabbi Henshke points out that after Haman parades Mordecai around Shushan (a tremendous moral victory for Mordecai over his archenemy), Mordecai midrashically returns to his sackcloth and ashes (see Megillah 16a). After Haman is hanged, which should have ended the conflict between Mordecai and Haman, only the king is relieved, because the threat to his own wife is eliminated (7:10). Even after Ahasuerus turns Haman's post over to Mordecai, Esther still must grovel before the king (8:1–6). The Jews remain in mortal fear because of the king's decree, irrespective of Haman.

B. GOD AND AHASUERUS

Most of the main characters of the Megillah have counterparts: Mordecai opposes Haman; Esther is contrasted to Vashti (and later Zeresh). On the surface, only Ahasuerus does not have a match—but behind the scenes, he does: it is God.[25] While God's Name never appears in the Megillah, "the king" appears approximately 200 times. It would appear that Ahasuerus' absolute power is meant to occupy the role normally assigned to God elsewhere in Tanakh.[26]

Everyone must prostrate before the king's vizier—how much more respect is therefore required for the one who appointed him! And one who enters the throne room without the king's permission risks his or her life—reminiscent of the Jewish law of the gravity of entering the Holy of Holies, God's "throne room." Even the lavish parties at the beginning of the Megillah fit this theme. Instead of all the nations of the world coming to the Temple in Jerusalem to serve God (Isa. 2:2–4), all the nations of the world come to the palace in Shushan to see Ahasuerus' wealth and to get drunk.

C. THE MEGILLAH AS SATIRE[27]

Along with Ahasuerus' authority and absolute power comes a person riddled with caprice and foolishness. Ahasuerus rules the world, but his own wife does not listen to him. He makes decisions while drunk and accepts everyone's advice. Rabbi Henshke convincingly argues that the primary point of the Megillah is to display the ostensible power of a human king while satirizing his weaknesses.

The patterns established in chapter 1 continue throughout the Megillah. Haman is promoted simply because the king wants to promote him. This promotion occurs right after Mordecai saves the king's life and is not rewarded at all. Despite the constant emphasis on the king's laws, Ahasuerus readily sells an innocent nation for destruction and drinks to that decision (3:11–15). Later he still has the audacity to exclaim, "mi hu zeh ve-ei zeh hu!" (who is he and where is he, 7:5). Despite the king's indignant proclamation, the answer to his question is that it is the king himself who is the enemy of the Jews![28]

The striking parallel between Haman's decree (3:11–15) and Mordecai's (8:7–14) further illustrates the king's inconstancy: both edicts follow the identical legal procedure and employ virtually the same language, yet one allows the Jews to be exterminated while the other permits the Jews to defend themselves. The decree of self-defense rather than a repeal of Haman's decree of extermination demonstrates that Ahasuerus is subservient to his own decrees to the point where he cannot even retract them himself (1:19; 8:8, cf. Dan. 6:9, 13, 15–16). Finally, the Bigtan and Teresh incident (2:21–23) serves as a reminder that the king's power was precarious and that his downfall could arise suddenly from within his Empire.[29]

D. MORDECAI'S DISOBEDIENCE

We may identify two layers of motivation for Mordecai's not bowing to Haman: Rabbi Yaakov Medan asserts that Mordecai does not bow because he needs to send a strong message to Israel: passivity in the face of evil can cause even more harm in the future.[30]

In light of Rabbi Henshke's analysis, another answer emerges: Mordecai wishes to oppose the king's command (3:2, 4). Once the king promotes Haman (especially right after Mordecai had saved the king's life yet received no reward), Mordecai recognizes the fickle character of the king. Even further, Mordecai perceives that Ahasuerus had "replaced" God as the major visible power in Shushan. Thus Mordecai finds himself battling on two fronts. While superficially he opposes Haman, his defiance actually is also a spiritual rebellion against Ahasuerus. Therefore the text stresses that Mordecai was violating the king's decree by refusing to prostrate before Haman.

The Gemara lends conceptual support for this dual battle of Mordecai. After Mordecai learns of the decree of annihilation, he begins to mourn:

"And Mordecai knew all that had been done" (4:1)—what did he say? Rav says: Haman has triumphed over Ahasuerus. Samuel says: the higher king has triumphed over the lower king (Rashi: a euphemism for "Ahasuerus has triumphed over God"). (Megillah 15a)

According to Rav, Haman was the primary threat to Mordecai and the Jews. Mordecai bewails Haman's manipulation of the weaker Ahasuerus. According to Samuel, Mordecai perceives that Ahasuerus was too powerful. That Ahasuerus

allowed such a wicked individual to rise to power weakened the very manifestation of God in this world. Rav's response addresses the surface plot, the conflict between Haman and Mordecai. Samuel reaches to the struggle behind the scenes—God's conflict with Ahasuerus.

E. AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE WORLD OF AHASUERUS

Instead of stopping at its satire of the king, the Megillah offers an alternative lifestyle to the world of Ahasuerus. As was mentioned earlier, the Megillah consistently portrays the Jews' character in a positive light. In 3:8, Haman contrasts the laws of the Jews with the laws of the king. Thus Jewish laws and practices are an admirable alternative to the decrepit values represented by Ahasuerus' personality and society.

Ahasuerus is a *melekh hafakhpakh*, a whimsical ruler. His counterpart, God, works behind the scenes to influence the Purim story through the process of *ve-nahafokh hu* (9:1).[31] In the world of the *hafakhpakh* everything is arbitrary, self-serving, and immoral. There is no justice: a Haman can be promoted, as can a Mordecai. In contrast, God's world of *ve-nahafokh hu* is purposeful and just.[32] Although the reader is left wondering why the Jews were threatened in the first place, God had justice prevail in the end.

Even in their victory, however, the Jews remain entirely under the power of Ahasuerus. As a result, Purim is crippled as opposed to most other holidays:

[Why do we not say Hallel on Purim?...]Rava said: There is a good reason in that case [of the exodus] because it says [in the Hallel], "O servants of the Lord, give praise"— who are no longer servants of Pharaoh — But can we say in this case, O servants of the Lord, give praise—and not servants of Ahasuerus? We are still servants of Ahasuerus! (Megillah 14a)

CONCLUSION

The showdown between Haman and Mordecai is central to the surface plot, whereas the more cosmic battle that pits God and Mordecai against the world of Ahasuerus permeates the frame of the Megillah from beginning to end.

The reader is left helpless in the face of the question of why the Jews deserved this decree. The Jews appear completely righteous, and it specifically is the heroic integrity of Mordecai which endangers them in the first place. Yet the reader is led to confront God honestly, confident by the end that there is justice in the world, even when it is not always apparent to the human eye. This piercingly honest religiosity has been a source of spiritual inspiration throughout the Jewish world since the writing of the Megillah. The Megillah challenges us and brings us ever closer to God—who is concealed right beneath the surface.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] This chapter is adapted from Hayyim Angel, "Peshat and Derash in Megillat Esther," *Purim Reader* (New York: Tevah, 2009), pp. 59-76; reprinted in Angel, *Creating Space between Peshat and Derash: A Collection of Studies on Tanakh* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2011), pp. 186-201.

[2] See 3:1, 10; 8:3, 5; 9:24.

[3] Mishnah Megillah 3:4 requires that Parashat Zakhor (Deut. 25:17–19) be read the Shabbat preceding Purim. Mishnah 3:6 mandates that the narrative of Amalek's attack on the Israelites in the wilderness (Exod. 17:9–17) be read as the Torah portion of Purim. Josephus (*Antiquities* XI:209) asserts that Haman was an Amalekite.

[4] See, for example, Megillah 13b.

[5] Yaakov Klein, Mikhael Heltzer, and Yitzhak Avishur et al. (*Olam HaTanakh: Megillot* [Tel Aviv: Dodson-Iti, 1996, p. 217]) write that the names Haman, Hamedata, and Agag all have Elamite and Persian roots.

[6] Cf. Amos Hakham's comments to 2:5 in *Da'at Mikra: Esther*, in *Five Megillot* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1973); Aaron Koller, "The Exile of Kish," *JSOT* 37:1 (2012), pp. 45-56.

[7] Hakham suggests that “Agagite” may be a typological name, intended to associate Haman conceptually with “Amalek,” i.e., he acts as one from Amalek (the same way many contemporary Jews refer to anti-Semites as “Amalek” regardless of their genetic origins). Jon D. Levenson (Old Testament Library: Esther [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997], pp. 56–57) adds that Saul lost his kingdom to David as a result of not killing Agag; now Mordecai will reclaim some of Saul’s glory by defeating Haman the Agagite—although the Davidic kingdom stopped ten years after Jeconiah was exiled (2:6).

[8] See discussion in R. Haim David Halevi, *Mekor Hayyim ha-Shalem* (Hebrew), vol. 4, pp. 347–351.

[9] Although the Jews’ mourning and fasting may indicate that they were repenting from sins, the text avoids any reference to what these sins might have been. These religious acts just as easily could indicate a petition to God in times of distress.

[10] See Esther Rabbah 7:12; cf. Megillah 13b; Abba Gorion 26; 2 Panim Aherim 68; Aggadat Esther 30–31; Esther Rabbah and Targum Esther 3:8. Carey Moore (Anchor Bible 7B: Esther [New York: Doubleday, 1971], p. 39) translates *mefuzzar u meforad* as “scattered, yet unassimilated.” Hakham (on 3:8) suggests this possibility as well.

[11] Mordecai is a variant of “Merodakh” (= Marduk). See Jer. 50:2; cf. II Kings 25:27 (~Jer. 52:31); Isa. 39:1. See Megillah 12b; Esther Rabbah 6:3; 2 Panim Aherim 62; Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer 50; 1 and 2 Targum Esther 2:5, for midrashic explanations of Mordecai’s name.

[12] See Megillah 13a (several alternative midrashic etymologies of the name Esther are given there as well). Yaakov Klein, Mikhael Heltzer, and Yitzhak Avishur et al. (*Olam HaTanakh: Megillot* [pp. 238–239]) maintain that the name Esther derives from the Persian word “star” (meaning “star” in English as well). They reject the derivation from Ishtar, since a shin in a Babylonian word (Ishtar) would not be transformed into a samekh in the Hebrew (Esther).

[13] Even if pagan names suggest assimilation, it is possible that their host rulers gave them these names, as with Daniel and his friends (Dan. 1:7). Cf. Megillah 13a: “The nations of the world called Esther this after Ishtar.” At any rate, it is clear that Esther needed to conceal her Jewish identity, so her using the name Hadassah would have been unreasonable.

[14] Cf. Esther Rabbah 2:11; Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer 48. Other midrashim look to other eras for theological causes of the Purim decree. Esther Rabbah 1:10 turns to the Jews’ violation of Shabbat in the time of Nehemiah. Esther Rabbah 7:25 considers the threat in the Purim story retribution for the brothers’ sale of Joseph. Esther Rabbah 8:1 blames Jacob’s deception of Isaac.

[15] See midrashim cited in Torah Shelemah I:52, 60, 61.

[16] Song of Songs Rabbah 7:8 concludes that even if only a few Jews participated in the party, all of Israel still could be held responsible because of the principle of *arevut*, corporate national responsibility.

[17] See, e.g., Esther Rabbah 6:2.

[18] For further discussion of the Septuagint additions, see Carey Moore, Anchor Bible 44: Daniel, Esther and Jeremiah: The Additions (New York: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 3-16; 153-262.

[19] See Gen. 23:7; 27:29; 33:3; 42:6; I Sam. 24:8; II Sam. 14:4; I Kings 1:23. Amos Hakham notes that the terms *keri’ah* and *hishtahavayah* (in Est. 3:2, 5) are collocated exclusively in regard to God, or to pagan deities.

[20] Mordecai is a hero, but it is less evident whether his actions always should be considered exemplary (majority opinion), or whether he should be considered a hero for reacting properly to a problem that he had created in the first place. See Rava’s opinion in Megillah 12b–13a; Panim Aherim 2:3. One also could argue that Mordecai was willing to assume personal risk but did not anticipate a decree of genocide against his people.

[21] See also Esther Rabbah 7:5; Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer 50; Abba Gorion 22; Panim Aherim 46; Esther Rabbah 2:5, 3:1–2; Targum 3:2; Josephus, Antiquities, XI, 6.5 and 8; Ibn Ezra; Tosafot Sanhedrin 61b, s.v. Rava.

[22] Megillah 10b, 19a; Esther Rabbah 7:8. Cf. Sanhedrin 61b, with Tosafot ad loc., s.v. Rava.

[23] R. Yitzhak Arama was perhaps the first to argue that the reasoning of idolatry is derekh ha-derash. See Barry Dov Walfish, *Esther in Medieval Garb: Jewish Interpretation of the Book of Esther in the Middle Ages* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), p. 69. The closest implicit reference to pagan practices in the text is Haman's lottery.

[24] R. David Henshke, "Megillat Esther: Literary Disguise" (Hebrew), in *Hadassah Hi Esther* (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 1999), pp. 93–106.

[25] Cf. Esther Rabbah 3:10: "Everywhere in the Megillah where it says, 'King Ahasuerus,' the text refers to Ahasuerus; every instance of 'the king' has a dual holy-secular meaning" (i.e., it refers both to God and to Ahasuerus).

[26] Earlier commentators also address the issue of why God's Name is not mentioned in the Megillah. Ibn Ezra opines that the Megillah would be translated for distribution throughout the Persian Empire; since pagan translators may substitute the name of a pagan deity for God's Name, the author of the Megillah deliberately avoided referring to God. Rama (Yoreh De'ah 276) suggests that there was doubt whether the Megillah would be canonized (cf. Megillah 7a); therefore, they omitted God's Name anticipating the possibility of rejection, which would lead to the mistreatment of the scrolls. For a more complete survey of medieval responses to this issue, see Barry Dov Walfish, *Esther in Medieval Garb*, pp. 76–79.

[27] For a thorough analysis of the use of irony in the Megillah, see Moshe D. Simon, "Many Thoughts in the Heart of Man...: Irony and Theology in the Book of Esther," *Tradition* 31:4 (Summer 1997), pp. 5–27.

[28] Megillah 16a: "And Esther said, 'the adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman' (7:6)—R. Eliezer says: this teaches that Esther began to face Ahasuerus, and an angel came and forced her hand to point to Haman."

One should not overlook Esther's remark to the king (7:4): were she and her people to be sold into slavery, she wouldn't have protested, indicating that the king and his interests are too important to trouble for anything short of genocide! Cf. 8:1–4, where Ahasuerus turns Haman's wealth over to Mordecai and Esther but does nothing to address his diabolical decree. The king's priorities are depicted as incredibly perverse in these episodes. Compare Megillah 11a: "'He was Ahasuerus' (1:1)—he was wicked from beginning until his end." This Gemara penetrates beneath the king's ostensible benevolence toward the Jews at the end of the Megillah, remarking that he was no better than before.

[29] Although Bigtan and Teresh failed in their efforts, King Xerxes—who often is understood by scholars to be Ahasuerus—was assassinated by other court officials within ten years of the Purim story (465). See Moore (*Esther*), p. 32. For analysis of the biblical and extra-biblical evidence to identify Ahasuerus with Xerxes and Esther with his wife Amestris, see Mitchell First, "Achashverosh and Esther: Their Identities Unmasked," in ??????.

[30] R. Yaakov Medan, "Mordecai Would Not Kneel or Bow Low—Why?" (Hebrew), in *Hadassah Hi Esther*, pp. 151–170.

[31] R. Yonatan Grossman demonstrates how the entire Megillah is structured chiastically around the principle of *ve-nahafokh hu* (Yeshivat Har Etzion, Virtual Bet Midrash 2007 [<http://vbm-torah.org/archive/ester/01ester.htm>]).

[32] See R. Avraham Walfish, "An Ordinance of Equity and Honesty" (Hebrew), in *Hadassah Hi Esther*, pp. 107–140.

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