

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 more than 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.

Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours, has been confirmed as one of approximately 240 initial hostages to Hamas in Gaza. The Wall St. Journal featured Hersh and his family in a front page article on October 16. Chabad, OU, and many synagogues recommend psalms (Tehillim) to recite daily for the safety of our people. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the help of Hashem.

Two years ago, as we approached the end of Sefer Shemot, Russia attacked Ukraine, and our most immediate focus was on the impact of the war on the many Jews caught up in the fighting. At that time, 200 Chabad families were serving an estimated 350,000 Jewish families in Ukraine, as well as assisting numerous non-Jewish victims in the area. While help from the United States helped Ukraine enormously early in the fighting, this support has been lagging more recently.

Meanwhile, for the past five plus months, Israel has been coping with Hamas and the results of a vicious invasion, attack, and kidnapping of our people. While the United States early supported Israel strongly, the U.S. government has turned increasingly away from Israel and now impedes Israel's goal of removing the ability of Hamas and Gaza to repeat this attack. Other anti-Semitic attacks, especially from Iran and Lebanon, threaten Israel every day, and anti-Semitic attacks against our people have exploded in number and violence.

As we face challenges both within and outside the Jewish community, in Israel and in the Diaspora, Pekudei's message guides us in many ways. Rabbi Yehoshua Singer observes that honesty and integrity are Moshe's critical values in enabling B'Nai Yisrael to construct the Mishkan, God's special place within our midst. Rabbanit Yaffah Arnoff observes that the builders of the Mishkan bring the various components to Moshe but are unable to assemble them into the Mishkan. God sends His Divine spirit to Moshe, and the Mishkan assembles itself in his presence. Rabbanit Arnoff observes that success in difficult tasks, such as the war with Hamas and anti-Semitism in the world, requires that we maintain a deep sense of the higher purpose of what we are doing. We must earn Hashem's bracha to bring His glory to reside within our midst. Rabbi Marc Angel adds that we must strengthen ourselves, and then God will give us additional strength – the fortitude to fulfill our goals.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, observes that the Torah's description of the Mishkan process parallels the story of creation. God creates our world by making order out of chaos. Almost immediately, humans descend into chaos, and before long, God decides to undo creation and start over with Noach. Rabbi Sacks observes that Moshe descends from Har Sinai and finds that many of the people have descended into chaos. The Mishkan is a tikkun for chaos – precise instructions for creating the Mishkan to create a place of order for Hashem's presence. The Mishkan is a tikkun for the

chaos of Sefer Bereishis as well as for Egel Zahav. If we want God in our midst, we must honor Hashem's order in both space and time (Shabbat and Yom Tov).

Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon, z"l, observes that the parsha opens by noting 100 silver talents for the bases of the Mishkan (38:25). This silver corresponds to the 100 brachot that a Jew is to recite each day. The building of the Mishkan notes "as Hashem commanded Moshe" 18 times – corresponding to the 18 brachot of the Amidah. Add the two, and we have 113 – the number of words at the end of each bracha of the Amidah. The number 113 also corresponds to the gematria of "lev" (heart), a word which appears 113 times in the Torah. The Mishkan reminds us that we must keep God's commandments in our hearts every day.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander notes a Midrash that the initial inventory of the donations for the Mishkan comes up with 1775 shekels more donated than the cost of the items used for the Mishkan. God then directs Moshe to look up. He notices that there are hooks ("vavim") not included in the costs. When adding the costs of the silver vavim, the total costs come to exactly the amount of the donations. "Vav" is also the symbol for "six" – the day when God creates humans. "Vivim" also means "connectors" and "bridge builders," so the Torah is giving us a message that the ideal for humans is to connect the physical and spiritual aspects of life and to build bridges in the world. Rabbi Brander concludes that an important mission for us is to build bridges among segments of Jewish society both in Israel and across the world. (Rabbi Brander has been expressing his wish that Israelis come together and avoid the many political and religious disputes that have been pulling apart Israelis and Jews in the Diaspora.)

Is there anything more boring than reading detailed instructions for building a structure – and then reading exactly how the builders follow the instructions? A person who has this reaction to reading the discussion in the Torah for four of the past five weeks is missing the most important lessons. The Torah does not include senseless detail and duplication. The material on the Mishkan has many layers of insights, and the lessons are both important and exciting. The Devrei Torah below illustrate many of these insights and help us understand more of the treasures of the Torah. May we take to heart the lessons of Pekudei and remove the differences that have been dividing us from fellow Jews as well as from others friends in the world.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, took an active role in political protests, such as leading a protest for Soviet Jews by the Russian embassy in the 1980s and working actively for Israel. He also devoted a significant amount of his career as a chaplain in the U.S. Navy. He understood and taught the lessons of the Mishkan, working to come close to Hashem and to work for more unity among various Jewish groups. May we teach these lessons to our children and grandchildren.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (wounded in battle in Gaza), Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and

Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Pekudei, Purim: The Game is Over

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5767 (2007)

And when Haman saw that Mordechai did not bow and prostrate to him he became filled with anger. It was despicable in his eyes to send his hand against Mordechai alone, because they told him the nationality of Mordechai and therefore he sought to destroy all the Jews that were in the entire kingdom of Achashveiros, the nation of Mordechai. (Esther 3:5-6)

And Haman told them about his wealth, and his honor, and his abundance of children, and that the king had elevated him above all the other princes and servants of the king. Haman said, "Esther the Queen had invited none other than I to be at a party with the king, and also tomorrow I am summoned to her with the king, and all this is worthless to me every time I see Mordechai the Jew sitting in the gate. (Esther 6:11-13)

Man alive! What is his problem? Is it just a bruised and/or inflated ego? Why does he jump from hating Mordechai to attacking all Jews? How could all of his wealth and status be considered worthless because one individual who refused to show obeisance? Was so drunk with power that he could not tolerate a single dissenting opinion? Is there some other hidden reason at play that we have yet to discover?

The verse tells us in this week's portion, Pekudei, "*And Moshe saw all the work and they did it, as HASHEM commanded so they did and Moshe blessed them.*" (Shemos 39:43) In which way did Moshe bless them? Rashi writes, "*He said to them, "It should be that the Divine Presence should rest on the work of your hands!"*" What's so great about that blessing?

Years back I would drive out on a regular basis with an Israeli buddy who was in charge of organizing classes. Yossi had a peculiarity related to buying gas. Many times we traveled with the tank below "E," just so we could fill up later in New Jersey where the prices are reliably less.

One of those fateful evenings heading home we crossed the George Washington Bridge into New Jersey, just in time, and at the place where the sign read "no U turn" he made a U turn and we pulled up to the pump. In New Jersey there is no self-service and therefore at that early hour in the morning and into the frigid weather strode a man, let us say, more acclimated to warmer weather, wearing his wool cap and gloves.

To employ a human touch I suggested to Yossi, "I'm gonna make his day!" Yossi looked at me in horror. "Don't give'm a tip, we came here to save money!" I assured him I had another plan and that was just to engage him in some meaningful conversation. I stepped out of the car with two Snapple bottles and asked him as he stood by the pump, "Do you recycle these or do they go into this garbage can?" With a shiver in his voice he answered, "They all go in the same place." I nodded in agreement and began, "We're all coming from the same place and going to the same place." He looked at me with an understanding eye and so I continued, "We all come from and go back to G-d. If you understand that you understand everything and if you don't understand that then you don't understand anything." He seemed to understand well so I went on. "If you have that you have everything even if you have nothing else but if you don't have that then even if you have everything else you have nothing." He nodded. We paid for the gas and sped into the night but I think we both had a treat in the brief exchange.

The greatest blessing Moshe could offer is that G-d should settle in the midst of your work. If you have that you have everything. If not, all just may be a bunch of nothing. When confronting Mordechai the Jew, Haman was reminded of and tortured by the notion that, like a-kid counting Monopoly money, ultimately his piles of currency and real estate holdings are only valuable until the game is over.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5768-pekudei/>

Parshat Pekudei: Hooks and Connections

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone © 5784 (2024)

When the building of the Mishkan is completed, Moshe performs a final accounting of the funds collected and how they were used. Our parsha opens with a review of the numbers: how much gold was used, how much silver and how much copper. In the process of this review, the Torah notes a minor expense directed towards the fashioning of silver hooks, which would be used to hold up the tapestries making up the walls of the Mishkan (Shemot 38:28).

At face value, this expenditure report doesn't seem to offer us much by way of spiritual teaching. After all, the hooks were merely a technical necessity, not a means for connecting the people to God. But the Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 51:6) sees between the lines a crucial teaching moment for Moshe and the Jewish people. While each and every step of the Mishkan's construction was communicated to Moshe from God, as highlighted by the repeated reminder throughout our Parsha that all steps were undertaken *"as God commanded Moshe,"* the budget review was Moshe's independent undertaking. Concerned that some members of the Jewish people would fear he had skimmed a few silver talents off the top, Moshe made a point of not inaugurating the Mishkan until everyone was assured that no donations had been misdirected or mishandled. Along the way, though, Moshe realized that the numbers don't add up!

Upon running the numbers, he discovered 1,775 Shekel that had not been accounted for – a minor rounding error for all that was collected, but one that nonetheless he felt may cost him his reputation as the faithful leader of the Jewish people. It was in that moment that God directed Moshe's attention upwards, whereupon he noticed the silver hooks, hiding behind the tapestries they were holding up. That was where the rest of the silver had been used, and the matter was settled. The Jewish people celebrated the completion of the Mishkan joyously, confident that Moshe had been faithful in his oversight of the project.

It is no accident that the component of the Mishkan that allowed for a successful accounting were the hooks, known in Hebrew as 'vavim.' The word 'vav' refers not only to hooks, which held together fabrics in the Tabernacle courtyard, but also to the root of the word, the letter 'vav.' The literal meaning of 'vav' in Hebrew is 'and,' signifying connection and partnership. To this day, many Sifrei Torah are written in accordance with a kabbalistic tradition called *"vavei ha'amudim,"* *'the vavs/hooks of the pillars,'* such that every column of the Torah scroll begins with the letter Vav. But the origin of this tradition, cited by Rema as a custom (YD 273:6), is not entirely clear.

Perhaps as the Torah is to be our connection between the mundane and the ethereal, it seems fitting that each column of the Torah would begin with the letter Vav, representing this ideal. For without the mundane there is no need for the ethereal, and without the ethereal the mundane is purposeless. The 'vavs,' hanging atop the Mishkan and atop the Torah scroll, hold up our entire Weltanschauung. Torah is founded upon connection and trust between the realms of the spiritual and physical.

We, as humans, are born on Yom Vav, the sixth day of creation. We have the ability and opportunity to serve as 'vavim,' as connectors and bridge builders. With strife emerging once again between sectors of the population of Israel, and paradoxically with growing opportunities to connect Jewish communities within and beyond the State of Israel around common cause, purpose and challenge, now is the time for vavim – connections. We must live up to the mission of being born on Yom Vav, of Moshe's meticulous leadership, building bridges through the development of mutual trust and partnership. Perhaps we will be worthy of making our national homeland, along with the entire world, into a Mishkan, a peaceful dwelling place for us and the Divine presence.

(I wish to thank Rabbi Dr. Jacob J Schacter for sharing with me several years ago the kernel of the idea presented.)

Rabbi Brander dedicates his Dvar Torah this week for a full and speedy recovery of Ari Spitz (Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah), who was wounded in battle in Gaza.

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Pekudei --The Rosh Yeshiva Responds:
Halakhic Status of Bread Made with Both Wheat and Almond Flour
by Rabbi Dov Linzer
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

He set upon it an arrangement of bread before Hashem as Hashem had commanded Moses
(Shemot 40:23)

QUESTION - Washington, DC

A bread made with mostly rice flour but some wheat flour would be HaMotzi if you could taste the wheat. What about if instead it were made with almond flour? Would the same taste rule apply or would you need *rov*?

ANSWER

A question relevant to those with gluten intolerance as well. *Mishnah Challah* 3:7 teaches that if there is a mixture of wheat and rice, it is considered bread for HaMotzi and matzah if there is a wheat taste present.

Ramban, on page 31a of his *Hilkhot Challah* on that mishnah writes that this rule is unique to the combination of wheat and rice. It is a principle called גורין – the wheat “drags” the rice. The *Mishnah Torah* in *Hilkhot Bikkurim* 6:11 and *Hilkhot Chameiz uMatzah* 6:5, mentions only a wheat and rice combination, as does *Shulchan Arukh* YD 324:9 and OC 453:2. However, *Shakh* YD 324:17 states that it seems that the *Tur* – who uses the word גען and not מיען – disagrees with the *Shulchan Arukh* and would apply it to all 5 types of grain (but presumably only with rice).

A separate debate addresses whether the dough needs to contain the minimum shiur of one of the five grains – a *kezayit* for HaMotzi and 43 eggs for challah. Ramban states that as long as the bread dough contains the minimum shiur the ratio of wheat to rice can be extremely small. *Ra'avad*, in the two Rambams above, says that you need a shiur of the wheat flour in a ratio of 1:8 or 1:9 – so you can eat the minimum amount of wheat flour in the requisite time.

When we get to *Shulchan Arukh* we find:

1. Only wheat and rice are mentioned (as stated above) – other grains and flours are presumably no good.
2. No mention of shiur – presumably there is no minimum proportion of wheat flour, it is considered as bread, as long as the wheat can be tasted.

Mishnah Berurah 453:14 follows the peshat of the above – it only works with wheat and rice and you do not need a particular proportion. He writes that you fulfill the mitzvah with one *kezayit* of such bread. He also adds that if it is a mixture of other types of grain – say barley, such that the barley is 1:8/1:9 of the rice, then you fulfill the mitzvah with a *kezayit* of the bread.

My pesak is that wheat and rice works even if the wheat is a tiny amount, and other grains work if the oats, barley, etc. is 1:8 or 1:9. You fulfill the obligation even with 1 kezayit of such bread.

Thus, a person who is gluten intolerant can have matzah made of just a small amount of wheat flour combined with rice flour)yes – this overrides kitniyot(. I think the ratio has to be more than 1:60, though to make sure it is tasted, you would probably have to do a taste test, or use the 1:8 or 1:9 ratio. If you can't use wheat flour, barley flour plus rice)or almond(flour in a 1:9 ratio, is fine. The same would be true for HaMotzi.

The answer to the original question is yes, this does apply to almond flour, if there is 1:8 or 1:9 ration of wheat flour to the almond flour.

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/03/ryrpekuidei/>

Consciousness for Crafting a Sacred Space

By Rabbanit Yaffah Aronoff *

The close of the Book of Exodus is breathtaking. *“The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of God filled the Mishkan (Tabernacle). Moshe could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud rested upon it and the glory of God filled the Tabernacle”*)Ex. 40:34-35(.

Something Bnei Yisrael have built together has become a space worthy of the Divine Presence. What was it about Bnei Yisrael at that moment in history that made them equal to such an invaluable gift?

A midrash from this week's parsha offers us a clue. On the verse, *“They brought the Mishkan to Moshe...”*)39:33(Shemot, Raba writes:

They had so many wise people there, and yet they had to go to Moshe and were unable to assemble it by themselves... What did they do? They all took their craftwork to Moshe and said, “Here are the beams and here are the bolts.” When Moshe saw them, the Holy Spirit immediately dwelled on him, and he assembled the Mishkan. And do not say that Moshe assembled it. Rather, miracles occurred and the Mishkan erected itself, as it says)Ex.40:17(, “The Mishkan was set up.”)Shemot Raba 52:4(

The midrash opens with a predicament, to which anyone who has struggled with Ikea furniture can relate. Here are a group of intelligent artisans who have handcrafted the component parts of the Mishkan, expecting that the final stage of connecting the pieces would be the easy part. Yet, just the opposite is the case. No matter what they try, nothing works.

How do they react to this unforeseen difficulty? They bring the pieces they have crafted to Moshe, and, according to the midrash, use simple words to allude to their problem: *“Here are the beams; here are the bolts.”* After giving so much of themselves to this project and after fruitless attempts to reach completion on their own, these artisans are able to speak to Moshe from a place of detachment. The beams are not their beams, nor are the bolts their bolts. They are simply the beams and bolts.

Years ago, a gifted carpenter named Shmuel built some bookcases for our living room. When he finished his work he told us with a smile that the bookcases were really his and that we were merely using them and that if ever we had any trouble we should call him. I felt reassured knowing that Shmuel was proud of his work and did not see his creations as just another job.

Shmuel's approach is obviously ideal for everyday life. But Hashem asks something else of us when it comes to creating a sacred space. In such an endeavor, there is no room for ego. Instead we are asked to give of ourselves without thinking of ourselves, to contribute to a sacred, national project free of any expectation of personal recognition or aggrandizement. What qualified the artisans of the Mishkan for the job was not only their manual skills but, more importantly, their consciousness of these values.

Perhaps as a nod to the artisans' intense humility, the Torah seemingly prematurely describes the component parts of the Mishkan brought to Moshe as the Mishkan itself:

They brought the Mishkan to Moshe, the tent and all its furnishings, its clasps, its beams, its bolts, its pillars and sockets)Ex. 39:33(

The artisans did not bring the Mishkan to Moshe. Rather, they brought him the bits and pieces that they hoped would comprise the Mishkan. I would like to say that in this verse, Hashem has granted each beam, clasp, etc the status of Mishkan because of the selflessness and sense of higher purpose with which the artisans presented them to Moshe.

Moshe, whose outstanding attribute is humility, immediately grasps the magnitude of the artisans' act of self-effacement. And in that moment, he is graced by the Holy Spirit and succeeds in assembling the Mishkan.

According to the Midrash's conclusion, Moshe only appeared to assemble the Mishkan. But, in fact, it arose on its own. And that is only fitting. No one person can assemble what was to become the spiritual focal point of the nation.

In this difficult time of war, we have been privileged to see so many acts of selflessness and intuitive understanding that success can come only from a deep sense of a higher purpose that unites us all. May we, just like Bnei Yisrael, be worthy of the dwelling of the glory of God among us.]emphasis added[

* Torah teacher at large, and community leader in Jerusalem's Boyar Congregation. Semikha from the De'ah Kollel of Ohr Torah Stone.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/03/pekudei5784/>

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-donai.*" 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.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its winter fund raising period. Thank you.

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

Jewish Strength: Defying the Anti-Semites

By David Suissa *

It's hard to recall a time in recent decades when we've seen more bad news for Jews. The massacre of Oct. 7; the alarming rise in antisemitism, especially on college campuses; the framing of Jews and Israel as white oppressors and colonialists; a protest movement that defends terrorists; biased media and education, etc. – everywhere we turn, we seem to find another threat.

In all this bad news, one piece of good news can easily get lost: we've never had more power to fight back.

Indeed, one can argue that the most significant Jewish development of the past 100 years is the transformation of Jews from a physically vulnerable people that went to its slaughter to a powerful people able to defend itself.

Given the rise in Jew hatred, it may sound odd to mention Jewish strength. But both thoughts can be true at once: We have a greater need to defend ourselves as well as a greater power to do so.

Israel's 75-year history is the epitome of that idea. Surrounded by antisemitic animosity and constant threats to its survival, the Jewish state was forced to become stronger and stronger. With a greater need to defend itself came a greater power to do so. The massacre of Oct. 7 only reinforced that idea.

Now compare modern Israel to the Jews of Europe who trembled with fear 85 years ago as Jew haters prepared to take them to their deaths, all six million of them. Those Jews also had an enormous need to defend themselves – but zero power to do so.

If there's such a thing as an afterlife, I can imagine six million Jewish souls in heaven right now smiling at the feistiness of their descendants.

Feisty we are.

Whether in Israel or in the Diaspora, the Jews of 2024 are anything but the Jews of Auschwitz. We are no longer weak. We are no longer invisible. We are no longer silent.

Everywhere there are threats, we see assertive Jews defending their people, whether through institutional gatherings, civic activism, social media, legal initiatives, street rallies, philanthropic involvement, academic activism, Super Bowl commercials, even flashy murals of Israeli hostages to greet attendees at the Academy Awards.

The Jews of 2024 make noise. We should never underestimate or under appreciate the power and the freedom to make that noise.

Pick any attack on Jews and you're bound to hear Jewish noise. The United Nations may be shamelessly biased against Israel, but that didn't stop Foreign Minister Israel Katz from addressing the UN Security Council yesterday, asking its 15 members to declare Hamas a terrorist organization and to pressure the group to release all hostages.

It was nasty of Oscar-winning filmmaker Jonathan Glazer to use his acceptance speech to hijack the Holocaust and bash Israel, but the backlash has been as loud as an Iron Dome rocket. Among the reactions was a letter from the Holocaust Survivors Foundation telling Glazer it was "disgraceful for you to presume to speak for the six million Jews, including one and a half million children, who were murdered solely because of their Jewish identity. You should be ashamed of yourself for using Auschwitz to criticize Israel."

This week, Hebrew University suspended a law faculty lecturer, Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, due to her involvement in a petition that accuses Israel of committing genocide in Gaza.

Throughout our post-biblical history, Jewish strength came from our tradition, our wisdom and our values. Today, our strength also comes from our ability to defend ourselves.

Jew haters may have the right to spew their hate, but Jews have the right to take them on, and we are using it.

The Anti-Defamation League has been chronicling that hate for years, while also taking action. Last week it held its annual Never is Now conference that attracted 4,000 attendees and featured speakers like Israeli President Isaac Herzog; State Department antisemitism envoy Deborah Lipstadt; Rabbi David Wolpe; author Dara Horn; philanthropist-activist Marc Rowan; and Daniel Lifshitz, an advocate for the hostages whose grandfather, Oded, is still in captivity.

"Antisemitism is not just a threat to Jews but to democracy," said Lipstadt.

"We are not OK," ADL head Jonathan Greenblatt said in his "State of Hate" address. "The world of Oct. 8 is one in which the perpetrators of the worst antisemitic massacre since the Holocaust are celebrated as heroes – not just in Ramallah or Beirut, but in London and New York and on campuses, including Harvard and Columbia."

We are not OK, but we are blessed that we can do something about it.

Even if Israel may face opposition in some parts of our government, let's never forget that the most powerful parliament in the world, the U.S. Congress, is strongly supportive of Israel, and that American political leaders across the board have joined the fight against antisemitism.

So yes, the bad news is that there's a greater need to defend ourselves, but the good news is that all around us are signs of our ability to do just that. We need not apologize for our influence and our activism to protect Jewish rights. That activism also includes the freedom to dissent. Jews are not a monolithic voice, which is part of our strength.

Our strength also comes from our multiple and diverse contributions to America, which date to the very beginning of our American journey. As Lipstadt said, our fight is America's fight. As grateful beneficiaries of the American Dream, we are ideally suited to bring it back to life.

I saw this anonymous note in Reddit recently that moved me:

"We are not weak, we are Jews. We are the ones who wrestled with angels. We are the ones who dragged Nazis out of South America to stand trial in the homeland. We are the ones who rescued more than 100 hostages in Entebbe in the pitch black of night. We are the ones who rose from near obliteration to absolute shining examples of productive citizens. We will continue to show the world how we alchemize fear and trembling into courage and success."

Throughout our post-biblical history, Jewish strength came from our tradition, our wisdom and our values. Today, our strength also comes from our ability to defend ourselves, as fundamental a value as there ever was one. We may be under attack from haters, but unlike our ancestors, now we can fight back.

* Editor, *Jewish Journal* (Los Angeles).

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3206>

Parshas Pekudei -- Extra, Extra, Read All About It!

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

In addition to the Mishkan/Sanctuary which the Jews were told to build in the desert, the Medrash tells us that there was a second Sanctuary, a Sanctuary of Testimony. What exactly was the function of this second Sanctuary?

When Moshe announced the mitzvah to build the Mishkan, the people were excited and donated generously. Despite the fact that an enormous amount of wealth and talent was required, the Jews donated so much that the Torah records, "And there was extra." The Medrash says that with that extra, the second Sanctuary was built.

It is probable that this second Sanctuary was not a functional edifice. It probably did not have doorways that you could walk through, or altars that could be used. It was strictly for show. But it was a Sanctuary of Testimony – Testimony that "You can do it." This second Sanctuary was testimony that despite the enormity of the task, we succeeded... and even had extra.

The message of this second Sanctuary is a meaningful one. Sometimes when we do good, we simply move on. The Torah teaches us to first celebrate and commemorate the success, and only then should we move on. This way, if at a later date you need to be inspired, you have left yourself something to admire and remind yourself that you can do it.

I recall at one point in my youth I completed a significant section of Halacha study. My Rebbe instructed me that I should make a siyum, a festive celebration. I objected. I said, "But I didn't complete it with all the commentaries." He said, "No matter. Make the celebration on what you did do, and one day you will finish it with the commentaries."

Some people understand and implement this positive feedback in a most effective way.

I once had the privilege of spending time with a very devout Jew who ran an interest free loan fund. As a loan was paid he would mark the contract "Paid" and he would then slide it into his drawer. At the end of the day, I watched as he carefully ripped off the top and bottom of each "paid" contract, thus removing the parts that contained the borrower's printed name and the signature. The parts that he removed he would shred and discard. But the contract itself he would save.

He explained, "I don't need to remember who borrowed money. That information I can discard. But the fact that I did lend money is something I would like to remember. The fact that we loaned \$1,000, \$5,000, or \$10,000 to people in need is something that will inspire me to continue."

It is, indeed, worthwhile for people to save something of their "to do" list, even after the task is completed. So many people just move on after an accomplishment. But if, for example, you have a file in which you keep the parking stub from every time you visited someone in the hospital, then you have something to go back to when you need to be inspired.

Interestingly, it is often the "extra" that produces the most inspirational aspect of a life experience. It is the extra donations to the Sanctuary that were saved to inspire, and the paid loan documents and parking stubs which can be a force of positive reinforcement to us all.

Contrast that with newspapers that we all attach so much importance to. At first they are deemed sacred. But after a day or two they can truly be discarded. As one news commentator lamented, "There is nothing as awful as being current. Today you are important, but tomorrow your words can be found on the bottom of a bird cage."

The Mishkan of Testimony reminds us that the true test of a remarkable event is if you can take its "extra" and find it meaningful to save. If so, the event had eternal value. Save it -- read all about it -- because when you do you will be inspired to continue in the ways of goodness.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 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.**

[Note: Because I must post early this week, Rabbi Rhine's Dvar Torah is not yet ready. I am sending one from his archives.]

<https://www.teach613.org/parshas-pekudei-extra-extra-read-all-about-it/>

Vayakhel-Pekudei -- Sometimes You Should Sweat the Small Stuff

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

The experience surrounding the construction of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle in the desert, was perhaps one of the greatest moments in our nation's history. A newly freed slave nation came together to construct a magnificent structure, filled with finely crafted tools and vessels, with a purity of heart and soul that made it worthy of G-d's Presence. Perhaps this commitment and enthusiasm was most clearly expressed in the donations towards the project. Everyone came forth immediately and donated whatever they had that could be used in the construction. By the third day they already had more materials than they were able to use.

Rabbeinu Bechaye teaches us that the devotion and dedication expressed in the construction of the Mishkan, also applied to the handling of finances and donations:

"And the verse revealed to us the elevated level of the wise ones doing the work in their great trustworthiness -- that they told this to Moshe)that they had more donations than they needed(and they were busy and engaged with their work and they left their work to tell Moshe. For so the language shows, 'Each man from his work that they were doing', and this is the language, 'and they said to Moshe saying' time after time. Also the elevated status of Moshe who reigned over them, that he did not choose their silver and gold and therefore it writes, 'and Moshe commanded and they spread the message in the camp' to prevent the matter)that they shouldn't donate more(.

Rabbeinu Bechaye Shemos 36:5

The nation understood that dedication to G-d must be expressed in our integrity and character, as well as in our devotion to G-d. They acted with integrity and avoided any possible theft or misuse of funding.

Yet, if we read Rabbeinu Bechaye's words, we find two difficult phrases. First, he tells us that the trustworthiness of the craftsmen was seen in the fact that they told Moshe about the extra donations in the middle of their work. Why was it necessary for them to interrupt their work? Would it not have been just as honest had they finished their task before coming and telling Moshe. Especially considering that he says they were coming to Moshe *"time after time."* Certainly once they had told him that they had extra materials, they could have added any further excess to the same pile. Why did they need to again tell Moshe immediately?

Second, he says that Moshe's integrity was expressed by the fact that he didn't *"choose their silver and gold."* Moshe was involved and engaged in leading the nation, in addition to the current national project of building the Mishkan. The workers who were receiving the donations and were disrupting their work to keep him informed surely must have told the people bringing the donations, as well. If Moshe hadn't devoted time and resources to actively spreading the word, would anyone think Moshe was choosing their gold and silver?

Perhaps these two phrases are the true greatness which Rabbeinu Bechaye is highlighting. Moshe certainly had many aspects of communal life he could have engaged with. At the top of his list was stopping the donations. For Moshe it was unacceptable to allow more donations, no matter how busy he was. Integrity and honesty come before all else. He couldn't allow himself to choose to wait and to allow people to donate more.

This same sense of priority is what Rabbeinu Bechaye is highlighting in the craftsmen. They were busy and engaged with new and difficult crafts, which due to their spiritual nature, required specific intent, in addition to careful attention to detail. They could easily have waited to tell Moshe that they had extra materials. However, financial integrity with other's finances was too important to them. It simply couldn't wait.

We are often taught that we shouldn't sweat the small stuff. Just focus on the important tasks. The Torah is teaching us that when an issue is important to us, even small aspects should not be overlooked. Even when engaged in lofty, spiritual pursuits, every nuance of honesty and integrity should be cherished and valued.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Pekudei

by Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

]Rabbi Hefter did not send a new Dvar Torah for Pekudei. Watch this space for further insights from Rabbi Hefter in future weeks.[

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Vayakhel Pekudei -- Who is in the Details?

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia * © 2024

We are taught to believe that the text of the Torah is extremely economic and succinct, and that Torah and redundancy are mutually exclusive. We therefore cannot help but wonder why the Torah is so verbose when describing the construction of the Tabernacle. To answer this question, I think we should consider the phenomenon of scrupulosity, or religious OCD.

R. Dr. Avraham Twersky writes in his introduction to *Religious Compulsions and Fears, a Guide to Treatment*, by Dr. Avigdor Bonchek:

...when a person becomes overly obsessed, to the point that he becomes neurotic and is unable to function properly, it may be a sign of OCD...

Dr. Bonchek himself speaks of the following elements in religious OCD: washing and cleaning, checking, repeating, ordering, and hoarding. He says that a compulsive person might receive a ruling from an authoritative rabbi yet be unable or unwilling to abide by it. This person, says Dr. Bonchek, "is not free enough, not flexible enough."

What if you discover Judaism but are not fully familiar with Halakha? In her fascinating memoir, *Devil in the Details*, Jennifer Traig opens for us a window into that world)p. 31(:

I liked scrupulosity because it got right to the point. It's the purest form of OCD. In a sense, all OCD is religious, of course; it's a disease of ceremony and ritual... OCD certainly looks like religious practice: we perform our compulsions with exacting devotion, we repeat incantations, and you know what cleanliness is next to. But with scrupulosity, the rituals truly are rituals, the incantations are prayers. The stakes, more-over, are infinitely higher. With other forms of OCD, you fear that if you don't perform your compulsions, your father might get sick; with scrupulosity, you fear you'll cause a global spiritual Armageddon, or at the very least, damn yourself to hell for all eternity.

Traig drove her family to the brink of insanity because her knowledge of Judaism was limited, and she blurred the line between Jewish Law and her own scrupulosity)that was before Rabbi Google was ordained.(Here is, for example, her guide to handwashing:

First, you need to get some water going.

- ✓ Next, choose your poison. What kind of soap is for you?
- ✓ Rub your hands together vigorously and scrub, scrub, scrub.
- ✓ I don't know if water is clean. What if water isn't clean? What if water just makes you dirtier?
- ✓ You'll wash and wash and wash, but you'll never be safe.
- ✓ Okay, try not to think about it. Let's just say water is clean and move on.
- ✓ But what if it's not clean?
- ✓ We're moving on. The next part is tricky. Your hands are clean – but they're wet. How to get them dry without getting them dirty again? The air dry technique is best. If you touch something, or if for some reason you think you maybe touched something, go back to Step 1. Yes, let's go back to Step 1 just to be safe.

Compare this guide with the way some of my friends in Yeshivah would wash their hands for bread, and consider that for them eating was torture because of all the rituals performed before, during, and after eating:

Find the right vessel.

1. Fill it until it overflows.
2. Dry the handles, so your hands will not become impure from the water on the handles.
3. Now dry your hands from touching the handles.
4. Hold the vessel in your right hand and pass it to the left hand.
5. Wait! Do it again! The right hand is more important than the left, and it is disrespectful for the right to serve the left. You should place the vessel on the counter, then pick it up using the left hand.
6. Wash the right hand three times.
7. Place the vessel on the counter.
8. Pick it up with your right hand.
9. Wash your left hand three times.
10. Lift your hands up so the water does not drip from the wrist down and render your palms impure.
11. Dry your hands.

Congratulations! You are now ready to wash your hands for bread. Seriously. This whole ritual was performed just to prepare your hands for washing, since you cannot perform the actual sacred ritual while your hands are impure. There is only one little problem. Now that your hands are pure, you cannot say the blessing after you wash the second time, because the washing is unnecessary. Solution? Bend down and touch your shoe. Now your impure hands are ready for the wash!

12. Repeat steps 1-11.
13. Say the blessing.
14. Dry your hands.

This is a true description of how some of my friends used to wash hands before the meal, a process which would take close to ten minutes. Some of them would wash their hands three times, and we didn't even start talking about rituals of counting letters, words, verses, and days, or of obsessive and even abrasive cleaning for purity purposes.

I believe that the Torah wanted to prevent us from turning our religious life into a compulsive, fear-infused string of uncontrollable actions, but instead of depriving us completely of the joy of OCD, the details of the tabernacle were handed to us. You want to obsess about something? Here is your chance — the Temple and the Tabernacle. Everything that has to do with these buildings is described with such detail and discussed so meticulously to satisfy our need for this type of behavior. The laws of the Temple were practiced by a select group of people, the priests, and most people would visit the Temple only during the pilgrimage holidays. During the rest of the year, the Torah wants us to guide our lives with love and compassion, with light in our hearts and not with darkness and fear. In that spirit, the Torah laws which are not temple-related are much less detailed.

The Torah is a codex of joy and love. The famous golden rule, as well as the Ten Commandments, is about treating other human beings with respect and dignity, about loving ourselves and acknowledging our potential, and about finding an intimate, spiritual connection to God. The laws of the Torah are wise and they accommodate and help the human condition, but if the joy we derive from performing a Mitzvah is based on the comfort of repeating a familiar pattern, on habit alone, without a deeper sensation which has the power to transform and inspire us, something is missing. When that happens, we should stop for a moment, reflect on our actions and start working on the construction of a spiritual temple in our heart, alongside our practical observance.

Shabbat Shalom

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Shalom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria.** The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Dvar Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia, who has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

A Month of Turnarounds

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

The month of Adar can be best described as a month of positive turnarounds.

For instance, in the portions we have been reading, the Jews make the golden calf and almost lose their status as God's chosen people. However this week they complete the Tabernacle and renew their relationship with God.

On Purim, Haman makes a decree against the Jews and for Mordechai to be hung by the gallows. Three days later, the decree has been nullified and Haman is hanged.

In Adar we recognise and celebrate that good things can happen, sometime within a very short timeframe, no matter what the situation.

As we go through this month of Adar, we pray that all of us personally merit this immediate positive upturn. We pray that everyone at our AJCC campus receives an Adar-worthy boost. And we pray that the IDF and Israel have a Purim miracle with the return of all the hostages.

Shabbat Shalom and Chodesh Tov.

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah

Pekudei: Always on His Mind

Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski)1863-1940(, the brilliant Lithuanian scholar and posek, was known to write scholarly Halachic correspondence while simultaneously conversing with a visitor on a totally different subject. When questioned how he accomplished this remarkable feat, Rabbi Grodzinski humbly replied that his talent was not so unusual.

"What, have you never heard of a businessman who mentally plans out his day while reciting the morning prayers?"

Constant Awareness

One of the eight special garments worn by the kohen gadol, the high priest, was the tzit. This was a gold plate worn across the forehead, engraved with the words kodesh le-Hashem — “*Holy to God*.”

The Torah instructs the kohen gadol that the tzitz “*will be on his forehead – always*” (Ex. 28:38). The Sages understood this requirement not as addressing where the head-plate is worn, but rather how it is worn. It is not enough for the tzitz to be physically on his forehead. It must be always “*on his mind*.” The kohen gadol must be constantly aware of the tzitz and its succinct message of “*Holy to God*” while serving in the Temple. His service requires conscious recognition of the purpose of his actions, without irrelevant thoughts and musings. He cannot be like the fellow whose mind was preoccupied with business matters while he mumbled his daily prayers.

Tefillin and the Tzitz

The golden head-plate brings to mind another holy object worn above the forehead: tefillin. In fact, the Sages compared the two. Like the tzitz, wearing tefillin requires one to be always aware of their presence. The Talmud in Shabbat 12a makes the following a *fortiori* argument: If the tzitz, upon which God’s name is engraved just once, requires constant awareness, then certainly tefillin, containing scrolls in which God’s name is written many times, have the same requirement.

This logic, however, appears flawed. Did the Sages really mean to say that tefillin, worn by any Jew, are holier objects than the sacred head-plate worn only by the high priest when serving in the Temple?

Furthermore, why is it that God’s name is only recorded once on the tzitz, while appearing many times on the scrolls inside tefillin?

Connecting to Our Goals

We may distinguish between two aspects of life: our ultimate goals, and the means by which we attain these goals. It is easy to lose sight of our true goals when we are preoccupied with the ways of achieving them.

Even those who are careful to “stay on track” may lack clarity as to the true purpose of life. The Sages provided a basic rule: “*All of your deeds should be for the sake of Heaven*” (Avot 2:12). However, knowledge of what God wants us to do in every situation is by no means obvious. Success in discovering the highest goal, in comprehending our purpose in life, and being able to relate all of life’s activities to this central goal — all depend on our wisdom and insight.

For the kohen gadol, everything should relate to the central theme of “*Holy to God*.” We expect that the individual suitable for such a high office will have attained the level of enlightenment where all of life’s activities revolve around a single ultimate goal. Therefore the tzitz mentions God’s name just once — a single crowning value. Most people, however, do not live on this level of enlightened holiness. We have numerous spiritual goals, such as performing acts of kindness, charity, Torah study, prayer, and acquiring wisdom. By relating our actions to these values, we elevate ourselves and sanctify our lives. For this reason, the scrolls inside tefillin mention God’s name many times, reflecting the various spiritual goals that guide us.

In order to keep life’s ultimate goals in sight, we need concrete reminders. The tzitz and tefillin, both worn on the forehead above the eyes, are meant to help us attain this state of mindfulness.

Now we may understand the logic of comparing these two holy objects. Even the kohen gadol, despite his broad spiritual insight, needed to be constantly aware of the tzitz on his forehead and its fundamental message of kodesh le-Hashem. All the more so an average person, with a variety of goals, must remain conscious of the spiritual message of his tefillin at all times.

)*The Splendor of Tefillin*. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. III, p. 26(

<https://ravkooktorah.org/PKUDAY60.htm>

Pekudei: The Blessed Power of Order (5780)

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

Pekudei – in fact the whole cluster of chapters beginning with Terumah and Tetzaveh and culminating in Vayakhel and Pekudei – is an extraordinary way for the book of Exodus to end. The rest of the book is a tempestuous story of the Israelites' exile and enslavement and the confrontation between the ruler of Egypt and the man he may have grown up with in the palace, Moshe, now the leader of the Hebrew slaves. It is about the most dramatic Divine intervention in history, a story of signs and wonders, miracles and deliverances. Nature itself is overturned as a people fleeing from persecution cross a sea on dry land while the chariots of Pharaoh's army are stuck fast in the mud. It is the world's most famous story of freedom. Films have been made of it. Many oppressed people have based their hopes on it.

Its natural culmination should surely have been Exodus chapters 19-24: the revelation of God at Mount Sinai, the covenant between God and the people, the Ten Commandments and the civil laws that followed. This is surely where the story has been heading all along: the formalisation of a relationship that would bind God to a people and a people to God, bringing heaven down to earth and lifting a people from earth to heaven.

Of what conceivable relevance to this story is the long narrative of the construction of the Tabernacle, told first in Terumah and Tetzaveh as God's command to Moshe, and in Vayakhel and Pekudei as Moshe's command to the people and a description of how they carried it out? It has nothing to do with miracles. It seems to have nothing to do with freedom. The chief actor in these chapters is not God but the people who bring the contributions and Betzalel, the master-craftsman, and those who work with him, including the women who spun goats' hair into cloth, brought gifts and gave their mirrors for the bronze washbasin. Most of the narrative reads as if it belongs to Vayikra, the book of holiness, rather than Shemot, the book of freedom.

The Torah is telling us something profound and still relevant today, but to understand it we must approach it in stages. The first fascinating fact is that the Torah uses very similar language to describe the Israelites' creation of the Tabernacle and God's creation of the universe. This is how the Torah describes the completion of the Tabernacle:

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

And this is how the Torah describes the conclusion of the creation of the universe:

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

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

The closer we examine the two texts, the more we see how intricately the parallel has been constructed. The creation account in Genesis is tightly organised around a series of sevens. There are seven days of creation. The word "good" appears seven times, the word "God" thirty-five times, and the word "earth" twenty-one times. The opening verse of Genesis contains seven words, the second fourteen, and the three concluding verses 35 words. The complete text is 469 (7x67) words.

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

So, first conclusion: the language and construction of the two passages is meant to direct us to a comparison. The Israelites' creation of the Mishkan was a counterpart of God's creation of the universe. But how? How compare a tiny building with the entire universe? And how compare the assembly of pre-existing materials with the Divine creation of something from nothing?

We need another step. The first chapter of Genesis describes God creating a universe of order.

God said, *"Let there be," ... and there was ... and God saw that it was good."*

For the first three days He created domains: day and night, upper and lower waters, and sea and dry land. On the next three days He placed the appropriate objects or life forms in each domain: the sun, moon and stars, birds and fish, animals and humans. At the end of the sixth day we read:

"God saw all that He had made, and it was very good."

Meaning, each element was good in itself and they were in a balanced relationship with one another. The entire account exudes harmony. In the beginning, God created order.

Then He created humans and they created chaos: first Adam and Eve, then Cain, then the generation of the Flood, to the point at which the Torah tells us that God regretted that He had created humanity on earth (Gen. 6). The story of the opening chapters of Genesis is thus the descent from order to chaos.

We now begin to see what the Tabernacle really was. It was a tikkun, a mending, of the sin of the Golden Calf. The Torah says relatively little about the Calf but a great deal about the Israelites' behaviour. First they gathered menacingly against Aharon, who seems to have been fearing for his life. Then, once the Calf had been made, they ate and drank and rose "to engage in revelry." When Moshe came down the mountain he saw the people *"running wild, for Aharon had let them run beyond control and become a laughing stock to their enemies."* This is a portrait of chaos. Order had completely broken down. The people had allowed themselves to be swept up, first by fear, then by Dionysiac celebration.

The tikkun for chaos is order. The Tabernacle, with its precisely delineated dimensions and materials, put together from the voluntary contributions of the people, fashioned by a craftsman under divine inspiration, was just that: a microcosm of pure order.

So the end of Exodus is not quite an echo of the beginning of Genesis: it is an antidote to it. If humanity can reduce God's order to chaos, then humanity must show that it can rescue order from chaos. That is the journey the Israelites must take from the Golden Calf to the making of the Tabernacle. We can travel from chaos to order.

The Golden Calf was the ill-judged, unplanned, chaotic answer to the genuine question the Israelites were asking: what shall we do, here in the middle of the wilderness, without Moshe to act as our intermediary with God? The Mishkan was the real answer. It was the enduring sign that the Divine presence was in their midst, even without a prophet like Moshe. In

fact, once the Mishkan was completed and dedicated, Moshe had no further role within it. Its service was led not by Prophets but by Priests. Priests are masters of order.

The Mishkan, the Temple and the synagogue, different though they are, were in place what Shabbat is in time. They both represent an ideal realm of order, the way God wanted our world to be. Entering them we step out of the social world with its conflicts and strife, hostilities and injustices, and find ourselves under the wings of the Divine presence, sensing the harmony of the heavens and the cleansing of the spirit when we come to atone for our sins or offer thanks for our blessings. This is where we can always find God's indwelling spirit. This is the antidote to the travesty we so often make of God's world.

There is another reality. **I believe that sacred time, Shabbat, and sacred space, the Tabernacle/ Temple/ synagogue, are where the restless soul finds rest; where hearts open and minds soar; where we know we are part of something larger than this time, this place; where if we listen we can hear the song creation sings to its Creator; where we bring our sins and failings to God and are cleansed; where we sense that life has an order we must learn to honour; and where God is close – not at the top of a mountain but here in our midst.**

There must be a time and place where we recognise that not all is chaos. That is why Exodus ends with the Mishkan. Freedom exists where order rules.

Around the Shabbat Table:

]1[Where else in Judaism can we see a focus on order?

]2[Is there also room for spontaneity in Judaism?

]3[How can we make order from chaos in our lives and in the world as a whole?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/pekudei/the-blessed-power-of-order/> No footnotes have been preserved for this Dvar Torah. Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

Life Lessons From the Parshah -- Pekudei The Power of Blessings

By Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l * © Chabad 2024

The Reeking Suit

In 19th-century Eastern Europe, there lived a modest Jewish tailor who was highly skilled at his craft. With time, his expertise led him to serve the nobility and aristocracy of his day. As his success soared, his Jewish practice, sadly, suffered. He gradually drifted from his traditional upbringing, immersing himself entirely in secular society.

One day, a distinguished nobleman approached the tailor, seeking his assistance. "Listen, my friend," began the nobleman. "I have just returned from Paris and I brought with me the most exceptional material. I want you to create a suit for me, one that I will wear only on the most special occasions. Here's the material. You have impeccable taste. I trust you; I'm excited to see what you will come up with"

The tailor was overjoyed. Being commissioned by this particular nobleman to make this suit meant that he had made it to the top.

Getting right to work, he toiled day and night, sparing no effort. But when he presented the nobleman with his work of art, instead of heaping praise upon the tailor, the nobleman's face contorted with displeasure. "You call this a suit?" he spat.

"I've never seen anything so disgusting! Not only is it a pitiful excuse for a suit, it stinks!" Wrinkling his nose in disgust, the nobleman threw the tailor and the suit out of his home.

The tailor stood there in shock. Moments earlier he had felt on top of the world, and now everything had come crashing down. Not knowing what else to do or where to turn, he made his way to his Rebbe — Rabbi Yerachmiel, the son of the Yid Hakadosh and a great Chassidic master in his own right.

"Rebbe, please help me," pleaded the dejected Jew. "I know I haven't been the most devout Jew lately, but I need the Rebbe's advice. I created what I believed was the suit of the century, yet I was thrown out on the street! I don't know what to do."

Rabbi Yerachmiel responded compassionately.

"My dear friend, listen carefully to my instructions. Go home and take apart the suit. Unpick every stitch, then sew it back together anew. I give you my blessing that your efforts will be met with success. Present it to the nobleman, and he will appreciate it."

Knowing that the nobleman had already expressed his disgust for this suit, the tailor was skeptical. Nevertheless, he dutifully followed the Rebbe's directions. When he timidly presented the suit to the nobleman again, to his shock and delight, the nobleman was overjoyed! "This is the most beautiful suit in the world. I've never seen such a masterpiece! Bravo! Not only will I pay you what I promised, but I will pay you double."

Baffled, the tailor returned to his Rebbe, seeking an explanation.

"When you were initially hired by the nobleman and awarded this prestigious commission, it went straight to your head," the Rebbe explained. "You became filled with arrogance. You forgot about God. All you could see was yourself and your success. And your arrogance reeked. You reeked from it, and your work reeked from it. Even the nobleman smelled it. So he threw you out, together with the suit."

"But when you came to me, you were brokenhearted and humbled. And so, all you needed to do was remake the suit with your newfound sense of humility. Recognizing this, I blessed your efforts. And that is why the nobleman loved it."

100 Blessings

One of the central themes of the Torah portion of Pekudei revolves around the critical importance of blessings in our lives.

The parshah begins with a detailed accounting of the exact quantities of gold, silver, and copper donated by the people for the construction of the Tabernacle. As part of this accounting, the verse states, "100 silver talents were used to cast the bases for the Sanctuary... a total of 100 bases made out of the 100 talents, one talent for each base."¹

Rabbi Jacob Ben Asher, the late 13th- and early 14th-century Biblical commentator known as the Ba'al Haturim, taught that the 100 bases in the foundation of the Tabernacle correspond to the 100 blessings that a Jew is mandated to say each day. Just as the bases formed the foundation of the Tabernacle, these blessings are foundational to our daily lives.²

Upon completing the construction of the Tabernacle, the verse notes, "Moses saw the entire work, and lo! they had done it; as the Lord had commanded, so had they done. So Moses blessed them."³

More blessings.

In another teaching,⁴ the Ba'al Haturim highlights that the phrase “as G d commanded Moses” appears 18 times in this parshah. This led the Sages to institute the 18 blessings of the Amidah — the central prayer of the daily morning, afternoon, and evening services. The sages later expanded the Amidah prayer by adding a 19th blessing. The Ba'al Haturim notes that this final blessing corresponds to a similar phrase in our parshah: “as the L rd had commanded, so had they done.”⁵

The parallels continue as the Ba'al Haturim notes that by adding the number of Hebrew words each time the Torah repeats the above-mentioned phrases — “as G d commanded Moses” and “as everything G d commanded Moses, so had they done” — it totals 113 words. Similarly, adding the closing words of each of the blessings of the Amidah also totals 113. Remarkably, there are exactly 113 instances of the word lev, “heart,” in the Five Books of Moses, emphasizing the need for heartfelt concentration when reciting the blessings.⁶

More blessings.

Our Work, G d's Blessings

Upon the completion of the Tabernacle's construction, Moses blessed:

“May it be G d's will that the Divine presence should dwell in the work of your hands. 'And may the pleasantness of the L rd our G d be upon us, and the work of our hands establish for us, and the work of our hands establish it.’⁷ ”⁸

The Tabernacle's purpose was for G d to dwell within it, and the blessings express the hope for this to be realized.

The words “And may the pleasantness of the L rd …” are from one of the psalms authored by Moses, and serve as the basis for the Havdalah prayer we recite each Saturday night. As we conclude Shabbat and commence our work week, we acknowledge that despite our efforts, our true success is dependent upon G d's blessings. We can work day and night, we can exert tremendous effort, but if our work lacks G d's blessing, we will not succeed.

And so, we pray, “G d, we've just left Shabbat. We're ushering in a new week. Before we get to our first item of business, please, may the pleasantness and sweetness of Your blessings descend upon us. May the work of our hands be well established. We should succeed. It should click. We should be blessed.”

Blessings, blessings, blessings.

There are two components to a blessing, and more broadly, to life. The Torah says, “And the L rd, your G d, will bless you in all that you shall do.”⁹ What is the meaning of this verse? Is what you do the source of your living? Or is G d's blessing the source of your living? If G d's blessing is the source of your living, why do you need to go to work? If work is the source of your living, then why do you need G d's blessing?

The answer lies in recognizing that we need both — blessings from G d channeled through the work we do.

Divine Dwelling, Manifested

When did Moses bestow this blessing upon the people? It was on the day the Tabernacle was first erected, as recorded in the Book of Leviticus.¹⁰

There were seven days of consecration — from the 23rd of Adar until the 1st of Nisan — during which Moses erected and dismantled the Tabernacle, and performed the service (i.e., brought all the offerings) each day.

On the eighth day, the people erected the Tabernacle, and Aaron, the High Priest, offered all of the sacrifices. After concluding the service, Aaron blessed the people with the famous Priestly Blessings. Later, Moses and Aaron jointly

approached the people and blessed them, saying, “*May it be G d’s will that the Shechinah (the Divine presence) rest in the work of your hands.*”

Why did they choose this particular blessing?

Rashi explains:

*Throughout the days of consecration, when Moses erected the Tabernacle, performed the service in it, and then dismantled it daily, the Shechinah did not rest in it. The people felt humiliated and said to Moses, “All of our efforts were so that the Shechinah should dwell among us, so that we would know that we have been forgiven for the sin of the Golden Calf!” Therefore, Moses answered them, “...Do [what the L rd has commanded], and the glory of the L rd will appear to you... Through JAaron’s[offerings and his service the Shechinah will dwell among you.”*¹¹

What was the litmus test for the Divine presence? If a G dly flame descended from heaven to consume the sacrifices. This did not happen during the first seven days, but on the eighth day, with the blessing of Moses and Aaron, it finally occurred. A flame descended onto the altar and consumed the offerings, and the people were elated! Mazal tov! They had achieved the very purpose of constructing the Tabernacle.

That is the power of blessings.

The Power to Bless

When Adam and Eve were created, G d blessed them, instructing them to “*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.*”¹² Following the Great Flood, G d bestowed a similar blessing upon Noah, saying, “*Be fruitful and multiply and develop the world.*”¹³ And G d blessed Abraham, promising, “*I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing.*”¹⁴

According to our sages, with the words, “*and you shall be a blessing,*” G d gifted the power of blessing to Abraham. From that point on, every Abraham, every righteous person, has the power to give blessings.

In our generation, we witnessed the power of blessings with the Rebbe. The Rebbe would stand, for hours on end, distributing dollar bills for charity, blessing each recipient with the words “*blessing and success.*”

Blessings, blessings, blessings.

This is why, traditionally, people would go to a tzaddik for a blessing. Students would request a blessing from their teachers, community members from their rabbis, and chassidim from their rebbe.

And the blessings of a tzaddik are so powerful, they remain potent even after his passing.

Case in point: In the narrative of the Spies who were sent by Moses to check out what was to be the Land of Israel, we find that Caleb, one of only two spies who spoke positively about the Land, took a detour. Where did he go? He went to Hebron, to the cave of Machpelah, the burial place of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, and Leah. Caleb stopped there, fell to the ground, and beseeched: “*G d, please save me from this terrible test of the Spies.*”¹⁵

Praying at the Ohel, praying at the grave of a tzaddik, and asking for a blessing are central parts of Jewish life.

Blessings, blessings, blessings.

We all work hard. We innovate, we plan, we have great ideas. Yet, we must always maintain focus — we must always be cognizant that the blessings come from G d.

May each and every one of us see tremendous blessings in every arena of our lives.

May the pleasantness of G d be upon us, and may all our hard work be well established.

May the Divine presence dwell in the work of our hands.

May we merit to draw down the Divine presence, with the coming of our righteous Moshiach, speedily in our days.

Amen.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Exodus 38:27.
2. Ba'al Haturim, Exodus 38:27.
3. Exodus 39:43.
4. Ba'al Haturim, Exodus 40:21.
5. Exodus 39:43.
6. Ba'al Haturim, Exodus 40:21.
7. Psalms 90 :17.
8. Rashi to Exodus 39:43.
9. Deuteronomy 15:18.
10. Leviticus 9:23.
11. Rashi, Leviticus 9:23.
12. Genesis 1:28.
13. Genesis 9:1.
14. Genesis 12:2.
15. Rashi, Numbers 13:22.

* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6348684/jewish/The-Power-of-Blessings.htm#footnoteRef2a6348684

Pekludei: Stations in the Journey

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

For the cloud of G-d was above the Tabernacle by day, and fire would be there by night, visible to the entire House of Israel, at all their journeys.)Ex. 40:38(

During their journey in the desert, the Jewish people never knew in advance how long they were going to stay at any of their stations.

Nevertheless, they were required to set up the Tabernacle in its entirety at each encampment, following G-d's instructions to keep the Tabernacle functioning at all times. Thus, despite their inherent temporary nature, each station had a "permanent" nature, as well.

Nonetheless, the Torah here calls the stations "journeys" rather than "stations" or "encampments." This is not in order to emphasize the temporary nature of each encampment, but to indicate that the intrinsic value of each encampment was that it constituted a preparation for the journey that would follow – indeed, for all the journeys that would ensue until the people would reach their final destination.

The same applies to all our stations in life – geographical, emotional, and spiritual – as well as those of our people throughout history. Each station is an essential step in a journey. Just as every step in our life is a necessary step in making us who we aspire to become, every step in our exile is a necessary step toward the ultimate Redemption, without which the future revelations of Divinity would not be able to occur.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

May G-d grant a decisive victory over our enemies.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* Insights from the Rebbe.

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Shabbat Shalom

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

On Jewish Character

Pekudei has sometimes been called the accountant's parsha, because that is how it begins, with the audited accounts of the money and materials donated to the Sanctuary. It is the Torah's way of teaching us the need for financial transparency.

But beneath the sometimes dry surface lie two extraordinary stories, one told in last week's parsha, the other the week before, teaching us something deep about Jewish nature that is still true today.

The first has to do with the Sanctuary itself. God told Moses to ask people to make contributions. Some brought gold, some silver, some copper. Some gave wool or linen or animal-skins. Others contributed acacia wood, oil, spices or incense. Some gave precious stones for the High Priest's breastplate. What was remarkable was the willingness with which they gave:

The people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning. So all the skilled workers who were doing all the work on the Sanctuary left what they were doing and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done."

So Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: "No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the Sanctuary." And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work. (Ex. 36:3-7)

They brought too much. Moses had to tell them to stop. That is not the Israelites as we have become accustomed to seeing them, argumentative, quarrelsome, ungrateful. This is a people that longs to give.

One parsha earlier we read a very different story. The people were anxious. Moses had been up the mountain for a long time. Was he still alive? Had some accident happened to him? If so, how would they receive the Divine word telling them what to do and where to go? Hence their demand for a calf – essentially an oracle, an object through which Divine instruction could be heard.

Aaron, according to the most favoured explanation, realised that he could not stop the people directly by refusing their request, so he adopted a stalling manoeuvre. He did

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something with the intention of slowing them down, trusting that if the work could be delayed, Moses would reappear. This is what he said: Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." (Ex. 32:2)

According to the Midrash he thought this would create arguments within families and the project would be delayed. Instead, immediately thereafter, without a pause, we read: So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. (Ex. 32:3)

Again the same generosity. Now, these two projects could not be less alike. One, the Tabernacle, was holy. The other, the calf, was close to being an idol. Building the Tabernacle was a supreme mitzvah; making the calf was a terrible sin. Yet their response was the same in both cases. Hence this comment of the sages:

One cannot understand the nature of this people. If they are appealed to for a calf, they give. If appealed to for the Tabernacle, they give. [Yerushalmi Shekalim 1, 45]

The common factor was generosity. Jews may not always make the right choices in what they give to, but they give.

In the twelfth century, Moses Maimonides twice interrupts his customary calm legal prose in his law code, the Mishneh Torah, to make the same point. Speaking about tzedakah, charity, he says:

"We have never seen or heard about a Jewish community which does not have a charity fund." [Laws of Gifts to the poor, 9:3]

The idea that a Jewish community could exist without a network of charitable provisions was almost inconceivable. Later in the same book, Maimonides says:

We are obligated to be more scrupulous in fulfilling the commandment of tzedakah than any other positive commandment because tzedakah is the sign of the righteous person, a descendant of Abraham our father, as it is said, "For I know him, that he will command his children . . . to do tzedakah" . . . If someone is cruel and does not show mercy, there are sufficient grounds to suspect his lineage, since cruelty is found only among the other nations . . . Whoever refuses to give charity is called Belial, the same term which is applied to idol worshippers. [Laws of Gifts to the poor, 10:1-3]

Maimonides is here saying more than that Jews give charity. He is saying that a charitable disposition is written into Jewish genes, part of our inherited DNA. It is one of the signs of being a child of Abraham, so much so that if someone does not give charity there are

"grounds to suspect his lineage." Whether this is nature or nurture or both, to be Jewish is to give.

There is a fascinating feature of the geography of the land of Israel. It contains two seas: the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee is full of life. The Dead Sea, as its name implies, is not. Yet they are fed by the same river, the Jordan. The difference is that the Sea of Galilee receives water and gives water. The Dead Sea receives but does not give. To receive but not to give is, in Jewish geography as well as Jewish psychology, simply not life.

So it was in the time of Moses. So it is today. In virtually every country in which Jews live, their charitable giving is out of all proportion to their numbers. In Judaism, to live is to give.

The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Above Suspicion

I have written and lectured extensively on the topic of Jewish leadership. I have frequently indicated that I consider Moses our teacher, Moshe Rabbeinu, a role model for those who would be leaders.

Once, after a lecture on just this topic, I opened the floor to a question-and-answer session. I have always found such sessions useful and instructive. The questions that are raised by the audience are often quite provocative, raising unanticipated issues.

On this particular occasion, a gentleman in the audience raised a question which encouraged me to think long and hard. He asked, "Rabbi, can you recall a moment in your own career when Moses' example influenced your leadership behavior? What specific lesson did you learn from Moses?"

At first, a number of possibilities came to mind. After all, Moses was a teacher, an advocate for the people, a person who came to the aid of the oppressed, a selfless person. Surely there are many aspects of Moses' life that I have tried, however inadequately, to emulate.

But after some introspection, I recalled one specific incident and shared it with the

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audience. I told them that the one time I most consciously followed Moses' example was the time when I was entrusted with some Chanukah gelt.

When I was a child, I remember fondly how my grandfather would gather all of his grandchildren around the Chanukah menorah, have us line up in order of our ages, and distribute to each of us a silver dollar, Chanukah gelt. Many still practice this custom, although I suspect that nowadays far more than a silver dollar is distributed.

One year, back when I was the rabbi of my former synagogue, I received a phone call from a gentleman just a few days before Chanukah. This gentleman was one of the influential trustees of a major charitable foundation. I had interacted with him many times with regard to proposals I submitted to the foundation for grants to community institutions. He typically studied these proposals very assiduously and asked very demanding questions of me about these proposals. He would say, "There is much that I find worthwhile in your proposal. My tendency to be generous inclines me to grant you the funds you request, but I cannot be generous with someone else's money."

He voted against almost every proposal that I submitted.

One year, just a few days before Chanukah, he called. At that point, none of my proposals for charity was even under consideration. I was surprised by his call and even more surprised when he asked me to lunch that very day.

We met at a local restaurant and chatted about all sorts of things for the better part of an hour. Finally, he asked me if I knew what Chanukah gelt was. He himself had fond memories of the Jewish customs he had experienced in his childhood.

When I assured him that I knew very well what Chanukah gelt was, he withdrew an envelope from his pocket and said, "Here is a check for Chanukah gelt. I know that you control a discretionary charity fund and I'd like you to deposit this check in that fund for the use of truly needy families."

Of course, I thanked him profusely for the donation. I did not think it was proper to open the envelope in his presence, so I didn't open it until I returned to my car. I was astonished to find that the sum was easily equal to the yearly salary of most of the members of my congregation. When I looked at check more carefully, I noted that he had made out the check to me personally, and not to my discretionary fund.

I cannot deny that I immediately heard the loud voice of temptation. But, along with that voice, another voice was heard, and it uttered nothing other than the first verse of this week's

Torah portion, Parshat Pekudei, (Exodus 38:21-40:38): "These are the records of the Tabernacle...which were drawn up at Moses' bidding...under the direction of Itamar son of Aaron the Priest."

The people had contributed vast amounts of silver and gold and other precious materials for the construction of the Tabernacle. Moses, and only Moses, was in charge. He was, in the words of the Midrash, a gizbar, the comptroller of those funds. Technically, he was accountable to no one. He did not have to make a reckoning, and he certainly did not have to invite another person into the process.

But our verse tells us that he not only initiated a reckoning, but he invited his nephew, Itamar, to hold him to account. He insisted upon full accountability for every bit of the material collected.

Midrash Rabbah comments, making use of other biblical verses: "A dependable man will receive many blessings, but one in a hurry to get rich will not go unpunished (Proverbs 28:20)." Moses was a dependable man, as is written, 'Not so with my servant Moses; he is trusted throughout my household (Numbers 12:7).' He alone was the gizbar, yet he invited others to perform the accounting...our verse does not read, 'These are the records which were drawn up by Moses,' but rather, 'These are the records which were drawn up at Moses bidding.' Moses asked to be held accountable, and did what he could to be assured that he would be held accountable."

Getting back to that cold pre-Chanukah afternoon, I am proud to say that my conscience prevailed. It was in the days before cell phones, but I immediately went to the nearest phone booth and called my "Itamar," a respected member of my congregation. I told him that I held this magnanimous gift in my hands and wanted him to know about it. I asked him to form a small committee which would decide exactly how to distribute the "Chanukah gelt" to those who needed it the most. Until today, we jokingly refer to that committee as "the Itamar committee."

The commentary known as Torah Temimah, written by the early-20th-century rabbi, Rabbi Baruch Epstein, opens his remarks on this week's parsha with a citation from an earlier halachic authority known as Bach: "Although a trustee of charity who has proven himself trustworthy need not be scrutinized, it is, nevertheless, advisable that he give a full reckoning of his collections and distributions, as did Moses our teacher."

Long after the incident with the Chanukah gelt, I came upon this astute remark in the book The Transparent Society by David Brin: "When it comes to privacy and accountability, people always demand the former for themselves and the latter for everyone else."

Likutei Divrei Torah

Not so with Moses. He demanded accountability for himself, and so should we all.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

An Upright Torah

The focus of significance in any synagogue is the Ark containing the Torah. That this is so we learn, according to Maimonides, from a verse in this morning's Sidra. When the building of the Tabernacle was concluded, Moses performed a final act: and he took and he put the testimony into the Ark. The word *edut*, "testimony," refers to the two stone tablets, the *luhot*, upon which were inscribed the revelation of God. And, Maimonides teaches us at the end of his Laws of Sefer Torah, just as the tablets were placed in the Ark in the Tabernacle; so are we commanded to place the Scroll of the Law in the Ark in the synagogue. "It is a commandment to designate a special place for a Sefer Torah, and to honor it and to embellish it even more than one thinks adequate. The words on the tablets of the covenant are the same words which we have on our Scrolls."

However, this tracing of the institutions of the Sefer Torah in the aron in the synagogues to the *luhot* in the aron in the Tabernacle, presents certain difficulties. One of the commentaries on Maimonides' famous Code, the author of *הגהות מילונייה*, records a question asked of his teacher: If indeed the scrolls in the Ark in the synagogue are of the same nature as the tablets in the Ark in the Tabernacle, then why is that the *luhot* in the Tabernacle were placed in the aron in a prone position, lying down, whereas the Sefer Torah that we place in the Ark in the synagogue stands upright? If the source is the tablets in the Tabernacle, then why do we not store the scrolls in our synagogues too lying down?

There is compelling logic to this question. In fact, the author of this commentary records a responsum by the famous Rabbi Jacob Tam who said that had he had realized this point earlier, when they were building his synagogue, he would have ordered a much broader and wider ark in order that he might have the scrolls lying down rather than standing upright.

Nevertheless, the force of Jewish Law and the weight of Jewish customs is against this decision to have the scrolls lying down. In all of our synagogues the Sefer Torah is stored upright; indeed, in some Sephardic synagogues the scroll is read while standing on the table. Why, then, do we keep the Sefer Torah standing up, unlike the Tablets?

A famous Talmudic scholar, R. David Ibn Zimra, known as the RaDBaZ, wrote a responsum on the subject in which he offered three alternative answers. All three answers are meaningful. They contain or imply insights into the nature of Torah and Judaism that are

significant for all times, including our very own.

His first answer is that there is a fundamental difference between the luhot and Sefer Torah. The Tablets were meant as edut, as a testimony, as symbols; they were not intended for reading. Their very presence was important; but people did not come especially to open the Ark and to read the Tablets in order to inform themselves of the Law. Whereas the Sefer Torah was meant specifically for reading and for instructing; hence the Sefer Torah is kept in an upright position, always ready for immediate use. What we are taught, therefore, is that the Torah must be for us more than a symbol, more than mere edut. It must be a guide, a code for conduct. The very word "Torah" comes from the Hebrew תורה which means guidance, pointing out, instruction.

A symbol is revered; a guide is used and experienced. Because of its very sacredness, a symbol often lies prone, it is remote and is less prone to be involved in the turmoil and bustle of life. It is treated with antiseptic respect. A guide, a "Torah," is of course sacred; but its sanctity is enhanced by its involvement in life with all its complexities and paradoxes, its anxieties and excitements. A Torah, in order to fulfill its holy function, must stand ready—literally stand!—to be read and applied. It is this lack of involvement in everyday life that has caused one contemporary Jewish thinker to bemoan what he has felicitously called our American-Jewish "theology of respect." We American Jews are a very respectful people; we do not reject Judaism outright; instead, we are more delicate: we "respect" it. We have respect for the synagogue—therefore we keep miles away from it. We respect the Rabbi—hence we never consult him as to the judgment of Judaism on significant problems. We respect Almighty God and therefore would never think of troubling Him about the things that really bother us. We respect Judaism and Torah so much that we never think of taking them seriously in the rigors and hardships of daily existence. But respect alone is something which is offered to a symbol, to the Tablets which are merely edut, and which therefore lie prone. They are a symbol—and that is all. It is only when we have transformed the symbol into the scroll, the theology or respect into a Torah of life that our Torah stands upright and ready for use.

This is important for Jewish scholarship in our days as well. Great opportunities are open for scholarship in the mid-twentieth century: the formulation of the attitude of Torah to the great ethical questions of our day. There is a businessman who wants to know the decision of Torah on price collusion and the housewife who seeks instruction on how to treat her maid. There is a young man who is interested not only in the morality but also in the ethics of courtship, and the government employee who wants to know how far he may go in

accepting unofficial gifts. Halakhah can yield such guidance; if we do not know all the answers of Halakhah it is because we need scholars to search more diligently and in greater scope and depth than has been done heretofore.

But nevertheless, the greatest majority of the problems that occur to us can, without new halakhic research, be dealt with decisively and lucidly by Torah. Our Torah is an upright one when we make the decision to consult it in these practical problems. This, indeed, is the difference between an ideal and a principle: An ideal is an abstraction to which we offer our gesture of respect; a principle is that which governs our very real conduct. The luhot are symbols or ideals; the Sefer Torah is a principle or guide. We have no dearth of ideals; we are sorely lacking in committing our lives to relevant principles. If our Torah is to be a Torah, it must be upright, ready-to use.

The second solution offered by RaDBaZ is to make the following distinction between the Tablets and the Scrolls of the Law. According to tradition, the engraving on the stone went through the tablets from side to side. Nevertheless a miracle occurred and these tablets were they could be read equally well from either side. In other words, despite the fact that the engraving went through and through, you were able to read the message on the stone tablets according to the normal Hebrew system, from right to left, no matter which side you approached them from. Whereas the Sefer Torah was written only on one side, on the inside of the parchment. Therefore, the Tablets could be placed lying down; for no matter how you laid them down, you could read them from the side you approached them. But the Sefer Torah had to stand with its face, upon which was written the text of the Torah, facing the congregation, so that it might always be ready for immediate reading and consultation and study.

There was a time in Jewish life when Judaism was such that it was that it could be approached from any point of view. In a total Jewish environment, even a semi-literate could be a good Jew. Where one's milieu was fully saturated with Jewish feeling and Jewish life, study and scholarship were not quite crucial. One could be unlearned and still sense the presence of God, the Shekhinah; at the very least, one could benefit from the Shekhinah, from the very Jewishness of one's neighborhood and surroundings. However, in a society depleted of Jewishness, in a milieu emptied of Jewish feeling and life, Jewishness can be acquired only in one way: by study and by scholarship.

We do not live in a total Jewish environment. Our surroundings are secularized and often antagonistic to the goals of Judaism. Therefore, for us, Jewish scholarship, Jewish education, Jewish study, are not only paramount, but indeed the only way to acquire Judaism in the full sense of the word. It is our

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only guarantee of survival. It is interesting that when, two or three generations ago, very wealthy and philanthropic Jews founded our great philanthropic organizations, they acted according to the noblest precepts of Judaism. It goes without saying that charity or tzedakah is an all-important mitzvah in our faith. Yet these people, who gave and worked so much for charity, who love their people so, completely neglected the study of Torah. And, tragically enough, today these founders of our Federation do not have one single Jewish survivor left! For indeed, Judaism without tzedakah is unthinkable; but Judaism without the study of Torah is impossible.

It is only recently that the day-school movement has won the approbation of larger sections of American Jewry. And not only Jewish studies for children, but also Jewish education has begun to show improvement. Only this week statistics were gathered that indicate that American Jews spend annually in the vicinity of three-million dollars on adult education. Of course, there is a question as to the results, the extent of its work, the methods employed. But nonetheless, it is encouraging news that we have finally come to understand the importance of a Sefer Torah which stands ready to be read and studied and researched. For that is why our scrolls are placed in a standing position: to teach us the need for immediate reference and education.

The third answer provided by RaDBaZ is a rather daring idea. The synagogue, unlike the Tabernacle, was meant to be primarily a House of Prayer, not one of revelation and sacrifice. Therefore, since the worshippers come to the synagogue and stand facing the Ark, the Sefer Torah too must stand when it faces the worshippers.

In a sense, this summarizes the other two reasons advanced by RaDBaZ. The Sefer Torah stands because the worshippers stand. What a beautiful idea! There is a mutual and reciprocal honor exchanged by the Torah and its admirers. The Torah itself rises before the מתפללים who take her seriously, who involve her in their daily life, and who study her assiduously. We are told in the First Book of Samuel, that God says "for I will honor those who will honor Me, and those who neglect Me shall be disgraced." God honors those who honor Him! The Torah stands out of respect before the worshipper!

One of the great and seminal thinkers of Hasidism, the renowned Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of the HaBaD branch of Hasidism, has expressed this idea in yet another way. The Torah as the revelation of God, and indeed even as an aspect of God Himself, is filled with holiness and divine Light. It contains sublime, heavenly illumination. When the student of Torah studies it sincerely and selflessly, without any thought of personal gain, what he accomplishes is the broadening of the

absorptive capacity of Torah for this divine light; he adds to Torah's lustre and brilliance. Whereas, if he studies it for selfish and unworthy reasons, the lights of Torah are dimmed and its brilliance is diminished.

What a bold idea! The fate of Torah depends upon us. The sanctity of Torah is not a constant: its kedushah varies with the sincerity and application of the Jew who studies Torah. If we honor Torah, it honors us by being more sacred. And, Heaven forbid, if we neglect Torah, it contains less illumination and sanctity with which to bless our own lives.

That the destiny of Torah depends upon us we often see in unpleasant ways. Too often do we discover that Judaism is reviled because of the personal conduct of individual Jews who are apparently committed to Torah, but who act in a manner that is unbecoming, unattractive, and unethical. A thousand years ago, the great Gaon, R. Saadia, at the end of his introduction to his offers eight reasons, all of them psychologically potent, as to why people reject God and Torah. One of them applies to our case: a man notices the obnoxious behavior of a Jew who believes in God, and he therefore rejects not only this inconsistent Jew, but also all that he professes, i.e., God and His Torah. It happens so often in our own experience. Let an Orthodox Jew misbehave, and people blame Orthodoxy rather than the individual. It is unfortunate, it is illogical, it ignores the weakness of all human beings no matter what their ultimate commitments; but—it is a fact. And, it places upon us a heavy, yet marvelous responsibility. This very fact, whether we like it or not, reminds us that each of us possesses great risks and tremendous opportunities. We can, each of us, by our actions, influence the destiny of Judaism. We can, by our attitude and approach, either diminish or enhance the lustre of the Light contained within Torah. If we are עזים, then the Sefer Torah too is עז; if we stand upright, then Torah stands upright. Heaven forbid, if we lie down on our God-given duties, then Torah falls because of us.

This then is the significance of the position of the Torah in the Ark. It is upright because it must be ready for use as a guiding principle in our lives. It is upright because it must be studied and its message plumbed. It is upright because it stands in respect and honor of those who so use it and thereby enhance its own holiness and illumination. Torah must never lie in state. It must stand in readiness. The Jew must never sink low; he must soar even higher—and thereby contribute to the sublimity of Torah. For as Maimonides put it, in the passage we quoted in the very beginning—it is a mitzvah to honor and glorify and embellish the Torah even more than we can. For if we will not strive to be more than merely respectful Jews, we will become less than respectful Jews. If we do not aspire to become more than human, we are in danger of becoming less than human.

The times we live in, the circumstances that surround us, and our ancient and hoary tradition all call out to us to stand up and live as upright Jews, and so keep our Torah in the ark upright as well.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

We Toil and Receive Reward; For the Toil!

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #231, Making a Siyum. Good Shabbos!

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

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endeavor, toil that does not produce results does not receive reward.

Some years 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 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 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.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

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.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

When Defeat is the Ultimate Success

Rabbanit Sally Mayer

In Parshat Pekudei, the mishkan finally comes together. The Jewish People invested greatly in this holy project, donating precious gems and materials, fashioning the beautiful vessels and curtains, carving beams and forming connectors, and putting it all together into the grand resting place for God's Presence in the camp.

In the final pesukim of our parsha and of Sefer Shemot, we hear that the cloud symbolizing God's Presence filled the mishkan. However, there is a discordant pasuk inserted just before the end of the parsha (40:35): "And Moshe was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting, for the cloud had rested upon it, and the Glory of Hashem filled the mishkan." Why mention again that the cloud filled the mishkan, and point out that Moshe could not go inside? It seems strange – the point of the mishkan was for Moshe and the Kohanim to go inside, to speak to God and serve Him; isn't it disappointing that Moshe, who invested his soul in the project, cannot enter right at the climax of the dedication?

Upon reflection, however, the fact that Moshe cannot enter the mishkan is actually the symbol of its success. Imagine an architect who designs a couple's dream house, and the builder who takes the plans and brings them to fruition. The greatest success of those experts is when the couple takes the keys and begins to live there – and by necessity, then, those who designed and built it are locked out! Our greatest joy is when our children grow up and lead independent, successful lives separate from us, not when we have access to every detail of what is happening with them as we did when they were small.

This idea is also reflected in a famous story about the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai. The Talmud in Menachot 29b relates that when

Moshe went up to receive the Torah, he saw that Hashem was "tying crowns" atop some of the letters in the Torah, and asked Hashem why He was doing so. Hashem responds that in the future, there will be a sage named Akiva ben Yosef, who will build interpretations based on these crowns. Moshe asks to see this incredible scholar, and finds himself transported many centuries into the future, sitting in Rabbi Akiva's beit midrash. Moshe hears the discussion but doesn't know what they are talking about, and feels despondent – how can he be the one receiving the Torah from Hashem but not understand the give-and-take in the beit midrash of the future? Moshe is mollified when he hears a student ask Rabbi Akiva the source of a certain halacha, and Rabbi Akiva responds, "This is a law that was given to Moshe at Sinai." But why does this make Moshe feel better? They are saying this law came from him, but it isn't familiar to him! The answer is the same as we discussed above: he knows he has succeeded when his work, his creation, surpasses him. When the Torah Moshe taught is taken further, to places he didn't dream of. When the mishkan he built is off limits because Hashem's Presence has moved in.

There is another Talmudic story that takes this idea one step further. In Bava Metzia 59b, we read of a debate between the majority of the sages at the time and the great scholar Rabbi Eliezer, over the ritual purity status of a certain type of oven. Proper protocol in such a case is to follow the majority view, based on the pasuk in Shemot 23:2. However, Rabbi Eliezer will not accept this outcome. He calls down miracles to prove he is right – may the carob tree be uprooted from its spot, may the stream flow in the opposite direction, may the walls of the beit midrash begin to cave in – yet Rabbi Yehoshua, representing the majority, says we must ignore these supernatural events and follow the regular method of decision-making in halacha. Finally, Rabbi Eliezer calls down a heavenly voice, which states unequivocally that the law is in accordance with Rabbi Eliezer in every case. Rabbi Yehoshua stands up and declares, "It is not in Heaven!" (Devarim 30:12) – once the Torah has been given, we do not pay attention to heavenly voices. This is, at first glance, shocking – is the point of the Torah not to follow God's Will? If He lets us know what that is directly, why would we follow the usual decision-making protocol? The answer to this question comes in the next line of the Talmud: the sage Rabbi Natan met Eliyahu HaNavi and asked him how Hashem reacted when Rabbi Yehoshua said that. Eliyahu answers that Hashem smiled and said, "My children have bested Me, my children have bested Me." Once again, we see that even for God Himself, the greatest success is when our children and our students take what we have taught them and bring it to a new place, even if that place is beyond us.

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Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

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 Nebenzahl shlit" 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 Nebenzahl 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 Shemah, "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 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 tin 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

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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 Tzephaniah (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.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah

by Rabbi Label Lam

The Job of the Jews

And Moshe did; according to all that HASHEM had commanded him, so he did. It came to pass in the first month, in the second year, on the first day of the month, that the Mishkan was set up. (Shemos 40:16-17)

When (the month of) Adar enters we increase in joy! – Talmud

What is so grand about building the Mishkan that it takes up so much space in the Torah. We have about 4 and ½ chunky Torah portions packed with detailed descriptions of what was commanded and how it was executed with precision.

Every year we revisit this account of what was essentially a singular event in history event for this particular plan. In the meantime, though, mountains and mountains of practical and daily Hallachos are hanging by threads of very spare information provided in the Written Torah.

Can there possibly be a relationship between the Hebrew month of Adar, which hosts Purim and the completion of the Mishkan? Let us see if we can discover a connection. Also, how does Adar catalyze an increase in joy?

Let us take a journey back to the murky origins of the universe when the world was yet, "Tohu v' Vohu", void and astonishingly empty. In that very dark picture, there was a glimmer of hope

literally hovering nearby. The verse reads, “And the spirit of ELOCHIM was hovering on the face of the deep”.

I don’t know if I am qualified to explain all or any of the primordial ingredients present when the world was so young. One thing, though, is abundantly clear. HASHEM- ELOCHIM was hovering in search of a landing port.

What does that mean? In whichever way we can understand it, like an airplane in search of a runway or a helicopter looking for a safe place to set down, still a giant question is begging for a sensible answer. Why was HASHEM hovering in search of a port, a place to land? Create such a space and land! You are the Creator!!!

When the Kotzker was yet a precocious child of 3, his Rebbe asked him, “Where can HASHEM be found?” The impish child answered his Rebbe, “Everywhere!” His Rebbe shook his head indicating that he had not given the right answer and he asked the same question again and again only to be given the same unacceptable answer. Then the Rebbe told him directly, landing a profound lesson, “HASHEM can be found only where He is invited to enter.

A famous Badkan, a Jewish comedic entertainer once said that he went to the airport to pick up his mother in-law. On the way home he asked her, “How long are you staying?” She replied, “As long as you want.” He asked her in wonderment, “You’re not even coming in for a cup of coffee!?” HASHEM had been waiting thousands of years till Avraham and Sara came along and invited HASHEM in, and later, as a nation, a Mishkan was constructed and HASHEM was welcomed into our midst.

At an ecumenical gathering in South Africa many years ago, a minister was given the honor of reciting an opening convocational prayer. He began like this, “May we merit to transcend the dust of materialism that darkens our vision and clouds our ideals and may we transcend the pull of material desire that holds us in its clutches...” Upon concluding another clergy member asked him, “Why do we have to transcend this physical world?! Why don’t we just make a place here on earth for G-d to dwell?” The answer came back emphatically, “That’s the job of the Jews!”

The name of the month ADAR in Hebrew is ALEPH-DALET-REISH! ALEPH stands for HASHEM Who is one. The first time ALEPH is used at the beginning of a word in Torah is ELOCHIM. DALET- REISH spells DAR, to reside. HASHEM finds residence with us in ADAR. It’s not just when we enter the time zone of Adar that we increase in joy but rather when ADAR enters and penetrates us, to that extent joy is amplified.

Purim is packed with eating and drinking with gusto. Yet in just such a setting we joyously

welcome HASHEM into our very midst, in full fulfillment of the job of the Jews.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez

Adar: The Month of Happiness

Why is Adar the happiest of months? Nissan should be the happiest month – the greatest miracle to befall the Jewish people, the Exodus, was in Nissan, so why not then?

It is because of Purim and Pesach needing to be together – we begin two months of joy. No matter how dark and disparaging the time seems, we are able to overcome.



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from: YUTorah <office@yutorah.org>
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Rav Soloveitchik on Pekudei: Hosting the Holy One

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider (Excerpted from Torah United, Teachings on The Weekly Parashah From Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and The Chassidic Masters (Ktav, 2023)

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik was once asked to speak at an intimate sheva berachot, the postnuptial celebrations. He began as follows: "How should a religious couple furnish their new home? And I don't mean the physical space or the furniture. I refer to the spiritual makeup of the house." He went on to propose that the simplest model to follow is that of the Mishkan, the house of God.

Three of its holiest components are mentioned together in Parashat Terumah—the ark, the table, and the menorah—while a fourth, the golden incense altar, is left for Parashat Tetzaveh. The first grouping indicates some commonality, and Ibn Ezra suggests that these three are the basic elements of a home: a place to rest (the ark), 1 a table for eating (the showbread table), and a source of light (the menorah). 2 The Mishkan, therefore, is not only a place to offer sacrifices, but a location in our midst in which God can reside, where we can feel His proximity.

If "the Tabernacle can transform into a house," the Rav reasoned, "the private house of the Jew can transform into a Tabernacle." The Rav now turned to the bride and groom: How do we accomplish this and host God in our home?

"We welcome God into our homes through establishing... the bed, the table, the chair and the lamp. Homiletically, the bed represents family purity, the table represents keeping kosher as well as the mitzvah of welcoming guests, while the menorah represents the study of Torah.... And in such a spiritually furnished home, one can hear the voice of God as in the Mishkan: "I will arrange My meetings with you there, and I will speak with you from atop the ark cover" (Exodus 25:22). In such a sanctuary, the Shechinah indeed finds a place to dwell."³

The many facets and features of the Mishkan are meant to inspire a Jew to bring holiness and God's presence into our own lives.⁴

The Rav's eminent forebear, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, stated that the well-known verse, "they shall make Me a midst Temple so that I might dwell in their midst. (Exodus 25:8), indicates that the divine presence (שׁמֵן כָּבֵד) is intended to be manifest within (בְּבָנָיו) each Jew. The verse does not say He will dwell within the Temple but "in their midst," or, more literally, "within them." He continued:

The main purpose of the sacred and the Temple and the resting of the divine presence is man. For if he sanctifies himself properly by fulfilling all of the commandments...then he himself becomes the actual Temple, and within him is God. As it says, "The Temple (בְּבָנָיו) of God, the Temple of God, are these" (Jeremiah 7:4).⁵

This interpretation of the verse also features in the writings of the Malbim. In a lengthy treatment of the Mishkan's symbolism, he noted that the verse following "they shall make Me a Temple" ends with "and so shall you make" (Exodus 25:9). He explained:

He commanded "and so shall you make," that everyone should build a Temple in the chambers of their heart, preparing themselves to be a Temple for God and an abode for His mighty presence. [...] This should also be followed for generations to come: everyone should build a Temple in the chambers of their heart and prepare an altar to offer up all the parts of their soul to God, to the extent that they sacrifice their soul for His glory at all times.⁶

Rabbi Elazar Azikri, the kabbalist best known for his liturgical poem "Yedid Nefesh," composed a poem that includes the line, "Inside my heart I will build a Mishkan for His splendor, my only soul shall offer Him a sacrifice." Based on this line, the famous rosh yeshiva of Chaim Berlin and original thinker Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner (1906–1980) composed the beautiful song known as Bilvavi. This song eloquently and figuratively expresses the Temple of divine service located within the heart:

In my heart I will build a mishkan, for the beauty of His honor. In the mishkan I will place an altar for the rays of His splendor. For an eternal light, I will take for myself the fire of the Akedah.

YUTORAH IN PRINT Pekudei 5784

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subject: **Tidbits • Parashas Pekudei Klal Gavoah in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz zt"l**

Parshas Pekudei • March 15th • 5 Adar II 5784

Reminders – [Candle lighting NYC 6:45pm] The final opportunity for Kiddush Levana is at 10:14 PM EDT on March 24th. | As the precarious situation in Eretz Yisrael continues, each person should increase reciting tehillim or performing other mitzvos as a zechus for the many Acheinu Beis Yisrael 'in travail and captivity'. | Daf Yomi - Friday: Bavli: Bava Metzia 16. • Yerushalmi: Terumos 73 • Mishnah Yomis: Nedarim 7:4-5 • Oraysa: Next week is Yoma 74a-76a. | Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

Next on the Calendar: Parshas Zachor, is next Shabbos, Parshas Vayikra. Taanis Esther is observed this Thursday, March 21st (it is observed earlier due to Shabbos). | Purim begins Motzaei Shabbos, March 23rd. Shushan Purim is on Monday, March 25th.

Parsha in a Paragraph: PEKUDEI: An accounting of the precious metals and materials collected for the Mishkan • The Bigdei Kehunah are fashioned • Everything is completed as Hashem commanded • Moshe blesses the workers • Hashem commands Moshe to erect the Mishkan • On Rosh Chodesh Nissan, Moshe erects the Mishkan and anoints the Keilim • Moshe dresses Aharon and Aharon's sons in the Bigdei Kehunah and anoints them • The Ananei HaKavod rest on the Mishkan • Hashem's Glory fills the Mishkan and Moshe cannot enter • The Bnei Yisrael travel based on the movement of the Ananei HaKavod • Chazak Chazak V'nis'chazeik!

Haftarah: The haftarah of “Vatishlam” (Melachim I, 7:51) is leined. It describes the chanukas habayis of the First Beis Hamikdash conducted by Shlomo Hamelech. (Sefardim lein the haftarah of “Vaya’as Chiram” - Melachim I, 7:40-50).

For the Shabbos Table “אֲלֹהֶה פָּקֹדֶת מִשְׁקָן מִשְׁקָן הַעֲדָה” “These are the accountings of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of the testimony” (Shemos 38:22) The Midrash on this pasuk explains that the repetition of the words “HaMishkan, Mishkan” is an allusion to the two Batei Mikdash, that were tragically destroyed due to sin. Why at this juncture of the inauguration of the Mishkan does the Torah seek to allude to the destruction of the Batei Mikdash?

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l explains: in our parashah, Moshe Rabbeinu made public accounting of all the materials donated to the Mishkan, and detailed the way in which they were used. This public accounting served a dual purpose: firstly, that no one should suspect him of misappropriating the materials, and secondly, that he personally should not be tempted to do so! Surprisingly, Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest of our prophets and a G-dly man, felt it appropriate to place safeguards to ensure he would not succumb to petty thievery.

Rav Moshe zt”l explains that the generation of the Churban was lax in instituting safeguards from sin; this was the polar opposite of the zehirus and vigilance demonstrated by Moshe Rabbeinu in our parashah. Tragically, by placing too much faith in their ability to resist temptation, they neglected to establish adequate protections against transgressions that they eventually succumbed to. Ultimately, this led to the destruction of the Batei Mikdash, that the Midrash says our pasuk is alluding to. One must be careful to never ‘let his guard down’ as these gedarim are a primary component of Avodas Hashem. Through proper zerizus and zehirus, we will bez”H be zocheh to the rebuilding of the Bais HaMikdash speedily in our days.

Thirty days before the chag: MATANOS L’EVYONIM: “It is preferable to spend more money on gifts to the poor than on one’s seudah and mishloach manos, as there is no greater joy than making the poor and less fortunate happy” (Rambam - Hilchos Purim 2:17). On Purim day, each man and woman must give to two needy people the monetary equivalent of a small meal. An ‘individual in need’ is classified as someone who is struggling to cover his day-to-day expenses. Maaser funds may not be used for the obligatory amount. One should ensure that his wife and bar/bas mitzvah children fulfill this mitzvah (one can simply ask the gabbai tzedakah to acquire the monies on behalf of his wife or child and provide it to a needy recipient on their behalf). It is proper to train one’s chinuch age children in this mitzvah, although the obligation regarding minors is a matter of dispute. Throughout the day, one should give freely to any needy individual who solicits without examining their legitimacy, just as Hashem performed the miracle of Purim without over examining our merits and deeds.

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Four Testimonies

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The mishkan was an ambitious project designed to craft a house of Hashem on Earth. The mishkan hosted daily korbanot, was the scene of national assembly, and was the epicenter for the devar Hashem (Word of God) and divine communication. It also voiced a testimony. The Torah designates the mishkan as a mishkan ha’eidut, or a house of testimony. Beyond enabling religious rites, it testified to truths which, previously, had been unclear or under dispute.

We were selected by Hashem to represent Him in a dark and confused world. After two centuries of brutal slavery and merciless persecution, we were liberated through supernatural miracles. A few weeks later, we stood beneath a blazing mountain, receiving His word, and pledged to live by His will.

Shockingly, just a few weeks later, we betrayed our faith and fashioned an egel (golden calf). After months of tefillah and teshuva, Hashem forgave us and repositioned the construction of His house. The mishkan testified to the possibility of forgiveness. We take this concept for granted, but ancient man could not imagine divine forgiveness. The sanctuary confirmed that Hashem desired penitence and accepted human apology. It testified to Mankind that Hashem would forgive their failures.

Furthermore, the mishkan produced testimony about Jewish history. It announced that Hashem had not forsaken His people and that we were still chosen, despite our horrible misconduct. The mishkan testified that Jewish selection is enduring and capable of outlasting our moral betrayals.

Historical Testimony

Often, epic events reshape the arc of history, irreversibly affecting the human condition. Some events, however, aren’t just dramatic and historically impactful but are also testimonial. These moments don’t just re-landscape history but also message humanity and message history. They aren’t merely historical shifts but are historical testimonies which discredit popular perspectives and introduce new paradigms. Legal testimony is registered in court and alters our prior perceptions of innocence or guilt. Historical testimony is registered in the human imagination and refutes faulty historical assumptions. At several crucial junctures, events in Jewish history testified against preconceived ideas. The sanctuary was the first historical testimony and it signaled that even after moral collapse we were still chosen.

The Second Testimony

Nine hundred and fifty years later, the Purim episode provided a second historical testimony. A student of history, Haman understood that we were chosen by Hashem and had been privileged to extraordinary divine providence. He took a brave gamble, though, wagering that, after our first exile, we had forfeited that chosen status and were now similar to other nations. As he described it: [The Jews are] a nation “scattered and divided,” living amongst other nations. His genocidal plan fed off the popular conception that the Jews had surrendered their chosen status and had abandoned their destiny. Yerushalayim had been sacked, the Mikdash had been incinerated, and we had been exiled from the land. Haman assumed that, at his stage of history, we had been discarded by Hashem and had become just as vulnerable as any other nation. With enough hatred and enough money, we could be erased from the map of humanity.

The Purim miracle debunked his malicious assumptions. Not only were we once chosen but we were still chosen. Despite our severe moral breakdowns and despite the trauma of being evicted from our homeland, Jewish destiny was still intact. Our chosen status could not only outlast sin, but could also survive exile.

The Third Testimony

Twenty-five hundred years later, a third testimony became necessary. The Holocaust was the most horrific atrocity in history. Never before had genocide been launched against an entire nation. Tragically, wars and natural disasters often devastated local populations, but never before was there a concerted and wholesale attempt to eradicate an entire race of people living in different countries and of vastly different ideological opinions. By launching his genocide, Hitler declared that the Jewish people didn’t have the right to inhabit this Earth. Two millennia of Jewish suffering coupled with contemporary social and racial theories, appeared to support his murderous claim.

In the dismal aftermath of the Holocaust, the Jewish future seemed bleak. The Holocaust accredited the contention that we were a forsaken people condemned to slowly disappear or to gradually become assimilated into the general population. The Holocaust raised severe existential questions for which many people had no answers. After a lengthy exile and unspeakable suffering during the Holocaust, it appeared that Jewish history was cursed. A few years later, these gloomy predictions were rebutted. Our return to Israel and to Jewish sovereignty repudiated any notions that Jewish history had ended. Despite the confusion of exile and the chaos of the Holocaust, it was obvious that Hashem still cared for us, and that His ancient promises

hadn't expired. In 1965, the Church officially reconciled with Judaism, recognizing us as the people of God and condemning any form of antisemitism.. After thousands of years of persecution and after the disaster of the Holocaust, our return to Israel testified to our fiercest enemies that our people had an enduring role in the fate of Mankind. Not only would Jews survive, but they would continue to shape civilization.

The Fourth Testimony

Seventy-five years after the third testimony, we are listening to the sound of the gradually- emerging fourth testimony. It is obvious that this war is much more than a local geopolitical skirmish. It is also painfully obvious that the war isn't just being waged with a terrorist group or with a seething Arab world. A broad coalition of Israel haters lines up to protest our just and moral war. Many of these fuming protesters are just antisemitic opportunists using the current conflict as an excuse to spew hatred and death threats at us. Many are even explicit about their desire to rid the world of our people. They still haven't "received the message" of previous testimonies.

Many of the anti-Israel protestors, though, do not contest our rights as a people, but are staunchly opposed to our rights to our land. To them this country never belonged to us, and we are nothing more than exploitative colonial invaders. The current cultural environment which has broadly condemned colonialism and has championed the rights of the oppressed appears to lend credibility to Israel haters. They naively and simplistically apply policies and viewpoints to our struggle to live peacefully in our homeland.

This is the first time since the formation of Israel that its right to exist is being broadly challenged. The phrase "from the River to the Sea" explicitly denies us any rights to our ancient homeland. Of course, the claim that Jews have the right to exist, but the state of Israel does not, is disingenuous. History has proven that without a Jewish homeland Jewish survival is tenuous, at best. However, Israel has the right to exist independent of its role in preserving Jewish survival. This is our ancient homeland which Hashem delivered to us. We are not exploitative colonizers but a peaceful nation returning home, seeking goodwill, and aspiring to share prosperity with our neighbors.

This outcome of this struggle will provide the fourth testimony of history. The mishkan testimony reaffirmed Jewish selection even after our national sin. The Purim testimony reinforced Jewish selection even after exile. The State of Israel testimony verified Jewish destiny even after it had appeared to have faded through time and violently wrecked during the Holocaust. The fourth testimony will affirm that not only are we Hashem's chosen, and not only is our destiny eternal, but that we have the right to live in our ancient homeland awarded to us by Hashem. The fourth testimony, like previous testimonies, will be entered into the annals of history. Like previous testimonies, it will be violently opposed until its opponents fade away and it enters collective human consciousness.

The writer is a rabbi at Yeshivat Har Etzion/Gush, a hesder yeshiva. He has smicha and a BA in computer science from Yeshiva University as well as a masters degree in English literature from the City University of New York. YUTORAH IN PRINT Pekudei 5784

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subject: Rabbi Frand on Parsha

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Pekudei

Parshas Pekudei's Positive Pride Preempts Previous Pernicious Pride
These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1285 "It's A Siman Min HaShamayim" – Is There Such A Thing?

The following thought on Parshas Pekudei comes from the sefer Nachalas Eliezer, written by Rav Eliezer Cohen, who was a Mashgiach in the Gateshead Yeshiva in England.

The Medrash says as follows on the words "Eleh pekudei haMishkan" (These are the reckonings of the Tabernacle) (Shemos 38:21). "At the time

you made the Golden Calf and danced around it, you angered Me with the words "Eleh Elohecha Yisrael (This is your god O Israel) that brought you up from the Land of Egypt" (Shemos 32:4). Now that you made the Mishkan with the word eleh, my anger has been appeased, as this eleh atones for the earlier eleh."

This is a Medrash that obviously requires some kind of an explanation. First of all, was the aveira (sin) of the Eigel HaZahav (Golden Calf) based on the fact that they used the word "Eleh"? The aveira was the fact that they made an Eigel HaZahav altogether, a pseudo avodah zarah. The expression "I was angered with the word eleh" seems a bit imprecise, to say the least. Also, what kind of atonement is it that they used the same word when building the Mishkan? Is this some type of gezeirah shavah? eleh-eleh?

The truth of the matter is that the Peirush Marzu on the bottom of the Medrash interprets this Medrash: The word eleh has a certain connotation. It has the connotation of "I am proud of this!" How do we know that? The Marzu writes that another Medrash says: Rav Yitzchak said, at the time of Creation, it is written "Eleh toldos hashamayim v'ha'aretz (These are the products of the heaven and the earth) when they were created on the day that Hashem, G-d made earth and heaven." (Bereshis 2:4). The Creator praises them. He says, as it were, "Look! Look at My world. Look at what I have created." The Creator praises the work of His Hands. This is the connotation of using the word eleh – Look at my accomplishment!

Now we can begin to understand the above-cited Medrash. Of course, it is horrible that they built an Eigel HaZahav. But it added insult to injury when they proclaimed "Eleh Elokecha Yisrael asher he'e'lucha m'Eretz Mitzrayim" as if they were proud of what they did. The Gemara (Berachos 19a) says "If someone sees a Torah scholar commit an aveira at night, don't suspect him the next day – for he has certainly already done teshuva for his aveira of the previous night."

We all slip up. If someone sees a talmid chochom who did an aveira at night, he clearly feels bad about it. Without a doubt, by the next morning, he has already done teshuva. A talmid chochom may have been momentarily grasped by his Yetzer HaRah, but he immediately makes amends and goes on with his life. On the other hand, the pasuk says "(Why do You stand aloof) when the wicked man glories in his personal desire and the robber praises himself that he has blasphemed Hashem?" (Tehillim 10:3). The rasha is proud of what he did. He regrets it not, but rather he brags about his wicked deeds.

This is the difference. Of course, the Eigel haZahav was wrong, but dancing around the Eigel and proudly saying "Eleh Elohecha Yisrael" really angered the Ribono shel Olam.

They were desperate. They thought they lost their leader and they did not know who would lead them. Fine. They made an Eigel haZahav. Very Bad. But at least there would have been some extenuating circumstances to find some justification for their succumbing to their sense of desperation. But when they danced around it and pointed to it (eleh) with glee – that showed that there was no regret whatsoever. That is what angered the Almighty. Eleh pekudei haMishkan shows that they were proud of having built the Mishkan. The money contributed, and the effort put into all the work of construction was something about which they felt very good, and they wanted to brag about it. That was the atonement for the aveira of the Eigel. Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Vayakeil/Pikudei is provided below: ... A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2024 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org

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subject: The Bliss of Ego-Death — New Essay by Rabbi YY

Our Relationship with Money

The Day Moses Became a Bookkeeper

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

Who Tells Me Anything?

A woman called a local hospital. "Hello," she said. "I'd like to talk with the person who gives the information regarding your patients. I'd like to find out if the patient is getting better, doing as expected or getting worse."

The voice on the other end of the line said, "What is the patient's name and room number?"

"Sarah Cohen in Room 302," the woman answered.

"I will connect you with the nursing station."

"3-A Nursing Station. How can I help you?"

"I would like to know the condition of Sarah Cohen in Room 302."

"Just a moment, let me look at her records. Oh, yes. Mrs. Cohen is doing very well. In fact, she's had two full meals, her blood pressure is fine, her blood work just came back as normal, she's going to be taken off the heart monitor in a couple of hours and, if she continues this improvement, Dr. Weiss is going to send her home Tuesday at noon."

"Thank G-d!" the woman said. "That's wonderful! Oh! That's fantastic, what wonderful news!"

The nurse said, "From your enthusiasm, I take it you must be a family member or a very close friend!"

"Not exactly," the woman said. "I'm actually the patient herself; I'm Sarah Cohen in 302! Nobody here tells me anything."

The Long Journey

The drama was almost complete. The people exiled in a foreign country for more than two centuries, and for much of that time in unbearable conditions, experienced a miraculous liberation through direct and manifested intervention by the Creator. At Mt. Sinai, G-d and Israel enter into a mutual covenant to become partners in "tikkun olam:" repairing a world estranged from its essence. Never again in history would G-d completely part the veils that conceal Him, communicating His presence to an entire nation.

Forty days later, in a moment of collective insanity, the people deny G-d. They substitute the moral sovereign of the universe with a golden calf. G-d now views His attempt to mold a people into a "kingdom of princes and a sacred nation" as a colossal failure. He sees no value anymore in the Jewish experience. Moses stands up to G-d, eliciting from Him a deeper chord in His relationship with Israel. G-d re-embraces the people and instructs them to build a home in their midst for His elusive presence. In this sanctuary, the all-pervading truth of G-d would be more manifest and accessible. The Jewish people en masse present to Moses large amounts of gold, silver, copper and many other materials required for the construction of an exquisite tabernacle. Moses appoints brilliant architects, sculptors, and designers to build the home, design the vessels, carve out the furniture and craft the items that would make up the new Divine home.

At the opening of the Torah portion of Pekudei[1], the work is complete. Soon, the sanctuary would be erected and the Divine presence would reside therein. This is a charged moment, a dramatic peak in a long and turbulent journey of a people. After all of the ups and downs, G-d is about to "move in" with the Jewish people.

The hero of the story is, no doubt, Moses. With courageous selflessness, he triumphed, over G-d, as it were. He is the man responsible for bringing the people—and G-d—to this extraordinary moment, when humanity would reintroduce G-d to a world that banished Him.

Time for Bookkeeping

But wait. Right at this moment, the Torah interrupts the narrative, shifting the story from creating a space for G-d in this world, to the realm of bookkeeping. Moses, at this point, presents a detailed account of all the wealth contributed to him for the construction of the tabernacle. He reports to the people how many pounds of gold, silver, and copper he received, and

how exactly it was used in the structure. He gives an account for every last piece of jewelry and metal that came into his hands.

Why? The Midrash[2] relates that some Jews murmured about Moses stealing some of the money, using charity funds for his own purposes. Thus, Moses gave a detailed account of the destination of every "dollar" collected in the grandiose "building campaign."

This is a simple but very telling scene. Moses, let us recall, is the spiritual giant of history, whom Maimonides defined as the greatest human being to ever walk the earth[3]. "G-d would speak to Moses face to face, as a man would speak with his friend," the Bible says[4]. "Not so my servant Moses," G-d thunders on Aaron and Miriam after they had gossiped about him. "In My entire house he is the trusted one. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him, in a clear vision and not in riddles; he gazes at the image of G-d. Why do you not fear to speak against My servant, Moses[5]?"

Does a man who speaks to G-d face to face really need to prove that he is not using money for a cruise in the Caribbean, for a new BMW or to build his portfolio? The Jews, observing Moses' unparalleled devotion and love to them in the most trying of circumstances, knew full well that Moses was no charlatan. If G-d trusts him, they could trust him too. Even if some Jewish rabble-rousers murmured about Moses stealing some of the money, we would expect Moses to ignore them.

"Who do they think they are to question my integrity," we would expect Moses to think to himself. "I gave my life for these rebels when G-d wanted to destroy them. After all, it was G-d Himself who appointed me to my present position, against my will[6]. How dare they challenge my honesty?" These feelings would be understandable. Yet, astonishingly, without even being asked or instructed to do so, Moses, in total humility, stands up and gives an accounting for every last penny that came into his hands.

One of the great Halachik authorities, Rabbi Joel Sirkish (1561-1640), known as the "Bach," derives a law from this episode[7]: Even the most beloved and believable collectors of charity are obliged to give a detailed account to the community of the destination of every cent they collected for charity. Nobody, writes the Bach, could be trusted more than Moses, the man whom G-d Himself trusted. Yet even he felt compelled to give an accounting of all the contributions.

An interesting historical note: The Bach was extremely wealthy. He was the Rabbi of Cracow and he lent the community enormous sums of money. He fed and supported many of his students, distributing enormous sums for charity.

This is one of the great moral messages of Judaism: When it comes to somebody else's money, be accountable for every dollar. Don't cover up, don't lie, and don't deceive. You can't lie to people and then be honest with G-d, with your wife, with your children, with your friends.

If only Bernie Madoff would have internalized this story...

We all need and thus appreciate money. Some of us love money. Even spiritual leaders need money and often cherish it deeply. Rabbis are also only human beings. That is not evil. The story turns ugly when we become dishonest with our money. We must learn from Moses: to always be able to give an account for every dollar that came into our hand.

Respecting Another Person

There is yet something deeper. Moses truly believes in the dignity of the people and in their right to know what has transpired with their contributions. Moses does not allow his spiritual greatness and extraordinary authority to implant in his psyche a sense of superiority over the masses, in which it is beyond his ego to give them a detailed account of his spending. On the contrary, he views his G-d-given power as a means to confer dignity and greatness upon all of the people.

Moses set an example for all the generations to come. The great Jewish leaders always understood that what qualified them as leaders and teachers and what bestowed upon them the right to power was not their charisma, brilliance, skills, or even the fact that the Almighty Himself appointed them to their position. It was, rather, the fact that deep down in their hearts they

really viewed their "subjects" as equals. They possessed a sincere belief that dignity was the property of all.

Insecure leaders must resort to fear and tyranny in order to ensure loyalty and secure their position. They must speak in the name of authority rather than in the name of integrity. They must remain aloof and superior and never allow the simple folk too much access to the truth. Vulnerability is too dangerous. At best, they create followers. Genuine leaders, on the other hand, gain the trust, appreciation, and affection of their people, because of their trust in the people and their unyielding faith in the majesty of every individual human being molded in the image of the Divine. They create leaders.

This is true about all of our relationships in life. If you wish to inspire genuine loyalty, in a marriage, in the workplace, or in friendships, you must learn to genuinely accept the other person as an equal, conferring upon him or her the dignity you hold dear for yourself[8].

[1] Exodus 38:21. [2] Shmos Rabah 51:6. [3] Rambam, commentary on Mishnah, introduction to Sanhedrin chapter 11. [4] Exodus 33:11. [5] Numbers 12:7:8. [6] Exodus chapter 3. [7] Yoreh Daah section 257. Cf. an interesting story related by his son-in-law, Rabbi David Segal, known as the "Taz," in his "derashos" for Parshas Pekudei. [8] This essay is based on a talk delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shabbas Pekudei 5744, March 3, 1984, and on other sources.

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Rabbi Wein

The end of the book of Shemot describes the culmination of the events of the exodus from Egypt, the revelation at Sinai and the construction of the Mishkan/Tabernacle. All of these events are certainly on the positive side of the historical ledger. On the other side that the book of Shemot represents there is the sin of the Golden Calf and the constant carping and complaining of the Jewish people against Moshe and against the God of Israel.

In effect, this sets the template for all further Jewish history. There are always ups and downs, pluses and minuses in the national behavior of the Jewish people. The book of Shemot ends on a triumphant note – the spirit of God, so to speak, invests and dwells within the Jewish people, and the Mishkan/Tabernacle that they so lovingly built – promising an eternal relationship.

Jewish tradition teaches us that this is the ultimate result of the long story of our existence. It will end triumphantly but there will be many serious bumps on the road before we arrive at our ultimate destination. It seems especially appropriate that at the conclusion of this holy book, the entire congregation rises to proclaim that we will be strengthened in our lives and experiences. We will attempt to strengthen the positive side of our ledger and minimize the entries on the other side. The Torah expended much detail and space to the construction of the Mishkan/Tabernacle. Part of the reason for the need to adhere to the laws in this regard is that the devil lies in the details. All of history instructs us that seemingly unimportant details shape great events, with unexpected results.

The ineptness of Archduke Ferdinand's chauffeur, who drove the car back into the teeth of the assassins' ambush after first escaping from it, helped bring about the cataclysmic events that are called World War I. The Jewish people questioned why Moshe was late on returning from his ascent on Mount Sinai and thus the conditions for the construction of the Golden Calf somehow presented themselves. All of Jewish law and halachic decisions are built upon recognizing and analyzing the details of the issues involved. It is the small detail that builds the general rule, not the other way around. We are all aware how in architecture, manufacturing and construction for example, it is the smallest detail that is the difference between success and failure, achievement or disaster.

This is in line with the details regarding the Mishkan/Tabernacle, which in turn reflect the Torah itself, which represents all human life. Today's parsha teaches us the requirement of accountability in all aspects of our lives. All of these ideas are taught to us to help us form a proper ledger book on the basis of whose entries we will be eventually judged. This book of Shemot stands as the book of human judgment and understanding.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

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COVENANT & CONVERSATION
Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l
On Jewish Character = PEKUDEI

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Pekudei has sometimes been called "The Accountant's Parsha", because that is how it begins, with the audited accounts of the money and materials donated to the Sanctuary. It is the Torah's way of teaching us the need for financial transparency. But beneath the sometimes-dry surface lie two extraordinary stories, one told in last week's parsha, the other the week before, teaching us something deep about Jewish nature that is still true today.

The first has to do with the Sanctuary itself. God told Moses to ask people to make contributions. Some brought gold, some silver, some copper. Some gave wool or linen or animal skins. Others contributed acacia wood, oil, spices, or incense. Some gave precious stones for the High Priest's breastplate. What was remarkable was the willingness with which they gave: The people continued bringing [Moses] additional gifts every morning. So all the skilled workers who were doing all the work on the Sanctuary left what they were doing, and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than enough for the work God has commanded us to do."

Moses ordered an announcement to be made throughout the camp: "Let no man or woman make anything more as an offering for the Sanctuary."

And so the people brought no more, because what they already had was more than enough to for all the work that was to be done.

Ex. 36:3-7

They brought too much. Moses had to tell them to stop. That is not the Israelites as we have become accustomed to seeing them, argumentative, quarrelsome, ungrateful. This is a people that longs to give.

One parsha earlier we read a very different story. The people were anxious. Moses had been up the mountain for a long time. Was he still alive? Had some accident happened to him? If so, how would they receive the Divine word telling them what to do and where to go? Hence their demand for a Calf – essentially an oracle, an object through which Divine instruction could be heard.

Aaron, according to the most favoured explanation, realised that he could not stop the people directly by refusing their request, so he adopted a stalling manoeuvre. He did something with the intention of slowing them down, trusting that if the work could be delayed, Moses would reappear. This is what Aaron said:

"Take off the gold rings from the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."

Ex. 32:2

According to the Midrash, he thought this would create arguments within families, there would be resistance to the requests for jewellery, and the project would be delayed. Instead, immediately thereafter without a pause, we read:

So all the people took the gold rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron.

Ex. 32:3

Again the same generosity. Now, these two projects could not be less alike. One, the Tabernacle, was holy. The other, the Calf, was close to being an idol. Building the Tabernacle was a supreme mitzvah; making the Calf was a terrible sin. Yet their response was the same in both cases. Hence this comment of the Sages:

One cannot understand the nature of this people. If they are appealed to for a Calf, they give. If appealed to for the Tabernacle, they give.

Yerushalmi Shekalim 1, 45

The common factor was generosity. Jews may not always make the right choices in what they give to, but they give.

In the twelfth century, Moses Maimonides twice interrupts his customary calm legal prose in his law code, the Mishneh Torah, to make the same point. Speaking about tzedakah, charity, he says:

"We have never seen or heard about a Jewish community which does not have a charity fund."

Laws of Gifts to the poor, 9:3

The idea that a Jewish community could exist without a network of charitable provisions was almost inconceivable. Later in the same book, Maimonides says:

We are obligated to be more scrupulous in fulfilling the commandment of tzedakah than any other positive commandment because tzedakah is the sign of the righteous person, a descendant of Abraham our father, as it is said, "For I know him, that he will command his children . . . to do tzedakah" . . . If someone is cruel and does not show mercy, there are sufficient grounds to suspect his lineage, since cruelty is found only among the other nations . . . Whoever refuses to give charity is called Belial, the same term which is applied to idol worshippers.

Laws of Gifts to the poor, 10:1-3

Maimonides is here saying more than that Jews give charity. He is saying that a charitable disposition is written into Jewish genes, part of our inherited DNA. It is one of the signs of being a child of Abraham, so much so that if someone does not give charity there are "grounds to suspect his lineage." Whether this is nature or nurture or both, to be Jewish is to give.

There is a fascinating feature of the geography of the land of Israel. It contains two seas: the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee is full of life. The Dead Sea, as its name implies, is not. Yet they are fed by the same river, the Jordan. The difference – and this is key – is that the Sea of Galilee receives water and gives water. The Dead Sea receives but does not give. To receive but not to give is, in Jewish geography as well as Jewish psychology, simply not life.

So it was in the time of Moses. So it is today. In virtually every country in which Jews live, their charitable giving is out of all proportion to their numbers. In Judaism, to live is to give.

Questions from the Front Lines

with Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein

by Tzvi Yaakovson

Yated Ne'eman 28 Adar I 5784 I March 8, 2024

I have once again received a copy of Vovei Ha'Amudim, the monthly publication of Kehillas Bais Dovid in Cholon, which is under the leadership of Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein. You may recall an observation that I often make about the material in this kuntres. Vovei Ha'Amudim contains several sections featuring material drawn from Rav Zilberstein's teachings, including his responses to various shailos that were presented to him, and I have often observed that the questions themselves tend to evoke admiration. These shailos illustrate the degree to which the questioners are meticulous about their observance of the mitzvos bein adam lechaveiro, the depth of their concern about maintaining their monetary integrity or avoiding lashon bora, and the care and attention that they invest in performing mitzvos.

For instance, in the section titled Maaseh Choshev, we find that a man who was spending Shabbos in the hospital with his son asked Rav Zilberstein if he was permitted to leave his child alone to go to daven, with the knowledge that the hospital staff would call him if he was needed. In Eretz Yisroel, the

standard practice is for the companion of a hospital patient to leave his telephone number with the nurses in the ward. This allows the companion to move freely around the grounds of the hospital, while the staff will be able to contact him if his presence is needed. The questioner wished to know whether he was permitted to leave his son's room on Shabbos, knowing that it might cause a nurse to desecrate Shabbos by calling him, or he was required to remain there to avoid that possibility. The shailah was further complicated by the fact that he would have to carry his phone with him if he left the room. Even under those harrowing circumstances, the beleaguered father was focused on how best to balance the halachos of Shabbos with the value of davening with a minyan. ..

One of the chapters in this month's kuntres featured a series of short questions and answers, all of which were both fascinating and edifying. I found one question especially interesting: If a man is ill and does not have the strength to daven, is his wife permitted to recite the bracha of shelo asani isha for him? This is a very interesting shailah that has never occurred to me in the past. Rav Zilberstein responded that the wife should recite the brocha of sheosani kirtzono.

Another question, which is probably one that affects many of us, is whether a person is permitted to adjust his tefillin shel yad during the Shemoneh Esrei. A third questioner asked if he was permitted to attend the wedding of his nephew, who was marrying a non-Jewish woman who had undergone a Reform conversion. Rav Zilberstein's answer to this question was an emphatic no.

This edition of the kuntres also included a new section consisting of shailos that the Rav had received pertaining to the war.

Rescuing the Captives --The first question was a shailah of incomparable gravity: Would the halacha permit staging a rescue operation to forcibly secure the freedom of hostages in Gaza, when this may create further danger or pressure for the captives remaining in captivity? While this question was not presented to Rav Zilberstein for practical purposes, there are important principles to be derived from the theoretical discussion. "The people of Israel were informed about the rescue of two hostages," the questioner wrote. "We would like to ask the following: If there were a Sanhedrin in Eretz Yisroel today, would they have approved this operation? The Gemara states (Gittin 45a) that one may not rescue captives due to the consideration of tikkun ha'olam, and according to Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, for the benefit of other captives. Rashi explains that the Tanna Kamma maintains that even if there is no one else in captivity at the time, a successful rescue might cause the captors to imprison future prisoners under harsher conditions, whereas Rabi Shimon's concern was only that if there are other prisoners in captivity, the captors might torture them. According to Rabi Shimon, then, it is permitted to rescue captives if there is no one else remaining in captivity. "The Shulchan Aruch rules (Yoreh Dei'ah 252:5) in accordance with the Tanna Kamma's view, meaning that even if there are no other captives at the moment, it is forbidden to rescue prisoners due to the possibility that future captives may suffer more as a result. That being the case, it is certainly prohibited to rescue captives when others are being held in captivity at the time. Sure enough, after the rescue of the two hostages, I read the following report: 'It is believed that after the successful rescue of two hostages, the Hamas terror organization will increase its security measures for the remaining captives. It is projected that Hamas will increase the number of guards and possibly will transfer more of them to subterranean tunnels, where it will be more difficult for a rescue operation to be carried out. This gave rise to our question: Would the Sanhedrin have ruled against mounting a rescue operation of this nature, due to the danger in the remaining hostages?'

Rav Zilberstein replied, "It is permitted to rescue hostages, and it is even a mitzvah to do so. The prohibition to rescue captives applies only when there is a concern that their captors will intensify the harsh conditions under which the others are being held. In this case, however, such a concern cannot be a factor, since the terrorists are cruel people who are tormenting their captives as much as they can. Moreover, Chazal prohibited only smuggling the

captives out of their confinement without a direct confrontation with their captors, but if the rescuers can kill the captors, then it is permitted." This psak, like many others in these kuntresim, is accompanied by extensive explanatory notes. On this particular topic, Rav Zilberstein quotes his father-in-law, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, who was once consulted about a similar situation. "We are dealing with lowly, beastlike creatures, the descendants of Yishmoel, who was born as a *pcrc odom*" Rav Zilberstein explains. "This means that Yishmoel is a wild beast by nature, and he merely has the appearance of a human being who walks on two legs. The (the terrorists) already impose the harshest conditions possible on their captives, and it is unlikely that they could worsen their conditions further. Therefore, it is proper to rescue them as quickly as possible. Similarly, my father-in-law and teacher, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, was once asked about the Mishnah's statement that one may not ransom captives for more than a reasonable price, lest the captors decide to take more prisoners. He explained that this does not apply to terrorists, since they will always do anything in their power regardless of the reactions of others. In this case, as well, the terrorists are already subjecting their captives to the greatest abuse they can inflict, and we do not need to be concerned that they may worsen the conditions further."

Davening for Rain -- The next question, which came from a soldier on the front lines, was one that I found incredibly painful to read. "I am one of a group of thirty soldiers who are stationed in Gaza," the questioner wrote. "We recently entered a building in Gaza and searched the entire building. When we saw that there were no terrorists or booby traps anywhere in the building, we positioned ourselves on the second floor. One of our group, the deputy commander of the battalion, went upstairs to use the facilities, and then we suddenly heard a volley of gunshots from that direction, alerting us to the presence of terrorists. We quickly began shooting toward the upper floor, and two of our men were injured; one of them was miraculously saved when two bullets were halted by his bulletproof vest but a third bullet hit him in the leg. Meanwhile, the terrorists upstairs threw a grenade at us, which miraculously exploded only on the side that was facing away from us. We could have fired a single missile to wipe out all the terrorists upstairs, but we did not know what had happened to our fellow soldier who was there. Had the terrorists discovered him? Was he still alive? The battle therefore took a long time; we weren't able to use the stairs due to the danger, and we had to call for reinforcements and medical aid. Boruch Hashem, after forty minutes, the incident was brought to an end, with one fatality and two casualties in our ranks. After an investigation, it became clear that the building had indeed been empty when we entered it, but it was very close to another building, and the terrorists were able to leap from the adjacent building into the upper story. The first volley of bullets killed the officer who was upstairs, but the gunfire alerted us to the terrorists' presence and we were able to kill them. If they had come downstairs quietly, without our realizing that they were present, they could easily have thrown a grenade into the room where we were sitting, *chas v'shalom*, and they might have killed all of us. "We recognize that such a situation would present a serious *shailah*. If there are terrorists in a place such as the upper floor of a building and one of our men is there as well, but we do not know if he is still alive and hiding or if he has been killed, would we be permitted to throw an explosive into that area to save ourselves? In that case, the soldier upstairs would certainly be killed if he was still alive. Are we required to continue fighting while taking precautions to ensure that he isn't accidentally killed, even though our other men would be endangered as a result? In other words, when a person is pursued by a *rodef*, we know that it is a *mitzvah* to eliminate him. However, if that may also result in the death of a person who is not a *rodef*, is it necessary to endanger our entire unit to avoid actively killing someone who isn't a threat to us? Or is a person permitted to do anything that he would ordinarily do to save his own life without taking the collateral damage into account, regardless of how great it is?" Rav Zilberstein replied, "It is permitted to fire the explosive since that is not considered an act of killing the soldier; it is merely an act of killing the terrorists. It is permitted to kill a *rodef* even if one thereby endangers the life of another Jew. Furthermore, die

soldiers on the lower floor were facing certain danger, while it was not certain that the soldier who had gone upstairs was still alive. In such a case, it is correct to save those who are in certain danger rather than endangering them further for a person who might no longer be alive." The explanatory footnotes on this psak contain a fascinating but extremely lengthy discussion. While I won't quote the entire discussion, I will make note of one interesting detail that the rov mentions. The Chazon *hh* discusses the ease of a person who sees an arrow that is about to be shot and will kill many people, and who is able to divert the arrow -- so that it is aimed in a different direction and kills only one person, who would not otherwise have been among its victims. In that case, the Chazon *hh* debates whether it would be permissible to redirect the arrow to save the lives of the larger number of victims. Rav Zilberstein explains various lines of reasoning about that issue and explores whether it has any bearing on the question that was presented to him. Of course, these are issues of the utmost gravity.

Another question about the war came from a kollel: "In the month of Teves and at the beginning of Shevat, there was no rain. We have now begun to receive heavy rain, and we have given thanks in our kollel for the rainfall and are dawning for it to continue. However, one of the *yungeleit* said, 'How can we be dawning for more rain? Don't you know that there are many soldiers in Gaza and Lebanon right now who are being greatly disturbed by the rain? They are out in the open, and the rain and cold are affecting them heavily. Perhaps this isn't the right time to be dawning for rain.' This led to a fierce debate over whether it is appropriate to daven for rain under the circumstances. On the one hand, we know that the rain is very beneficial for agriculture. On the other hand, it may create great hardships for the soldiers. One of the *yungeleit* pointed out that the *kohen gadol* used to daven on Yom Kippur for rain even if it would interfere with others, as we find that he davened for Hashem to disregard the *tefillos* of the travelers to be spared from rain at the time when the world needed precipitation. Even though there were many people on the roads, the world's need for rain was more important. Perhaps the same is true of our case. The world's need for rain may be more important than the needs of those people will be harmed by it. Since we entertained various arguments about this topic, we decided to ask the rov to *pasken* on it for us. Rav Zilberstein replied, 'Hashem is capable of bringing rain in one place while withholding it in another. Therefore, one should daven for the rain to be a *bracha* to fall in the places where it is needed. In the explanatory notes, Rav Zilberstein discusses the *tafillah* of the *kohen gadol* on Yom Kippur, as well as developing an extensive interpretation of the Gemara's discussion about rainfall (Rosh Hashanah 17b).

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Wanted Dead or Alive

By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

Question #1: Getting Rid of those Bugs!

"May I trap or kill mosquitoes, bees, or wasps on Shabbos?"

Question #2: Hanging from the Lowest Tree

"I forgot to hang the flypaper before Shabbos. May I do it on Shabbos?"

Question #3: A Charming Shabbos

"May a snake charmer work on Shabbos?"

Answer: Catching or dispatching

We have all been in the following uncomfortable situation: Sometime during Shabbos, a mosquito appears in our vicinity seeking to earn its living. Although we realize that this creature requires its sustenance, we are not eager that we, our children or our guests should become mosquito fodder, even just as a minor donor. Are we permitted to trap or kill the mosquito? Trapping living things, *tzad*, was an action necessary for acquiring some of the materials used to build the Mishkan, and is one of the 39 *melachos*, categories of prohibited activity on Shabbos (Mishnah Shabbos 73a and Rashi ad loc.). Killing living things also violates the *melachos* of Shabbos, a

topic that we discussed last week. Here, we discuss many pertinent principles of Shabbos and some details of the melachah of tzad.

Shabbos nomenclature

When discussing what one may or may not do on Shabbos, the Mishnah and Gemara use three terms: (1) chayov, punishable, when a particular act constitutes melachah, meaning that it desecrates Shabbos by violating a Torah law; (2) patur, exempt, meaning it does not violate a Torah law, and (3) mutar, permitted, when an act may be performed on Shabbos. We will discuss the middle term, patur, which states that a particular forbidden act does not violate Torah law. This term usually indicates that the act is prohibited due to rabbinic sanction, but sometimes the Sages permitted such acts. But first we will explain what makes performing a forbidden activity patur?

Meleches machsheves

The Gemara (Chagigah 10b; Bava Kama 26b; Kerisus 19b) teaches that the Torah prohibited only something that can be categorized as meleches machsheves, which can perhaps be translated as premeditated melachah. An obvious example of meleches machsheves would be trapping an animal to obtain its hide or meat. Similarly, someone who digs a hole to plant the base of a tree violates the meleches machsheves of choreish, plowing, and one who picks a fruit performs a meleches machsheves of kotzeir, harvesting. Meleches machsheves is often explained by what it is not. Following that approach, I will provide three categories of labor that are exempt from being defined as desecrating Shabbos min haTorah, because they do not qualify as meleches machsheves, at least according to some opinions.

Mekalkeil

In general, an act constitutes meleches machsheves only when its direct result is beneficial. This means that an action that is inherently destructive does not violate Shabbos min haTorah, even when one needs the result. For example, digging a hole in the ground when one needs the earth but not the hole is defined as a destructive activity and prohibited only miderabbanan. The dug hole itself is a negative development, rendering the burrowing to be mekalkeil, not prohibited min haTorah, but only because of rabbinic injunction. However, digging a hole to plant or to create a posthole results in a positive benefit and is indeed prohibited min haTorah, since one wants the hole in the ground.

Bemino nitzad

Here is a second example of meleches machsheves that is particular to the melachah that we are discussing, tzad. The tanna'im (Shabbos 107b) dispute whether it is prohibited min haTorah to ensnare a creature that mankind does not typically use, such as a scorpion or a flea, which is called ein bemino nitzad, literally, a species that is not trapped. The halachic conclusion follows the lenient opinion, ruling that tzad applies only to a species that is bemino nitzad, commonly trapped, so that mankind can benefit from it. For example, a species that is eaten, from whose body a medicine is extracted, or whose hide is used as leather qualifies as bemino nitzad. The halachic authorities discuss whether trapping an animal for scientific research or so that one can have it as a pet makes the animal bemino nitzad (Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 10:21; Chazon Ish, Orach Chayim 50:4 at end).

However, a species that is caught only because it is an annoyance has the status of ein bemino nitzad.

Why is this true? The purpose of trapping is to harness a living creature so that mankind can use it. Thus, tzad is a type of acquisition (see Shu"t Avnei Neizer, Orach Chayim 189:7; Biur Halachah, 316:2 s.v. Oh Choleh). However, trapping a creature that mankind does not generally use is not acquiring these creatures, but distancing them from potential victims. Therefore, most opinions conclude that trapping a species that is ein bemino nitzad does not violate the melachah of tzad, and is prohibited only because of rabbinic injunction. Thus, since flies are ein bemino nitzad, catching them would not violate a Torah prohibition. Hanging flypaper on Shabbos would still involve a rabbinic prohibition and it is similarly prohibited to set up a mousetrap on Shabbos (Magen Avraham 316:9; see Piskei Tosafos, Shabbos 17b #62).

By the way, many authorities consider mice to be bemino nitzad, since there are places in the world where their hide is used (Chayei Odom 30:7). There is also a dispute whether a non-kosher species harvested only as food is considered bemino nitzad (Ritva, Shabbos 106b; Nimla Tal, Meleches Tzad #37).

Melachah she'einah tzerichah legufah

Many authorities rule that another category of activity -- Melachah she'einah tzerichah legufah, literally, an act not needed for its purpose -- is not prohibited min haTorah because it is not considered meleches machsheves. In fact, there is a dispute among tanna'im whether a Melachah she'einah tzerichah legufah is prohibited min haTorah or only miderabbanan. Whereas Rabbi Yehudah contends that Melachah she'einah tzerichah legufah is prohibited min haTorah, according to Rabbi Shimon, these acts are prohibited only by virtue of rabbinic injunction.

What is a Melachah she'einah tzerichah legufah? Among the rishonim, we find differing opinions as to exactly how to define this term, and there are many instances where a dispute in halachah results. Since this complicated question is a bit tangential to our topic, I am going to present only one approach. According to Tosafos (Shabbos 94a s.v. Rabbi Shimon) and the Rivash (Shu"t Harivash #394), Rabbi Shimon contends that the 39 melachos are prohibited min haTorah only when performed for a goal or purpose similar to the reason why this melachah was done when constructing the Mishkan. However, performing a melachah to accomplish a purpose other than that for which this melachah was performed in the Mishkan qualifies as a Melachah she'einah tzerichah legufah. This means that it is prohibited only miderabbanan, according to Rabbi Shimon and those who rule like him.

Here is an example: Removing an item that has a bad odor from a reshus hayachid, an enclosed area, into a reshus harabim, an open area meant for public use, is a classic case of Melachah she'einah tzerichah legufah. Although moving something from a reshus hayachid into a reshus harabim constitutes the melachah of carrying, moving the foul-smelling item from a house to a reshus harabim does not constitute a melachah min haTorah, according to Rabbi Shimon, because the purpose of the carrying when building the Mishkan was to relocate the item to a new place. However, when removing a foul-smelling item, there is no significance attached to the place to which the item is moved; one's goal is only to distance it from its current location. The public area does not constitute the goal of one's act; rather, it is merely a convenient place to deposit unwanted material. For this reason, Rabbi Shimon contends that this act was not prohibited by the Torah, but only by the Sages. On the other hand, Rabbi Yehudah considers Melachah she'einah tzerichah legufah as conforming to the definition of meleches machsheves and prohibited min haTorah.

Although most rishonim conclude that the halachah follows Rabbi Shimon that Melachah she'einah tzerichah legufah is prohibited only because of rabbinic injunction, the Rambam and others rule, according to Rabbi Yehudah, that Melachah she'einah tzerichah legufah is prohibited min haTorah.

When exempt is permitted

There is a passage of Gemara that reflects both on our opening question and on a different aspect of the melachah of tzad. "Shemuel said: Whenever the Mishnah states that something is patur when performed on Shabbos, the activity is prohibited [because of a rabbinic injunction], with the exception of the following three instances, when patur means that the activity is permitted. The first case discusses catching a deer, the second is catching a snake and the third is lancing a boil" (Shabbos 3a; 107a, as explained by Tosafos, Shabbos 3a s.v. Bar). Shemuel proves from Mishnayos that, in these three instances, the acts are permitted (Shabbos 107a). The first two of these cases educate us to understand what constitutes the melachah of trapping. (The case of lancing a boil involves a different topic that we will leave for a different article.)

What are the first two cases presented by Shemuel? The first situation is when a deer entered a building, and someone sat in the doorway of the building, thereby preventing the deer's escape. When that person sat down,

he trapped the deer and therefore performed the melachah of tzad. This is true, even if he was not involved in coaxing the deer into the building. The Mishnah (Shabbos 106b) then states that if a second person sits alongside the first in a way that the deer's escape is still blocked, even when the first person gets up, the second person has not desecrated Shabbos. This is because the second person did not trap the deer but merely guaranteed that a captured animal remains in captivity. Although the Mishnah says that the second person is patur, Shemuel explains that one may lechatchilah sit down alongside the first person, even if one's intention is to keep the deer trapped when the first person gets up. This explains a different aspect of tzad -- the melachah is making the animal available for human use, but once it is already trapped, there is no further violation in keeping it under human control.

The second case is based on two different mishnayos. One Mishnah (Shabbos 107a) permits catching a scorpion, so that it doesn't bite, and another states that catching a snake to prevent it from biting does not violate Shabbos min haTorah, whereas catching it for medicinal uses does (Eduyos 2:5). Tosafos proves that both Mishnayos that permit tzad to protect someone are discussing creatures whose bite is painful, but not life-threatening, pikuach nefesh (Tosafos, Shabbos 3a s.v. Bar). Were the Mishnah discussing a creature whose bite is life-threatening, it would be obvious that one may kill it, because of the general rule that actions necessary to protect life supersede Shabbos and almost all other mitzvos.

Shemuel ruled that although catching non-dangerous creatures is ordinarily prohibited on Shabbos, since this involves only a rabbinic injunction the Sages permitted it under extenuating circumstances.

Why is the act of trapping non-dangerous creatures considered only a rabbinic injunction? We have already presented two possible reasons. The first is because of the principle of Melachah she'einah tzerichah legufah, since one has no interest in capturing a snake or a scorpion (Tosafos op. cit.). The second reason is that one is not catching these species to make them available for human use, which is an essential component of the melachah of tzad (Avnei Neizer, Orach Chayim 189:7; Biur Halachah, 316:2 s.v. Oh Choleh).

Mosquitoes versus snakes

Although we have discovered that one may catch snakes and scorpions that are not life-threatening, this does not tell us whether one may trap mosquitoes, bees or wasps. Although the sting or bite of these species is indeed painful, it is not usually as painful as a snake or scorpion bite. Thus, it might be that Chazal did not permit catching mosquitoes, bees or wasps. We can presumably derive the answer from the following passage of Gemara:

"Someone who trapped a flea on Shabbos, Rabbi Eliezer rules him liable for desecrating Shabbos min haTorah, whereas Rabbi Yehoshua rules that his desecration of Shabbos was only of a rabbinic ordinance" (Shabbos 107b). The Gemara explains that this dispute is dependent on an issue that we discussed earlier. Does one desecrate Shabbos min haTorah if he traps a species that is not usually trapped? Rabbi Eliezer rules that he does, whereas Rabbi Yehoshua rules that he does not. Thus, it appears from this Gemara that although Shemuel proved that it is permitted to trap a scorpion, even of the non-deadly variety, one cannot trap a flea, which is considered only as causing discomfort.

Three types of varmints

We can, therefore, divide the different types of unpleasant biters and stingers into three categories:

1. Those that are potentially life-threatening to people. In this instance, if there is even the slightest possibility of danger, one may kill or catch them on Shabbos.
2. Those whose bite will be very painful, but there is no life-threatening danger. These may be trapped on Shabbos, provided that one's intent is only to save people from harm (Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 10:25). However, it is forbidden to trap if one intends to use the insect, reptile or arachnid. (Modern biology categorizes spiders and scorpions as arachnids, because they have

eight legs, are carnivorous and are wingless. If we want to categorize insects and arachnids together, we should use the word arthropods, but that still excludes snakes and other reptiles. So, for most of this article, I have simply used the word creatures. My apologies to the scientists who are reading this.)

3. Those whose bite will be unpleasant, but not highly painful. In this instance, there is a dispute among the rishonim. Tosafos and the Rosh quote from an earlier baal Tosafos named Rav Poras that, if one sees that an insect may bite him, he is permitted to remove the insect. When the insect is not so close to him, he may brush the insect off, but he may not trap it. Not all authorities accepted Rav Poras' approach. The Mordechai (#402) quotes Rav Yehudah Gaon that he noticed that the "elder rabbis" did not trap fleas, even when they were on their skin. The Beis Yosef, however, contends that even Rav Yehudah Gaon accepts the ruling of Rav Poras, but that he himself practiced this as a personal chumrah, not as the required halachah that he would rule for others. There are other rishonim, however, who certainly disagree with Rav Poras and prohibit trapping mosquitoes, even when they are on your skin, since they are only a discomfort (Meiri, Shabbos 107b).

Consensus

The consensus of halachic authorities follows Rav Poras, although there is a dispute among them whether it is permitted to catch the insect only when it is actually biting (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 316:9; Bach) or whether one may remove the insects even when they are in close proximity (Taz 316:8; Magen Avraham 316:18; Elyah Rabbah). The Mishnah Berurah (316:37) concludes that when one can brush off the insect, he should not rely on the heter of trapping it, but he implies that one may trap the insect if brushing it off will not suffice.

Answers

At this point, let us take a fresh look at our original questions:

"May I trap mosquitoes, bees, or wasps on Shabbos?"

The answer is that if the insect is about to attack someone, one may trap it. One may also trap it if its sting or bite is very painful, and certainly if it is potentially dangerous.

May one hang flypaper on Shabbos? The answer is that one may not.

"May a snake charmer work on Shabbos?" If one is not intending to use the snake, it is permitted. This is all the more so if the snake is dangerous.

In conclusion

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (Shemos 20:10) notes that people mistakenly think that work is prohibited on Shabbos, to ensure that Shabbos is a day of rest. He points out that the Torah does not prohibit doing avodah, which connotes hard work, but melachah, which implies purpose and accomplishment. We certainly see this idea borne out by the ideas of meleches machsheves, which denote the purpose of the action, and have no correlation at all to the amount of energy expended. The goal of Shabbos is to allow Hashem's rule to be the focus of creation by our refraining from our own creative acts (Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch Commentary to Shemos 20:11).

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subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion

Parshat Pekudei: The Importance of Function

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

"And Moses erected the sanctuary, and he fastened its sockets, and he placed its boards, and he inserted its bars, and he installed its pillars." (Exodus 40:18)

We have often queried the significance of the five Torah portions which conclude the book of Exodus, and especially the repetitions which we find in

the detailed descriptions of the accoutrements of the Sanctuary. Even if we concede the very profound theological message of Ki Tisa and the unique prescription of the priestly garments in Tetzave, we are still left with the initial delineation of the furnishings of the Sanctuary in Teruma and the seeming repetitions thereof in Vayakhel and Pekudei. Why not a general statement to the effect that “And Moses did as he was instructed in the construction of the Sanctuary”!?

Rabbi Elhanan Samet, in his groundbreaking study of the portions of the Bible from a structural-narrative perspective, explains as follows: The commandment to make the various furnishings of the Sanctuary is given by God in the Torah portion of Teruma. The precise performance of the Israelites of every detail of the divine command is detailed in the Torah portion of Vayakhel; this is perhaps to emphasize the fact that we must serve the Almighty in precisely the manner which He commands, no more and no less, in order to protect Judaism from religious fanaticism and zealotry. The actual completion, the final hammer blow of the construction of each sacred object, is presented in the Torah portion of Pekudei.

From an Israeli perspective, I might explain the importance of emphasizing the finish in a separate Torah portion by bringing to your attention a typical phenomenon of Israeli construction: Ninety percent of the work generally gets done efficiently and even almost miraculously, but the last ten percent requires cajoling, entreating and sometimes (even usually) never gets done at all. And it goes without saying that the last ten percent is quite critical, especially during a rainy winter season!

But in a more serious vein, let us investigate the construction of the sanctuary table (shulhan) in order to understand the true reason for the order of description. The divine command to make a sanctuary table is presented in the portion of Teruma in eight verses (Ex. 25:23–30), beginning with “You shall make a Table of acacia wood, two hand-breadths long, a hand-breadth wide, and a hand-breadth and one-half in height,” and the description of the actual execution or making of the Table is detailed in the portion of Vayakhel almost precisely paralleling the command in Teruma, in only seven verses (Ex. 37:10–16).

What is missing in the execution? In the portion of Teruma, the last verse of the commandment regarding the construction of the Table tells us: “And you shall place upon the Table the shewbread before Me always” (Ex. 25:30); and then, towards the end of the portion of Teruma, we find: “And you shall situate the Table outside the curtain on the northern side of the Sanctuary” (Ex. 26:35). These two features, the function of the Table (for the shewbread), and the placement of the Table, while commanded in Teruma, are not included in the actual construction of the Table in the portion of Vayakhel; but these two features are specifically mentioned in the portion of Pekudei: “And he [Moses] placed the Table in the Tent of Meeting on the side of the Sanctuary northwards just outside the curtain, and he arranged the arrangement of the bread before the Lord as the Lord had commanded Moses” (Ex. 40:22, 23).

Why do we need the separate portion of Pekudei to tell us that the function and placement of the sacred Table of the Sanctuary were carried out? One might suggest a logical, technical reason: The specific placement of the Table as well as its function as repository of the shew-bread could only be effectuated once the entire Sanctuary had been completed. Placement is a matter of relative space, each sacred object placed in relationship to the other sacred objects, and the various Sanctuary placement and functions could not take place unless the Sanctuary had reached its final stage of construction. This final completion occurs only in Pekudei, and therefore it is only in this Torah portion that we find the phrase “just as the Lord commanded Moses” (Ex. 40:17–32) appearing, not only once but actually seven times.

I would like to suggest another reason for the significance of Pekudei as the portion of the “finish,” the portion which emphasizes the placement and function of the sacred object.

Each of us must see ourselves as sacred vessels, placed upon this world-Sanctuary in order to fulfill a specific task which is crucial if human society is to be perfected under the kingship of the divine. Rosh Hashana, the Jewish

New Year, ushers in the introspective period known as the Ten Days of Repentance. It also is called the Day of Remembrance. One of the most stirring prayers on this Day of Remembrance begins: “You [God] remember the deeds of the historic world, and are po-ked all the creatures from the earliest time.” The Hebrew word “po-ked” is usually translated as “taking notice of,” a synonym for remembering. However, the late Rabbi Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, zt”l, Dean of Yeshiva Torah Vadaas maintained that the verb comes from the noun “tafkid,” or function, and therefore the phrase ought to be translated, “You give a specific function to every creature from the earliest time.”

The most proper and penetrating question of repentance that an individual ought to ask him or herself is, “Am I in the right country, doing the right thing? In the one chance at life which God grants me, am I pursuing the proper path in the proper locality?”

The Hebrew word “pekudei” can also be translated as the plural “functions,” for each vessel – whether a sacred physical object or a sacred human subject – completes its reason for being only when its unique function is actually performed. Only then can a vessel be considered as fully formed, can a life be assessed as having been truly lived. We can only pray that we are utilizing the unique gifts which the Almighty has imbued within us to perform the right function in the proper place; only then will the divine orchestra play its completed symphony, and only then will the perfected world-Sanctuary provide a home for God to dwell in our midst.

Shabbat Shalom

From: Alan Fisher <afisherads@yahoo.com>

date: Mar 14, 2024, 11:13 PM

Potomac Torah Study Center: Devrei Torah for Shabbat Pekudei 5784 ...

Two years ago, as we approached the end of Sefer Shemot, Russia attacked Ukraine, and our most immediate focus was on the impact of the war on the many Jews caught up in the fighting. At that time, 200 Chabad families were serving an estimated 350,000 Jewish families in Ukraine, as well as assisting numerous non-Jewish victims in the area. While help from the United States helped Ukraine enormously early in the fighting, this support has been lagging more recently.

Meanwhile, for the past five plus months, Israel has been coping with Hamas and the results of a vicious invasion, attack, and kidnapping of our people. While the United States early supported Israel strongly, the U.S. government has turned increasingly away from Israel and now impedes Israel’s goal of removing the ability of Hamas and Gaza to repeat this attack. Other anti-Semitic attacks, especially from Iran and Lebanon, threaten Israel every day, and anti-Semitic attacks against our people have exploded in number and violence.

As we face challenges both within and outside the Jewish community, in Israel and in the Diaspora, Pekudei’s message guides us in many ways. Rabbi Yehoshua Singer observes that honesty and integrity are Moshe’s critical values in enabling B’Nai Yisrael to construct the Mishkan, God’s special place within our midst. Rabbanit Yaffah Arnoff observes that the builders of the Mishkan bring the various components to Moshe but are unable to assemble them into the Mishkan. God sends His Divine spirit to Moshe, and the Mishkan assembles itself in his presence. Rabbanit Arnoff observes that success in difficult tasks, such as the war with Hamas and anti-Semitism in the world, requires that we maintain a deep sense of the higher purpose of what we are doing. We must earn Hashem’s bracha to bring His glory to reside within our midst. Rabbi Marc Angel adds that we must strengthen ourselves, and then God will give us additional strength – the fortitude to fulfill our goals.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, zt”l, observes that the Torah’s description of the Mishkan process parallels the story of creation. God creates our world by making order out of chaos. Almost immediately, humans descend into chaos, and before long, God decides to undo creation and start over with Noach. Rabbi Sacks observes that Moshe descends from Har Sinai and finds that many of the people have descended into chaos. The Mishkan is a tikkun

for chaos – precise instructions for creating the Mishkan to create a place of order for Hashem’s presence. The Mishkan is a tikkun for the chaos of Sefer Bereishis as well as for Egel Zahav. If we want God in our midst, we must honor Hashem’s order in both space and time (Shabbat and Yom Tov).

Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon z”l, observes that the parsha opens by noting 100 silver talents for the bases of the Mishkan (38:25). This silver corresponds to the 100 brachot that a Jew is to recite each day. The building of the Mishkan notes “as Hashem commanded Moshe” 18 times – corresponding to the 18 brachot of the Amidah. Add the two, and we have 113 – the number of words at the end of each bracha of the Amidah. The number 113 also corresponds to the gematria of “lev” (heart), a word which appears 113 times in the Torah. The Mishkan reminds us that we must keep God’s commandments in our hearts every day.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander notes a Midrash that the initial inventory of the donations for the Mishkan comes up with 1775 shekels more donated than the cost of the items used for the Mishkan. God then directs Moshe to look up. He notices that there are hooks (“vavim”) not included in the costs. When adding the costs of the silver vavim, the total costs come to exactly the amount of the donations. “Vav” is also the symbol for “six” – the day when God creates humans. “Vivim” also means “connectors” and “bridge builders,” so the Torah is giving us a message that the ideal for humans is to connect the physical and spiritual aspects of life and to build bridges in the world. Rabbi Brander concludes that an important mission for us is to build bridges among segments of Jewish society both in Israel and across the world. (Rabbi Brander has been expressing his wish that Israelis come together and avoid the many political and religious disputes that have been pulling apart Israelis and Jews in the Diaspora.)

Is there anything more boring than reading detailed instructions for building a structure – and then reading exactly how the builders follow the instructions? A person who has this reaction to reading the discussion in the Torah for four of the past five weeks is missing the most important lessons. The Torah does not include senseless detail and duplication. The material on the Mishkan has many layers of insights, and the lessons are both important and exciting. The Devrei Torah below illustrate many of these insights and help us understand more of the treasures of the Torah. May we take to heart the lessons of Pekudei and remove the differences that have been dividing us from fellow Jews as well as from others friends in the world.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z”l, took an active role in political protests, such as leading a protest for Soviet Jews by the Russian embassy in the 1980s and working actively for Israel. He also devoted a significant amount of his career as a chaplain in the U.S. Navy. He understood and taught the lessons of the Mishkan, working to come close to Hashem and to work for more unity among various Jewish groups. May we teach these lessons to our children and grandchildren.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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

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subject: Parsha Insights

Parshas Pekudei

At The Gravesite of Mother Goose

This week we conclude the Sefer {Book} of Shemos with Parshas Pekudei – the accounting of materials used for the construction of the Mishkan {Tabernacle}.

The Ramban, at the beginning of the Sefer, described Shemos as the Sefer of Galus and Geulah–Exile and Redemption. With this he explains why Shemos began with the names of Bnei Yisroel {the Children of Israel} who went down to Mitzrayim {Egypt}, even though that information had already been given at the end of Breishis. He writes that Shemos, as the Sefer of Galus and Geulah, had to begin with the very beginning of the Galus—that descent to Mitzrayim.

As such, it follows that Shemos will end with the final stage of Geulah–Redemption. There’s often a lot of confusion over what constitutes this redemption. Many would describe Geulah as leaving Mitzrayim, but that took place in the middle of Shemos. Others would say that it was receiving the Torah on Har Sinai {Mount Sinai} but that also took place in the middle of Shemos. Still others would maintain that the stage of redemption would only be reached when we’d enter Eretz Yisroel {the Land of Israel} but that doesn’t take place until long after Sefer Shemos.

If so, what was the true redemption that was reached at the end of Shemos? The end of Pekudei tells what happened once the Mishkan had been erected and all the vessels had been positioned in their proper places: “And the cloud covered the Ohel Moed and the Honor of Hashem filled the Mishkan. [40:34]” The redemption was Hashem’s presence resting amongst Bnei Yisroel. That tangible presence of Hashem that had been seen and felt so clearly on Sinai was now a constant reality, traveling with them wherever they went.

Nowadays, we too can get a bit confused over what constitutes redemption. This past week I accompanied my highschool students on an overnight trip to Boston. On the way we stopped at the Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island. One sensed the foundation of religious freedom being laid when reading the resonating words written by George Washington in response to a letter sent to him by Moses Seixas, the warden of the congregation.

Washington wrote: The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of once class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent national gifts. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

May the children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlasting happy. G. Washington

One felt a historical perspective of the great freedoms that we as Jews have enjoyed in the United States and have enabled us to flourish. At risk of getting a little too carried away with this American spirit, we continued on to Boston, contemplated the Holocaust Memorial and visited the colonial cemetery; home to many great people and also to the author of Mother Goose. At that point I began to reflect on the visits to cemeteries I had made during my years in Israel . . . Praying at the grave of Rav Yosef Karo, the author of Shulchan Aruch, for a clarity in halacha {Jewish Law}. Praying at the grave of the Arizel for a deeper understanding of Torah. Praying at the grave of Rabi Akiva to have the strength and exuberance to be willing to start again, no matter what one’s age might be. To be willing to see the good in even the darkest of moments. Those were the thoughts that were running through my mind as I stood at the grave site of Mother Goose . . .

We dare not confuse freedom with redemption. We dare not compare any place in the world to the Land of Israel. And I thank you, Mother Goose, for driving that point home in a very clear way.

Good Shabbos, Yisroel Ciner

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from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

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subject: S P E C I A L S - Taamei Hamitzvos - The Menorah

Reasons Behind the Mitzvos: The Menorah

By Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

"Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance."

(Meiri, Bava Kama 17a)

Mitzvah #98 in Sefer HaChinuch

THE MITZVAH

After commanding us to construct a Shulchan (golden table) for the show-bread in the north side of the Mishkan, Hashem commands us to construct the Menorah and to place it in the south side. The Menorah is sculptured from a solid gold piece weighing one kikar (120 manah), with a central "trunk" from which emerge an additional three "branches" on each side, totaling seven lamps. It is decorated symmetrically with twenty-two long and narrow cups, eleven spheres shaped like a certain species of apple, and nine flowerlike designs. The Sages have a tradition that its height is eighteen handbreadths (approx. 1.5-1.7 meters). The wicks of the six branches on the side were turned to face toward its center (Shemos 25:31-40; Bamidbar 1-4; Menachos 28b). The Menorah alludes to many deep ideas and esoteric secrets, a selection of which will be presented here. This mitzvah has practical relevance even today, for the Kabbalists teach that the Shabbos and Chanukah lights present the Menorah in the Jewish home. Some have a custom to light seven Shabbos candles for this reason.

A ROYAL CANDELABRUM

On a simple level of understanding, Hashem commanded us to erect the Menorah next to the Shulchan in the same way a king would place a magnificent candelabrum next to his table. Light gladdens the mind because the soul is made of Divine Light, and it expands and experiences delight when exposed to light. Seven is a standard number of branches for an elegant candelabrum (Rabbeinu Bachaye).

THE CELESTIAL BODIES

On a deeper level of understanding, the Menorah symbolizes that Hashem provides illumination for His world. Its seven lamps allude to the seven significant celestial bodies (kochavei leches), namely, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the sun, Venus, Mercury, and the moon (Tanchuma 7). The central, main lamp represents the sun (Avodas HaMenorah). The Menorah is placed on the south side of the Mishkan, just as the sun runs along the equator to the south of Eretz Yisrael (Chizkuni). Its golden material resembles light. The requirement for all its parts to be made of a single piece of gold, which weighed a single kikar, the way its branches stem out from a single trunk, the way its lights turned toward the center of the Menorah — all suggests that there is a single source for all light: Hashem. Since the most basic form of idol-worship in olden times was that of the celestial bodies, and of the sun in particular, it is especially significant that Menorah proclaims Hashem's unity with regard to them.

HOLINESS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

In addition, the Menorah alludes to the holiness that shines down into our world during the holy days of the year. The seven lamps correspond to the seven days of the week. The one in the center corresponds to Shabbos; the other six lamps turn toward it, for it is the focus of six days of the week. The twenty-two cups correspond to the twenty-two days of the festivals in the year (in the Diaspora), the eleven spheres correspond to eleven Roshei Chodesh (not including Rosh Hashanah, which is a festival), and the nine flowers correspond to eight days of Chanukah and one day of Purim (Rav Yosef Masas, cited in Mayim Chaim §277).

SYMBOL OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE

The ner maaravi (western lamp) never went out, so long as the Jewish people were worthy of this miracle. This was a constant testimony that Hashem's Divine Presence rested amongst the Jewish people (Menachos 86b). The seven branches correspond to the seven Sefiros, all emerging from one central branch, which symbolizes Hashem's absolute unity (Rabbeinu Bachaye).

THE WISDOM OF THE TORAH

The Menorah symbolizes that Hashem provides illumination for His world in the spiritual sense as well, that is, through the Divine wisdom of the Torah. As opposed to the Aron, which symbolizes the actual Torah that was received by prophecy, the Menorah symbolizes the wisdom of the Torah as it is attained by

the study of the Jewish people (Rav Hirsch). The central branch represents the Written Torah, and the six protruding branches represent the six orders of the Oral Torah (Arizal, cited in Be'er Basadeh). The 7 branches, 22 cups, 11 spheres, and 9 flowers add up to 49 components, corresponding to the 49 days in which the Torah was given. Accordingly, there is a custom to recite Tehillim §67, which has 49 words, written out in the shape of a Menorah, during the 49 days of the Omer that lead up to Giving of the Torah. The Menorah weighed 120 manah, corresponding to the three times forty days that Moshe spent on Mount Sinai in order to receive the Torah (Maaseh Rokeach). The Menorah is positioned in the south of the Mishkan, which is called its "right side," since the heart of the wise man is on his right (Koheles 10:2; Midrash Tadsheh §11).

The Midrash expounds that the verse, The beginning of Your words shall illuminate (Tehillim 119:130), alludes to the Menorah. Arizal, Rama (Toras HaOlah §16), and the Vilna Gaon explain this to mean that the opening verses of the Torah's five Books allude to the various components of the Menorah. The opening verse of Bereishis has seven words, alluding to the number of branches; the opening verse of Shemos has eleven words, alluding to the number of spheres; the opening verse of Vayikra has nine words, alluding to the number of flowers; the opening verse of Bamidbar has seventeen words, alluding to its height. [Although its height is eighteen handbreadths, the Commentators explain that the eighteenth is alluded to by the kollel, or the eighteenth handbreadth is a part of a handbreadth and is not counted, or it corresponds to the base of the Menorah, or it is alluded to by the beis of Bereishis, or a combination of the above.] The opening verse of Devarim has twenty-two words, alluding to the number of cups.

We may suggest that these five components correspond precisely to the contents of those Books, as follows: Bereishis is the Book of Creation, which is described in a verse as, He formed seven pillars for it (Mishlei 9:1), meaning, Hashem created the world in seven days (Rashi); so too, the Menorah has seven lamps that correspond to the seven days of Creation (Tanchuma), set on seven pillars. Shemos begins with tribes descending to Egypt, and they are represented by eleven stars; hence, eleven spheres. Vayikra speaks about the mitzvos that pertain to a tribe that is not counted amongst the rest: Levi. Levi is comprised of eight families (Livni, Shimi, Amram, Yitzhar, Chevron, Uziel, Machli, and Mushi), plus Aharon's Kohanite family, and so too, there are eight flowers along the branches of the Menorah, plus a ninth by its base. The flowers are associated with the Tribe of Levi, as we find that Aharon's staff sprouted blossoms (VaOlech Eschem Komemiyus). Bamidbar describes the Jewish people travelling through the Wilderness in a camp of eighteen elements: the Mishkan in the center; surrounded by four family groups (Gershon to west, Kehas to south, Merari to the north, and the families of Moshe and Aharon to the east); surrounded by four groups of three tribes; and the encampment as a whole (the kollel). This finds expression in the Menorah's height of eighteen handbreadths, which alluded to in the seventeen words of the opening verse of Bamidbar, along with the kollel. In Devarim, Moshe teaches the Torah to the Jewish people, and the Torah is symbolized by its twenty-two letters; hence the number of cups.

THE TORAH SCHOLAR

A Torah scholar is compared to a tree, and so too, the Menorah has a trunk, branches, flowers, cups similar to the ovary of a flower, and spheres shaped like fruit (Rav Hirsch; see there). The height of the Menorah is that of an average man (Alshich). It measures eighteen handbreadths, the numerical value of the word chai (life), because the Torah is the Tree of Life (Toras HaOlah). The cups, which contain spheres, from which blossom forth flowers, allude to the three stages of a Torah scholar's development. First, he must focus solely on receiving Torah from his teachers, like a cup; then he must focus on retaining his studies, like sealed-off sphere; and then he becomes capable of blossoming and producing novel Torah thoughts in accordance with Torah's truth (Dvar Mikra, by Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein). The seven lamps correspond to the seven gateways to the soul: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and the mouth (Midrash Tadsheh §11). Every Jew is capable of radiating with Divine glory by acquiring Hashem's wisdom that is contained in the Torah, our national heritage.

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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 “Siyum”.

I. AN OVERVIEW OF SEFER SH'MOT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I. DETAIL AND REPETITION

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

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

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

A second question (which we addressed in our shiur on Parashat Terumah – you can find it at <http://www.torah.org/advanced/mikra/sh/dt.57.2.07.html>) comes on the heels of this one. After reading about God's detailed commands to Moshe 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 Moshe) 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 Moshe 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 Moshe ascended Mount Sinai (see 24:4-5).

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

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

IV. RETURN TO THE GARDEN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This introduction is difficult on two counts:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VII. THE GOAL OF DIVINE WORSHIP

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

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

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

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

VIII. THE MISHKAN AS A COMMEMORATION OF THE EXODUS

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

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

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

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

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

IX. POSTSCRIPT: KODESH YISRA'EL L'YHVH

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

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

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

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

HAZAK HAZAK V'NIT'HAZEK

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Parshat Pekudei: Summing up Shemot, Introducing VaYikra

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

TRANSITION: SEFER SHEMOT / SEFER VAYIKRA

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

SEFER SHEMOT, IN 481 WORDS:

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

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

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

OK, SO WHAT?

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

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

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

BUT:

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

A perhaps even more explicit example of the revelation of Hashem in the first part of the sefer is the conversation between Hashem and Moshe at the beginning of Parashat Va-Era in which Hashem announces to Moshe that a new stage of Divine revelation is about to begin. Although He had revealed Himself to the Avot (forefathers) only in the aspect of E-I 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-I 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 "Hataf" (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