

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 13 #22, March 13-14, 2026; 25 Adar 5786; Vayakhel-Pekudei 5786; Shabbat HaHodesh
Mevarchim HaHodesh. Rosh Hodesh Nisan is next Thursday

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) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We celebrate the return of all our hostages from Gaza and mourn those of our people who perished during the last two years. May a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

The double parsha of Vayakel-Pekudei closes Sefer Shemot and points us to both Vayikra and Bemidbar. Once Hashem's presence returns to the Mishkan, Moshe could not survive entering the Ohel Moed, because God's presence in the Mishkan is so much more intense than even on Har Sinai during the Revelation. (40:35) Turn a few lines later in the Torah, and Hashem calls to Moshe (Vayikra 1:1), so Moshe can continue his close, personal relationship with Hashem. Shemot also tells us next that B'Nai Yisrael could only move their camp when God's cloud would rise from above the Mishkan and move (40:36-37). God's cloud first rises on 20 Sivan of the second year in the Midbar (Bemidbar 10:11), so the ending of Shemot also points to continuing the story of the travels of B'Nai Yisrael in Sefer Bemidbar.

At first reading, Vayakel-Pekudei repeats the details of building the Mishkan from Terumah and Tetzaveh. At a deeper level, however, the repetition is not the main story. The Torah comments more than twenty times that B'Nai Yisrael carry out every detail of construction exactly as God tells Moshe. As Rabbi Menachem Leibtag observes, this repeating refrain reinforces the understanding that there is no room for human innovation when selecting or producing a symbol for Hashem's Divine Presence.

Several details about the implements of the Mishkan emerge from our double parsha. For example, Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at alephbeta.org observe that the curtains of the inner walls of the Mishkan and most of the clothes of the Kohen Gadol consist of stripes of blue, purple, red, and white – resembling the colors of a rainbow and the colors that blend together to create the white light of the sun. The connection between the colors in the Mishkan and Kohen Gadol's clothing reflect back to Noach, for whom God creates a rainbow as a promise of never ending the living world again by flood. The creation story and recreation after the flood start with a dark world in which Hashem takes steps to make space for light, sky and earth, land and water, vegetation, and life – space in which humans can exist. The fabrics of the curtains and the clothes of the Kohen Gadol, with both wool and linen, are shatnez, a mixture not permitted for clothing for Jews. My interpretation is that the Torah restricts shatnez to holy coverings such as tallit, clothes for the Kohen Gadol, and coverings for the Mishkan.

“Vayakhel” connects forward to Korach, who also gathers (“vayakhel”) a congregation of Jews – but in his case to challenge Moshe and Aharon as leaders of B'Nai Yisrael. Korach, a first cousin of Aharon and Moshe, argues that all Jews are holy and that he has as strong a case as they do to lead B'Nai Yisrael. Moshe gathers the Jews for a holy purpose, to carry out Hashem's orders for creating the Mishkan. Korach gathers the Jews for an evil purpose. Rabbi Fohrman observes another point. the root of “vayakhel” is the same as the root for “Havdalah.” Both words indicate separation – either separating a group from everyone else, separating Shabbat from the rest of the week, or (as first used in the Torah), separating individual days of creation. The Torah directs us to separate for holy purposes, not for evil.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander focuses on the Haftarah, Yechezkel's prophecy of the dedication of the Third Temple some time in the future. The prophecy includes additional korbanot not in the Torah. Many early Rabbis argued that Yechezkel does not belong among our sacred writings because the additional korbanot seem to contradict the Torah. Rabbi Brander discusses opinions of Rambam and Rabbi Yosef Messas, both of whom argue that Yechezkel's prophecies are frum, because they refer only to the inauguration of the Third Temple and not to everyday korbanot. Rav Messas observes that the korbanot in the Second Temple differ from those in the First Temple and that halachah permits changes over time, when conditions change and when the changes are consistent with halachic precedent. Rabbi Brander presents the halachic reasoning far better than I can. I only add my opinion that I find his presentation both convincing and extremely important – something that all Jews should study and evaluate. Readers with questions should refer to their local Orthodox Rabbis, because I am not learned enough to give a definitive response to questions.

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine relates the Mishkan to its implications for our behavior in the spirit of proper religious behavior. Rabbi Rhine concludes that the Mishkan reinforces the lesson that proper behavior focuses strongly on how we treat our fellows. We see this conclusion in many places in Tanach. For example, Mishpatim continues Hashem's discussion with Moshe after the Revelation – and the mitzvot in Mishpatim focus primarily on how we treat fellow humans and animals. Treating others, especially those less advantaged than we are, is a frequent focus of the Torah, prophets, and Rabbis.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, certainly agreed with Rabbi Rhine. Rabbi Cahan focused frequently on treating others properly, sharing our bounty with others, and teaching our children the importance of tzedakah. We try to relate this message to our children and grandchildren, both through our direct messages and through our behavior.

Shabbat Shalom,

Alan & Hannah

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. 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 Shleimah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezl Esther, Avraham Dov ben Blimah; Aria'ah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Rena Michal bat Sara, Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, 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.

Haftarat Parshat Hachodesh: Halakha in Motion

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander *
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Rabbi Brander dedicates his Dvar Haftarah this week to the heroic soldiers, security forces and first responders of the IDF, defenders of the Jewish people and the land of Israel, and the United States Armed Forces, defenders of liberty and justice for all. May Hashem protect them and bring them all home speedily and safely.

Few books in Tanakh came as close to being suppressed as the book of Yechezkel. The Talmud records, in more than one place (Shabbat 13b; Menachot 45a; Chagiga 13a), that the Sages considered removing it from public circulation altogether because of apparent contradictions between Yechezkel's prophecies and the commandments of the Torah. What saved the

book was the extraordinary effort of a single scholar: **Chananya ben Chizkiya**, who sat alone in his attic, working through the difficulties by lamplight – three hundred jugs of oil, the Gemara tells us – before he was done. This week's haftara, which we read from Ezekiel chapter 45, sits at the center of that controversy.

The difficulties are concrete. Yechezkel announces sacrificial offerings that do not appear anywhere in the Torah: a special offering on the first of Nisan (v. 18), another on the seventh of Nisan (v. 20), and additional offerings for Pesach (v. 23) and Sukkot (v. 25). These are not minor adjustments; they look, on the surface, like a prophet amending the laws of the Torah outright. That the Sages were alarmed is understandable. And yet the question Chananya ben Chizkiya grappled with in that attic echoes in every generation: **How far can our sacred traditions evolve, and in what direction?** It is a question our own era forces us to confront.

The Rambam, in *Hilkhot Maaseh Hakorbanot* (2:14–15), offers one resolution: There is no real contradiction; Yechezkel's additional offerings are specific to the inauguration of the Third Temple in the Messianic era – supplementary rites for a singular moment, not a revision of the permanent system. The Torah's sacrificial system will remain fully intact.

But a bolder reading comes from **Rabbi Yosef Messas** (1892–1974), one of the preeminent halakhic authorities of Morocco and later the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Haifa. In a thrilling responsum (*Mayim Chayim, Orach Chayim* 2:264), Rav Messas takes a different position: **Yes, there will be genuine changes in the Third Temple – and that is not only permissible, but needed.** He explains that when King Shlomo built the First Temple, he also introduced modifications to the sacrificial service that differed from what had been practiced in the Mishkan. The template was not frozen at Sinai; it must evolve to meet a new reality. [emphasis added]

Rav Messas goes further. He invokes the midrash in *Vayikra Rabba* (9:7): In the Messianic era, only the Minchat Todah – the thanksgiving offering – will remain. The broader sacrificial system existed because the surrounding nations worshiped through sacrifice, and the Jewish people needed a corresponding religious form to redirect their spiritual instincts toward God. Once that world has passed, the form itself may pass with it, even as the spiritual purpose of the Beit haMikdash endures.

Rav Messas continues with even more striking claims, suggesting that the Menorah in the Third Temple will not necessarily be lit with olive oil – it will be lit with electricity. Not because electricity was ever part of the Temple's traditional practice, but because it provides superior illumination. King Shlomo didn't use electricity because it did not exist. The Second Temple didn't use it for the same reason. But **the moment a technology emerges that more powerfully fulfills the Temple's sacred purpose, halakha has both the capacity and the mandate to embrace it – without losing its spiritual compass.** [

This is the deeper principle at stake. **The concept of halakha does not refer to statutes etched in stone; the word literally means to walk, to move. It is a living system, designed to accompany the Jewish people through ever-changing conditions, without surrendering what is essential: the core Divine and rabbinic principles.**

We see this in our own times: The past few years of war have generated halakhic questions no previous generation has faced. Government media offices, fulfilling new roles critical to the country by responding in real time to dangerous misinformation spread by international media – Does responding to fake news on Shabbat constitute pikuach nefesh? **The questions are new; the framework for answering them today is the same, finding the governing principles in Jewish law.** Halakha “walks,” it directs our spiritual compass. It endures and remains relevant not by being rigid, but by being eternal and baked into its tapestry is the capacity to embrace new realities.

Rav Messas envisions a Third Temple faithful to everything that matters – in its theology, its sanctity, its role as the dwelling place of the Shechina – while remaining fully responsive to the world it inhabits. Its core is unchanging. Its accoutrements will adapt. In that adaptation, the Temple does not become less holy; it becomes more alive.

As we inaugurate this month of redemption, our haftara carries both promise and challenge. **The Third Temple will come. When it does, it will not be a museum of ancient forms, fossilized in time. It will be a living institution – one that, like halakha itself, continues to walk forward.**

Shabbat Shalom.

Ed. note: I consider this Dvar Halacha to be extremely important and potentially controversial. I have put some text in boldface for emphasis. Regardless of ones opinion of his arguments, we should all read and consider Rabbi Brander's analysis. The process of accommodating Halacha to new situations is extremely important to our religion, and the Haftorah this week is an excellent time to consider the process.

* 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@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. **Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

<https://ots.org.il/haftarat-parshat-hachodesh-rabbi-brander5786/?pfstyle=wp>

Pekudei: An Original Thought

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5763

"And Betzalel the son of Uri, the son of Chur of the tribe of Yehudah did all that Hashem commanded Moshe. (Shemos 8:22)

And Betzalel the son of Uri...did all that Hashem commanded Moshe: Even things which his teacher Moshe did not tell him his opinion he turned out to be in agreement with what was said to Moshe on Sinai. For Moshe commanded Betzalel to make first the vessels and afterwards the Tabernacle. Betzalel said to him, *"It is customary for people to make first the house and then to place vessels inside it?"* Moshe said to him, *"This is what I heard from the mouth of The Holy One Blessed Be He!"* And so Betzalel made the Tabernacle first and afterwards he made the vessels. (Rashi)

*To welcome the Shabbos, come let us go
For it is the source of blessing
From the beginning,
From antiquity she was honored
Last in deed but first in thought.
(From Lecha Dodi – Friday night liturgy)*

What's the great debate about whether or not to make the vessels and then the Tabernacle or visa versa? Of course it's a matter of practicality to construct the building and only later the furniture. Even Moshe agreed. Why then do we need to know that Betzalel was told at first to make the vessels? The Maharal helps explain why it was that Moshe did not command first on the external structure.

What is the first thing we need before starting to build a building? I know some people will say, "Money!" There's something more basic than that. No not a building permit. Right! A plan! You can't get money or a permit without submitting first an architect's scheme. The drawing itself first requires something even more fundamental before it becomes a reality. Yes. A motivation! A will to create or become! And that all flows from an imaginative picture, an ideal of how things will look or be after all the work is done.

Before I build my dream home I have already pictured how it will be to sit comfortably surrounded by a wall of Torah books and fire place flickering nearby casting forth it's inspiring warmth and light. That picture drives the process from stage to stage. All the details are mapped out and the dirty work begins.

Trucks and bulldozers create a muddy hole where later a foundation is formed of concrete. Materials litter the lot and it all seems chaotic until the frame of the structure begins to take shape. The job is still not nearly done. Subcontractors march on through with wires and tubes and tiles and paint supplies until the inside is as fine as the outside is solid.

The house is complete, and the prescient moment is about to take place. The walls are packed with holy books. A bunch of dry logs is loaded into the waiting fireplace. The fire takes. Enters the man, with the vision, tea in hand and sets himself

down opening one of the ancient tomes before him as the fire warms his toes. The picture is complete. What was visualized at first was actualized at last.

Lest we be seduced into thinking that the building itself is more important than its true function, Moshe set the record straight. The vessels and their special internal use are the real purpose of the project. The Almighty is not served by a meaningless building. There is no “edifice complex” at play here.

The main part, the essence is the realm within. The outer world serves and thrives on the inner. For practical logistical considerations the external structure needs to be worked on first. The man of action might seem to have a different set of priorities than the soulful dreamer, but the builder is really working to create an appropriate setting, a garment to house an ideal. They, Moshe and Betzalel, are partners.

When Shabbos arrives it is the source of blessing not just for the week ahead but also it fits as the flame atop the wick of week that preceded it, with the realization of the original good all that hard work was aiming to. With that thought in mind we build yet another week and crown it again with an original thought.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5763-pekudei>

Pop Quiz: What's Holier – Shabbat or the Beit haMikdash?

By Rabbi Dov Linzer

Rosh HaYeshiva and President, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2014, 2019

Before entering into extensive detail about the making of the Mishkan, this week's parasha opens with the mitzvah of Shabbat:

And Moshe gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together, and said unto them, these are the words which the Lord has commanded, that you should do them. Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day, a Shabbat of rest to the Lord... (Shemot 34:1-2)

The juxtaposition of the Mishkan and Shabbat occurs not only here but in Ki Tisa as well at the end of the commands to make the Mishkan. This juxtaposition indicates, minimally, that these are two parallel institutions, two loci of kedushah. The Mishkan represents kedushat makom, sanctity of space, while Shabbat represents kedushat zman, sanctity of time. The Rabbis take this further stating that the juxtaposition is meant to indicate that Shabbat cannot be violated for the making of the Mishkan. That is, sanctity of time trumps sanctity of space.

It is easy to understand why this is the case. Sanctity of time, Shabbat, precedes historically any sanctified space, the Land of Israel, the Temple Mount, or the Mishkan. It also directs one away from the physical. Time is not a physical entity, space is. Physicality and sanctity can sometimes be a dangerous mix; it could lead to idolatry. Shabbat's lack of physicality make it truer to the infinite, non-physical God, the source of all that is holy in the world.

Here in Parashat Vayakhel the command of Shabbat precedes the Mishkan, while in Ki Tisa it followed the Mishkan. What is the reason for this change in order? Something happened between the commandment of Shabbat in Ki Tisa and the commandment of Shabbat in Vayakhel – the making of the Golden Calf.

Originally, God started with the command of the Mishkan. Shabbat comes as a warning at the end: *“However, My Shabbats you shall keep”* (31:13). It is true that Shabbat is more important, but the focus is on the Mishkan. “However,” akh, make sure to remember Shabbat; even as you build the Mishkan, do not violate Shabbat.

After the Golden Calf, the order of presentation had to be different. It became clear that the people could easily turn the physical into an idol. A reorientation was necessary. Only the prioritizing of Shabbat, not just in principle, but also in the mindset of the people, could ensure that the Mishkan would not itself become a Golden Calf. Start with Shabbat; start with the ultimate, abstract truth. Make sure that this foundation is well laid, that you have fully internalized that this kedusha is primary. Only then can you move on to building the Mishkan.

But notice what did not happen. The Torah did not, in response to the Golden Calf, retract the command of the Mishkan. Why not just eliminate the physical kedushah and be done with it? The answer is obvious: as people we are trapped in our physicality. It is not possible to sustain a life of kedushah if all we have is the abstract kedushah of Shabbat. We need physical kedushah; we need ritual mitzvot, we need a synagogue, we need a Temple. It is these that make our worship real; that give us the ability to connect to an infinite God.

Rambam tried to move beyond this. He claimed that sacrifices were only needed for a people who were influenced by pagan practice; that the ideal was to sit and contemplate God. But who can worship that way? We may not require sacrifices, but who can really feel connected to God through prayer without any physical component? We need a synagogue and the rituals of prayer. We need to create images in our minds which make God more like us; a Being we can relate to. We still need a Mishkan and we can have it, so long as we do not confuse it with God Godself. So long as the kedushah of Shabbat, of abstract, higher truth comes first.

Shabbat represents more than non-physicality; it represents inclusivity and unrestricted access. The Mishkan, in its very this-worldliness, was not equally accessible to all. It existed in one place, more accessible to those who lived closer, less so to those who lived farther. And not everyone had the same access. There was a hierarchy – Kohen, Levi, Yisrael – of who could enter, who could get closer to the Holy of Holies, to God's glory as it manifested itself in the physical world. Even Kohanim could be excluded from access or from service if they were impure, if they were not properly clothed, or if they had physical blemishes.

Shabbat, in contrast, is accessible to all, regardless of place, of status, or of gender. This is underscored in the opening verse of the parasha: *"And Moshe gathered all the congregation of the Children of Israel..."* Mishkan is about hierarchy; Mishkan is for the few. Shabbat is about equality; Shabbat is for all.

Shabbat represents abstract kedushah, higher truth and unrestricted access. Mishkan represents concretized kedushah, symbolic truth and restricted access. These two kedushot exist in an ongoing dialectic where the kedushah signified by Shabbat must remain primary, but where it cannot exist without its physical translation into the signified by the Mishkan.

It is this dialectic that I believe is in play in so much of the contemporary debates that have been raging within our community. The call for greater inclusivity in areas of ritual and synagogue echoes the opening words of our parasha. It is a call for the kedushah of Shabbat, the kedushah that precedes the Mishkan. It is a call for a kedushah that is for all the congregation of Israel; a kedushah of equality and inclusivity.

However, those who oppose changes in traditional ritual and roles are not motivated by mean-spiritedness or a desire to exclude people. Their opposition is rooted in the second part of the parasha, in the importance of Mishkan. These existing structures and hierarchies serve as symbols to impart necessary religious values. While some people may be excluded as a result, it is these symbols that root us in our past, in our ancient traditions, in authenticity. From this point of view, to tear down these structures is to tear down the Mishkan. It is to tear down those symbols that anchor us – people who live in the real world and not the ideal one – in the past and connect us to the full weight and power of our tradition.

Is our current structure a Mishkan or is it possible that it has become more like a Golden Calf? Has it become so reified and concretized that it has become an end in itself, worshipped for its own sake, undermining higher kedushah?

Perhaps one way to know if this is the case is to see whether anything else is ever given any weight. If someone can only talk about maintaining traditional structures and guarding its borders without ever addressing the larger religious questions and concerns, then it is possible that these structures, for this person, no longer point to a higher truth. They may have become this person's Golden Calf.

Those calling for more equality need to respect the need for the Mishkan. They do themselves a disservice if they think that one can exist in a world of Shabbat without the symbolic, rooted truths of the Mishkan. And those calling for maintaining the traditional forms must be vigilant that these forms do not supplant the greater religious truths. They must make sure that they are not turning the Mishkan into their Golden Calf.

Humility is the key. If each side can approach its own position with humility, if each side can appreciate the truths held by the other, we will be able to work towards a religious life that has full kedushah, a life rooted in the eternal truths of Shabbat and in the concrete truths of the Mishkan.

Shabbat Shalom!

From my archives

A Sanctuary of Awe: Seeing the Mishkan's Role Beyond the Korbanot

By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

This week's double Torah portions of Va'Yakhel and Pekudei often try the patience of readers. The unrelenting focus on the smallest details in the Mishkan's construction (the length of the curtains, the composition of the metals, the precise placement of the rings) can feel tedious, a long, dry preamble to the human-centric drama of Sefer Va'Yikra.

This sense of tedium is largely a function of our reading order. The sequential placement of these parshiyot in Shemot is deeply misleading: it suggests a simple chronology where God first commands the building of the Temple and its purpose is simply to serve as the exclusive venue for the sacrifices, which are detailed and spelled out elaborately in the following Sefer of the Torah, Va'Yikra. In this common view, the Temple itself is the means, and the korbanot are viewed as the ultimate end.

I however believe that these parshiyot are, in fact, the very heart of the matter, since the minutiae of the Tabernacle embody a profound spiritual essence. The true relationship is the reverse: **the korbanot are the means; the dwelling of humanity in the Divine Presence, the sheer aesthetic experience of the Temple, is the ultimate end.** (Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* 3:47 might be read as supporting this thesis.) [emphasis added]

Following the transcendent encounter at Sinai, the moment of blissful intertwining between Lover and beloved, a necessary separation occurred. Yet, God's intense desire was to continue that intimate, enduring relationship. To achieve this, God instructed us to design a breathtaking, ornate abode — an unparalleled gallery adorned with precious metals and exquisite tapestries. These were not mere decorations but artworks whose aesthetic perfection has the power to induce radical amazement. Radical amazement, by its very nature, is transcendent. And transcendence is the gateway to the godly. When our senses are overwhelmed by the ineffable, when our minds soar upward and outward, we have penetrated the divine realm, and the human spirit achieves a profound unity with the Divine. For such art to have this profound, transformative power, every minute detail, every precisely measured thread, matters. The very minutiae that bore some is the foundation of its majesty.

The korbanot are thus designated as the gravitational force, the incentive mechanism that draws us in. Our deep and powerful yearning for expiation or expression of thanks provides the perfect impetus to make the arduous pilgrimage to the Temple. Once we are physically present, our attention shifts from the practical offering to the profound atmosphere; the sheer beauty and ornateness of the sanctuary then has the power to influence and impact us, triggering that transcendent state. This dynamic is underscored by the limited role of the individual bringing the offering, whose duty is often merely to bring it and little more, as the Kohanim take over the remainder of the process. Why is the personal involvement of the offerer so curtailed? Because the ultimate goal is for people to simply BE THERE — to stand within the presence of the Divine and be transformed by its perfection.

This understanding of the Temple as a visually and aesthetically centered experience is powerfully supported by Chazal in the Talmud. The first daf of Masechet Chagiga emphatically stresses that the purpose of Aliyah La'Regel, the thrice-yearly pilgrimage, is to see and to be seen. The visual encounter is so crucial to the pilgrimage that the Gemara derives from it the exemption of those unable to perceive the Temple's beauty from the mitzvah of Aliyah La'Regel. If one cannot have the visual encounter, the essential purpose of the arduous journey is curtailed. The Temple was not primarily an auditorium for audible instruction or a venue for olfactory offerings; it was a visual spectacle designed to induce awe through its perfect, tangible beauty. We were invited to see. Encountering the Divine is a sensory experience, an aesthetic engagement that can be physically — and visually — experienced in the world.

This profound aesthetic and visual goal (this pursuit of a transcendent experience grounded in tangible beauty) forces a necessary pivot in our religious practice. With the singular, perfect vehicle of the Beit Hamikdash no longer physically present, the essential spiritual task is clear: to seek alternative venues and experiences that can continue to induce that same 'radical amazement' and nourish the reciprocal love between humanity and the Divine.

In the wake of the Temple's destruction, this task falls upon us: we must frequent spaces that induce radical amazement, catapulting us into that transcendent zone where humanity and divinity intersect. Art houses, alongside batei midrash, serve as our modern mini-temples where we seek the ineffable. For this reason, the perusal of art becomes a profoundly spiritual and religious exercise, offering a necessary reprieve from our daily grind and transforming the temporal into a celestial space, in effect recreating the transcendent experience of the Beit Hamikdash.

Ultimately, this aesthetic and transcendent ideal remains the central aspiration as I pray thrice daily for the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash. More than the sacrificial rite — the precise details of which remain a source of discussion — it is the return to that perfect aesthetic space, the sanctuary of unadulterated beauty, that is the yearning of my soul; it is the vision of experiencing the Divine, seeing Him, as it were, with the mind's inner eye, that directs my prayer. While the question of the sacrifices' future is significant, it is ultimately immaterial to this core desire, as the korbanot were always meant to be merely the means to an end. The deep longing for that aesthetic perfection, for the radical amazement and transcendence it fosters, will remain the primary focus — the very art of awe that transforms mere minutiae into divine majesty.

Shabbat Shalom.

[Ed. note: read this Dvar Torah in conjunction with Rabbi Brander's Dvar Haftorah above.]

[note: because of problems formatting across different word processing problems, I had to omit most Hebrew text, and some remaining Hebrew text will end up out of order, depending on word processing format.]

* Chair of the Talmud Department and the Director of the Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2026/03/a-sanctuary-of-awe-seeing-the-mishkans-role-beyond-the-korbanot/>
<https://library.yct Torah.org/2026/03/a-sanctuary-of-awe-seeing-the-mishkans-role-beyond-the-korbanot/>

Vayakhel - Pekudei Message for Students in Israel

By Rabbanit Yaffa Aranoff *

The Torah describes the surge of generosity through which Bnei Yisrael brought materials for the Mishkan. Again and again the Torah describes people whose hearts moved them to give and to create.

Amid that description we read about the leaders: *"The leaders brought the onyx stones and the stones for setting, for the ephod and the breastplate."* (Shemot 35:27)

But the Torah writes their name unusually: מאשנהו — missing the letter ו. Why?

Rashi quotes a midrash in which Rebi Natan explains that the leaders did not initially volunteer. Instead they said: *"Let the people give whatever they wish, and whatever remains missing, we will complete."* Only after the people had finished did the leaders ask what remained — and then brought the precious stones for the שוֹן and פֹּאָךְ.

The midrash judges this critically, describing them as ולצענתו — lazy. That seems surprising. Their reasoning was thoughtful, even responsible — they stepped back to give their community space to give fully.

But the surrounding verses hint at what they may have missed. Just before, the Torah describes the women who spun goats' hair: *"All the women whose hearts lifted them with wisdom spun the goats' hair."* (Shemot 35:26)

The key phrase is **וּבָלֵאֲשֶׁנּוּ** — their hearts lifted them. One verse later we meet the **מִיָּאִישׁוֹ**. The near-identical language (**מֵאִשׁוֹ/אֲשֶׁנּוּ**) invites comparison. The leaders calculated their role. But the Mishkan was built through a different energy — through people whose hearts carried them forward.

Not all commentators accept this critique. Rashbam notes that the stones bore the names of the tribes, making the leaders' contribution naturally fitting. Chizkuni adds that these valuable stones were items the leaders had acquired leaving Mitzrayim, reflecting their status. In these readings, the **מִיָּאִישׁוֹ** led appropriately from their position.

But the midrash pushes back: the leaders were criticized precisely because they acted as leaders — stepping back to evaluate rather than spontaneously joining the movement. Kli Yakar sharpens this further, suggesting their calculation contained a subtle trace of pride. Their reasoning sounded humble, but it still placed them above the moment.

The deeper question remains: what kind of leadership does a particular moment require? Sometimes it means stepping back and providing what others cannot. But sometimes it means allowing oneself to be moved.

And yet the critique has its limits. The **מִיָּאִישׁוֹ** received a yellow card, not a red one. When **וַנִּשְׁמָה תְּכוֹנָה** arrived, they stepped forward first — given the honor of inaugurating the **תְּבוּרָה**, tribe by tribe, day by day. Their earlier hesitation had become a lesson learned.

Bnei Yisrael had just left Mitzrayim, still learning how to live as a free nation. Every individual, every tribe had to discover their role within the whole. The **מִיָּאִישׁוֹ** were learning too — and their response at **וַנִּשְׁמָה תְּכוֹנָה** showed they had grown.

That journey of a people learning to function as a nation, each person finding where and how to give, is important today too. Israel is living through an unprecedented moment. Israelis are being asked again and again: what is my role right now? When should I lead, and when should I step aside?

There are no perfect answers. But the story of the **מִיָּאִישׁוֹ** reminds us that getting it wrong once is not the end. What matters is the willingness to learn, to adjust, and to show up when the next moment of dedication arrives.

[Note: some Hebrew text omitted because of software issues; my software sometimes reverses order of Hebrew words.]

* Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Director of Israel Office.

Be Strong: Thoughts for Vayakhel-Pekudei-Hahodesh

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals 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 current fund raising period. Thank you.

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

Paired Perspectives on the Parashah: Vayakhel

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

Introduction

The narrative arc of the Tabernacle reaches its culmination in Vayakhel. What began with the divine blueprints in Parashat Terumah now becomes a human achievement. The Torah lingers over the construction with remarkable detail, signaling that something essential is being revealed — not only about Israel's worship, but about Israel's relationship with God and the world.

Two complementary perspectives illuminate the meaning and purpose of the Tabernacle. One views it as a portable continuation of Sinai — revelation institutionalized and made ongoing. The other reads the Tabernacle as a recreation of Creation and the Garden of Eden — a sacred space in which humanity is invited back into God's presence. Seen together,

these perspectives frame the Tabernacle as the fulfillment of God's purposes in history.

Perspective I — The Tabernacle as Sinai Redux

Ramban argues that the Tabernacle is the perpetuation of the Sinaitic theophany. In his commentary to Exodus (25:2), Ramban writes that Israel was commanded to construct a sanctuary so that the revelatory experience of Sinai might continue among them in permanent form. The cloud, the fire, and the divine speech — all elements of the original revelation — reappear within the sanctuary. What Israel had witnessed briefly at Sinai would now accompany them in their journeys.

Ramban reinforces the Sinai parallel through close attention to textual sequence. The spatial structure reinforces this point: the summit of Sinai corresponds to the Kodesh ha-Kodashim, accessible only to Moses (or later the High Priest); the middle zone corresponds to the Kodesh, for elders and priests; the base corresponds to the courtyard, where the altar stands. In both settings, God descends and speaks from the sacred center.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks cited Max Weber's insight that transformative charismatic events survive only when they are routinized — translated into enduring institutions and practices. Sinai was unparalleled, but it was also ephemeral. Its survival required the regular rhythms of commanded worship.

In his introduction to Exodus, Ramban adds one more layer: the Tabernacle completes the redemption from Egypt. Redemption is not fulfilled by liberation alone but by God dwelling among Israel, restoring them to the spiritual stature of the Patriarchs, with whom the Divine Presence rested continuously. Revelation becomes residence; Sinai becomes home.

Perspective II — The Tabernacle as Creation and Eden Redux

Another set of sources views the Tabernacle not through the lens of Sinai but through the lens of Creation and Eden. The Tabernacle stabilizes the world and invites humanity back into sacred space.

A remarkable Midrash (*Numbers Rabbah* 12:12–13) teaches that the world was like a two-legged stool until the Tabernacle was erected, and only then did it stand firm. Creation itself, the Midrash implies, is incomplete until God's Presence dwells in the world through human action. The partnership between God and Israel brings the world to its intended stability.

The Torah reinforces the Creation parallel in narrative detail. When the construction is finished, "*Vayekhal Moshe et ha-melakhah*" — "*Moses completed the work*" (Exodus 40:33; cf. 39:32), echoing "*Vayekhulu ha-shamayim ve-ha-aretz*" at the end of Creation. Moses beholds the finished work and blesses it (39:42–43), as God does in Genesis. Vayakhel thus portrays human beings engaging in creative labor that mirrors God's creative labor.

The placement of Shabbat laws on either side of the Tabernacle narrative underscores the point. The command to build concludes with Shabbat (31:12–17), and the account of building begins with Shabbat (35:1–3). God created the world in six days and ceased on the seventh; Israel builds the Tabernacle and refrains on the seventh. The categories of prohibited labor on Shabbat derive from Tabernacle work (Shabbat 49b), demonstrating that sacred human creativity is bounded by sacred restraint.

A final set of texts extends the analogy from Creation to Eden. Humanity's ideal state was to remain with God in the Garden, obeying His command. Sin led to exile, and God stationed cherubim to guard the way to the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22–24). In the Tabernacle, cherubim reappear — this time not as guardians against intrusion but as symbols of Divine Presence above the Tablets of the Torah, which becomes a new Tree of Life. The sanctuary thereby becomes a realized Edenic space, inviting all humanity — through Israel — to fulfill their potential as bearers of God's image.

Other Midrashim reinforce the theme. *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* locates Eden's opening at Moriah (Temple Mount in Jerusalem), linking primordial sacred geography to Jerusalem. Eden thus migrates from Mesopotamia to Zion, and exile gives way to return.

Conclusion — Revelation Institutionalized, Creation Completed

Seen through these two lenses, the Tabernacle accomplishes a double transformation. It converts the unrepeatable revelation of Sinai into a sustained relationship mediated through discipline, routine, and commanded worship. And it completes creation by enabling humanity to participate in its perfection, returning to the sacred space from which it once departed.

The Tabernacle therefore belongs not only to the story of Israel but to the story of the world. Revelation, creation, and redemption converge in the sanctuary. In Vayakhel, Israel learns not only to receive God's gifts but to build a world in which God's Presence can dwell.

* Yeshiva University and National Scholar, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3419>

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

Your Beautiful Palace By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

The news today is filled with encouraging updates. The military capabilities of Iran continue to be reduced. The extent of destruction that this regime has brought to the world is hard to fathom. If we were to imagine a dedicated fellow reading a list of names of the thousands of people murdered and maimed by this regime and its proxies the reading would go on for many, many hours. There is understandable excitement in seeing video clips of the explosions destroying rockets, missiles, and the companies that manufacture them. We have much to thank Hashem for in the hundreds of successful bombing missions. Yet, if Hashem were to pick a logo or icon by which he wished to be known to the world, He would not choose the bunker busting bomb as His trademarked logo.

The second Bracha of Shemoneh Esrei is known as Gevuros – Strength. The intention of this Bracha is to describe the strength of Hashem. In it we do not describe explosions, earthquakes, or tsunamis. While these are all from Hashem, they are not what Hashem considers His claim to fame. The strength identified is the power to give life; the imagery is a droplet of rain.

Explosions are necessary at times. Destruction of evil is to be acknowledged, and it is something we are very grateful for. But the symbol of strength that Hashem wants us to carry in our minds is not the great explosion of 30,000-pound bunker busting bombs hitting Fordow. This was necessary. But when Hashem wants us to picture His greatness, it is as the bestower of life, the nurturer of mankind.

Indeed, in the book of Melochim (1:19) we read of the intimate conversation that Hashem had with Eliyahu. That conversation occurred after the dramatic showdown with the false prophets. Eliyahu was fiery, passionate, and at his best. Yet Hashem told Eliyahu that His essence was not about storms and fiery explosions, as necessary as they sometimes are. **Although Eliyahu carried the passion and zealotry of Pinchas as his core, he was tasked to recognize that the essence of Hashem is to be found in soft and gentle communication.** [emphasis added]

This concept is further developed by a story recounted by the Chovos HaLivavos (*Yichud HaMaaseh 5*). The author describes an encounter between victorious soldiers returning from battle and a wise man. The wise man said, “*You are returning in victory from the small battle. Now you should engage in the real battle of life: To battle the bad character traits that threaten to destroy.*” It is important to win the battles on the battlefield of war. But the true mark of distinction is one who overcomes jealousy and personal feelings of insult. Instead of escalating and destroying, the true mark of distinction is one who can engage in soft, gentle communication with a touch of empathy and understanding.

This is why the newlywed man is absolved of going to war (Devorim 24:5). The Torah wants to guide us as to the purpose of war. War and victory on the battlefield are not intrinsic values. The purpose of those battles is to provide space and security to build and to nurture life. The newlywed man, focused and ready to build a family, stands as an image of the goal and is protected.

As the Parsha describes the building of the Mishkan and how everything came together, it is worth focusing on what we can do as individuals to build and nurture the Mikdash Miat (Mini-Sanctuary) of our own families. Whatever stage of life we are in, the people we interact with are our opportunity to express Hashem’s definition of true strength. As the Mishna in Avos states: “**Who is strong? He who conquers his urges.**” True strength is not in explosions. True strength is illustrated with a droplet of water, the ability to nurture, the ability to provide life, the ability to carry on a difficult conversation with dignity, the ability to bestow a compliment. [emphasis added]

Hashem brought great plagues on the Mitzriyim. Hashem assisted Yehoshua in his battle against Amolek. These events were necessary. But Hashem does not declare these to be the hallmark of how we are to know Him. Hashem’s identity is not linked to Cherev – the sword, which is associated with Churva – destruction. It is indeed forbidden to build the Mizbeiach in the Mishkan using such an implement. (Shemos 20:22) Hashem wants us to identify Him and the Mishkan as a place that is focused on nurturing and endearing communication.

In our own lives we can apply the values of nurturing and giving support to our families and to those around us. Practice what Hashem considers true strength and build your own beautiful palace.

For Family Discussion:

The Torah identifies a newlywed as someone who is focused on building his home and family. Who are other people and potential role models who display exemplary devotion to family and relationships?

Who is someone in your life who could use an uplifting note of thanks or a compliment this coming week? What could you do to nurture them?

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, or to help sponsor his Torah insights, contact Rabbi Rhine.

Pekudei - The Gift of the Pure

By Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

The parsha begins with an accounting of the donations given for the construction of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle in the desert. Before it begins the accounting, though, the Torah reviews which Mishkan we are discussing, “*These are the accountings of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of the Testimony, which was charged through Moshe, the service of the Levi'im in*

the hands of Isamar son of Aharon the Kohein. And Betzalel son of Uri son of Chur of the tribe of Yehuda did all that Hashem had commanded Moshe. And with him Oholi'av son of Achisamach of the tribe of Dan, carpenter and craftsman, and weaver with the blue dyed wool, and with the purple dyed wool, and with the scarlet thread and with the linen." (Shemos 38:21-23) All of these details have already been repeated in the previous sections. Why is the Torah repeating this information again now?

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

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

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

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

* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and then associated with the Savannah Kollel.

Shabbat vs. Idolatry

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

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

gods. Because humans crave power and want to satisfy their base needs, all pagan societies eventually became tyrannical or decadent. The focus of these societies on power and desire led to their destruction.

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

Women in the Mishkan

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom.

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>**. The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights (copyright) to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz *

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation **

The Torah is so “stingy” with ink that at times it uses a shorter word or even omits a letter. As Chazal (our sages of blessed memory) teach, this reflects Hashem’s mercy toward the sofrim (scribes), so they would not have to spend too much money on ink. In other words, the Torah sometimes “*shortens itself*” to make the writing more manageable.

And yet, this week we read a double parsha, Vayakhel and Pekudei. You may notice that these portions again describe the building of the Mishkan (the Tabernacle). What is striking is that we already read about this in great detail just a few weeks ago in Terumah and Tetzaveh.

If the Torah is usually so careful with its “ink,” why repeat the entire story in such detail?

So this week's Shabbat table discussion is: Why does the Torah repeat the story of the Mishkan, and with such detail?

Bahavat Yisrael,

Rabbi Netanel

* Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher> .

[Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message for the congregation?]

** Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

Rav Kook Torah Vayakhel: Choosing a Leader

Betzalel's Appointment

God informed Moses of Betzalel's appointment to oversee the construction of the Tabernacle, and Moses subsequently apprised the people. According to the Midrash (Berakhot 55a), however, this was not just a perfunctory notification.

God asked, 'Moses, is Betzalel acceptable to you?' 'Master of the world,' exclaimed Moses, 'if he is acceptable to You, then certainly he is acceptable to me!' 'Nevertheless, I want you to speak with the people.' So Moses went to the people, and asked them, 'Is Betzalel acceptable to you?' 'If he is acceptable to God and to you,' responded the people, 'then certainly he is acceptable to us!'

The Sages learned from this story a lesson in public appointments — one should seek the people's approval before assigning a leader. Still, it seems superfluous for God Himself to consult with Moses and the people. Certainly God knows who is best qualified to organize the Tabernacle construction; why bother consulting with Moses and the people? Was this just a formality, out of politeness?

Three Qualifications for a Leader

A great leader must possess three qualities. These qualities differ in relative importance and the ease by which they may be recognized.

The first trait of leadership is integrity and purity of soul. This is an inner quality, only fully revealed to the One Who examines innermost thoughts and feelings. It is also the key trait of true leadership.

The second quality sought in a leader is the wisdom needed to successfully guide the people. This quality is recognizable to people — but not to all people. Only the astute can accurately gauge a leader's sagacity. While not as crucial as the trait of personal integrity, an administrator cannot successfully lead the people without good judgment and political acumen.

The final quality that marks a successful leader consists of external talents apparent to all, such as charisma and eloquence. While these qualities are less important than the previous two, they certainly contribute to a leader's popularity and effectiveness.

The order is, of course, important. Candidates who excel only in the superficial qualifications make poor and even corrupt leaders. Good leadership is based on honesty and integrity. Upon these traits, the other two levels, political acumen and charisma, are built.

The Midrash about Betzalel reflects this prioritization. First, God affirmed Betzalel's qualifications in terms of those inner qualities that only God can truly know. While critical, these traits of integrity and purity are not sufficient. Therefore, He consulted with a wise leader — Moses — whether Betzalel also qualified in terms of the political wisdom necessary for the position. And finally, the people were consulted whether Betzalel met the qualifications that they sought in a popular leader.

(*Gold from the Land of Israel*, pp. 166-167. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. II, p. 262.)

<https://ravkooktorah.org/vayakhel60>

Vayakhel: The Beauty of Holiness or the Holiness of Beauty (5768, 5779)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former UK Chief Rabbi*

In Ki Tissa and in Vayakhel, we encounter the figure of Betzalel, a rare type in the Hebrew Bible – the artist, the craftsman, the shaper of beauty in the service of God, the man who, together with Oholiab, fashioned the articles associated with the Tabernacle. Judaism – in sharp contrast to ancient Greece – did not cherish the visual arts. The reason is clear. The biblical prohibition against graven images associates them with idolatry. Historically, images, fetishes, icons and statues were linked in the ancient world with pagan religious practices. The idea that one might worship “*the work of men's hands*” was anathema to biblical faith.

More generally, Judaism is a culture of the ear, not the eye.[1] As a religion of the invisible God, it attaches sanctity to words heard, rather than objects seen. Hence there is a generally negative attitude within Judaism towards representational art.

There are some famous illustrated manuscripts (such as the *Bird's Head Haggadah*, Bavaria, circa 1300) in which human figures are given bird's heads to avoid representing the full human form. Art is not forbidden as such; there is a difference between three-dimensional and two-dimensional representation. As Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg (c. 1215–1293) made clear in a responsum, “*There is no trespass [in illustrated books] against the biblical prohibition...[illustrations] are merely flat patches of colour lacking sufficient materiality [to constitute a graven image].*”[2] Indeed several ancient synagogues in Israel had quite elaborate mosaics. In general, however, art was less emphasised in Judaism than in Christian cultures in which the Hellenistic influence was strong.

Positive references to art in the rabbinic literature are rare. One exception is Maimonides, who says the following:

If one is afflicted with melancholy, he should cure it by listening to songs and various kinds of melodies, by walking in gardens and fine buildings, by sitting before beautiful forms, and by things like this which delight the soul and make the disturbance of melancholy disappear from it. In all this he should aim at making his body healthy, the goal of his body's health being that he attain knowledge. Rambam, “Introduction to commentary on Mishnah Avot,” *Eight Chapters on Ethics*, chap. 5. 298.

The very terms in which Maimonides describes the aesthetic experience make it clear, however, that he sees art in strictly instrumental terms, as a way of relieving depression. There is no suggestion that it has value in its own right.

The strongest positive statement on art of which I am aware was made by Rabbi Abraham ha-Cohen Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of (pre-State) Israel, describing his time in London during the First World War:

When I lived in London, I would visit the National Gallery, and the paintings that I loved the most were those of Rembrandt. In my opinion Rembrandt was a saint. When I first saw Rembrandt's paintings, they reminded me of the rabbinic statement about the creation of light. When God created the light [on the first day], it was so strong and luminous that it was possible to see from one end of the world to the other. And God feared that the wicked would make use of it. What did He do? He secreted it for the righteous in the world to come. But from time to time there are great men whom God blesses with a vision of that hidden light. I believe that Rembrandt was one of them, and the light in his paintings is that light which God created on Genesis day. Rav Kook, Jewish Chronicle, September 9, 1935

Rembrandt is known to have had a special affection for Jews.[3] He visited them in his home town of Amsterdam, and painted them, as well as many scenes from the Hebrew Bible. I suspect that what Rabbi Kook saw in his paintings, though, was Rembrandt's ability to convey the beauty of ordinary people. He makes no attempt (most notably in his self-portraits) to beautify or idealise his subjects. The light that shines from them is, simply, their humanity.

It was Samson Raphael Hirsch who distinguished ancient Greece from ancient Israel in terms of the contrast between aesthetics and ethics. In his comment on the verse "*May God enlarge Japheth and let him dwell in the tents of Shem*" (Genesis 9:27), he observes:

The stem of Japheth reached its fullest blossoming in the Greeks; that of Shem in the Hebrews, Israel, who bore and bear the name (Shem) of God through the world of nations...Japheth has ennobled the world aesthetically. Shem has enlightened it spiritually and morally. The Pentateuch, translated with commentary by Samson Raphael Hirsch (Gates- head: Judaica Press, 1982), 1:191.

Yet as we see from the case of Betzalel, Judaism is not indifferent to aesthetics. The concept of *hiddur mitzvah*, "*beautifying the commandment*," meant, for the Sages, that we should strive to fulfil the commands in the most aesthetically pleasing way. The priestly garments were meant to be "*for honour and adornment*" (Exodus 28:2). The very terms applied to Betzalel – wisdom, understanding and knowledge – are applied by the book of Proverbs to God Himself as creator of the universe:

*The law and the Lord founded the earth by wisdom;
He established the heavens by understanding;
By His knowledge the depths burst apart,
And the skies distilled dew. Proverbs: 3:19–20*

The key to Betzalel lies in his name. It means "*In the shadow of God.*" Betzalel's gift lay in his ability to communicate, through his work, that art is the shadow cast by God. Religious art is never "*art for art's sake.*"[4] Unlike secular art, it points to something beyond itself. The Tabernacle itself was a kind of microcosm of the universe, with one overriding particularity: that in it you felt the presence of something beyond – what the Torah calls "*the glory of God*" which "*filled the Tabernacle*" (Exodus 40:35).

The Greeks, and many in the Western world who inherited their tradition, believed in the holiness of beauty (Keats' "*Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know*").[5] Jews believed in the opposite: *hadrat kodesh*, the beauty of holiness: "*Give to the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness*" (Psalms 29:2). Art in Judaism always has a spiritual purpose: to make us aware of the universe as a work of art, testifying to the supreme Artist, God Himself.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] For a more nuanced view, however, see Kalman Bland, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

[2] See Tosafot, commentary to *Yoma* 54a–b, s.v. Keruvim; *Responsa Rabbi Meir Mi'Rothenberg* (Venice: 1515), 14–16.

[3] See Michael Zell, *Reframing Rembrandt: Jews and the Christian Image in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam* (University of California Press, 2002), and Steven Nadler, *Rembrandt's Jews* (University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[4] The phrase is usually attributed to Benjamin Constant (1804).

[5] The last lines of Keats' famous poem, "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

Around the Shabbat Table:

[1] Why does Judaism have a complicated relationship with the visual arts?

[2] What is the difference between the approaches of Maimonides and Rabbi Kook to art?

[3] What message is contained in the name "Betzalel"?

[4] On Rabbi Kook's approach to art: Why does Rabbi Kook describe Rembrandt as "a saint"?

[5] According to Rabbi Sacks, what is the source of the light in Rembrandt's paintings? What does this have to do with the message hidden in Betzalel's name?

[6] Do you find art is a route to spirituality and a way for you to connect to God? If not visual art, are there other forms of art (such as music or poetry) that you find moving?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayakhel/the-beauty-of-holiness-holiness-of-beauty/> 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 Devar.

Life Lessons From the Parshah - Vayakhel/Pekudei: Seeing the Forest Through the Trees

By Yehoshua B. Gordon* © Chabad

Most years, the Torah portions of Vayakhel and Pekudei are combined and read in the same week. In a Jewish leap year. . ., however, they are read separately, each assigned its own week.

The Rebbe often expounded upon the significance of the title of a Torah portion. While at first glance the title may seem to simply be the first word or perhaps the first unique word in the portion, there is a deeper meaning. Not only is every Torah portion replete with practical lessons, taught the Rebbe, but the particular title is in and of itself a lesson.

The Big Picture

In the parshah of Vayakhel, we read that Moses gathered the Jewish people and informed them, "*We're building a Tabernacle; here's a list of items I need you all to contribute.*" Remarkably, the people contributed so generously that Moses had to instruct them to stop giving — the only time in recorded history where a rabbi had to stop an appeal because too much was contributed!

What does the name Vayakhel signify? Vayakhel means to assemble, to gather — it embodies the concept of summarizing, tallying up a total, and seeing the big picture.

The opening verse of Pekudei reads, “*These are the numbers of the Tabernacle ... which were counted at Moses’ command ...*,”¹ and there follows an exact accounting of the component parts that were used in the construction of the Tabernacle.

What does Pekudei represent? Pekudei means numbers — it emphasizes counting each part, enumerating each item, and focusing on the details.

Life is made up of two parts: The individual parts, and the total, or sum of the parts. The big picture and the little picture. Vayakhel imparts the crucial lesson that we must consider the big picture; we must look at the entire project; we must look at the Jewish People as a whole. Pekudei, on the other hand, underscores the value of the individual part — every item is important; every Jew is important.²

I am reminded of an adorable story about a mechanic that was called in to try to fix a gigantic cruise ship that suddenly stopped working. Surveying the situation, and after making an elaborate show of taking out all his tools, he proceeded to tighten one single screw, and then announced that the ship was repaired. The mechanic’s bill arrived a few days later, for \$10,000! Unwilling to pay such a hefty sum for seemingly minimal work, the cruise operator requested an itemized invoice. The revised invoice arrived: \$1.00 for turning the screw; \$9,999 for knowing which screw to turn.

There is a big picture and a little picture.

That’s the essence of Vayakhel — the big-picture approach, knowing which screw to turn.

Taking the First Step

On a personal level, I underwent my own “Vayakhel” experience when I decided to embark on the enormous undertaking of teaching the entire Mishneh Torah (Maimonides’ halachic teachings), making these classes available online on Chabad.org. Maimonides’ work comprises 1,017 chapters, and I committed to tackling one chapter daily.

At the outset, it was overwhelming, even mind-boggling — 1,017 chapters at a pace of one chapter per day would take the better part of three years! But then I remembered that as a young man, I once entered the office of a dear friend of mine, Rabbi Yaakov Noach “Yankel” Kranz, of blessed memory. At the time, his office was in Oak Park, Michigan, and there was a large poster on the wall. The poster depicted an overgrown field with very tall weeds — probably 12 to 15 feet tall — and in the corner was a fellow with a lawn mower, the weeds towering over him. The caption on the poster read: “*The best way to finish a large project is to begin.*”

How do you complete a massive project? By taking the first step. And then by taking it one step at a time after that. With this approach, thank G d, we successfully completed this amazing project!

And that is Vayakhel: Focus on the big picture and move forward one day at a time, one act at a time, one step at a time.

Tabernacle Within

The portions of Vayakhel and Pekudei, which detail the construction of the Tabernacle, its vessels, and the specifics of the priestly garb, are a veritable repeat of the portions of Terumah and Tetzaveh. The Torah is well known for its brevity; so much so, that some laws are derived from what seems to be an extra word or even an extra letter. And so, the question arises: why repeat two entire portions?

Rashi addressed a similar question in the portion of Chayei Sarah, where Abraham sends his servant Eliezer to find a wife for Isaac. The story is initially told as it unfolds and it is then repeated. Rashi, citing the Midrash, comments, “*The ordinary conversation of the servants of the Patriarchs is more beloved before the Omnipresent than the Torah of their sons, for the section dealing with Eliezer is repeated in the Torah, whereas many fundamentals of the Torah were given only through allusions.*”³ Clearly, when something is repeated in the Torah it’s because it’s very precious to G d.

In a similar vein, the Tabernacle — and later, the Holy Temple — signifies the manifestation of G d's presence in this world and within each of us. The primary purpose of a Jew is to create a dwelling place for G d in our hearts and in our lives. The Torah conveys the significance of this theme by telling us about the Tabernacle in detail and at length, and then repeating it again for emphasis.

Divine Work-Life Balance

Our parshah begins with Moses gathering the Jewish people and stating, *"These are the things that the L rd commanded to make ..."*⁴ Then, just as he starts speaking about the Tabernacle, Moses unexpectedly transitions to the laws of Shabbat: *"Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have sanctity, a day of complete rest to the L rd; whoever performs work thereon [on this day] shall be put to death."*⁵ Why is Shabbat inserted here?

Rashi explains that Shabbat is mentioned in order to convey to the Jews that, despite the immense importance of constructing the Tabernacle, this activity must not be pursued on Shabbat. Shabbat is considered holier even than the crucial task of building the Holy Temple.⁶

However, in a sense, Shabbat is mentioned here precisely because it is very much a part of building the Tabernacle — of creating a dwelling place for G d in this world with all our actions and in everything we do.

One might argue: *"You want me to create a dwelling place for G d? I can do that by resting on Shabbat. But the other six days? I've got to stay focused on my work; I've got to make a living. You know what it takes to be a successful businessman? You've got to work. It's not easy. You've got to pound the pavement, day and night!"*

In truth, however, there are two ways to approach work:

One way is to believe that your success is commensurate with your effort. To believe that if you don't throw yourself — body and soul — into the rat race, you cannot make a living.

The other way is the Torah's approach: *"Six days work shall be done."* The work will *"be done"* — by itself. Yes, He expects us to work and create a channel for His blessing, but it is ultimately G d who provides us with a living.. We should invest just enough effort that we don't feel like we're getting it for nothing.

That is why the laws of Shabbat are an integral part of building the Tabernacle: not just that the *"Seventh day shall be ... complete rest,"* but also the *"Six days work shall be done."*⁷

The Day After

After the Jewish people sinned with the Golden Calf, Moses spent 40 days on Mount Sinai praying to G d to forgive them, and on the 40th day — the 10th of Tishrei, Yom Kippur — G d forgave them. Moses' address to the people at the beginning of Vayakhel took place the following day.⁸

Most of us take Yom Kippur very seriously. Even many Jews who do not regularly go to synagogue make it a point to show up. It's amazing. Nobody will miss Kol Nidrei. When the services are over at the close of Yom Kippur, some people approach me and say, *"Rabbi, it was great to see you. See you next year!"*

There's a cute story about a little girl whose parents moved away from their Jewish observance. Her grandparents, however, remained observant. One summer, the little girl was sent to stay with her grandparents. Bubby and Zaidy utilized every moment to instill Jewish teachings and practice into this little girl. She began to recite blessings, observe the Shabbat; she was taught to read Hebrew, keep kosher, and so on. When her parents came to pick her up, the girl thanked her grandparents and headed out to the car. *"One minute,"* the little girl said to her parents, as she ran back up to the house, extended her little hand to the mezuzah on the doorpost, and said, *"Goodbye G d! See you next year."*

Coming to synagogue on Yom Kippur is great, and we certainly are not critical of those who come only on that day. In fact, Yom Kippur is called *“achat bashanah”* – *“the one day of the year.”*⁹ The “one day” that the spark of oneness is awakened within each and every Jew to recognize the One G d. But what happens the day after?

Moses gathered the people the day after and told them. *“If you want to create a dwelling place for G d, it has to be not just on Yom Kippur, but the day after. And the day after that. And every day of the year.”*

My father, Rabbi Sholom B. Gordon, of blessed memory, used to share a wonderful teaching with me based on a verse in Psalms: *“My tears were my bread day and night when they say to me all day long, ‘Where is your G d?’”*¹⁰ The simple meaning of the verse is that the Jew cries day and night because the nations of the world taunt him, saying, *“Why are you suffering? Where is your G d? Why is He not saving you?”*

But there’s a deeper meaning. *“I know you’re a Jew in the synagogue. I know you’re a Jew when you pray, when you’re swaying back and forth with a tallit over your head. But ‘where is your G d all day long’ Where is your G d the rest of the day?”* G d must be present in our business lives, our personal lives, our everyday lives.

This is the profound life lesson that we learn from Vayakhel taking place the day after Yom Kippur. When do we begin construction of the Holy Temple? When do we make sure our hearts are a Tabernacle and a home for G d? The day after Yom Kippur.

One year, at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, the Sixth Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, of righteous memory, turned to his father, the Fifth Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom DovBer, who was known as the Rebbe Rashab, and asked, *“What is the Divine service that is required of us now?”*

The Rebbe Rashab replied, *“Now we begin to do teshuvah (repenting and coming close to G d).”*¹¹ Having just concluded Yom Kippur — the day that is entirely dedicated to the spiritual work of repentance, atonement, and coming closer to G d — now, taught the Fifth Rebbe, is when we must repent. Now is when we have to come closer to G d. Now, when Yom Kippur is behind us and everyday life resumes, that is when we have to create a dwelling place for G d.

As we navigate our daily lives, the holiest days and the most mundane moments, let us take to heart the timeless lessons of Vayakhel, of the day after. Every day holds the potential for Divine connection, and our mission is to build a sanctuary for the Divine both in this world and in our hearts. May each step, each act, and every day of our lives contribute to creating a dwelling place for G d. May we merit to usher in the Ultimate Redemption and along with it the Third Temple, with the coming of our righteous Moshiach, speedily in our days. Amen.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Exodus 38:21.
2. Likkutei Sichot, vol 21, pg 250.
3. Genesis 24:42.
4. Exodus 35:1.
5. Exodus 35:2-3.
6. Rashi to Exodus 35:2.
7. Likkutei Sichot vol. 1 , Vayakhel, pg. 187

8. Rashi to Exodus 35:1.
9. Exodus 30:10.
10. Psalms 42:4.
11. Recounted by the Sixth Rebbe, on the night following Yom Kippur, 5689 (1928).

* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon, z"l, directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. "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. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6347707/jewish/Seeing-the-Forest-Through-the-Trees.htm

Vayakheil: Four Parenting Tips

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky

*All those who were generous of heart brought earrings, nose rings, finger rings, and bracelets--gold objects of all kinds--as well as all those donated a wave offering of gold to G-d.
(Ibn Ezra, Shemot 35:22)*

Allegorically, this list of items that the women donated alludes to the four aspects of proper child-rearing and Jewish education, the purpose of which is to raise children who will transform the world into G-d's home:

Earrings: listening to the Torah's instructions in all aspects of educating children. Also, listening carefully to children's conversations with their peers, for children learn how to talk from their elder's example; if something is amiss in how they speak, it means something is amiss in how their role-models speak.

Nose rings: Develop a keen sense of "smell" to determine if children's friendships with other children are beneficial.

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

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

--From Kehot's *Daily Wisdom* Vol. 2

* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

[note: Because Rabbi Friedman's post did not reach me in time for my deadline, I am using an older parsha note.]

Gut Shabbos,

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

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

Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah
via the Internet

Sponsored by Arlene Pianko Groner and family
in memory of her mother, Marion Pianko, z"l,
whose yahrzeit is on 28 Adar,
and her maternal grandparents, Jack and Anna Burstein, z"l,
whose yahrzeits are on 23 Adar

Volume 32, Issue 22

Shabbat Parashat Vayakhel-Pekudei - HaChodesh

5786 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Three Types of Community

A long drama had taken place. Moses had led the people from slavery to the beginning of the road to freedom. The people themselves had witnessed God at Mount Sinai, the only time in all history when an entire people became the recipients of revelation. Then came the disappearance of Moses for his long sojourn at the top of the mountain, an absence which led to the Israelites' greatest collective sin, the making of the Golden Calf. Moses returned to the mountain to plead for forgiveness, which was granted.

Its symbol was the second set of Tablets. Now life must begin again. A shattered people must be rebuilt. How does Moses proceed? The verse with which the sedra begins contains the clue: Moses assembled all the community of Israel and said to them: "These are the things God has commanded you to do." Shemot 35:1

The verb *vayakhel* – which gives the sedra its name – is crucial to an understanding of the task in which Moses is engaged. At its simplest level it serves as a *motiv-word*, recalling a previous verse. In this case the verse is obvious: When the people saw that Moses was long delayed in coming down the mountain, they assembled around Aaron and said to him, "Get up, make us gods to go before us." Shemot 32:1

Moses' act is what the kabbalists called a *tikkun*: a restoration, a making-good-again, the redemption of a past misdemeanour. Just as the sin was committed by the people acting as a *kahal* or *kehillah*, so atonement was to be achieved by their again acting as a *kehillah*, this time by making a home for the Divine presence as they earlier sought to make a substitute for it. Moses orchestrates the people for good, as they had once been assembled for bad (The difference lies not only in the purpose but in the form of the verb, from passive in the case of the Calf to active in the case of Moses. Passivity allows bad things to happen – "Wherever it says 'and it came to pass' it is a sign of impending tragedy". (Megillah 10b) Proactivity is the defeat of

tragedy: "Wherever it says, 'And there will be' is a sign of impending joy." Bamidbar Rabbah 13

At a deeper level, though, the opening verse of the sedra alerts us to the nature of community in Judaism.

In classical Hebrew there are three different words for community: *edah*, *tzibbur*, and *kehillah*, and they signify different kinds of association.

Edah comes from the word *ed*, meaning "witness." The verb *ya'ad* carries the meaning of "to appoint, fix, assign, destine, set apart, designate or determine." The modern Hebrew noun *te'udah* means "certificate, document, attestation, aim, object, purpose, or mission." The people who constitute an *edah* have a strong sense of collective identity. They have witnessed the same things. They are bent on the same purpose. The Jewish people become an *edah* – a community of shared faith – only on receiving the first command: "Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household". Shemot 12:3

An *edah* can be a gathering for bad as well as good. The Israelites, on hearing the report of the spies, lose heart and say they want to return to Egypt. Throughout, they are referred to as the *edah* (as in "How long will this wicked community grumble against Me?" Bamidbar 14:27). The people agitated by Korach in his rebellion against Moses and Aaron's authority is likewise called an *edah* ("If one man sins, will You be angry with the whole community? Bamidbar 16:22). Nowadays the word is generally used for an ethnic or religious subgroup. An *edah* is a community of the like-minded. The word emphasises strong identity. It is a group whose members have much in common.

By contrast the word *tzibbur* – it belongs to Mishnaic rather than biblical Hebrew – comes from the root *tz-b-r* meaning "to heap" or "pile up". (Bereishit 41:49) To understand the concept of *tzibbur*, think of a group of people praying at the Kotel. They may not know each other. They may never meet again. But for the moment, they happen to be ten people in the same place at the same time, and thus

constitute a quorum for prayer. A *tzibbur* is a community in the minimalist sense, a mere aggregate, formed by numbers rather than any sense of identity. A *tzibbur* is a group whose members may have nothing in common except that, at a certain point, they find themselves together and thus constitute a "public" for prayer or any other command which requires a *minyán*.

A *kehillah* is different from the other two kinds of community. Its members are different from one another. In that sense it is like a *tzibbur*. But they are orchestrated together for a collective undertaking – one that involves making a distinctive contribution. The danger of a *kehillah* is that it can become a mass, a rabble, a crowd.

That is the meaning of the phrase in which Moses, descending the mountain, sees the people dancing around the Calf: Moses saw that the people were running wild, for Aaron had let them run out of control and become a laughingstock to their enemies. Shemot 32:25

The beauty of a *kehillah*, however, is that when it is driven by constructive purpose, it gathers together the distinct and separate contributions of many individuals, so that each can say, "I helped to make this." That is why, assembling the people on this occasion, Moses emphasises that each has something different to give:

Bring of what is yours an offering to the Lord. Let everyone who is willing bring an offering to the Lord: gold, silver, and bronze . . .

And let all among you who are skilled come and make the things that the Lord has commanded. Shemot 35:5, Shemot 35:10

Moses was able to turn the *kehillah* with its diversity into an *edah* with its singleness of

What Does Judaism Say About ... Podcast

with Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel. The week's

topic is: **Friendship**

Next week: Underlying Values and Concepts of Shabbat

Search for "Nachum Amsel" on your podcast app or go to:

Apple: tinyurl.com/applejudaismsays

Spotify: tinyurl.com/spotifyjudaismsays

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

purpose, while preserving the diversity of the gifts they brought to God:

So all the community of Israel left Moses' presence. And they came, everyone whose heart inspired him and whose spirit moved him, and brought an offering for the Lord, to be used for the Tent of Meeting and all its service, and for the sacred vestments. All whose hearts moved them – the men with the women – brought brooches, earrings, signet rings and pendants, all kinds of gold ornaments . . . Everyone who had sky-blue, purple, or scarlet wool . . . Whoever could make an offering of silver or bronze brought it . . . Every skilled woman spun with her own hands, and brought what she had spun . . . All the women whose hearts inspired them used their skill . . . The leaders brought rock crystal stones and other precious stones . . . So the Israelites – all the men and women whose hearts moved them to bring anything for the work that the Lord, through Moses, had commanded – brought it as a freewill offering to the Lord. Shemot 35:20-29

The greatness of the Tabernacle was that it was a collective achievement – one in which not everyone did the same thing. Each gave a different thing. Each contribution was valued – and therefore each participant felt valued. Vayakhel – Moses' ability to forge out of the dissolution of the people a new and genuine kehillah – was one of his greatest achievements.

Many years later, Moses, according to the Sages, returned to the theme. Knowing that his career as a leader was drawing to an end, he prayed to God to appoint a successor: "May God, Lord of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a person over the community." (Bamidbar 27:16) Rashi, following the Sages, explains the unusual phrase "Lord of the spirits of all flesh" as follows:

He said to Him: Lord of the universe, the character of each person is revealed and known to You – and You know that each is different. Therefore appoint for them a leader who is able to bear with each person as his or her temperament requires. Rashi on Bamidbar 27:16

To preserve the diversity of a tzibbur with the unity of purpose of an edah – that is the challenge of kehillah-formation, community-building, itself the greatest task of a great leader.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The End of Exodus and the Four Parashot

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

Why repeat all the details of the construction of the Sanctuary after we have already heard them when they were initially commanded? For example, with regard to one of the priestly garments, the Bible commands:

"And they shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, and purple, scarlet and fine twined linen, the work of the skillful workman." (Exodus 28:6)

And then, telling us of the command of the execution, the same words are repeated, practically word for word:

"And he made the ephod of gold, blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen. And they beat the gold into thin plates..." (Exodus 39:2)

If there is a difference, it's that the first time around the Israelites are given the command, and the second time the Torah records that the command was indeed performed. Would it not have been simpler to deal with the entire execution of external building, furnishings and priestly garb with the single verse: "And the Israelites built the Sanctuary exactly as God commanded"?

In order to understand the significance of the repetition, it is important to remember that the Almighty desires an intimate relationship between Himself and the people of Israel. That is why they are commanded to build a Sanctuary in the first place: "in order that He may dwell among us." However, worshiping the golden calf – whoring after strange gods – was a betrayal of the ideals given at Sinai. In effect, the Israelites committed adultery, scarring the love and intimacy God had just bestowed upon them. Were God only a God of justice, this would be the end of the Jewish people, their sin mandating a punishment which would have meant the end of Jewish history before it really began.

But since God is also a God of compassion, He forgives. But can we legitimately expect forgiveness for as heinous a crime as idolatry? Will the Almighty take Israel back even after they have committed adultery? Herein lies the true significance of the repetition of each and every painstaking instruction regarding the Sanctuary. God places his nuptial "home" with Israel before they sin with the golden calf, and God accepts their construction of the nuptial home after they have sinned with the golden calf. The repetition is a confirmation that the intimacy between God and Israel has been restored, that the relationship between God and His bride, Israel, has returned to its original state of mutual commitment and faith. The repetition

Likutei Divrei Torah

of the exact details is essentially God's gift of repentance.

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

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

The second special Sabbath – right before Purim – is Shabbat Zakhor. Zakhor means "remember": Remember to destroy the evil Amalek. Amalek is not only the power that would destroy us from without, but is also the force threatening to destroy us from within. Amalek may also be seen as the winds of assimilation and self-destruction! When the Torah at the end of the portion of Ki Tetzeh (Deut. 25) records how Amalek attacked the tired and the weak straggling from Egypt, those who did not fear God, this does not refer only to those who were physically weak, but also to the spiritually weak, those whose link to the chain of Israel had become inadequate and indifferent. Amalek enters when Israel ceases to fear God! This Sabbath always precedes Purim because back in Shushan there were two threats, Haman/Amalek from without and a nation deep in the amnesia of assimilation from within, seduced by the (hardly kosher) invitations to the palace of Ahashverosh, with all the non-kosher wine and shrimp one could enjoy. Israel, betrothed by the shekel to God, had now succumbed to the temptation of Amalek, substituting the temptations of gold and licentiousness for their God-groom.

Israel having been defiled by the lure of assimilation, Para, the next special Sabbath portion, encapsulates the process of purification. We should know that even if our impurity stems from death, the highest degree of impurity, we have the red heifer to cleanse us.

Finally, the Sabbath of HaChodesh brings us towards a new beginning. "Chodesh," the Hebrew word for month, is also bound up with "Chadash," new, and "Chidush," renewal. In

effect, the moon is the messenger of change and renewal, the ability to emerge from total darkness to a state of fullness, totality, and the perfection that awaits us on the fourteenth of Nisan when Passover begins.

Thus Shekalim, Zakhor, Para and HaChodesh parallel the portions of Terumah, Tetzaveh, Ki Tissa and Vayakhel-Pekudei. The journey begins with commitment and love, stumbles through failure and sin, but finally ends with the possibility of purification and renewal, individual and national freedom as symbolized in the festival of freedom, Passover, which always falls two weeks after the Sabbath of HaChodesh.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

You Don't Necessarily Get What You Pay For In Terms of Divine Presence Being Present

The pasuk in Parshas Pekudei says, "All the gold that was used for the work – for all the holy work – the offered-up gold was twenty-nine talents and seven hundred thirty shekels, in the sacred shekel." (Shemos 38:24). Parshas Pekudei provides an accounting of all that was donated and all that was used in the construction of the Mishkan. The Torah documents exactly how much gold was used in this holy work.

The Seforno on this pasuk notes that the Torah specifies the exact value of the gold and other precious materials that were used to construct the Mishkan because the amounts were relatively small compared to the gold and other precious materials that were used to construct the first Beis HaMikdash.

The Mishkan, in comparison with the Beis HaMikdash, was the equivalent of a motor home compared to a mansion. The Seforno adds that certainly, compared to the rebuilt Second Beis HaMikdash as redone by Herod, the Mishkan was miniscule.

Nevertheless, as basic and as Spartan as the Mishkan was, the Shechina (Divine Presence) was evermore present in Moshe Rabbeinu's Mishkan than in Shlomo Hamelech's Beis HaMikdash, and certainly more so than in the "Temple of Herod," which lacked the Shechina's presence to a very large extent. So here we have this very basic temporary dwelling called the Mishkan that was built on a shoestring budget relative to the Batei Mikdash, and yet there was a constant hashra'as haShechina (Divine Presence dwelling among us). Even the Beis HaMikdash built by Shlomo HaMelech, with all of its cedars and gold and silver – literally one of the man-made wonders of the ancient world – lacked the level of spiritual dimension that the Mishkan possessed.

The Seforno draws a fundamental moral lesson from this: It is not wealth and luxury that cause hashra'as haShechina. The Shechina cannot be bought by money. The most fancy and elaborate building does not cause hashra'as haShechina, but rather "Hashem desires those who fear Him." Hashem will place His Shechina among those who dedicate themselves selflessly to His Service.

This idea is brought home by two pesukim in Yeshaya (66:1-2) "Thus said Hashem: The Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool; what house could you build for Me, and what place could be My resting place? My hand created all these things, and thus all these things came into being – the word of Hashem – but it is to this that I look: to the poor and broken-spirited person who is zealous regarding My word." HaKadosh Baruch Hu does not care about the thickness of the padding of the theater seats in a shul. Hard wooden benches are fine for Him. He does not care about the benches. He cares about the people sitting on those benches. If the people sitting there are humble of spirit and tremble over His Word, then His Shechina will reside in such a shul.

A famous Gemara teaches (Nedarim 81a) "Take heed regarding the children of the poor for from them Torah will emerge for Israel." Poor children will be the future Torah leaders of Israel. The Maharal explains that just as when the Almighty is going to put His Shechina in a building, He does not look at the trappings, but rather, he looks at the inner quality, so too the children of poor people are generally humble. They come from poor backgrounds and they are not haughty and overly proud about things. That is where the Torah resides.

Rav Aharon Soloveitchik zt"l used to say over the following story: The progenitor of the famous "Brisker Dynasty" was named Rav Moshe Soloveitchik. His son, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, was the Beis HaLevi, the Rav in Brisk who had a son named Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, who needs no introduction and whose pedagogic and biologic descendants are a major force throughout the Yeshiva world across multiple continents to this very day. This major Torah dynasty all descended from Rav Moshe Soloveitchik, father of the Beis HaLevi.

Rav Moshe Soloveitchik was a businessman. He was in the lumber business and he was very successful. His fortune turned and he lost all of his money. It was such a shocking thing that this wealthy patron of so many charitable causes lost all his money. It had such an impact on the community, that the Beis Din of his town convened to try to figure out what he

Likutei Divrei Torah

was doing wrong to cause him to lose his money.

The Beis Din did a thorough investigation and they could not find anything wrong in Moshe Soloveitchik's religious behavior. The only thing they could find was that he gave more charity than a person is supposed to give. The Talmud legislates (Kesuvos 50a) that a person should not give out more than 20% of his income to charity. They found that Moshe Soloveitchik exceeded this limit. That is the only thing he did wrong.

When this finding was presented to Rav Chaim Volozhiner, he rejected that reason. He insisted that it cannot be that he lost his money because he gave too much tzedaka. Such a thing does not happen, he claimed.

What did Moshe Soloveitchik do when he lost all his money? He learned in the Beis HaMedrash and became an adam gadol. Obviously, he was a bright man. And from him came the Beis HaLevi and Rav Chaim Brisker and the Brisker Rav and the entire Soloveitchik dynasty.

In hindsight, Rav Chaim Volozhiner said that he understood why Moshe Soloveitchik lost his money. He lost his money so that his children would fall into the category of "the children of the poor" and therefore the Torah would emerge from the great Soloveitchik dynasty.

I saw in a sefer that Rav Meir Shapiro, the innovator of the Daf haYomi, once gave another explanation to the Talmudic advice "Take heed of the children of the poor, for from them the Torah will emerge in Israel." He explained that the children of the poor see how their parents struggle to pay tuition. The sacrifice the parents make to afford "schar limud" inspires the children and gives them an appreciation for the sacrifice their parents make to allow them to learn. That motivates them to become talmidei chachomim.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Spirit and the Heart of Vayakhel Rabbanit Bili Rebenstein (Pizam)

The portion of Vayakhel and Pekudei represent the stage of implementation and realization of the vision articulated earlier in the portions of Terumah and Tetzaveh. In those earlier portions, the Mishkan and its vessels were described in detail, along with the priestly garments and all that accompanied them. Now, in Vayakhel-Pekudei, those carefully delineated instructions are translated into concrete action.

At the center of this endeavor stand two principal figures: Betzalel ben Uri and Oholiav ben Achisamach. They are joined by "every

wise-hearted person in whom God had placed wisdom” (Shemot 36:2). It is striking that for a mission which appears, at first glance, entirely practical and materially oriented, the Torah emphasizes the heart. One might have expected the focus to rest upon the hands, symbols of craftsmanship, or upon the intellect, emblem of skill and technical knowledge. Instead, the Torah insists upon the heart. In doing so, it teaches that at the foundation of God’s Mishkan there can be no separation between deed, wisdom, and emotion. These three forces must operate in concert, each finding full expression. This idea is reinforced through the key terms that shape the passage describing the appointment of Betzalel and Oholiav. The verbs “to do” [la’asot] and to devise [lachshov] recur, and alongside them appears the repeated noun: heart.

Another significant term associated with Betzalel is ruach—spirit. Although not a recurring keyword in the passage, appearing only once, it carries profound weight: “And He filled him with the spirit of God...” (Shemot 35:31). This expression echoes the description of Creation itself: “And the spirit of God hovered over the face of the water” (Bereshit 1:2). The Torah thereby forges a link between the Holy One as Creator of the world and the human being as builder of the Mishkan. Of course, this does not suggest, heaven forbid, any divinization of the human or anthropomorphizing of the Divine. Rather, the textual resonance highlights the extraordinary power and wonder embedded in human creativity—the capacity to create, to bring forth something new.

The word ruach serves as a guiding term in another parsha, distant in both context and tone, and seemingly unrelated. Yet we may attempt to discern the connection between them.

In the portion of Beha’alotecha, the people complain about the lack of meat. In response, Moshe cries out, “I cannot bear this entire people alone...” (Bamidbar 11:14). Hashem’s answer is twofold: the people will indeed receive the meat they demand, as flocks of quail descend around the camp; and Moshe is instructed to appoint seventy elders, upon whom He will bestow a portion of Moshe’s spirit, thereby providing assistance in leadership so that Moshe will no longer carry the burden alone. In this context, the word ruach recurs several times, assuming a central and meaningful role.

Thus, ruach is a key term in the account of the elders’ appointment, and a term of great significance in the appointment of Betzalel. The image of seventy elders gathering to receive from Moshe’s spirit also resonates with

the image of skilled, wise-hearted artisans assembling around Betzalel and Oholiav to assist in the construction of the Mishkan.

An additional linguistic connection links these distinct portions. In the narrative of the Mishkan’s construction, the people rally to contribute precious materials. The Torah testifies that the donations exceed all expectation, to the point that the people must be restrained from further giving. The unusual expression – vayikale – is employed: “And the people were restrained from bringing” (Shemot 36:6). The rare verb vayikale conveys how difficult it was to halt the people, how they had to struggle against themselves to cease the flow of generosity that surged from within.

The same rare root כ.ל.ה—to restrain or confine—appears again in the episode of “the complainers” [hamit’onenim] and the bestowal of Moshe’s spirit in the portion Beha’alotecha. After Moshe and the seventy elders go outside the camp and receive from his spirit, two elders—Eldad and Meidad—remain within the camp and begin to prophesy independently. Their prophecy occurs apart from Moshe’s direct presence, disconnected from his authority. It is a strikingly autonomous stance—perhaps too autonomous. Yehoshua, Moshe’s devoted attendant, cannot accept it and exclaims, “My master Moshe, restrain them!” He perceives Eldad and Meidad as a threat to Moshe’s leadership. Yet Moshe is untroubled: “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all God’s people were prophets!”

The shared, unusual verb—to restrain—draws attention. It conveys an attempt to forcibly contain an overflowing abundance: whether a spirit of generosity and contribution, or the spirit of God manifest in prophecy. In both cases, an inner elevation surges forth from the human being, touching deeply upon the bond with the Divine—and in both cases, there arises a call to curb or confine that outpouring.

From a linguistic standpoint, then, several connections bind the two portions. As noted, the parallel images are equally striking: artisans gathering around Betzalel and Oholiav in our parsha, and the elders gathering around Moshe in Beha’alotecha. What then is the significance of this affinity?

To answer, one must attend to the profound differences between the two narratives. In terms of the people’s inner posture, a vast chasm separates them. The portion of Vayakhel is marked by generosity of heart and boundless devotion. The people’s actions are motivated by a consciousness of abundance and an urge to channel that abundance toward the Mishkan. In the portion of Beha’alotecha, by contrast, the prevailing mood is complaint.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Dissatisfaction stems from a sense of lack and from a jaundiced perception of reality.

The linguistic contrast is equally sharp. As noted, one of the guiding words of Vayakhel is “heart”. In the episode of the complainers, the prominent term is “meat”. For the Mishkan, the people offer their hearts; in Beha’alotecha, they demand flesh.

In both cases, the subject matter concerns the material—building materials in one, food in the other. Yet how vast the gulf between them. When placing these narratives side by side, one may perceive that the Torah articulates a profound Jewish thesis regarding the relationship between matter and spirit.

Matter can become holy of holies when spirit lifts it upon its wings. Yet matter can also descend into Kivrot HaTa’avah—graves of craving—into unbridled animalism, when severed from spirit.

This is the ancient Jewish symbol expressed by the Tablets, Luchot HaBrit—material tablets bearing spirit. The Midrash teaches that after the Sin of the Golden Calf, the letters left the Tablets and flew heavenward; the spirit departed, and the Tablets shattered upon the ground. Without spirit to uphold it, the material could not endure.

Confronting the challenge of a material life connected to and nourished by spirit, the Torah presents two stories: the ideal vision of Vayakhel, and the painful account of the complainers in Beha’alotecha.

The narrative of the complainers reminds us how easily we may sink into materialism, yet assures us that the possibility of recovery—the restoration of spirit—always remains.

The narrative of Vayakhel recalls what we so often forget. It reminds us of our most elemental identity as a people. The outpouring of generosity in Vayakhel highlights that beyond years of wandering, beyond the pain of destruction, and beyond layers of cold cynicism, we remain a nation whose very soul is rooted in nidvat halev—generosity of heart. From that place we began our journey, and to that place we return time and again, even when it seems we have strayed far from it.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky Emotional Spirituality and Concrete Expression

In these parshios of Vayakhel and Pikudei, we have the summation of all of the items that were made for the mishkan, including both the furnishings as well as the garments of the kohanim. The repetition of the items in such detail after they have already been specified in

Terumah and Tetzaveh deserves an explanation of its own, but there is another question that is even more bothersome. In Pikudei we have the listing of how much gold, silver, and copper was brought to the mishkan. The Torah itemizes the weight of each material and exactly how much was used for every item, with the amounts balancing out. True, it does show something about the integrity of the enterprise, in that every single bit of gold and silver, etc. that was donated was put to use. But is it really so necessary to itemize every single item and the exact amount of gold that went into it and so on?

While it is true that in the previous parshios of Terumah and Tetzaveh we have the exact measurements of all of these vessels and garments in painstaking detail, those details are significant because they are the halachic requirements of constructing the various items. Some of the items would be used later in the temple and would have to be made in the exact same way if the need arose to make a new one. Even for those items that would later change, there is still great significance in knowing all these measurements because all of these measurements include some sort of religious and mystical significance. The dimensions, the composition, and the way in which they were made reference deep ideas behind them. The itemization in Pikudei, however, seems to be merely an accounting summary: how much gold was brought, how much was used piece by piece and item by item, how much silver was brought etc. Why do we need to have that in the Torah? What is the Torah telling us?

Another noteworthy event reported in Terumah is that it was brought to Moshe Rabbeinu's attention that more than enough material had been collected for the mishkan. Moshe immediately issued a proclamation declaring that Klal Yisroel should henceforth stop bringing more gold etc. It does make sense that they should stop collecting if they don't need it, but from the solemnity of the proclamation, it feels as if there was something inherently wrong with bringing more goods.

There is a pshat attributed to the Ramban [in Emunah uBitachon- assumed to be a talmid of his], regarding the verse, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, and by the hinds of the field, that you not awaken or stir up love until it desires [shetechputz]". The Ramban [or his talmid] explains the passuk in a different sense. He says that the word "techputz" comes from the word "cheifetz" which means "an object". He interprets this verse homiletically as meaning the following: there are, at times, awakenings of deep religious emotions in people; a person is overcome with emotion and feels that "he is connected". Never let those feelings remain as such! It is emptiness unless one turns those

feelings into action and concretizes them. Thus, the passuk is describing the profound feelings of love in Shir Hashirim as having to find themselves in deed, never allowing emotion to dissipate into nothingness.

The donations to the mishkan stemmed from an incredible awakening of Klal Yisroel's love for Hashem. There was no clear obligation of how much to give; it was all *nidvas halev*. Klal Yisroel's religious emotions were at their height. To keep pouring out more and more affection even when it could not turn into something concrete was a travesty. Therefore, Moshe had to stop the collection immediately.

This, then, is what Pikudei is stating. There was an incredible outpouring of Klal Yisroel's love for Hashem, but none of it remained "in the air", dissipating into nothingness. Every bit of this *ruchniyus* was used to the fullest!

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

The Mishkan and the Golden Calf

By Rav Meir Spiegelman

"And Moshe gathered all of the congregation of Bnei Yisrael and he said to them, These are the things that God has commanded to do: Six days shall labor be performed, and on the seventh day you shall have a holy day, a Shabbat of rest to God; anyone who performs labor that day shall be put to death..."

"And Moshe said to all of the congregation of Bnei Yisrael, saying, This is the thing that God commands, saying: Take from among yourselves a contribution to God; anyone whose heart is willing shall bring it, an offering to God – gold and silver and brass..." (Shemot 35:1-5)

Moshe assembles the entire nation in order to teach them two mitzvot: Shabbat, and contributing to the Mishkan. The gathering of all of Bnei Yisrael is not a common occurrence in the Torah, and therefore right at the start of the parasha we already face a question: why is the entire nation assembled specifically for the purposes of conveying these two commandments?

Moreover, the mitzva of Shabbat is given here neither for the first time nor for the last. Why does the Torah repeat here, once again, the prohibition of performing labor on Shabbat? Chazal answer this question quite simply: the Torah wants to create a connection between the types of labor forbidden on Shabbat and the labor involved in the Mishkan. In other words, all types of labor that were performed in the Mishkan are forbidden on Shabbat. But Chazal may also be alluding to another level of connection, as we shall see below.

Command and Performance - At the beginning of parashat Ki Tisa, after the conclusion of the command to build the Mishkan, God commands Moshe concerning Shabbat (Shemot 31:12-17). A number of key-words here are echoed in our parasha: holiness, a Shabbat of rest to God, six days of performing labor, etc.

In my previous shiurim about the Mishkan, my approach followed the opinion that the command to build the Mishkan preceded the sin of the golden calf. We may therefore explain here that

Likutei Divrei Torah

the Torah repeats the command about Shabbat in order to complete the parenthetical "frame" and then bring us back to the natural course of events that was halted as a result of the golden calf. There are many instances where the Torah repeats a verse or reference to a certain subject in order to create this type of "frame" around a deviation from the main subject at hand. It is possible that in our parasha, too, the Torah repeats the mitzva of Shabbat in order to turn the episode of the golden calf into a parenthetical aside, while connecting the command to build the Mishkan and the description of its execution.

If we compare the commands concerning Shabbat and the contribution to the Mishkan in our parasha to the corresponding commands in the parashiot of Teruma and Ki Tisa, we can understand why these two subjects, specifically, were raised at an assembly of all of Bnei Yisrael. In parashat Teruma, when God commands Moshe concerning donations for the Mishkan, He tells him explicitly, "SPEAK TO BNEI YISRAEL and let them take a contribution to Me..." (Shemot 25:2). Similarly, in parashat Ki Tisa, in the command concerning Shabbat, God explicitly tells Moshe, "And you – SPEAK TO BNEI YISRAEL SAYING – but My Shabbats you shall observe" (Shemot 31:13). Obviously, Moshe taught Bnei Yisrael all of the Torah; hence the explicit command, "Speak to Bnei Yisrael" represents an instruction to gather all of the nation and to address them all together. Hence, at the beginning of our parasha, Moshe gathers the entire nation and teaches them the mitzva of Shabbat and the obligation of donating towards the Mishkan.

Location of the Golden Altar - Last week we discussed the consequences of the sin of the golden calf: the "external" consequences (inscription on the Tablets by Moshe instead of by God Himself), as well as the "internal" consequences (inter alia, a change in the form of God's guidance of the nation). If God indeed commanded Bnei Yisrael to build the Mishkan before the sin of the golden calf, it is quite reasonable to assume that the sin left an impression on the Mishkan endeavor.

In order to understand the influence of the golden calf on the construction of the Mishkan, we must compare the commands concerning the Mishkan that preceded the sin with the actual construction that followed it. If we discover discrepancies, then we must ascertain whether they result from the sin.

The most obvious (and perhaps most important) difference between the command concerning the Mishkan and its actual execution is, without doubt, to be found in the incense altar. The commentators address the strange location of this command – at the end of parashat Tetzaveh (Shemot 30:1-10), after the commands concerning the garments of the kohanim, their sanctification and the daily sacrifice, rather than in what would seem a more appropriate place: among the commands relating to the various Mishkan vessels. Most commentators agree that the incense altar was not an integral part of the Mishkan (indeed, Halakha reflects this reality) and therefore its construction is commanded only

at the end of all the other commands related to the Mishkan.

However, we could adopt a slightly different approach: perhaps God commanded the construction of the incense altar only after the sin of the golden calf. In the description of the actual building of the Mishkan, the construction of the incense altar is recorded in the appropriate place (Shemot 37:25-28). Thus we may postulate that the Torah mentions the command of the incense altar at the end of parashat Tetzaveh as an appendix to the commands related to the Mishkan, in order to complete them; however, the incense altar is distinguished from the other vessels in that it was commanded only after the sin of the golden calf. As we shall see further on, we can provide proof for this view.

In parashat Ki Tisa, when the Torah commands the blending of incense (30:34-38), there is no mention of Aharon or his sons; it is offered only by Moshe. In keeping with the view I am proposing, the reason is clear: in the beginning, before the golden calf, there was never any intention of having an incense altar, and so Aharon and his sons were not meant to offer any incense. Hence, at the beginning of parashat Ki Tisa, before the sin of the golden calf, there is no mention of them doing so.

Moreover, the purpose of the incense is to serve as a barrier in front of the revelation of the Divine Presence. Therefore, the Kohen Gadol offers incense on Yom Kippur ("I shall appear in a cloud above the covering"), and for the same reason it is specifically incense that serves as the barrier halting the destruction that begins to spread amongst the nation following the rebellion of Korach and his cohorts. When Moshe comes to speak with God, he must offer incense, for he enters the Kodesh ha-Kodashim (Holy of Holies), behind the curtain, and he must produce a screen of incense that will separate between himself and the Ark. There is no real need to offer incense when entering only the Kodesh (the Sanctuary, as opposed to the Kodesh ha-Kodashim), for the curtain serves as a partition between the Kodesh and the Ark.

However, this situation changed following the sin of the golden calf. The Torah once again repeats the fact that Aharon is – at least partially – responsible for the sin: upon Moshe's descent from the mountain he sees that "the nation was in disorder, for AHARON HAD MADE THEM DISORDERLY to the scandal of their enemies." The Torah itself testifies that "God plagued the nation FOR THEIR HAVING MADE THE CALF THAT AHARON MADE." His partial responsibility for the sin leads to a fundamental change in Aharon's status. While at first God wanted Aharon to be the Kohen Gadol, there was now a difficult problem involved in awarding that position to the person who had played a part in causing such a grave sin. Therefore, following the golden calf, Aharon was required to offer incense every time he came to the Ohel Mo'ed, in order to create an additional barrier between himself and the Ark. The need for the golden incense altar, then, was a direct result of the sin of the golden calf.

The Days of Inauguration - Indeed, the need for atonement for the golden calf is a most obvious

motif in the process of Aharon's training and preparation. On the eighth day, the Torah narrates, Aharon brought a calf as a sin offering (Vayikra 9:2). In all of the Torah, nowhere do we find another instance of a calf brought as a sin offering. It appears, therefore, that this calf was brought by Aharon in order to atone for the sin of the calf, for which he was partially to blame.

Having come this far, we can now point to another process that came about, apparently, only in the wake of the golden calf: the first seven days of inauguration of the Mishkan. As we know, during these seven days Moshe served as the kohen in the Ohel Mo'ed. But why was it specifically Moshe who was chosen to perform the Divine service during these days? Why could Aharon not have begun his service during these seven days? After all, Moshe had no advantage of prior training.

In order to answer this question, we must remember that the Torah makes no mention of sin offerings at all until the sin of the golden calf. It seems that the whole category of sin offerings is firmly bound up with the fact that God foregoes punishment for the sin of the calf, decreeing instead: "On the day when I punish, I shall visit their sin upon them" (Shemot 32:34). As Rashi (ad loc.) comments:

"Always, always, when I visit their transgressions upon them, I shall visit a little of this sin, too, together with the other transgressions. There is no suffering that comes to Israel that does not contain a little of the punishment for the sin of the golden calf."

Following the sin of the calf, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to bring sin offerings for all generations, in order to atone each time for the same sin. Similarly, the command concerning the sin offerings that were brought during the seven days of inauguration was also a result of the sin of the calf. Were it not for that sin, Moshe would not have needed to function as a kohen.

This last assertion, too, has support in the text. In the command concerning the basin, we read: "And Aharon and his sons shall wash their hands and feet from it" (Shemot 30:19). In contrast, when the basin is actually made, we read: "And MOSHE and Aharon and his sons washed their hands and their feet" (40:31). In the beginning, Moshe was not supposed to serve in the Ohel Mo'ed at all, and therefore he was not required to sanctify his hands and feet. In the wake of the golden calf, after Aharon's sin, it became necessary for Aharon to atone for his sin during the seven days of inauguration during which Moshe served as the kohen. Therefore, when it came to making the basin – at the end of Sefer Shemot – we are told that Moshe, too, would sanctify his hands and feet when he came to serve in the Mishkan.

The Command Concerning the Half-Shekel - At the beginning of the parasha of Teruma, the Torah teaches that Bnei Yisrael were required to contribute towards the Mishkan – each person in accordance with his ability. The Torah does not stipulate that each person must give a half-shekel: "From every person whose heart prompts him shall you take My offering." Only in parashat Ki Tisa, after the command about the Mishkan, do we find the first mention of the requirement to

Likutei Divrei Torah

raise a half-shekel from each individual. Why, then, does the Torah not mention this contribution in parashat Teruma?

This question joins two other questions that arise in the wake of the command to collect the half-shekel donations. Firstly, the Torah asserts that the half-shekel serves as atonement for Bnei Yisrael when they are counted, "So that there will not be a plague amongst them when they are counted." But why is there any need for this atonement? Moreover, the money collected from the half-shekel donations was enough for Betzalel to fashion the sockets and the pillars of the courtyard (38:25-28), which were the only two vessels in the Mishkan that were made of silver. Why, then, were Bnei Yisrael required to donate "gold and silver and brass"? What did they do with the silver that was collected?

To all the questions posed here, we may present a single all-inclusive answer: the parasha of the half-shekel, like those of the incense altar and the days of inauguration, came after the sin of the golden calf. As atonement for Bnei Yisrael's readiness to donate towards the calf, there was a need for voluntarism for the opposite cause – to build the Mishkan. Moreover, every time Bnei Yisrael got together and mobilized for some specific purpose, there was a need to collect a half-shekel from each one, as atonement for having mobilized to create the golden calf.

But this law, of collecting a half-shekel in order to atone for the mobilization to create the calf, is given for all generations. In that generation, Bnei Yisrael were required to donate the half-shekel even though there was no real need to count them (for nowhere do we find the results of such a census; we discover only the sum total of the half-shekels, in parashat Pekudei). God required of that generation that sinned in creating the calf to declare that they gave their allegiance to the Mishkan, and not to a calf. For this reason, they were required to contribute a half-shekel – as atonement for their contribution towards the calf.

Betzalel used the silver that was collected from all the half-shekels to build the sockets and the pillars of the Mishkan courtyard. Indeed, nothing could be more fitting than for Bnei Yisrael to contribute specifically these parts of the Mishkan – for the courtyard is the only area of the Mishkan where Bnei Yisrael are permitted to enter. Hence it is specifically there that they can atone, for all generations, for their sin.

Who Built the Mishkan - We may add one further fundamental change concerning the Mishkan that came about as a result of the golden calf. When God commands that the Mishkan is to be built, there is no mention of who is to build it. We would probably guess that Aharon should build it: his job is to be responsible for the Mishkan, and therefore it would seem logical that he should be in charge of its construction. Obviously, Aharon could entrust the actual, technical building job to the relevant professionals (such as Betzalel), but it would seem appropriate that he oversee the construction. But in practice, the Torah places Betzalel and Oholiav in charge of the building, as representatives of the nation as a whole. Betzalel is from the tribe of Yehuda, representing the first triad of tribes, while Oholiav is from the tribe of

Dan, representing the last triad. Thus, the Torah transfers responsibility for building the Mishkan from Aharon to all of Am Yisrael.

This situation has dual significance. Firstly, Aharon cannot build the Mishkan because of his part in the sin of the golden calf. Secondly, Am Yisrael must build the Mishkan as atonement for that same sin.

The Status of the Pillars for the Screen - In conclusion, let us note another discrepancy between command and execution concerning the Mishkan – this time, one that is not necessarily related to the sin of the golden calf.

In parashat Teruma we are told that the pillars for the screen are to be covered with gold, while in parashat Vayakhel we read that they are "ringed" with gold – i.e., not completely covered but rather decorated with gold rings (like the pillars of the courtyard, which are ringed with silver). This change may indicate a change in the status of the courtyard screen. If the pillars are considered part of the Mishkan, it is appropriate that they be covered with gold, like the pillars of the Mishkan. But if these pillars are only ringed with gold, then apparently they belong to the courtyard – where the pillars are ringed.

It is possible that, along with this change, the location of the screen was also changed. In the command concerning the Mishkan, the screen is to be placed outside of the pillars; therefore the pillars are within the Mishkan – i.e., inwards of the screen. In parashat Vayakhel, it seems, the screen hangs on the inner part of the pillars, such that the pillars stand at its outer part: i.e., in the courtyard. This may represent a distancing of the screen from the people, for upon the screen is a depiction of the keruvim, symbolizing the Divine Presence. Hence, this distancing, too, may be a result of the sin of the golden calf.

We may summarize as follows: there are two different approaches among the Rishonim, and both are the "words of the living God." The nation was commanded to build the Mishkan prior to the golden calf, but was commanded again thereafter. The Mishkan as projected before the sin is not the same Mishkan that was built in reality: it differs in the identity of the builders, in those who serve within it and their contribution, and even in its parts. Like the spiritual status of the nation, the Mishkan – the place where God meets with Moshe to convey the Torah to Bnei Yisrael – is severely affected by the sin of the golden calf. *(Translated by Kaeren Fish)*



BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io
From: Chaim Shulman <eshulman@gmail.com>
& Allen Klein <allen.klein@gmail.com>

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON VAYAKEHL PEKUDEI - 5786

parsha@groups.io / www.parsha.net - in our 31th year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://www.parsha.net> and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to parsha+subscribe@groups.io Please also copy me at eshulman@gmail.com A complete archive of previous issues is now available at <http://www.parsha.net> It is also fully searchable.

Sponsored in memory of **Chaim Yissachar z"l** ben Yecheil Zaydel Dov

To sponsor a parsha sheet contact eshulman@gmail.com
(proceeds to tzedaka)

From: *Chaim Shulman*

Based on the traditional commentaries and parshanim and with lots of help from chatgpt

Terumah–Ki Tisa–Vayakhel

When Was the Mishkan Commanded and What Was Its Purpose?

A central interpretive question in Sefer Shemos concerns the Mishkan: when was it commanded, and why was it given? Put simply, the issue may be framed as follows: **Was the Mishkan a response to the failure of the Egel, or the natural continuation of the revelation at Har Sinai?**

The answer to this question shapes how we understand the Mishkan itself and its role within the Torah's narrative.

At first glance, the **sequence of the parshiyos** appears straightforward. Parashas Yisro describes Maamad Har Sinai and the giving of the Aseres HaDibros. Parashas Mishpatim records the covenantal laws that follow the revelation. Immediately afterward, Parashas Terumah and Tetzaveh present the detailed instructions for building the Mishkan—its structure, vessels, kehunah, and sacred service. Only later, in Parashas Ki Tisa, does the Torah recount the sin of the Egel HaZahav. Finally, in Parashas Vayakhel and Pekudei, Moshe gathers the nation and the Mishkan is constructed.

The straightforward reading of the text therefore suggests that the Mishkan was commanded by Hashem to Moshe **before** the sin of the Egel. This is the view of the Ramban. Yet many classical commentators, including Rashi, understood the chronology differently. According to them, the Mishkan was commanded to Moshe only **after** the sin, even though the Torah records the command earlier.

This disagreement reflects two very different conceptions of the Mishkan. If the Mishkan was **commanded by Hashem to Moshe before the Egel**, it represents the natural continuation of Maamad Har Sinai—a permanent place where the Shechinah could dwell among Bnai Yisrael. But if the Mishkan was commanded **only after the sin**, the Mishkan becomes part of the process of kaparah and reconciliation following the greatest crisis of the covenant between Hashem and Bnai Yisrael.

The earliest articulation of this interpretation appears in the Midrash.

Midrash Rabbah comments on the opening verse of Parashas Terumah: עד הלאה הוא דכתיב אני ישנה ולבי ער — ויקחו לי תרומה — "Take for Me a contribution—

this corresponds to the verse 'I sleep, but my heart is awake.'" (Shir HaShirim 5:2)

The Midrash interprets the verse from Shir HaShirim as describing the state of Yisrael after the sin of the Egel. The nation feared that the Divine Presence had withdrawn from their midst. Yet HaKadosh Baruch Hu reassures them that the relationship has not ended. The Midrash explains: אני ישנה ממעשה העגל ולבי ער — הקב"ה מרתיק עלי "I sleep because of the sin of the Egel, but my heart is awake—HaKadosh Baruch Hu knocks upon me." (Shemos Rabbah 33:3) In this interpretation the **command to build the Mishkan** represents the moment when Hashem "knocks" again at the door of His relationship with Yisrael.

A similar idea appears in **Midrash Tanchuma**: אמר הקב"ה יבוא זהב של המשכן ומשכנו יבוא זהב של העגל. "Let the gold of the Mishkan come and atone for the gold of the Egel." (Tanchuma Pekudei 2) The very material used in the sin becomes the material through which holiness is restored.

Rashi adopts this Midrashic approach, that the **command to build the Mishkan was given to Moshe only after the sin of the Egel**, and integrates it into a chronological reconstruction of the events surrounding Sinai.

Commenting on the verse describing the completion of the command to Moshe— אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה. מעשה. משה ויתן אל משה ככלתו לדבר אתו. Rashi writes: "There is no earlier or later in the Torah; the episode of the Egel preceded the command concerning the Mishkan." (Rashi, Shemos 31:18)

Rashi then outlines the traditional timeline of the Sinai events. Moshe first ascended Har Sinai on the seventh of Sivan, the day after the revelation. He remained there for forty days. When he descended and saw the Egel he shattered the Luchos. This occurred on Shivah Asar b'Tammuz. Moshe then ascended the mountain again for forty days of prayer. Afterward he ascended a third time to receive the second Luchos. At the end of that period, on **Yom Kippur**, HaKadosh Baruch Hu granted forgiveness. Rashi summarizes: ב"ז בתמו נשתבר הלוחות. ביום הכפורים נתרצה הקב"ה לישראל. ולמחרת התחילו בניסן. "The Luchos were broken on the seventeenth of Tammuz. On Yom Kippur HaKadosh Baruch Hu was reconciled with Yisrael. The next day they began donating for the Mishkan, and it was erected on the first of Nisan."

According to Rashi, therefore, the Mishkan belongs historically to the period **after the sin of the Egel**. The Torah records its command earlier, but אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה; the Torah sometimes arranges material thematically rather than strictly chronologically.

Yet even according to this view, the principle is not unlimited. The Torah normally follows chronological order unless a compelling reason requires otherwise. In the case of the Mishkan, the Midrash suggests that the Torah places the Mishkan instructions immediately after the covenant at Sinai in order to emphasize the ultimate goal of the revelation: the creation of a community in which the Shechinah can dwell. Only later does the narrative reveal the crisis that made the Mishkan necessary.

Additional passages in the Torah appear to support this interpretation.

Immediately after the sin of the Egel the Torah describes **Moshe establishing a temporary tent** of meeting outside the camp: ומשה יקח את האהל ונסה לו מחוץ למחנה הרחק מן המחנה וקרא לו אהל מועד "Moshe took the tent and pitched it outside the camp... and he called it the Tent of Meeting." (Shemos 33:7) This episode suggests that after the Egel the Divine Presence no longer rested openly within the camp.

Sforno develops this Midrashic idea further. Immediately after the revelation at Sinai the Torah describes a simple form of worship: ... מזבח אדמה תעשה לי. "An altar of earth you shall make for Me... in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you." (Shemos 20:21)

Sforno understands this verse as describing the **original ideal** before the sin of the Egel. The relationship between Hashem and Yisrael was meant to be direct and immediate. But the **Egel revealed that such proximity** to the Divine Presence **could not yet be sustained**. Therefore a new structure of religious life became necessary.

Sforno writes: **עתה יצטרך לכהנים**. “Now priests are required.” According to this approach, the Mishkan and the kehunah represent a structural response to the spiritual crisis revealed by the Egel.

Yet not all commentators accepted this interpretation. Ramban, in particular, strongly disagrees. In his view the Torah’s order is chronological and the Mishkan was commanded **before** the sin of the Egel.

Ramban: The Mishkan as the Continuation of Sinai

The Midrashic interpretation adopted by Rashi and developed by Sforno presents the Mishkan as a response to the spiritual crisis created by the Egel. Yet **Ramban strongly disagrees**. In his view the **Torah’s narrative should be understood in its plain order, and the command of Hashem to Moshe to build the Mishkan preceded the sin.**

Ramban writes: **ועל דעת רבותינו שאמרו אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה ושהיה מעשה העגל קודם לצווי המשכן איננו נכון בעיני**. “The opinion that the episode of the Egel preceded the command of the Mishkan is not correct in my view.” (Ramban, Shemos 31:18)

For Ramban, the principle of **ומאוחר בתורה** cannot be invoked lightly. The Torah normally follows chronological order unless the text itself indicates otherwise. In the case of the Mishkan, Ramban argues that the Torah’s sequence reflects the actual order of events.

According to **Ramban, Moshe received the instructions for the Mishkan during his first forty days on Har Sinai**. The sin of the Egel occurred only afterward, when the people believed that Moshe had not returned from the mountain.

Ramban’s understanding is closely tied to his interpretation of the purpose of the Mishkan. He writes: **וסוד המשכן שיהיה הכבוד אשר שכן על הר סיני שוכן עליו**. “The secret of the Mishkan is that the Divine glory which rested upon Har Sinai should dwell there in hidden form.”

At Sinai the Shechinah descended upon the mountain in an overwhelming public revelation. The Mishkan continues that revelation within the life of the nation. What had once appeared upon the mountain now rests within the Mishkan at the center of the camp.

The structure of the Mishkan reflects this continuity. The Aron contains the Luchos received at Sinai. The Keruvim stand above the Aron as the place from which the Divine voice speaks to Moshe. The cloud of the Divine Presence appears above the Mishkan just as it had appeared upon the mountain.

In this interpretation the Mishkan is not a response to failure but the completion of Sinai. The revelation that began at Har Sinai becomes a permanent presence within the camp of Yisrael.

Other commentators also tend to preserve the chronological order of the narrative. The approach associated with **Rashbam and Ibn Ezra** similarly reads the Mishkan passages as part of the unfolding revelation at Sinai rather than as a later response to the Egel.

Yet even according to Ramban, the sin of the Egel remains significant. Although the command of the Mishkan preceded the sin, its implementation occurred only afterward. The process of **repentance and forgiveness delayed the realization of the Mishkan, but it did not create it.**

Thus the Mishkan ultimately emerges at the intersection of two defining moments in Sefer Shemos: the revelation of Sinai and the repentance that followed the Egel.

The Mishkan as Revelation and Reconciliation

Rav Y.D. Soloveitchik suggested that the two interpretations we have seen may reflect two complementary dimensions of the Mishkan itself. On one level the **Mishkan continues the revelation of Sinai**. The Shechinah that descended upon the mountain now dwells within the Mishkan at the center of the camp. The covenant revealed at Sinai becomes embodied in the physical structure of the Mishkan.

On another level the **Mishkan also reflects the lessons learned from the Egel**. The overwhelming experience of Sinai proved difficult for the nation to sustain. The Mishkan therefore introduces structure and discipline into the religious life of Yisrael. Access to the Divine Presence is mediated through the kehunah and the carefully ordered avodah of the Mishkan.

The Mishkan thus preserves the revelation of Sinai while at the same time transforming it into a form that can endure within the life of the nation. This dual meaning is reflected in the Torah’s formulation of the purpose of the Mishkan: **ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם**. “They shall make for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them.” (Shemos 25:8) The verse does not say that Hashem will dwell within the Mishkan itself. Rather, the Divine Presence will dwell **among the people**.

The Mishkan is therefore not an end in itself. Its purpose is to create a community capable of sustaining the presence of the Shechinah. Seen from this perspective, the debate between Rashi and the Ramban reflects two ways of understanding the same institution. From one perspective, the Mishkan emerges from the crisis of the Egel and represents reconciliation and renewal. From another perspective, it is the continuation of the revelation at Sinai and the means by which that revelation becomes a permanent presence within the camp of Yisrael.

The Mishkan thus stands at the **meeting point of revelation and repentance**. Through the Mishkan, the Divine Presence that appeared at Har Sinai returns to dwell within the midst of the nation. And through the generosity of the people—**כל נדיב לב**—the very gold that once served the Egel becomes the material from which the dwelling place of the Shechinah is built.

Translated & summarized primarily by chatgpt. Chaim.

Shabbat, the Mishkan, and the Meaning of Creative Labor *(Rav Yehuda Nachshoni – Parshat Vayakhel)*

Parshat Vayakhel opens with an unexpected sequence. Before commanding the people regarding the construction of the Mishkan, Moshe first reiterates the laws of Shabbat: **ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה וביום השביעי יהיה לכם קדש שבת שבתון**. “Six days work shall be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a Sabbath of rest for the Lord.” (Shemot 35:2)

The placement of Shabbat before the Mishkan invites an important question: why does the Torah introduce the laws of Shabbat at precisely this point? The Sages understood that this juxtaposition teaches a foundational principle of Jewish law: the thirty-nine categories of labor prohibited on Shabbat (ל"ט) correspond to the types of work that were required to construct the Mishkan.

The Gemara hints to this number through a textual allusion: **דברים הדברים** “These are the things.” (Shemot 35:1)

The Talmud explains: **דברים – שנים הדברים – שלשה אלה – בגימטריא שלשים ושש**. “Devarim’ implies two; ‘ha-devarim’ adds one more; ‘eleh’ has the numerical value of thirty-six.” Together these equal thirty-nine, corresponding to the thirty-nine forms of labor taught to Moshe at Sinai.

Another hint appears in the phrase: **אשר צוה ה' לעשות** “which the Lord commanded to be done.” Some commentators note that **לעשות** subtly alludes to **ל"ט**, suggesting the thirty-nine labors involved in the construction of the Mishkan.

The Meaning of Melachah

An important linguistic insight clarifies the nature of the Shabbat prohibition. Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg, **הכתב והקבלה**, distinguishes between two Hebrew words: **עבודה** (avodah) **מלאכה** (melachah)

The distinction is crucial for understanding Shabbat.

Avodah – Physical Labor Avodah refers to general physical exertion. A servant might perform avodah when: carrying heavy stones, running errands, or transporting utensils for his master. These acts require effort but no creative skill.

Melachah – Creative Craft Melachah, by contrast, refers to purposeful creative activity that alters the world. Examples include: building in order to construct, writing, weaving, crafting materials. Such activity requires: knowledge, planning, and intention

The Sages therefore stated: **לא אסרה תורה אלא מלאכת מחשבת**. “The Torah prohibited only thoughtful, creative labor.”

The prohibition of Shabbat is thus not against exertion itself, but against creative mastery over the world.

This insight explains why the Torah connects Shabbat to creation itself. Scripture says: *כי בו שבת מכל מלאכתו אשר ברא אלקים לעשות* “For on it He rested from all His work which God created to be completed.” (Genesis 2:3) The divine acts of the six days of Creation were melachot — acts of purposeful creative formation. Shabbat commemorates the cessation of those creative acts.

Shabbat and the Festivals

This linguistic distinction between melachah and avodah also clarifies an important halachic difference between Shabbat and Yom Tov.

Shabbat The Torah states: *לא תעשה כל מלאכה* “You shall perform no melachah.” All creative labor is prohibited.

Festivals Regarding festivals the Torah says: *כל מלאכת עבודה לא תעשו* “You shall perform no servile labor.” The phrase *מלאכת עבודה* excludes certain activities needed for food preparation. Therefore cooking and related activities are permitted on Yom Tov.

Yom Kippur On Yom Kippur the Torah again uses the stricter language: *לא תעשה כל מלאכה* Thus its prohibition parallels that of Shabbat.

Shabbat as Rectification for the Golden Calf

Many commentators explain that the juxtaposition of Shabbat and the Mishkan reflects a deeper spiritual theme. The Mishkan itself was constructed as a rectification for the sin of the Golden Calf.

The verse states: *אלה הדברים אשר צוה ה' לעשות*

The Or HaChaim interprets *לעשות* as implying repair or restoration.

Chazal taught: *כל השומר שבת כהלכתו אפילו עובד עבודה זרה כדור אנוש מוחלין לו* “Whoever observes Shabbat properly—even if he had worshipped idols like the generation of Enosh—is forgiven.” Shabbat therefore serves as the antidote to idolatry.

The Golden Calf represented a distortion of divine service through physical representation. Shabbat restores the recognition that God alone is the Creator and Master of the universe.

Sanctity of Time and Sanctity of Space

Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin in *אזנים לתורה* explains that the relationship between Shabbat and the Mishkan reflects two forms of holiness.

Shabbat – Holiness in Time Shabbat proclaims faith in the Creator of the universe. It affirms that the world is not governed by independent forces but by one divine source.

The Mishkan – Holiness in Space The Mishkan concentrates divine presence in a specific place. The Torah states: *וּשְׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם* “I will dwell among them.” Thus the Mishkan creates sacred space, while Shabbat creates sacred time.

Significantly, the Torah places the commandment of Shabbat first. Holiness of time precedes holiness of place because time itself was sanctified at the moment of creation.

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>

to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: Mar 12, 2026, 9:47 AM

subject: **Rav Frand - The Impact of Kedusha**

Parshas Vayakhel

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: # 585, The Melacha of Trapping. Good Shabbos!

The Impact of Kedusha

The Parsha begins, “And Moshe assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them...” (Shemos 35:1). Then the topic ends some twenty pesukim later with the words: “The entire assembly of Israel left Moshe's presence.” (Shemos 35:20) Moshe told them what he needed to tell them and then everyone left.

If this was a Talmudic passage, the Gemara would analyze it, asking, “This is obvious. What is the Torah telling us?” It goes without saying that if Moshe Rabbeinu summoned them to deliver a message, that when he was finished delivering that message, they would all walk away. Why does the

Torah, which never wastes words, need to include pasuk 20 at the conclusion of the narration?

Rav Elya Lopian says that the pasuk is teaching that when they walked away from Moshe Rabbeinu, it was evident that they had been in the presence of a Moshe Rabbeinu. A person does not spend time in the presence of a great Jewish leader without having an indelible impression left upon him. This is certainly true immediately after the encounter. Often, such an impression lasts a lifetime.

The pasuk “The entire assembly of Israel left Moshe's presence” teaches that the impression was “written on their faces” and they were a changed people because they spent time with Moshe Rabbeinu.

Rav Elya explains that when we see someone staggering drunk on the street and we wonder “where was he?” the answer is obvious. He was in a bar getting drunk. So too, when we see a person who was in the presence of a Moshe Rabbeinu, it is evident where the person was. He was in the presence of kedusha (holiness). Such is the influence of any environment. When someone is in a holy environment, when someone is in the presence of a holy congregation, when someone is together with spiritually great individuals, it makes an impression and it makes a difference. And the opposite is true as well.

The Ponevitzer Rav once offered a great interpretation to a Medrash in Parshas Toldos: Yosef Meshisa was a despicable Jew. He was a traitor to his people. At the time of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the invaders were afraid to enter into the Heichal (Holy Sanctuary). They picked a Jew to walk in first and betray his G-d. Who did they pick? They picked this low-life named Yosef Meshisa. They told him to go into the Beis Hamikdash, and as a reward, he could take anything he wanted for himself. He went in and took out the golden Menorah. When they saw what he took, they told him that this was too great a prize for a commoner. They told him that he could go back in and take something else that was more appropriate. This time, they promised that he could keep whatever he chose.

However, he refused to go back in a second time. They offered him a bonus. If he went in a second time, they would give him all the collected tax from Judea for the next three years. He still refused. “Is it not sufficient that I angered my G-d once, should I anger Him a second time?” They tortured him until he died, but he refused to go back in.

The Ponevitzer Rav asked, what happened to Yosef Meshisa? This was the traitor whom they picked as being the most likely Jew to do their bidding in desecrating the Beis Hamikdash. He already went in and stole the Menorah. Now he suddenly became a ba'al teshuva and refused to do it again, despite the offer of riches and despite the torturing. What happened to him?

The Ponevitzer Rav explained what happened to him. He was in the Beis Hamikdash for two minutes. He was never the same again. The influence of being in a makom kodesh (holy place) for two minutes changed his life.

If a person is exposed to radiation, chas v'shalom, he doesn't smell it and he doesn't feel it, but two minutes of exposure can change his whole body. Likewise, someone can be exposed to kedusha for two minutes and become a different person.

That is what this pasuk is teaching. The congregation left the presence of Moshe... but they were not the same anymore. They were not the same because they had been in the presence of a great man. Being in the presence of a great man, or even being in the presence of a makom kodesh – a Beis Medrash (House of Study), a Beis Knesses (House of Prayer), or Eretz Yisroel (the Land of Israel) can change a person's life.

This is why environment, friends, and community are so important. Such is the power of kedusha. It can change a person forever.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington.

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, Maryland.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion.

Tapes or 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 © 2023 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 (410) 602-1350

From: **Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>

Tidbits for Parashas Vayakhel - Pekudei 5786 in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz zt"l

Thu, Mar 12, 7:02 PM (5 hours ago)

Parashas Vayakhel - Pekudei • Parashas Hachodesh • March 14th • 25 Adar 5786 This week is Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Nissan. Rosh Chodesh is this Thursday, March 19th. The molad is Wednesday afternoon at 4:34 PM and 13 chalakim. The first opportunity for Kiddush Levanah is Motzaei Shabbos Parashas Vayikra, March 21st. The final opportunity is in the early morning of the first day of Pesach, April 2nd at 4:35 AM EDT. Parashas HaChodesh is leined this Shabbos, the Shabbos preceding Rosh Chodesh Nissan. Many congregations say Yotzros during Shacharis and Mussaf. Two Sifrei Torah are taken out, and the special maftir of Parashas HaChodesh (Shemos 12:1-20) is leined from the second sefer. The haftarah for Parashas HaChodesh is leined. Av Harachamim is omitted. As Kel Mallei may not be said during Chodesh Nissan or before Mussaf of a Shabbos Mevorchim HaChodesh, many have the custom to recite the Kel Mallei this Shabbos during Minchah (or after Kerias Hatorah this Monday, March 16th) for any yahrzeit which falls in Chodesh Nissan. Chodesh Nissan begins this Thursday, March 19th. For the duration of the month, Tachanun, as well as the Yehi Ratzons recited after Kerias Hatorah, are omitted from the weekday davening. On Shabbos, Av Harachamim (before Mussaf) and Tzidkoscha (after Minchah) are omitted as well. The Kel Mallei recited by one who has a yahrzeit is also not said. Fasting and hespeidim are generally prohibited as well. The berachah of Bircas Ilanos (a blessing on a newly blossomed fruit tree) is commonly said beginning in the month of Nissan. Some say it should specifically be said during Nissan. Many have the minhag not to eat matzah from Rosh Chodesh Nissan (although some do not eat matzah starting on Shushan Purim). One must donate money for Maos Chittim, money which will be used to provide the needy with food during Pesach. The donation may be given from maaser funds. Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Menachos 62 .. Shabbos Parashas HaChodesh is this Shabbos, Parshas Vayakhel - Pekudei, and is Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Nissan as well. Leil Bedikas Chametz is on Tuesday evening, March 31st Pesach begins on the evening of Wednesday April 1st.

VAYAKHEL: Moshe gathers Bnei Yisrael and teaches them about Shabbos - and in particular, the prohibition against igniting a fire • The instructions for collecting materials and constructing the Mishkan • Men, and perhaps even more so, women, bring materials • The Nesi'im bring the precious stones for the Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim • Betzalel has been blessed with Divine inspiration and capabilities • Moshe tells the people to stop bringing materials, as even more than needed was collected • Details of the Mishkan boards, curtains, vessels, and the Courtyard curtains and pillars are all repeated.

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 • Bnei Yisrael travel based on the movement of the Ananei HaKavod • Chazak Chazak V'nis'chazeik!

PARASHAS HACHODESH: This special keriah of maftir (Shemos 12:1-20) discusses the mitzvah of Kiddush HaChodesh, as well as the commandment in Mitzrayim to sacrifice a sheep for Korban Pesach.

HAFTARAH (PARASHAS HACHODESH): The haftarah (Yechezkel 45:16-46:18) details the inauguration of the third Beis HaMikdash. This will

take place in Chodesh Nissan and the Korban Pesach will be brought then, in the days of Mashiach.

“וַיָּבֵאוּ כָּל־אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־נְשָׂאוֹ לְבוֹ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר נָדְבָה רוּחוֹ אֹתוֹ הֵבִיאוּ אֶת־תְּרוּמַת ה'” “Every man whose heart inspired him came; and everyone whose spirit moved him, brought the portion of Hashem” (Shemos 35:21)

The Torah describes the contributors to the construction of the Mishkan, as individuals who were “Nesa'o Libo” and “Nad'va Rucho”. What are these descriptions referring to?

The Ramban explains that nedivus halev refers to those who contributed materials, and nesa'o libo refers to the craftsmen who performed the actual work. The Ramban writes that in Mitzrayim, Bnei Yisrael worked only with brick and mortar. Nevertheless, craftsmen emerged able to work skillfully with gold, silver and other fine materials. While the Torah acknowledges that, in the case of Betzalel, his ability was a direct blessing from Hashem, how did Betzalel's assistants come to possess their seemingly new talents? The Chofetz Chaim (in Toras Habayis §7) writes that people who come forward with dedication to any form of avodas Hashem are granted the abilities to fulfill the tasks that they undertook. One who possesses a true desire and dedication to rise to the task will merit Divine assistance to fulfill his goals. Even one who seems to be lacking in talent will merit Divine assistance and blessing to be able to grow and achieve.

Ira Zlotowitz - Founder | iraz@gpagency.com | 917.597.2197 Ahron Dicker - Editor | adicker@klalgovoah.org | 732.581.5830

from: YUTorah <yutorah@comms.yu.edu>

date: Mar 12, 2026, 6:01 PM

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Ram Yeshivat Har Etzion

Built Within Nature

The Mishkan is more than a structure meant to house the presence of Hashem or to facilitate sacrifice and ritual. As the House of Hashem, it stands as a religious icon, communicating religious symbolism. It embodies a vision of religious life and spiritual encounter.

Every detail—each kli sharet, every material, every measurement—symbolizes a distinct facet of avodat Hashem. Nothing is incidental. Through its physical form, the Mishkan gives religious experience shape.

If the details of the Mishkan symbolize facets of avodat Hashem, then the skeleton of the Mishkan conveys meaning as well. The edifice of the Mishkan was fashioned from shittim wood set upright, mirroring the posture in which these trees grow in nature. The planks were prepared from trees and erected vertically, rather than laid horizontally as in a log cabin.

NATURAL FORM AND RELIGION

This choice reflects a broader halakhic principle articulated by the Gemara: כּוֹי הַמְצוּת כּוֹי הַמִּצְוֹת all—אֵינָן כְּשֵׁרוֹת אֶלָּא דְרַךְ גְּדִילָתָן— valid only when performed in the manner of their natural growth. Whenever a natural object is employed for a mitzvah, it must be used in the posture in which it grew. Thus, a lulav is held upright, aligned with its natural form rather than inverted. The Mishkan's vertical planks express the same concept: avodat Hashem shaped by natural form rather than by convenience or efficiency. This protocol of positioning natural mitzvah objects in their natural form signals that religion is not meant to upend nature, but to reinforce it. The mitzvah is performed in the very manner in which nature presents itself. Religion is not contradictory to nature, but consistent with it. Just as religion does not clash with the natural world around us, it does not clash with the natural order within us. We were created with instincts, desires, and human faculties.

Hashem delivers His will and expects submission to that will, even when it runs against instinct or inclination. That demand can create the mistaken impression that serving Hashem stands in tension with human interest and suppresses human vitality. The guideline to perform mitzvot derech gedilatan pushes back against that assumption. It insists that religious life aligns with human nature and natural instinct, even as it sometimes asks us to discipline and restrain them. Over time, a life of mitzvot is presented as a path to

human rhythms of family life, professional responsibility, and interpersonal relationships. Religious consciousness must be allowed to breathe within those ordinary settings. We must live avodat Hashem not only in sacred spaces, but within the full texture of human life.

That danger was especially acute at the moment the first sacred space was constructed. With the emergence of the Mishkan, there was a real risk that religious life would become localized and that we would come to view the Mishkan as the exclusive seat of religion and lose the ability to discern religious meaning beyond its walls. To push back against that assumption, and to signal that the Mishkan was not synthetic or detached from the world we inhabit, an extraordinary step was taken.

WEAVING ON NATURE

The Midrash describes women weaving goat wool while it was still on the backs of the goats. Rather than first shearing the wool and then spinning and weaving it, they wove it directly upon the living animal. This was an extraordinary act of craftsmanship. It also carried symbolic force. The yarns of the Mishkan were fashioned while still embedded within nature. Only afterward were the fabrics harvested and incorporated into the Mishkan. The message was deliberate. The Mishkan was not meant to stand apart from the natural world or from ordinary human experience. Religious meaning can be discovered both inside the Mishkan and beyond it, in the natural world and in the lived, textured experiences of human life. Different laws govern the Mishkan than those that apply elsewhere, but Hashem is not encountered only within its confines. The Mishkan concentrates holiness, but it does not confine it.

The upright wooden planks taught that religion does not upend our nature. By comparison, the weaving on the backs of goats taught that religion must be lived within it.

TERMS THAT FRACTURE

We often rely on the terms *gashmiyut* and *ruchniyyut* to describe different realms of human experience and different spheres of identity. It is worth asking whether, in our religious and cultural world, this division still serves us well. Do we in fact divide our lives into two discrete domains, or do we seek instead to breathe religious meaning into every moment?

There is, of course, an obvious difference between standing before the Aron HaKodesh on Yom Kippur and shopping in a supermarket. Yet in both settings we aspire to act with religious sensitivity, even if those values express themselves differently. Segmenting life into two distinct realms—the physical and the spiritual—undermines the continuity we seek. Language shapes experience, and when these terms are overused they carve reality into sharply separated domains that meet. We risk becoming capable of religious behavior only when we feel immersed in *ruchniyyut*, and less attentive, less principled, when we drift into the world of *gashmiyut*.

Even if we succeed in infusing meaning into the *gashmiyut* space, it can remain disconnected, unintegrated with the deeper and more intense moments we associate with *ruchniyyut*. The result is an avodat Hashem that is uneven and episodic rather than fluid and organic.

Should we not instead strive for *shiviti Hashem l'negdi tamid*—a unifying consciousness that penetrates every aspect of life, every setting, every corner of the human condition?

The conclusion of the berachah of Asher Yatzar is puzzling. We thank Hashem for being the *Rofeh kol basar*, sustaining the proper functioning of our bodies, and then conclude with the cryptic phrase *u'mafli la'asot*—that He performs an extraordinary feat. In his comments to the Shulchan Aruch, the Rema explains this final phrase: we thank Hashem for fusing our immortal soul with our fleeting body into a single, cohesive unit, almost indistinguishable in lived experience. We live life as one integrated whole, rather than through the fractured lens of a divided or dichotomous existence. The Mishkan underscores this same message. Religion should not be viewed as a system that stifles nature—either the world around us or the world within us. Nor is religious life meant to be confined to moments or spaces that feel inherently holy. Rather, religion is meant to be overlaid upon the

full span of human life, encompassing both experiences that feel elevated and those that feel simply natural.

OU Press is honored to partner with Rabbi Moshe Taragin on his new volume in Hebrew regarding the recent war ('Emunah B'toch Hahastara). This remarkable book is also available in English, "Dark Clouds Above, Faith Below"

from: RIETS Kollel Elyon from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack <riets@substack.com>

date: Mar 12, 2026, 7:40 PM

subject: **The Chametz Within: From Menachot to Pesach**
Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

This week's Daf Yomi learning in Masekhet Menachot addresses one of the more counterintuitive features of sacrificial law: the prohibition of chametz in the minchah offering. The Torah states explicitly twice (Lev. 2:11, 6:10) that no meal-offering brought before God may contain leaven. The Talmud's extended discussion of this prohibition, and the parallel ban on *devash* (honey), opens a window onto fundamental themes of the Passover season. The Torah's simultaneous prohibition of both chametz and *devash* deserves consideration. Chametz carries well-known negative associations, but honey is sweet, pure, and in other ancient Near Eastern religious contexts, a prized offering to the divine. The answers the classical authorities offer illuminate not just the laws of sacrifices, but the deeper character of chametz and the symbolism of searching for and eliminating it as we approach Pesach. The Midrash *Lekach Tov* explains that the sacrifices are intended to "break the heart," to elicit genuine humility and contrition. *Se'or*, leavening, rises and puffs up. An offering characterized by inflation works against the very spiritual purpose it is meant to serve. The *Sefer HaChinuch* extends the critique, observing that chametz represents delay and pride, while *devash* represents the pursuit of pleasure and physical indulgence. Neither belongs before the Almighty.

The Netziv reads the prohibition at a more structural level. Chametz is the product of human involvement, and as we draw closer to the Sanctuary, the principle becomes that such interference should be minimized. The sacrifice should arrive as natural and unmediated as possible, and honey is problematic for a parallel reason, as it is itself a processed product of a living creature, a form of transformation that distances the offering from its elemental state.

Rabbenu Bachya reads both prohibitions through the lens of the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination. *Se'or* is a symbol of that inclination, as conveyed in the Talmud (*Berakhot* 17a), in the prayer attributed to Rav: "It is revealed and known before You that our will is to do Your will. And what prevents us? The *se'or sheba'isa*" — the leavening in the dough. The *Oznayim LaTorah*, critiquing the presentation of Rabbenu Bachya, distinguishes between two different expressions of the inclination to sin. *Se'or* corresponds to the pull toward idolatry — the gross, external evil that must simply be eradicated — while *devash* corresponds to the subtler temptation of sweetness and pleasure, which has its place in human life and cannot be entirely destroyed. In a separate comment, this author adds a unifying theme: God wants us to come before Him unadorned and genuine, without enhancement. The sacrifice should be us — unprocessed, unembellished. Even salt might seem to fall under this principle, were it not for its own covenantal significance. Nachmanides adds a historical dimension. Idolators commonly mixed honey into their sacrifices, and the Torah's prohibition is in part a deliberate distancing from that practice. He notes the Talmudic discussion (*Bekhorot* 7b) that honey might not be considered kosher at all, as it derives from a non-kosher creature. Its permitted status rests on the reasoning that the bee itself does not truly produce it but merely processes it, and precisely because of that ambiguous status, it has no place on the altar.

The Stringency of Chametz

Chametz is treated with a severity unlike virtually any other prohibition in the Torah. The *Radbaz* (*Responsa* III, 546, and *Metzudat David* #107) marshals an impressive list of the Torah's extraordinary stringencies in this

domain: the prohibition of eating chametz, the prohibition of deriving benefit from it, the punishment of excision (karet), the prohibitions of not seeing (bal yera'eh) and not finding (bal yimatze) chametz in one's possession, the extension of all these prohibitions to leavening agents (se'or), and an obligation of searching (bedikah) that the Radbaz understands as rooted in Torah law itself, not merely in rabbinic enactment.

This last point is significant. The Radbaz frames bedikat chametz as inherent to the Torah's own presentation of chametz — not derived from general halakhic principles regarding uncertainty or precaution, but as a direct expression of the extraordinary stringency that the Torah itself attaches to chametz. What the Rabbis then added, the obligation to search even the nooks and crannies, built upon that foundation, extending the reach of the Torah's mandate. In his understanding, the Torah and Rabbinic dimensions differ only in degree — how far one is expected to go in pursuing the possibility of chametz.

The Radbaz draws a comparison to the obligation, within the Land of Israel, to actively uproot and eliminate idolatry. The parallel is suggestive: in both cases, the obligation to search and eradicate flows from a specific relationship between a person and a place, making the home the natural locus of responsibility.

The real explanation for chametz's singular stringency must be sought in the symbolic weight that chametz carries — that symbol, as the Radbaz develops at length in his Metzudat David on the reasons for the commandments, being the evil inclination itself.

Three Approaches to the Metaphor

What is it about chametz that lends itself to this symbolic identification, and how might we understand it more precisely? Several approaches emerge, each capturing a different dimension of the connection.

The first connects chametz to stagnancy and the absence of initiative. Chametz is what happens when nothing active occurs — when dough is left alone and time does its work without direction or intervention. The evil inclination operates by a similar logic, encouraging passivity and deferral, persuading a person that there is always time to address what needs addressing. Over time, the neglected impulse, like unattended dough, ferments and grows — and even a small amount holds the potential for expansion. This is why the response to chametz cannot be merely passive avoidance; it requires active pursuit, searching, and destruction. One cannot simply look away. Chazal make this connection explicit: ein machmitzin et ha-matzot, ein machmitzin et ha-mitzvot — just as we do not allow the matzot to become chametz, so too we do not allow our mitzvot to become chametz. The quality of zerizut, of acting with alacrity, is woven into the entire Passover experience. (This theme is developed at length by R. Yitzchak Hutner, in the Pachad Yitzhak, Pesach, maamar 1.)

The second approach focuses on illusion. The evil inclination's essential nature is that it creates false impressions, making the bad appear good, the destructive appear attractive, the trivial appear significant. The Talmud (Sukkah 52a) records that in the future God will "slaughter" the evil inclination, and the righteous will see it as a towering mountain — an enormous challenge they somehow overcame — while the wicked will see it as a mere hair, wondering how they were ever led astray by something so insignificant. The evil inclination is ultimately nothing — it is, as the Beit HaLevi emphasizes, pure illusion. Chametz, by the same token, is nothing but matzah with air inside it. There is no qualitative difference, no additional ingredient, only inflation. Puffed up with emptiness, chametz is the food-form of illusion. With this imagery, using the light of the candle to search for chametz is about exposing the illusion, bringing the clarity of light to bear on what is actually there. (See Avir Yaakov, in the name of Rabbi Yehuda Leib Chasman.)

The third approach is perhaps the most fundamental. The difference between chametz and matzah is not one of ingredients but of control. The same dough, the same components — subjected to precise discipline and attentiveness, the result is matzah; left to its own trajectory, it becomes chametz. The halakhah underscores this: one cannot fulfill the mitzvah of

matzah with something that could not have become chametz. The very definition of matzah requires that chametz was a live possibility. The entire mitzvah is about what one chose to do with that possibility.

This is precisely the image of the moral life. Every human trait has the potential to develop in multiple directions. The same quality that is courage can become recklessness; the same quality that is generosity can become profligacy. Without discipline and conscious direction, the character traits ferment — not into something categorically different, but into an unregulated version of themselves.

This message is particularly acute at the moment of the Exodus. The liberation from Egypt could easily be misread as freedom to simply do as one pleases — the removal of external constraint, the absence of a master. The Exodus moved us from being servants of Pharaoh toward being servants of God, from a servitude that prevented us from reaching our potential to a commitment to a system that enables it. As the Talmud expresses it, we are God's servants, and therefore not enslaved to lesser masters. Chametz is the emblem of undirected freedom — the dough simply released, going its own way. Matzah is the emblem of freedom properly understood: purposeful, directed, and disciplined.

If all this is true, we are left with a question: if the symbolism of the evil inclination is the real reason chametz is treated so severely, why is it not simply prohibited year-round?

The Radbaz suggests that perhaps it should be, but the Torah simply had compassion on human digestive systems.

However, it might be possible to suggest that there is a particular significance unique to Passover and its context. The symbol belongs specifically to this historical moment of transition; it is embedded deliberately in the Exodus experience, at the gate between slavery and nationhood, because it is precisely there that its lesson is most urgent. Yetziat Mitzrayim was never meant to be merely an escape from Pharaoh; it was the beginning of a journey toward Sinai. The message of chametz and matzah is inseparable from that journey's meaning.

Biur and Bitul: Two Roots, One Obligation

Rav Kook, in the volume *Tov Ro'ei*, notes that there are two independent obligations prior to Passover, each of which could theoretically suffice on its own to address the problem of chametz. The first is biur — the physical elimination of chametz, the act of finding it and destroying it. The second is bitul — the mental renunciation of chametz, the declaration that renders it legally ownerless and null. Rabbinic law requires both, and Rav Kook is careful to distinguish them not merely as redundant precautions but as expressions of two genuinely different relationships to the obligation. Biur, in his analysis, is the more complete fulfillment. It is an act of active engagement — one goes after the chametz, confronts it, and removes it from the world. Bitul, by contrast, is essentially a withdrawal. One does not eliminate the chametz; one eliminates one's own legal connection to it. The chametz may remain physically present, but the person has, through renunciation, stepped back from it. Both accomplish the halakhic goal, but they do so in fundamentally different manners: biur is a positive act directed outward, while bitul is a legal act directed inward.

The resonance with the symbolism developed above is immediate. If chametz represents the evil inclination, then the distinction between biur and bitul is not merely technical. Bitul is the approach of one who says: I renounce this, I want nothing to do with it, I declare it as nothing. Biur, however, is the approach of one who goes looking — who takes the candle into the corners and refuses to leave the chametz undisturbed simply because a legal formula has neutralized its formal claim. The Passover obligation, in its most complete manifestation, demands biur: not because bitul is inadequate as a matter of law, but because active confrontation is the more complete response to what chametz represents.

The Breadcrumbs and the Mitzvah

This larger framework illuminates the meaning of the custom, cited by the Rama, of placing breadcrumbs before bedikat chametz. The rationale most commonly offered — that without them there might be a blessing recited in

vain if no chametz is found — encodes a deeper dispute about the nature of the mitzvah itself.

There are two ways to understand what bedikat chametz is fundamentally trying to accomplish. One view holds that the mitzvah centers on finding and destroying chametz, in which case a search that yields nothing risks being incomplete. The other view holds that the mitzvah centers on confirming the absence of chametz, in which case a search that finds nothing is a perfect fulfillment. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach held this latter position: the goal is to establish with certainty that the house is free of chametz, and success is precisely the discovery that nothing remains. In his view, the custom of placing breadcrumbs is entirely appropriate, but its absence would not constitute a blessing recited in vain.

Others, particularly in light of the Sha'ar HaTziyun's observation that contemporary pre-Passover cleaning is so thorough that many homes may technically lack a formal obligation of bedikat chametz by the night of the fourteenth, see the breadcrumbs as more functionally necessary — both to create the conditions for a valid bedikah and to give the “tashbitu” dimension of the search its concrete expression. “Tashbitu,” the Torah's command to eliminate chametz (Ex. 12:15), points toward active destruction rather than passive absence. We do not merely want to confirm that chametz is gone; we want to pursue and destroy it. Nachmanides, quoted by his student Rabbenu David (Pesachim 9a), rules that even multiple uncertainties do not exempt one from bedikat chametz, because the rabbinic enactment aims precisely to achieve clarity beyond the ordinary rules of uncertainty. The act of searching is itself the mitzvah, not merely a means toward finding.

Rav Kook's distinction between biur and bitul maps directly onto this debate. Those who see bedikah as oriented toward tashbitu — toward finding and destroying — are privileging the biur dimension: the search matters because it leads to active elimination. Those who see bedikah as oriented toward confirmation of absence are closer to the bitul model: the goal is to establish a clean legal and physical slate, and the search is the means of achieving that certainty. What Rav Kook's analysis adds is the recognition that even where both approaches are halakhically valid, they are not spiritually equivalent. The Passover experience, in its most complete manifestation, asks us to go looking — not merely to confirm that the chametz is gone, but to take seriously the act of confronting and removing it.

The custom of placing breadcrumbs before the search is, in this light, not a technicality but a statement of intention. We are not merely hoping that the house is clean. We are going looking — because the act of searching, finding, and eliminating is itself the fulfillment that Passover demands. To search only where we are certain nothing remains, to perform a bedikah that could not possibly yield chametz, is to choose bitul over biur, renunciation over confrontation. The breadcrumbs restore to the search its character as an act of biur: purposeful, directed, and complete.

The chametz within is not neutralized by being declared nothing. It is found, confronted, and removed, and with that, we are elevated and renewed. © 2026 RIETS Kollel Elyon

from: YUTorah <yutorah@comms.yu.edu>

date: Mar 12, 2026, 6:01 PM

Vayakhel-Pekudei 5786: **The Greatest Sanctuary**

By **Michal Horowitz** on March 12, 2026

With the reading of Parshios Vayakhel-Pekudei, we conclude Sefer Shemos, the sefer that chronicles the birth of our nation and our journey from slavery to redemption.

As we have noted in previous weeks, the final section of Sefer Shemos is devoted to the building of the Mishkan, the earthly abode for the Divine Presence amongst Am Yisrael. Beginning in Parshas Terumah and continuing through Tetzaveh, Ki Tisa, Vayakhel and Pekudei, the Torah describes both the instructions for the Mishkan and its ultimate construction. Our parsha opens with Moshe gathering the entire nation together: וַיִּקְהַל מֹשֶׁה וַיְבָרֵךְ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֱלֹהִים הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר-צִוָּה ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת אֲתֶם - Moshe

assembled the entire congregation of the Children of Israel and said to them: These are the things that Hashem has commanded to do (Shemos 35:1). Moshe then reiterates the commandment of Shabbos before conveying the instructions regarding the construction of the Mishkan: וְיָשֻׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מִלְאכָהּ - Six days work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a complete day of rest for Hashem (35:2). Only afterward does Moshe relay the command to bring the donations and materials for the construction of the Mishkan and its keilim (vessels). The commentators note that the Torah once again juxtaposes Shabbos and the Mishkan. Earlier, in Parshas Ki Tisa, after the instructions for Mishkan conclude, the Torah transitions to the commandment of Shabbos. Here, at the beginning of the actual construction, the Torah again emphasizes Shabbos before the building begins.

Rashi famously explains that the Torah places Shabbos before Mishkan to teach that the construction of the Mishkan does not override Shabbos. Even the holiest national project - building a sanctuary for the Divine Presence - must cease when Shabbos arrives.

There is, however, an additional and beautiful dimension to this juxtaposition.

The building of the Mishkan was not the work of one individual, nor even of a small elite group. Rather, it was a national endeavor that engaged the hearts, talents, and generosity of the entire people. Men and women brought donations, artisans contributed their skill, the nesi'im brought precious stones, and the master craftsmen oversaw the work. The Mishkan was constructed through the collective effort of an entire nation united toward a holy purpose.

Yet even in the midst of this great national project, Moshe first reminds the people about Shabbos.

Why?

Because (as Rav Soloveitchik zt'l teaches us) while the Mishkan represented a sanctuary in space, Shabbos represents a sanctuary in time. One is built with gold, silver, copper, wood and precious stones. The other is built with restraint - with the willingness to stop creating and recognize the Creator. Thus, even as the people begin the monumental task of building a dwelling place for the Shechina in space, Moshe reminds them that there already exists a sanctuary gifted directly by Hashem Himself: the sanctity of Shabbos.

The Mishkan required human construction. Shabbos did not.

As the Torah tells us at the conclusion of Creation:

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יְוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ - And G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it (Bereishis 2:3).

Hashem Himself sanctified Shabbos. And it is the Jewish people - as one whole nation, united in purpose and vision - that sanctified the Mishkan through their labor, devotion, and generosity.

Perhaps this is why our parsha begins with the word וַיִּקְהַל - Moshe gathered the entire nation together. The Mishkan could only be built through unity. Every donation, every talent, every heart was needed.

And yet, even greater than the sanctuary built by the nation is the sanctuary gifted to us by Hashem each and every week.

Shabbos arrives without fundraising, without construction, without human engineering. It arrives as a Divine gift, inviting us to step away from the noise of the world and enter sacred time.

With the completion of the Mishkan at the end of Sefer Shemos, the Torah tells us: וַיִּכַס הַעֲנַן אֶת-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיִּכְבֹּד ה' מֵלֵא אֶת-הַמִּשְׁכָּן - The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of Hashem filled the Mishkan (Shemos 40:34). Upon completion of Mishkan, the Divine Presence rested among the people.

May we merit to appreciate both sanctuaries and the Divine Presence within: the sanctuary in space and the sanctuary in time. May we cherish the holiness of Shabbos and the sacred spaces we build for Hashem in our lives.

And in the merit of our devotion to Torah, mitzvos, and the sanctity of Shabbos, may we merit the ultimate redemption and the rebuilding of the

Beis HaMikdash, speedily and in our days. "In Nissan they were redeemed, in Nissan they will be redeemed." (Rosh Hashana 11a) - amen v'amen.
בברכת בשורות טובות ושבט שלום, Michal

from: **Rabbi Efreim Goldberg** <reg@rabbiEFRimgoldberg.com>
date: Mar 11, 2026, 4:00 PM

Silence Is Complicity: When a Spouse's Words Become Your Responsibility

In the introduction to a recent episode of Behind the Bima, Yocheved and I had a discussion about the role of the Rebbetzin. There is no school or degree that formally prepares someone to become a Rebbetzin; it is a title and position that comes with being married to the rabbi. It usually comes without a salary, contract, or formal job description, but it often comes with significant expectations. Although the rebbetzin does not work for the shul and is not paid by it, what she says and does is often associated with the rabbi and seen as an extension of him.

While particularly relevant in the case of a rabbi and rebbetzin, the question arises more broadly as well. When, if ever, is someone responsible for the words or actions of their spouse? Does marriage create a shared moral identity, or are spouses entirely independent from one another? Does the answer change when the couple occupies a public role?

Jewish Insider recently reported that, though New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani spent his mayoral campaign attempting to distance himself from the most radical anti-Israel elements of his leftist movement, an examination of his wife's social media activity revealed she liked multiple Instagram posts cheering on Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, massacre.

Rama Duwaji, Mamdani's Syrian-American wife, liked a post that unambiguously celebrated the terrorist attack that saw nearly 1,200 Israelis and foreign workers killed, thousands wounded, 251 civilians and military personnel kidnapped, and numerous episodes of assault. Duwaji, an animator and illustrator by trade, liked this post and others using a personal account in her own name with which the mayor has interacted in the past. She has used it also to directly criticize Israeli policy. The posts she liked included captions featuring the slogan, "From the River to the Sea," and one included a clip of the crowd chanting, call-and-response style, "Every colonized people, every occupied people has the right to self-defense." Additionally, Duwaji liked a social media post claiming Hamas' rapes of Israelis during the Oct. 7, 2003 terror attack were a "mass hoax."

The report of the New York City First Lady's activity sparked backlash from critics and women's-rights advocates. Mamdani responded by saying, "My wife is the love of my life, and she's also a private person who has held no formal position on my campaign or in my City Hall. I, however, was elected to represent all 8.5 million people in the city. And I believe that it's my responsibility because of that role to answer questions about my thoughts and my politics and my stances."

Is that answer sufficient? True, Duwaji was not elected and holds no formal position, but are her views and positions irrelevant and entirely unassociated with and separate from the mayor's?

In a separate but similar story recently reported by The New York Times, Democratic Rep. Dan Goldman faced public scrutiny over his wife's social media activity, though the context and substance differed sharply from the Mamdani case. According to the Times, Goldman's wife, Corinne Levy Goldman, who also serves as his campaign treasurer, liked and shared a number of posts on X (formerly Twitter) following October 7, 2023. These included posts from right wing accounts that mocked "Jews for Palestine" supporters and criticized broader movements like Black Lives Matter. Some posts used language that critics viewed as insensitive or dehumanizing toward Palestinians or pro-Palestinian activists. In response, Goldman told the Times that his wife's likes do not speak for him and emphasized that his own record, votes, and statements are the only reflection of his beliefs. The Goldman episode differs in key ways from the controversy involving Mayor Mamdani's wife. Duwaji's likes on Instagram included posts that celebrate the Hamas attack itself and dismissed investigations into assault

and violence tied to the Oct. 7 massacre as a "hoax." Corinne Goldman's activity may not be beyond reproach but at most used rhetoric that some could find offensive. In addition, Goldman has a direct role in her husband's public life by serving as his campaign treasurer, whereas Duwaji has no such position.

And so the broader question remains. Whether a rabbi and rebbetzin, mayor and first lady, or congressman and spouse: are couples responsible for what their partner believes, says, or posts? Are we extensions of one another, or entirely separate and independent?

Certainly, individuals must retain independence even within marriage. There is room for individuality in thought and expression. No two people, even spouses, are meant to agree on everything. Yet Judaism also understands marriage as far more than two unrelated individuals living parallel lives.

The Torah describes the relationship between husband and wife as ezer k'negdo, a helpmate opposite one another. Our sages explain that a healthy marriage includes two roles. At times, it requires offering support and encouragement, and at other times, it requires having the courage to stand opposite, challenging a spouse in order to bring out the best in them. The Torah's vision of marriage is not simply one plus one equals two. It is two halves becoming a whole. The pasuk (Bereishis 5:2) describes, "He created them male and female, and blessed them, and He called their name Adam." Adam and Chava were originally created as one being, fused together, before Hashem separated them. The search for a spouse and the act of kiddushin are, in a sense, an effort to recreate that original unity.

The Talmud (Berachos 24a) expresses this idea even more explicitly with the phrase ishto k'gufo, a person's spouse is like their own body. This relationship is not purely symbolic. It carries real Halachic implications in areas ranging from lighting Chanukah candles to financial obligations to family minhagim.

Of course, being two halves of a whole does not mean thinking, speaking, or posting exactly alike. Spouses can have different tastes, preferences, political views, and priorities. Healthy marriages allow space for individuality. But there must also be shared red lines, a moral vocabulary a couple holds in common.

A husband and wife might vote differently, emphasize different issues, or express themselves differently. But when it comes to fundamental moral truths, good and evil, justice and cruelty, and the value of human life, silence or neutrality is not a real option, and a spouse cannot dismiss the other's position as "that's just their opinion, not mine."

When the Torah describes marriage as two becoming one, it is not speaking only about companionship or romance. It is describing a moral partnership. A spouse is not a random bystander. A spouse is the person closest to us, the one with the greatest access and the greatest potential influence over who we become.

That is precisely the meaning of ezer k'negdo. Sometimes the role of a spouse is to support and stand beside. Sometimes it is to stand opposite. If someone we love embraces a position that celebrates murder, excuses terror, denies violence against innocent people, or dehumanizes others, the most loving response is not silence but moral clarity, the courage to say this is not who we are.

Jewish tradition has long recognized that silence in the face of evil carries moral weight. The prophet Yeshayahu rebukes those who see injustice and remain silent. The Torah commands, Hocheach tochiach es amisecha, we must speak up when someone close to us is going down the wrong path. That obligation certainly applies within the most intimate relationship we have. Just last week we read the famous words of Mordechai warning Esther in no uncertain terms about the consequences of staying silent: Ki im hacharash tacharishi.

This is not about controlling a spouse or denying their independence. It is about recognizing that marriage creates a shared moral space. When one partner publicly embraces something morally reprehensible, the other cannot entirely hide behind technicalities of independence. The world reasonably

assumes that if you strongly oppose something outrageous said by the person closest to you, you would say so.

If you do not object, if you allow it to stand unchallenged, dismiss it, or pretend it has nothing to do with you, then you are no longer merely an observer. In some measure, you become complicit.

Ishto k'gufo cuts both ways. Just as a spouse's kindness and goodness reflect on their partner, so too does cruelty or moral blindness when it goes unchallenged. To be married is to share not only a home and a life, but also responsibility for the moral atmosphere you create together.

In the end, the question is not whether spouses are identical or independent. Of course they are individuals. The question is whether we take seriously the covenant of becoming one. When someone we are one with celebrates evil and we say nothing, we have allowed that evil to live in our shared space, and others are justified in concluding we tolerate it.

For that reason, the issue raised by the reports about Rama Duwaji cannot simply be brushed aside as the private views of a private person. If posts that celebrate the October 7 massacre, deny the assault of Israeli women, and glorify terror truly do not reflect the values of Mayor Mamdani, then the moment calls not for distance but for clarity. Leadership demands the courage to say clearly that celebrating the murder of innocent people and denying the suffering of victims is morally abhorrent.

If a spouse publicly embraces such a position and we remain silent, we share responsibility for allowing it to stand. But if we believe something is wrong, we must say so. In this case, the appropriate response is simple. If those posts do not represent his values, Mayor Mamdani should say so plainly and unequivocally and object to them.

Silence is not neutrality. Silence is complicity.

From: Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky <rmk@torah.org>

Drasha By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Vayakhel

Up Close and Personal

These final portions in the Book of Exodus summarize the amazing accomplishments of the Children of Israel in building the Mishkan — the edifice that would house the Divine presence in this temporal world — while in the desert. It was a mammoth feat, an act that consumed an entire nation. Men and women, young and old each had a share in this great endeavor. The Torah tells us: "Every man whose heart inspired him came; and everyone whose spirit motivated him brought the portion of Hashem for the work of the Tent of Meeting, for all its labor and for the sacred vestments. The men came with the women; everyone whose heart motivated him brought bracelets, nose-rings, rings, body ornaments — all sorts of gold ornaments — every man who raised up an offering of gold to Hashem." (Exodus 35:21-22)

And then there were those who did the work. "Moses summoned Bezalel, Oholiab, and every wise-hearted man whose heart Hashem endowed with wisdom, everyone whose heart inspired him, to come close to the work, to do it (Exodus 36:2). The wording needs clarification. Why use the term, "whose heart inspired him, to come close to the work, to do it"? Why not just say "whose heart inspired him, to do the work"? What is the meaning of coming close to do the work? Just do the work!

The lines outside of Rav Elozar Menachem Shach's apartment in B'nai Beraq were always long. Visitors came from across the nation and the world to speak to the eldest sage in Israel. Young and old, wealthy and poor waited in the corridor of the tiny apartment in order to gain either wisdom, advice, counsel or blessing from the revered sage.

One evening after almost everyone had left, a wealthy North American philanthropist was about to enter the study to speak to Rav Shach concerning an important matter. Before entering the study he noticed a father clutching the hand of a school-aged child no more than eleven years old.

"Please, sir," interrupted the father. "It is difficult for my child to sit still in class. Talmud seems to bore him. Please let me enter before you. I just want a quick blessing from the rabbi that my son should develop an interest in

Torah learning." It seemed innocuous enough. The wealthy man had already waited quite a while and he figured that another minute or two for Rav Shach to shake the boy's hand, give him a blessing, and send him on his way could not take that long, and so, he agreed.

It was almost 45 minutes before the child left Rav Shach's apartment. The boy and his father were both beaming enthusiastically. Then they spotted the benevolent man who allowed them to go ahead. He was baffled. "What happened in there?" He asked. "Why did his blessing take so long?"

The father of the young boy began to explain. "We entered the room expecting a brocha and a handshake. But Rav Shach told us that we didn't need his blessing. He asked my son what he is learning. Then he took out that Tractate and sat down with him. He learned a Mishna with my son until he understood it. Then the Rashi. Then the Gemara. Then more Rashi. Then a Tosefos. It was not long before my son and the revered Rosh Yeshiva became entangled in excited Talmudic repertoire!

"The Rosh Yeshiva explained to us that all you need is to get close to the Gemara, draw yourself to it. Then it will grasp you and embrace you! You don't need a blessing to enjoy it. You must draw yourself close to it and then you will enjoy it!"

Building a Mishkan, like any project that entails difficult work for the sake of Heaven, can be arduous. It can become depressing at times and it is easy to become dispirited and desperate. The key to the success of the building Mishkan lies in the words of the posuk, "everyone whose heart inspired him, to come close to the work, to do it." In order to do the work, you must draw yourself close to the work. If you take small steps with love and bring a project close to your heart, then rest assured you will complete the work in joy!

Good Shabbos Dedicated by Lionel and Ruth Fisch in memory of George Fisch and Rebbeca Stein If you enjoy the weekly Drasha, now you can receive the best of Drasha in book form! Purchase Parsha Parables at a very special price! The author is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore. Drasha © 2026 by Torah.org.

Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

Wed, Mar 11, 4:40 PM (2 days ago)

Rav Kook Torah

Psalm 9: Nations Who Forget God

The Sages expressed mixed views regarding the ancient Persians. Rabban Gamliel praised them for their modesty and refined manners, while Rav Joseph was far less complimentary, branding them a nation "consecrated and destined for Gehinnom."

Why such harsh words for a people known for culture and refinement? Destined for Gehinnom

When we observe a primitive people who rob and plunder, we attribute their actions to their savage and uncultured nature. However, when dealing with a civilized nation, we expect them to recognize the value of just and equitable conduct. When a highly-developed society is gripped by a belligerent spirit of conquest and oppression, like the ancient Persians who subjugated the Jewish communities under their dominion, they are destined to be judged harshly by the Eternal Judge.

Thus Rav Joseph described them as "consecrated and destined for Gehinnom." This judgment stems not from a primitive nature, but from a deliberate choice. The cultured Persians should have chosen the path of goodness, but instead opted for the path of violence and subjugation. Forgetting God

This idea may also be heard in King David's call for God's justice against evil nations:

"The Eternal has made Himself known, executing judgment... The wicked will return to the grave, all the nations who forget God" (Psalm 9:17-18). The phrase "nations who forget God" implies that these nations ought to remember Him. They possess the intellectual and cultural capacity to recognize the Creator and to emulate His ways of justice and kindness.

Yet they choose otherwise. Their wrongdoing is not the blindness of ignorance, but the willful act of those who deliberately pursue a path of moral treachery. They are truly “nations who forget God.” (Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I on Berakhot 8b (1:111) Illustration image: 5th century BCE carving of Persian and Median soldiers.)

BS”D

March 13, 2026

Alan Fisher <afisherads@yahoo.com>

Potomac Torah Study Center Vol. 13 #22, March 13-14, 2026; 25 Adar 5786; Vayakhel-Pekudei 5786; Shabbat HaHodesh Mevarchim HaHodesh.

Rosh Hodesh Nisan is next Thursday

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

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem’s protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We celebrate the return of all our hostages from Gaza and mourn those of our people who perished during the last two years. May a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

The double parsha of Vayakel-Pekudei closes Sefer Shemot and points us to both Vayikra and Bemidbar. Once Hashem's presence returns to the Mishkan, Moshe could not survive entering the Ohel Moed, because God's presence in the Mishkan is so much more intense than even on Har Sinai during the Revelation. (40:35) Turn a few lines later in the Torah, and Hashem calls to Moshe (Vayikra 1:1), so Moshe can continue his close, personal relationship with Hashem. Shemot also tells us next that B’Nai Yisrael could only move their camp when God's cloud would rise from above the Mishkan and move (40:36-37). God's cloud first rises on 20 Sivan of the second year in the Midbar (Bemidbar 10:11), so the ending of Shemot also points to continuing the story of the travels of B’Nai Yisrael in Sefer Bemidbar.

At first reading, Vayakel-Pekudei repeats the details of building the Mishkan from Terumah and Tetzaveh. At a deeper level, however, the repetition is not the main story. The Torah comments more than twenty times that B’Nai Yisrael carry out every detail of construction exactly as God tells Moshe. As Rabbi Menachem Leibtag observes, this repeating refrain reinforces the understanding that there is no room for human innovation when selecting or producing a symbol for Hashem's Divine Presence.

Several details about the implements of the Mishkan emerge from our double parsha. For example, Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at alephbeta.org observe that the curtains of the inner walls of the Mishkan and most of the clothes of the Kohen Gadol consist of stripes of blue, purple, red, and white - resembling the colors of a rainbow and the colors that blend together to create the white light of the sun. The connection between the colors in the Mishkan and Kohen Gadol's clothing reflect back to Noach, for whom God creates a rainbow as a promise of never ending the living world again by flood. The creation story and recreation after the flood start with a dark world in which Hashem takes steps to make space for light, sky and earth, land and water, vegetation, and life - space in which humans can exist. The fabrics of the curtains and the clothes of the Kohen Gadol, with both wool and linen, are shatnez, a mixture not permitted for clothing for Jews. My interpretation is that the Torah restricts shatnez to holy coverings such as tallit, clothes for the Kohen Gadol, and coverings for the Mishkan.

“Vayakhel” connects forward to Korach, who also gathers (“vayakhel”) a congregation of Jews - but in his case to challenge Moshe and Aharon as leaders of B’Nai Yisrael. Korach, a first cousin of Aharon and Moshe, argues that all Jews are holy and that he has as strong a case as they do to lead B’Nai Yisrael. Moshe gathers the Jews for a holy purpose, to carry out Hashem's orders for creating the Mishkan. Korach gathers the Jews for an evil purpose. Rabbi Fohrman observes another point. the root of “vayakhel” is the same as the root for “Havdalah.” Both words indicate separation - either separating a group from everyone else, separating Shabbat from the rest of the week, or

(as first used in the Torah), separating individual days of creation. The Torah directs us to separate for holy purposes, not for evil.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander focuses on the Haftorah, Yechezkel's prophecy of the dedication of the Third Temple some time in the future. The prophecy includes additional korbanot not in the Torah. Many early Rabbis argued that Yechezkel does not belong among our sacred writings because the additional korbanot seem to contradict the Torah. Rabbi Brander discusses opinions of Rambam and Rabbi Yosef Messas, both of whom argue that Yechezkel's prophecies are frum, because they refer only to the inauguration of the Third Temple and not to everyday korbanot. Rav Messas observes that the korbanot in the Second Temple differ from those in the First Temple and that halachah permits changes over time, when conditions change and when the changes are consistent with halachic precedent. Rabbi Brander presents the halachic reasoning far better than I can. I only add my opinion that I find his presentation both convincing and extremely important - something that all Jews should study and evaluate. Readers with questions should refer to their local Orthodox Rabbis, because I am not learned enough to give a definitive response to questions.

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine relates the Mishkan to its implications for our behavior in the spirit of proper religious behavior. Rabbi Rhine concludes that the Mishkan reinforces the lesson that proper behavior focuses strongly on how we treat our fellows. We see this conclusion in many places in Tanach. For example, Mishpatim continues Hashem's discussion with Moshe after the Revelation - and the mitzvot in Mishpatim focus primarily on how we treat fellow humans and animals. Treating others, especially those less advantaged than we are, is a frequent focus of the Torah, prophets, and Rabbis.

Shabbat Shalom, Alan & Hannah

RIETS Kollel Elyon from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon

Substack <riets@substack.com>

Wed, Mar 11, 10:37 AM (2 days ago)

Lessons From the Mysterious Prohibition of Carrying on Shabbat

RIETS Kollel Elyon

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

The prohibition of carrying on Shabbat, which is derived from this week's Torah reading (Ex. 36:6), is a challenging one to understand. On the one hand, it is one of the most well-known aspects of Shabbatobservance, due to the often controversial eruvin that are constructed in public areas to address its strictures; on the other hand, its conceptual basis is arguably the least understood of all of the Shabbatprohibitions, leading even the giants of medieval rabbinic scholarship to label it an “inferior melakhah” (melakhah geruah; see Tosafot, Shabbat 2a, and others).

This designation is rooted in the fact that this prohibited labor requires more explanation and source derivation than do other melakhot. Most blatantly, it seems to differ from the general understanding of what a melakhah is, which is a meaningful change or improvement in the world, rather than an act of exertion. In fact, in is in this context that this definition is most clearly stated in the earlier literature: the Ohr Zarua (Hil. Shabbat 82, citing Rabbeinu Tam) writes that carrying is conceptually difficult because no change takes place in the object, which is identical to what it was before the melakhahbegan, and is simply situated somewhere else.

The status of inferior melakhah has several possible consequences. Tosafot write that the derivative prohibitions (toldot) of carrying need an independent source, as opposed to other melakhot, because of this status. The Chayei Adam (Hil. Shabbat 9:11) states that an object that has been illicitly carried on Shabbat (at least if done inadvertently) may still be used, in contradistinction to other melakhot which taint the object with a rabbinical prohibition (see also Ritva, Eirubin 41b; Biur Halakhah 318:1; Responsa Minchat Shlomo, I, 5). R. Betzal Ashkenazi (Responsa, 41) asserts that while one who violates other melakhot is eligible for punishment if he receives a general warning (hatra'ah), in the case of carrying, the specific violation must be named in order for the warning to be effective. Further, some

authorities understand that the reason the Talmud says that an eruv is not required for Yom Tov is that carrying falls short of the status of a melakhah as relevant to Yom Tov. (See also Afikei Yam, II, 4:8.) In further explaining this status, it appears that Tosafot on the one hand, and the Rashba and Nachmanides on the other hand, take different approaches. The authors of the Tosafot focus on the fact that there would seem to be no practical distinction between carrying from one private domain to another and from carrying from a public domain to a private domain; yet Jewish law does distinguish between them. The Rashba and the Nachmanides direct their explanation toward the fact that a heavy object brought from one corner of the room to another would result in no transgression, while a small object taken from a private domain to a public one would be prohibited. (See also Meiri to Shabbat 2a; and Responsa Levushei Mordechai, 62.) Some suggest that these two approaches may reflect two understandings in the prohibition of carrying on Shabbat: is the issue the lifting of an object and transporting it from one place to another, as implied by the Rashba, who is primarily concerned about the seemingly arbitrary nature of which acts of carrying are prohibited, and the fact that relative effort is irrelevant? Or is the concern the changing of its domain of location, as is the impression given by the Tosafot, who are concerned with the unclear basis for distinguishing between different acts of transfer? (See, for example, R. Asher Weiss, *Minchat Asher*, Shabbat, 1; *Sam Derekh* to Shabbat; Responsa Binyan Av, I, 12.) These possibilities create two greatly distinct understandings of what the prohibition is. The first possibility would mean that carrying is a fundamentally different concern from all the other prohibited labors. In this view, the issue actually is exertion, what is generally assumed to be a misunderstanding of what melakhah means. Thus, the 38 other prohibited labors would be defined by creative change; this one is a different category, literally “heavy lifting”. Nonetheless, for technical reasons, it is not measured by the weight of the object, but by the carrying of it into a different domain (the alternative, that all carrying, even inside of a closed room, should be forbidden, would be impractical and incompatible with a proper Shabbat experience).

If this understanding is correct, it could also explain how another Shabbat prohibition is, according to some authorities, also derived from another verse associated with carrying (Ex. 16:29): the concept of Techum, which bars walking beyond a certain distance on Shabbat (*Sefer HaChinukh*, 24, and Maimonides, *Hilkhos Shabbat* 27:1-2; Nachmanides, prohibition 321, disagrees). It could be maintained that this is essentially the same concept as prohibited carrying, excessive exertion beyond a certain point. In the language of the *Chinukh*, “one should not walk a great distance, but rather in the fashion of a pleasurable stroll” which would be more typical of a shorter distance. A very similar classification could be applied to carrying. Thus, Shabbat would be instructing us on two tracks: the more familiar injunction against imposing creative change on the world; and the additional exhortation to maintain a sense of peace and physical rest on that day, to more effectively allow for the spiritual renewal and internal recreation that it is meant for.

According to the other understanding, by contrast, carrying is actually a typical melakah, but one that requires greater explanation, as it seems on the surface that no change is taking place. Once we are informed that carrying is indeed a melakhah, however, our world literally changes. The location of an item, which seemed to be only a detail, actually impacts on its essence. This is a profound lesson that not only guides the laws of Shabbat but teaches us how to relate to the surroundings not only of objects but of people as well, and to appreciate the effect that these surroundings have.

This notion is reflected in a comment of R. Yaakov Kaminetsky (*Emet L'Yaakov*, Ex. 36:6). He took note of the fact that most of the prohibitions of Shabbat were communicated to the Jewish people at an earlier point, at Marah. Carrying, however, was left out, and only conveyed in this week's reading, in conjunction with the building of the Tabernacle.

Marah was an ideal point to teach the laws of Shabbat in general. The water there was bitter, and the Jews complained they could not drink. Upon God's

instruction, Moses takes a piece of wood and throws it into the water, and it miraculously becomes sweet, and the same verse then tells of Moses' instruction of Shabbat to the people (Ex. 15:25, with Rashi). Shabbat teaches of God's creation of the world, and control of all that is in it. At this moment, with the Jews exposed to God's ability to change nature in wondrous ways, they are ready to be taught this concept; to abstain, for a day, from changing the world, in deference to God's ownership of it.

However, a prohibition of carrying at that point would have been baffling to them. Granted, we should not change the world on the Shabbat; but what impact is there in simply moving an object from one place to the next? The introduction of the Tabernacle opened their eyes to a new reality. If God could choose to focus his presence on a particular location, this factor must mean more than they could have imagined; to change location is to become something new.

Of course, deep down, the Jews knew this all along; they had previously had their lives transformed by being taken out of Egypt. Indeed, R. Samson Raphael Hirsch asserted that most of the labors of Shabbat are associated with the commemoration of the creation of the world (Ex. 20:11). Carrying, however, is connected to memorializing the exodus from Egypt (Deut. 5:15). The change that comes with shifting one's surroundings is not limited to dramatic extractions from one country to another; it can come as well from even a subtle movement to an environment that differs only slightly. For that to happen, the laws of Shabbat teach us, we need to learn to pay attention.

Parshas Vayakhel: Mishkan and Shabbat

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. A SIGN BETWEEN GOD AND THE B'NEI YISRA'EL

After concluding the many commands regarding the construction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle), God gave the following instruction to Mosheh:

You yourself are to speak to the Israelites: You shall keep my Shabbatot, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I, Hashem, sanctify you. You shall keep the Shabbat, because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Shabbat of solemn rest, holy to Hashem; whoever does any work on the Shabbat day shall be put to death. Therefore the Israelites shall keep the Shabbat, observing the Shabbat throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days Hashem made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed. (Sh'mot 31:13-17)

This is not the only place where the commands regarding the Mishkan and Shabbat are juxtaposed. Following the tragic narrative of the Golden Calf, at the beginning of our Parashah,

Mosheh prefaced his presentation of the commands of the Mishkan to the B'nei Yisra'el with a short statement about Shabbat:

Mosheh assembled all the congregation of the B'nei Yisra'el and said to them: These are the things that Hashem has commanded you to do: Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy Shabbat of solemn rest to Hashem; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire in all your dwellings on the Shabbat day. (Sh'mot 35:1-3)

Immediately afterwards, he presented the details of the Mishkan to the people, whereupon they began their donations and building.

II. SHABBAT PRECLUDES EVEN THE MISHKAN-CONSTRUCTION

Beginning from the Mekhilta (at the beginning of Parashat Vayakhel), many commentaries maintain that the juxtaposition of Shabbat with the construction of the Mishkan teaches us the limits of the Mitzvah of building a Mishkan – that even that, the noblest of human endeavors, must cease on Shabbat. Note R. Hirsch's words (from his commentary at the beginning of our Parashah):

The mastery of Man over matter, in getting, producing, changing, manufacturing the raw materials of the world, attains its highest meaning in the Temple. The world submits to Man, for him to submit himself and his world to God, and for him to change this earthly world into a home for the Kingdom of God, to a Temple in which the Glory of God tarries on earth. The building of the Temple is a sanctification of human labor, and in the context here, it is represented as being a combination of all those creative activities of Man, by the cessation of which – by cessation from all M'lakhah – the Shabbat is made into an acknowledgment of man's allegiance to God...

III. M'LAKHAH IN THE MISHKAN = M'LAKHAH ON SHABBAT

There is another significant connection between the Mishkan and Shabbat made by the Rabbis.

The Torah, in its initial command to avoid a certain class of activities on Shabbat, does not specify those actions. Rather, the Torah states: "Do not do any M'lakhah." (Sh'mot 20:10). This command is repeated in many other Shabbat-passages (31:14-15, 35:2, Vayyikra 23:3, Devarim 5:14). What is the meaning of M'lakhah? This key word – which is not only the principal phrase of prohibited work on Shabbat but also on the other Holy Days of the calendar (see Sh'mot 12, Vayyikra 23) – means something akin to "work" and is first used in the description of God's creation of the world (B'resheet 2:2-3). Nevertheless, it is not at all clear which type of work is prohibited on Shabbat. How do we distinguish prohibited actions

from those which are permitted on Shabbat?

The Gemara (Shabbat 49b) records a B'raita that indicates that the definition of M'lakhah is based upon its meaning in the Mishkan (see Tosafot *ibid.* who indicates that this is the reason that the two sections were juxtaposed in the Torah) – any activity which was an integral part of the construction of the Mishkan is defined as M'lakhah and is, therefore, prohibited on Shabbat.

This association, while explaining the significance of the Torah's juxtaposition of these two institutions on one occasion (most probably at the beginning of Parashat Vayakhel) does not explain our section, nor does it explain the passages cited below from Vayyikra. [As to why the operative and categorical definition of prohibited "work" on Shabbat should be derived from the Mishkan – that is a topic in and of itself, beyond the scope of this shiur].

IV, KEEPING SHABBAT AND REVERING THE MIKDASH

There are two other places in the Torah where Shabbat and Mishkan are linked – but, in those passages, the importance of both of these institutions is linked within one verse:

Et Shab'totai Tish'moru v'et Mikdashi Tira'u, Ani Hashem – You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am Hashem. (Vayyikra 19:30, 26:2)

Why does the Torah associate the observance of Shabbat with proper reverence for the Mikdash?

These questions lead us to a larger one regarding Shabbat as presented in our Parashah. Up until this point, the commands regarding Shabbat (in the Mahn and in the Ten Statements) were framed in terms of a "gift from God" (Mahn) or testifying to God as the Creator (the Ten Statements). In addition, the selection in the Ten Statements would seem to imply that Shabbat should ideally be observed by all of humanity, as God created us all and we should all testify to that fact. Yet, in our Parashah, Shabbat is clearly presented as a uniquely Israelite practice, one which does not "belong" to other nations. (Indeed, the Rabbis stated that a non-Jew should not observe Shabbat – see BT Sanhedrin 58b, MT M'lakhim 10:9). Besides this "nationalistic shift", several new terms are introduced in our Parashah:

* Chillul: A term with which we are most familiar, denoting a violation of Shabbat, is Chillul Shabbat. This term shows up, for the first time in a Shabbat context, in our Parashah – M'challeleha (everyone who profanes it – 31:14). Although translated "desecration", the word Chillul actually means "defilement" or "pollution". It is usually associated with holy people (e.g. Kohanim – Vayyikra 21:9), places (e.g. the Mishkan – Vayyikra 21:23) or sancta (e.g. Terumah – Bamidbar 18:32). How can such a term be associated with a time period, such as Shabbat? How can a day become polluted or defiled?

* Ot: Shabbat is a sign of a covenant between God and the B'nei Yisra'el. Although hand-T'fillin are called an Ot (Sh'mot 13:9,16), as was the blood to be placed on the doorposts in Egypt (*ibid.* 12:13), Shabbat was never previously referred to in this manner. Each of these two earlier occasions are "signs" which tell us (or remind us) about some other event (e.g. the Exodus) and might properly be called an Ot – but how can a day be considered a "sign"? What "other event" is signified here?

* Karet: the punishment of being "cut off from the people" for violating Shabbat. Until now, we have not been told what the punishment is for a violation of Shabbat – but why is it Karet – and why is it first mentioned here?

* laDa'at Ki Ani Hashem M'kadish'khem – "that you may know that I, Hashem, sanctify you." How does the "sign" of the Shabbat inform us that God sanctifies us? In addition, why mention this here, instead of earlier (e.g. during the Mahn narrative)?

In this shiur, I would like to suggest an additional reason for the Shabbat-Mikdash association (besides the two mentioned above – that even the building of the Mishkan ceases for Shabbat and that the activities involved in the construction of the Mishkan define "M'lakhah" for Shabbat) – one which would explain the appearance of these new terms in our Parashah.

V. THE PURPOSE OF THE MISHKAN

In order to understand the significance of this command regarding Shabbat given at the conclusion of the command regarding the Mishkan, we have to go back and review the purpose of the Mishkan:

v'Asu Li Mikdash, v'Shakhanti b'Tokham –

“Let them make a Mikdash for Me, that I may dwell among them” (Sh'mot 25:8).

The phrasing here is odd – it should have said “Let me dwell in it (i.e. the Mishkan)”. The implication is that by constructing this sanctuary, God will cause His presence to be manifest among the people.

This signals a fundamental change in the relationship between God and the B'nei Yisra'el – one which implies a unique statement not only about that relationship but also about the quality and nature of the community of the B'nei Yisra'el. Up until this point, God had made covenants, promises and oaths to our ancestors which He began to fulfill through the Exodus. God has commanded us and brought us close to Him in order to be a “kingdom of Kohanim and holy nation” (19:6) – but none of these events, commands or promises imply anything about our direct encounter-relationship with the Divine.

With the command to build the Mishkan, that relationship shifts from a purely command-driven one to an encounter-laden one. Besides sanctifying ourselves and becoming God's Kohanim (see Yeshayahu 61:6), we are now God's people and stand in His Presence – at least potentially. God “walks in our camp” (Devarim 23:15 – compare with B'eresheet 3:8).

How is this new relationship manifested? What indicates – both to us and to the rest of the world – that God is, indeed, “in our midst”?

VI. CHILLUL – INTRODUCING DEATH

Before answering this question, let's examine the difficult word “Chillul” which is first introduced into the lexicon of Shabbat in our Parashah.

Although, as mentioned above, Chillul is translated as “defile” or “pollute” (see BDB, p. 320), it has another meaning which may be informative in both the context of Mikdash and that of Shabbat.

A Challal (same root) is a corpse (see B'eresheet 34:27, Bamidbar 19:18). The Mikdash becomes defiled by bringing Tum'ah (impurity) into it (or by contact on the part of a person who is impure with the sancta). The most essential source of Tum'ah is a corpse (read Bamidbar 19 carefully); since the Mikdash is the focus of the encounter between the B'nei Yisra'el and the Living God (see Sh'mot 29:43), any contact with death (a Challal) serves to defile (Chillul) that encounter.

We can see this most clearly from the closing verses of Parashat Yitro:

Make an altar of earth for Me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause My name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. If you make an altar of stones for Me, do not build it with hewn stones, for by your sword upon them vat'Challalehah (you will defile it).

As Rashi points out (ad loc.), since the purpose of a sword is to shorten a man's life and the altar's purpose is to lengthen man's life, it is inappropriate to wield the “shortener” on the “lengthener”. This comment becomes more impactful when viewed against the backdrop of the previous promise, “...I will come to you and bless you.” The encounter with God (which, at this point in Sefer Sh'mot, is limited to the place and time of an offering and not extended to the entire community, as it is through the construction of the Mishkan) is defiled via contact with (an instrument of) death.

VII. KARET – VIOLATION OF THE SPECIAL NATURE OF AM YISRA'EL

The punishment which is introduced (along with death) into the Shabbat vocabulary in our Parashah is Karet – excision. Whatever Karet may mean, it implies some sort of disconnection or excommunication (by God) from the people of Yisra'el.

The first occasion where Karet is found (explicitly; it may be the notion behind Man's exile from Eden) is in B'eresheet 17.

Avraham is commanded to circumcise himself and all of the males in his household, and "If any male fails to circumcise the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off (root: K-R-T) from his people; he has broken My covenant." (17:14)

Karet here seems to be the natural result of communal disassociation – since this individual is unwilling to demonstrate his fellowship with the people of Avraham via circumcision, he is, indeed, separated from them.

The second occurrence of this punishment (although not mentioned explicitly until later, in Bamidbar 9:13) is failure to participate in the Korban Pesach (Pesach offering). Here again, the individual who doesn't see himself as a member of the people and does not identify with their destiny and history is excised from the people.

These two Mitzvot 'Aseh (which are the only two which carry this punishment for non-fulfillment), in combination, serve as rituals which affirm the individual's identification with- and allegiance to – the history (Pesach) and mission (B'rit Milah) of Am Yisra'el. (Rabbi Soloveitchik zt"l refers to two covenants – the B'rit Goral – covenant of fate – and the B'rit Yi'ud – covenant of destiny – shared by all members of K'lal Yisra'el.)

Put together, we see that Karet is a punishment given by God to someone who denies the special Godly character of the B'nei Yisra'el.

This can be seen in several of the Mitzvot Lo Ta'aseh which carry this punishment. Karet is the indicated Divine punishment for entering the Mikdash (or eating sancta) while in a state of Tum'ah; in the same way, performing some of the rituals unique to the Mikdash outside carry this punishment. See, for instance, earlier in our Parashah (30:33,38); using the special formula for the K'toret (incense) or Shemen haMish'chah (anointing oil) for your own purpose makes the violator liable for Karet.

One other example of this Karet-communal identity connection is found in the laws of Yom haKippurim. Someone who fails to afflict himself on that day of atonement is excised from the people. "Indeed, any person who does not afflict himself throughout that day shall be excised from among his people" (Vayyikra 23:29).

VIII. SHABBAT – TEACHES THAT GOD HAS SANCTIFIED US

We can now understand the enhanced nature of Shabbat as reflected in this Parashah – and the import of this new "terminology" we find here.

As opposed to the earlier presentation, Shabbat is presented here as a "sign" (Ot) – because, with the introduction of the Mishkan, God's Presence will become manifest among the people. Shabbat is the weekly sign of that constant Presence. Unlike the physical Mishkan, the existence of which has not always been assured in our history, Shabbat is an eternal (l'doroteikhem – for your generations) focal point and sign of our ongoing encounter with God. Note that unlike the earlier presentation (in Sh'mot 20), where we are told that in response to His "rest", God sanctified and bless the day of Shabbat (which is why we should avoid M'lakhah), here, we are just told that on the seventh day Shavat vaYinafash – He rested and had repose. We cease work on Shabbat out of a sense of shared repose with God, much more than just the commandedness implied in the earlier passages.

Since Shabbat is the sign of the special relationship between God and the B'nei Yisra'el and of the "shared experience" between the two (as evidenced by the twinned phrases "holy for you" and "holy to Hashem"), this special "place in time" must be guarded carefully.

The newly introduced phrase "Sh'mirat Shabbat" takes on a new meaning in this light. As opposed to the purely Halakhic meaning – avoiding M'lakhah (see BT Berakhot 20b and Rashi ad loc. s.v. biSh'mirah) – "guarding" Shabbat means that it is now a possession (as R. Hirsch points out) and a "closed circle" between God and the B'nei Yisra'el which must be protected. This also explains why Shabbat is not to be celebrated or observed by other nations; even though creation is a universal experience which should be declared by all creatures, the partnership-fellowship with God which is unique to the B'nei Yisra'el and which informs the meaning of Shabbat is not to be shared with others.

This sense of "Sh'mirah" is perhaps best expressed by Rambam in his prescription for the mood and mode just before the onset of Shabbat:

What is honor? – This is what the Sages have said, that it is incumbent on one to wash one's face, hands, and feet in hot water before Shabbat because of the honor of Shabbat, and he wraps himself in tzitzit and sits seriously, waiting for to greet the Shabbat, as one who goes out to greet the king. The early Sages would gather their disciples before Shabbat and wrap themselves (in the tallit) and say: Let us go out to greet the Shabbat king. (MT Shabbat 30:2)

Someone who violates the Shabbat by bringing mundane activities into this sphere is not only violating God's commandment – and failing to testify to God's creation of the world, he is also denying the special Godly nature of the Jewish people. This is as much of a Chillul as bringing impurity into the physical Mishkan.

Shabbat is a Mishkan in time, where Am Yisra'el and HaKadosh Barukh Hu encounter each other as the beloved and lover of Shir haShirim (the Song of Songs) (which explains the custom to read this beautiful love song every Friday evening at the onset of Shabbat).

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

Parshat Vayakhel: A Conspiracy to Forgive (Part II)

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PARASHAT KI TISA (Part II)

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

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

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

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

a) Moshe faces the people, punishing the worst offenders and motivating (or shocking) the rest of the people into doing teshuva (repenting).

b) Moshe faces Hashem, convincing Him to forgive the people and return His Presence to them. Hashem's withdrawal of His Presence in response to the people's worship of the egel (golden calf) meant the canceling of the Mishkan; the return of His Presence signifies the reinstatement of the Mishkan plan.

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

a) He shatters the Luchos (Tablets), symbol of the covenant with Hashem, in front of the people, halting their idolatrous merry-making; according to the Seforno, he aims to shock the people into teshuva.

b) He grinds up the egel and feeds it to the people. While most mefarshim (commentators) interpret this as a way of showing the avenging Leviyim which of the people had worshipped the egel (as the offenders' bodies would somehow be physically changed in an obvious way by their ingestion of the Egel dust, as the sota's [woman suspected of adultery] body is disfigured by ingestion of the sota waters), Ramban interprets this act as Moshe's way of forcing the people to express disgust for and absolute rejection of the egel: making their god into fertilizer is a most graphic way to accomplish this psychological goal.

c) He commands the Leviyim, those most devoted to Hashem, to execute the worst offenders.

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

Last week we sketched an approach to this question:

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

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

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

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE:

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

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

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

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

CONSPIRACY OF MERCY:

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

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

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

SHEMOT RABBA, PARASHA 42, SECTION 9:

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

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

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

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

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

MOSHE MOVES OUT:

SHEMOT 33:7-11 --

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

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

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

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

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

JUST LIKE FRIENDS:

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

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

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

MIDRASH TANHUMA, KI TISA, CHAP 27:

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

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

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

MAKING IT PERSONAL (I): SHEMOT 33:12-13 --

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

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

1) "You have not told ***ME*** whom You will send with ***ME***."

2) "You promised ***ME***"

3) "You said ***I*** found favor"

4) "If so -- if ***I*** have found favor"

5) "Let *ME* know Your ways"

6) "Then *I* will know You"

7) "*I* will find favor"

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

WHAT'S IN A NAME:

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

RAMBAN, SHEMOT 33:14 –

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

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

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

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

MAKING IT PERSONAL (II):

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Moshe realizes two things:

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

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

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

MOSHE TURNS THE TABLES:

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

RASHI, SHEMOT 33:19 --

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

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

How does Hashem respond to Moshe's audacious request?

SHEMOT 33:14 --

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

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

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

SHEMOT 33:15-16 --

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

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

IBN EZRA, SHEMOT 33:21 –

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

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

Moshe responds as boldly as he has throughout the parasha:

SHEMOT 33:15-16 --

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

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

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

How does Hashem respond this time?

SHEMOT 33:17 --

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BRING ON THE FIREWORKS:

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

SHEMOT 33:18 --

He said, "Show me Your glory!"

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

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

(A) -- SHEMOT 33:19 --

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

(B) -- SHEMOT 33:20 --

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

(C) -- SHEMOT 33:21 --

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

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

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

MOSHE PLAYS HARD TO GET:

Note in the pesukim above that the Torah uses the word "Va-Yomer" -- "He said" -- four separate times, at the beginning of each statement made by Hashem. As we have seen several times in the Torah, this is the Torah's way of indicating that between each of Hashem's statements, He pauses and waits for Moshe to respond, but Moshe remains silent. Moshe's silence should make us 'suspicious': what is Hashem adding each time in the expectation that Moshe will finally agree? We must look for the progression in Hashem's statements:

(A) -- SHEMOT 33:19 --

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

Hashem responds quite warily to Moshe's request for the full divine experience. Still playing the 'role' of angry and distant God, Hashem 'suspects' that Moshe plans to somehow take advantage of the situation when He reveals Himself. He promises to reveal His merciful attributes, but insists that Moshe is not to attempt to use this opportunity to gain mercy and forgiveness for anyone whom Hashem is not ready to forgive: "Although I am revealing My goodness to you, calling out the name Y-HVH before you [signifying Presence, the opposite of Hashem's abandonment of the people], I will forgive only those I want to forgive, and I will have mercy only on those upon whom I want to have mercy!"

Moshe, unsatisfied with this offer, does not respond; he wants more than just a personal experience of Hashem's merciful attributes, more than just the text of the prayer he should use next time. He wants this intimate experience of Hashem's revelation to offer him a context in which to seek mercy for those whom Hashem is, so far, unwilling to forgive. Hashem has agreed to reveal His merciful attributes, but refused to allow Moshe to grab the opportunity to gain forgiveness for Bnei Yisrael: "I will favor whom I want to favor; I will be merciful to those to whom I want to be merciful!" For Moshe, this is simply not enough, and ultimately, his silence wins out, as Hashem capitulates on this point and merely offers Moshe another challenge. He 'attempts' to put Moshe off by reminding him of his limitations as a human being, arguing that the intense Divine experience he has requested will kill him:

(B) -- SHEMOT 33:20 --

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

But Moshe maintains his stony silence. He knows of his limitations, but he also knows that Hashem can find ways to shield him from a fatal exposure to the Divine. Hashem gives in once again, promising to make this revelation the ultimate prophetic epiphany Moshe requests and also promising to shield Moshe from harm:

(C) -- SHEMOT 33:21 --

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

But -- incredibly -- Moshe is still not satisfied! He maintains a stubborn silence, waiting for Hashem to give in. Hashem finally does so once again, promising that this experience will culminate in the establishment of a new covenant with the people Moshe so stubbornly represents:

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

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

Moshe's gamble has been successful. Hashem has agreed to become an open participant in the "conspiracy of mercy." Moshe, acting on Hashem's own instructions, has 'worn Hashem down.'

Note, though, that despite Hashem's agreement to reestablish a relationship with the whole nation, He still focuses on Moshe alone: only Moshe is to ascend the mountain, unlike at the original revelation of the Decalogue (Ten "Commandments"), when various privileged groups ascended to different levels on the mountain. Hashem communicates in no uncertain terms that He is participating in this covenant only on Moshe's merit. The covenant comes completely through Moshe; the people have no role in the Divine experience accompanying the giving of the Torah this time.

MOSHE TAKES ADVANTAGE:

All that remains now is for the Torah to tell us how the event takes place:

SHEMOT 34:4-7 --

He carved out two tablets of stone like the first ones. Moshe arose early in the morning and ascended Mount Sinai as Hashem had commanded him. He took in his hands the two tablets of stone. Hashem descended in a cloud, stood with him there, and called out the name, "Y-HVH." Hashem passed before him and called out, "Y-HVH, Y-HVH, God of mercy and kindness, slow to anger and great in kindness and truth; maintaining kindness for thousands, forgiving sin, iniquity, and transgression, but who will not simply excuse sin, remembering the sin of the fathers [with punishment] upon the children to the third and fourth generation."

Many people think that we have just read the most important part of this story: Hashem's revelation of His attributes of mercy. But the most important moment is still ahead:

SHEMOT 34:8 --

Moshe *hurried* to prostrate himself on the ground and bow. He said, "If I have truly found favor in Your eyes, then let Y-HVH please go in our midst, though it is a stiff-necked nation; forgive our sin and transgression, and make us Your possession!"

We will never know what Moshe saw as he peeked through the cracks between Hashem's protecting 'fingers,' but what we can understand is that **Hashem has detonated a hydrogen-bomb of divine mercy (so to speak) right in front of Moshe. Harnessing the power of this unparalleled expression of divine mercy-energy, Moshe does exactly what Hashem had warned him not to do (but eventually capitulated to): he takes advantage of the situation to attain forgiveness for the people. As He articulates the Midot Ha-Rahamim, Hashem's mercy creates such a powerful wave of divine Presence that Moshe must be shielded from it to survive. Moshe seizes the opportunity to make his final attempt to attain forgiveness for Bnei Yisrael: Hashem, who has just proclaimed in more than a dozen different ways how merciful He is, simply 'cannot' deny Moshe's request for mercy! He simultaneously agrees to forgive the people and establish a new berit (covenant) with them:**

SHEMOT 34:10 --

He [Hashem] said, "I hereby make a covenant: I shall perform wonders before your entire nation, which have never been created in the whole world and among all the nations; THIS ****WHOLE** **NATION,**** in whose midst you are, shall see the acts of Hashem, who is awesome, which I perform with you."

Note that the argument between Hashem and Moshe about whose nation this is has not been settled. Moshe begins his final request with a focus on himself -- "If I have found favor in Your eyes" -- and calls the nation "stiff-necked" -- but continues by grouping himself completely with the people, even making it sound as if he needs forgiveness along with them: "May Y-HVH go with *us*", "Forgive our sin and our transgression, and take us as Your inheritance." But Hashem responds by reasserting that he sees Moshe as separate from the people: he calls the nation "Your [Moshe's] nation" and refers to them as a separate entity from Moshe ("The nation *in whose midst* you are").

A SECOND COVENANT:

Hashem next commands a string of mitzvot which will be the substance of the new covenant. These mitzvot are a combination of the post-Exodus mitzvot, such as the sanctification of firstborn people and animals, and the mitzvot of the original Sefer ha-Berit ("Book of the Covenant"), the legal section of Parashat Mishpatim. Note what is missing here but present in the mitzvot of Parashat Mishpatim: all of the interpersonal mitzvot (the laws of damages, treatment of slaves, kindness to orphans, converts, and others, theft, murder, judicial laws, etc.). Instead, all of the mitzvot repeated here relate to our responsibilities to Hashem. We don't have the time to discuss the details here, but the choice of these mitzvot is certainly not random: a close look suggests that in different ways, **these mitzvot all reinforce allegiance to Hashem** (especially, of course, those which command us to keep away from idol worship). The original covenant, shattered by the worship of the calf, must be recast in this new berit, through its repetition of key mitzvot of the original berit.

MOSHE, LIMNINAL FIGURE:

In the final piece of the parasha, a veil now covers Moshe's face, symbolic of what has taken place over the course of the parasha. Although Moshe has remained deeply loyal to Bnei Yisrael, the events of the parasha have driven a wedge between him and the people forever. He will always be on one side of this miniature mechitza/veil -- with Hashem -- and the people will always be on the other side. In a sense, although Moshe has won the 'struggle' with Hashem over forgiving the people, Hashem has won the struggle over whether Moshe is truly a part of the people, indistinguishable from them.

Ironically, although we would think that the major result of Hashem's forgiving the people is that He is now closer to them, what the Torah chooses to emphasize is that as a result of Hashem's having forgiven the people, He is now closer to *Moshe.* The second revelation of the Torah is given to the people, but they are absent from the event itself. The forgiveness of Hashem is granted to the people, but they are absent from this story as well. Moshe is not only the conduit for Hashem's interaction with the people, he has become one of the major reasons why Hashem chooses to interact with the people at all!

MALAKHI 3:22 --

"Remember the Torah of My servant Moshe, which I commanded him at Horev upon all of Yisrael, laws and statutes."

Our Torah is truly Moshe's Torah, given to us not only through him, but because of him.

Shabbat Shalom
Emphasis added

PARSHAT VAYAKHEL

Is Parshat Vayakhel simply a repeat of Parshat Teruma?
 Indeed, the details of the mishkan are practically identical in both parshiot - however, their manner of presentation is quite different.

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

Let's explain how this affects their order:

THE ORDER IN PARSHAT TERUMA

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

"And you shall build for Me a **mikdash** in order that I shall **dwell** among you" (see 25:1-8).

and closes with an almost identical statement:

"And I shall **dwell** among **Bnei Yisrael**, and I will be for them a God, and they shall know..." (see 29:45-46).

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

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

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

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

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

This **Shchina** unit concludes with the laws concerning the **kohanim** who are to officiate in the mishkan (chapter 28), and the seven day dedication ceremony (chapter 29). In chapters 30 and 31 we found an additional unit, that contained a list of peripheral mitzvot relating to the mishkan (and its protection from the shchina), including the 'mizbach ketoret' and the 'kiyor'.]

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

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

Intro - Shchina

Keilim - the vessels (chapter 25)

- * The aron - which will house the **luchot**
- The kaporet - from where God will speak to Moshe
- * The shulchan - on which the **lechem** will be placed
- * The menora - which will provide light

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

- * The yeriot
- * The krashim
- * The "parochet"

Chatzer - The courtyard (chapter 27)

- * The mizbeiach - the altar in front of the **ohel mo'ed**
- * The courtyard - "amudei ve-kelei ha-chatzer"

Kohanim (chapters 28 & 29)

- * The bigdei kehuna
- * The dedication ceremony (**milu'im**)

Misc. Topics (chapter 30)

The Builder - Betzalel (chapter 31)

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

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

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

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

Shabbat

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

Teruma

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

The Builder

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

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

- * the yeriot
- * the kerashim
- * the parochet

Keilim (chapter 37)

- * the aron
- * shulchan
- * menora
- * mizbach ktoret (from misc. above)

Chatzer (chapter 38)

- * the mizbeiach
- * the kiyor (from misc. above)
- * the courtyard

Kohanim (chapter 39)

- * their garments

Construction

- * assembly of the mishkan on the 1st of Nissan (40:1-33)

Shchina

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

As you review (and compare) these two tables, be sure to note their similarities and differences. Doing so, while considering this distinction between 'function' and 'construction', will help you

understand how and why the order in Vayakhel / Pekudei differs from the order in Teruma / Tetzaveh.

[Note as well that the mizbach ha-ktoret and the kiyor that were omitted (for thematic reasons) from the **Shchina** unit in Teruma / Tetzaveh are now included (for practical reasons) in Parshat Vayakhel - right where they belong!

[See also TSC shiur on Parshat Tetzaveh.]

WHY THE REPETITION?

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

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

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

THE MISHKAN EXCLUSIVE

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

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

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

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

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

(see Ramban, introduction to Sefer Shmot)

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

SPIRITUAL REHABILITATION

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

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

Moshe interceded once again (see 33:12-16), whereupon God declared his thirteen 'attributes of mercy' (33:17-34:8), thus allowing

Bnei Yisrael a 'second chance'. Nonetheless, the **Shchina** did not return automatically. To bring the **Shchina** back, it would be necessary for Bnei Yisrael to do something - they must actively and collectively involve themselves in the process of building the mishkan.

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

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

TEXTUAL PARALLELS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AN APPROPRIATE FINALE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BACK TO BREISHIT

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

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

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

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

- 1) on the **kaporet** as protectors of the **aron**, which contains the **luchot** (Shmot 25:22), and
- 2) woven into the **parochet**, the curtain which guards the entrance into the kodesh ha-kodashim - the Holy of Holies (where the **aron** and **kaporet** are located).

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

- 1) The **keruvim** of the **kaporet**, protecting the **aron**, indicate that the 'Tree of Life' of Gan Eden has been replaced by the **Torah**, represented by the **luchot** inside the **aron**.

["Etz chayim hi la-machazikim bah" - see Mishlei 3:1-18.]

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

=====

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. An important clarification

It is important that we clarify this tikkun aspect of the mishkan.

We do not claim that the mishkan itself constitutes a tikkun for chet ha-egel. Rather, the **manner** by which Bnei Yisrael must build it serves as a tikkun. Consequently, our analysis here stands independent of the controversy between Rashi and Ramban as to **when** God commanded the building of the mishkan. As we explained in our shiur on Parshat Teruma, Ramban (mishkan commanded **before** chet ha-egel) and Rashi (mishkan commanded **after** chet ha-egel) argue only whether the need for a **temporary** mishkan resulted from chet ha-egel. However, Rashi must agree that the basic concept of a mikdash is necessary to perpetuate the experience of Har Sinai, just as Ramban in Parshat Vayakhel must agree that the manner in which Bnei Yisrael ultimately construct the mishkan reflects their correction of the sin of chet ha-egel.

B. 'Shchina tamid'

We stated that Teruma / Tetzaveh describes the function of each object in the mishkan. It may be suggested that the actual function of each 'kli' relates to the constant presence of the **Shchina** in the mishkan.

The following table demonstrates the three levels of kedusha in the mishkan, according to the functions of the accessories contained in the three regions of the mishkan:

Kodesh Kodashim

- the aron - contains the 'luchot ha-eidut'
- the kaporet - from where God will speak to Moshe

Kodesh

- the shulchan - 'lechem panim lefa'nai **tamid**'
- the menorah - 'leha'alot ner **tamid**'
- the mizbach zahav - 'lehaktir ktoret **tamid**'

Chatzer ha-mishkan

- the mizbach nechoshet- 'lehakriv olat **tamid**'

The kodesh kodashim contains the luchot, the eternal testament to the covenant at Har Sinai. God **speaks** to Moshe from in between the **keruvim** (25:21-22), thus perpetuating the Har Sinai experience. In this domain, God 'comes down' to man; as such, no 'avoda' (ritual) is performed.

Outside this domain, in the kodesh, the kohanim perform their daily **avodat tamid** - lighting the menorah, offering the ktoret, and keeping bread on the shulchan.

Outside the mishkan is the chatzer (courtyard). Here, Am Yisrael collectively offer their **korban tamid** on the **mizbeiach**. [See shiur on Parshat Tetzaveh for a complete analysis.]

Significantly, each 'kli' requires an 'avodat **tamid**'. The word tamid means everlasting or continuous. Am Yisrael must perform their daily avodat tamid in order to deserve the continuous presence of the Shchina.

A relationship with God does not come automatically; it requires constant effort on the individual's part.

C. Beyond the parallels between the mishkan and Gan Eden (as noted in the shiur), there exist as well textual parallels between the mishkan and the story of Creation in the first perek of Sefer Breishit. For example, "va-techel kol avodat ha-mishkan..." (39:32) and "va-yar Moshe et kol ha-melacha..." (39:43) correspond to Breishit 1:31 and 2:1. Indeed, several Midrashim view the mishkan as the completion of the Creation process.

1. Based on the above shiur, explain this parallel.
2. The entire mishkan plan is repeated a total of seven times in Sefer Shmot: Teruma Tetzaveh - 25:10-30:38 / 31:7-11, Vayk.Pkd: 35:11-19 /36:8-39:32 /39:33-42 /40:1-16 /40:17-33. Connect this as well to Breishit 1 (the seven-day process of creation).
3. Relate this parallel to the location of mitzvot shabbat, which concludes the tzivui ha-mishkan unit (31:12-17) and opens the binyan ha-mishkan unit (35:1-4).

D. The highest level of hitgalut, experienced by Moshe (33:11) and Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai (Dvarim 5:4), is known as 'panim be-fanim' - literally, face to face. When God 'changed' His attributes to 'midot ha-rachamim' (Shmot 33:17-34:9), He states that man can no longer see His 'face', only His 'back' (33:20-23).

1. Find the allusions to the human face in the mishkan:
For example: menorah=eyes, shulchan=mouth, etc.
2. In your opinion, could this represent 'pnei Hashem'?
3. How would the aron fit within this parallel?
How about the function of the 'orot izim ve-elim' as a cover for the mishkan?
4. Accordingly, what is the significance of the 'masach le-petach ha-mishkan' and the parochet, and the general concept of limited entry into the mishkan?
5. According to Rashi, would this have been the structure of the mikdash before chet ha-egel? According to Ramban?

E. The theme of Sefer Shmot

Throughout our study of Sefer Shmot, we traced three primary topics: (1) the Exodus (Yetziat Mitzrayim, chapters 1->17); (2) Ma'amad Har Sinai (chapters 19->24, 32->34); (3) the mishkan (chapters 25->31, 35->40).

Based on the above shiur, we can suggest a fundamental relationship between these three sections:

- 1) Through the process of Yetziat Mitzrayim, God fulfills His covenant with the Avot (the theme of Sefer Breishit) to redeem Bnei Yisrael from their bondage in Egypt so as to facilitate their development into His special nation.
- 2) To become this special nation, God and Bnei Yisrael enter into a covenant at Har Sinai (chapters 19->24). Bnei Yisrael receive the commandments which will mold their national and individual characters, transforming them into God's special nation.
- 3) The mishkan, the symbol of the special relationship established at Har Sinai, becomes the vehicle through which that relationship can continue. Although chet ha-egel calls into question Bnei Yisrael's ability to survive the terms of this covenant, the new terms of the **second luchot** allow them to build the mishkan, to which the **Shchina** returns.

An important pasuk in Parshat Tetzaveh highlights this overall theme. As explained in our shiur on that parasha, chapters 25-29, which appear amidst God's instructions regarding the mishkan, form a distinct unit which we may call the '**Shchina** unit' (compare 25:8 with 29:45).

The closing pasuk of that unit - "And I shall **dwell** among the people of Israel, and I will be their God" (29:45) - is followed by an important summary pasuk: "And you shall know that I am the Lord your God who took you out of the Land of Egypt - **leshochni betocham** - in order to dwell among you; I am the Lord your God" (29:46).

This pasuk accurately reflects the overall theme of Sefer Shmot. It ties together (1) Yetziat Mitzrayim, (2) Matan Torah, and (3) the

mishkan with the concept of Shchina. God takes Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt in order that they become His nation, and this relationship reaches its highest level with the presence of the Shchina. This level was attained at Har Sinai, and it forever remains within Bnei Yisrael's reach through the 'heir' and closest substitute to Har Sinai - the mishkan.

PARSHAT PEKUDEI

Sefer Shmot ends triumphantly, with the Torah's detail of how the **shechina** returns to dwell upon the Mishkan. Nonetheless, this conclusion seems to include a 'sour note', for it also informs us that Moshe Rabeinu was not able to enter the Mishkan! [See 40:34-35.]

Did something go wrong? Was Moshe unworthy?

To answer this question, this week's shiur examines a textual parallel that will not only highlight the thematic connection between the Mishkan and Har Sinai, but it will also help us understand the relationship between the books of Shmot, Vayikra, and Bamidbar.

INTRODUCTION

A rather obvious parallel exists between the concluding five psukim of Sefer Shmot and Torah's description of how God's glory had descended upon Har Sinai, when Moshe ascended the mountain for the first forty days (see Shmot 24:12-18).

As Ramban explains (in his opening commentary to Shmot 25:1), this parallel lends irrefutable support to our understanding that a primary goal of the Mishkan was to perpetuate the special relationship between God and His people that had reached its apex at Ma'amad Har Sinai. However, when comparing these two sets of psukim, there also appears to be some rather significant differences. Therefore, we begin our study by examining this parallel.

THE PARALLEL

The final chapter of Parshat Pekudei describes how the Mishkan is assembled for the very first time on the first day of Nissan (in the second year /see 40:1-33). Then, upon the completion of its assembly, the Torah informs us of what happened:

"Then the **anan** (cloud) covered the **ohel mo'ed**, and **kvod Hashem** (God's glory) filled the **Mishkan**" (see 40:34).

Let's compare this pasuk with a very similar description of Moshe Rabeinu's ascent to Har Sinai (as described at the end of Parshat Mishpatim):

"And Moshe ascended the **mountain** and an **anan** covered the **mountain**, and **kvod Hashem** dwelled upon **Har Sinai**..." (24:15-16).

[It is highly recommended that you compare these two sets of psukim in their original Hebrew.]

This obvious parallel highlights how the '**ohel mo'ed**' has replaced 'the **mountain**' and, correspondingly, 'the **Mishkan**' has replaced '**Har Sinai**.'

In essence, the Mishkan will now serve a similar purpose as Har Sinai, as both serve as a medium whereby Bnei Yisrael can 'encounter' the **shechina**.

Furthermore, as we discussed in our shiur on Parshat Tetzaveh, in both instances a completely 'direct' encounter, although desirable, is impossible. Therefore, Bnei Yisrael must be shielded from God's Presence by the '**anan**'.

However, the next pasuk in each of these two sources seems to 'ruin' the completeness of this parallel. In contrast to Har Sinai, where Moshe actually **enters** the **anan**, as we are told:

"And **kvod Hashem** dwelled on Har Sinai and the cloud covered it for six days, and **God called to Moshe** on the seventh day... and Moshe came **inside** the **anan** and ascended the mountain" (24:16-18).

In Parshat Pekudei, we find that he cannot enter:

"And Moshe was **unable** to enter the **ohel mo'ed**, because the **anan** was dwelling upon it..."(40:35).

Certainly, had Sefer Shmot concluded with God '**calling**' upon Moshe to enter the Mishkan, just as He had '**called**' upon him to enter the **anan** at Har Sinai, this parallel would have been complete; Yet, for some reason, Moshe cannot enter the Mishkan! Has Moshe been demoted?

JUST TURN THE PAGE!

Even though there may be a temptation to search for a reason for Moshe's 'demotion' (possibly due to the events of "chet ha'gel"), the truth is that there is no 'demotion'. To understand why, we simply need to 'turn the page', i.e. to read the opening pasuk of sefer Vayikra, where we find the precise pasuk that was 'missing' at the end of Sefer Shmot:

"And [God] **called out** to Moshe, and God spoke to him from the **ohel mo'ed** saying..." (Vayikra 1:1).

In other words, God **did** call upon Moshe to enter the 'anan' that covered the Mishkan (just as He had called him at Har Sinai) - and indeed - the parallel to Har Sinai is complete!

[See commentaries of Ramban, Rashbam, & Ibn Ezra on Shmot 40:35 and on Vayikra 1:1; as they explain these psukim in a similar manner!]

The following table illustrates how the opening pasuk of Sefer Vayikra actually belongs at the conclusion of Sefer Shmot:

HAR SINAI (24:15-18) =====	MISHKAN (Shmot & Vayikra) =====
the anan covers the har	the anan covers the Mishkan
kvod Hashem dwells upon it	kvod Hashem fills Mishkan
Moshe must wait until called	Moshe cannot enter (Shmot 40:35)
God calls Moshe ("vayikra el...")	God calls Moshe (Vayikra 1:1)
Moshe enters the anan & God speaks to Moshe	Moshe enters the Mishkan & God speaks to Moshe

Even though our parallel is complete, we now have a new problem, i.e. if the first pasuk of Vayikra actually belongs at the end of Sefer Shmot, why does the Torah begin a new sefer in the middle of a story?

To answer this question, we must carefully study the remaining psukim at the conclusion of Sefer Shmot.

A DOUBLE FINALE

Our understanding of Vayikra 1:1 as the logical continuation of Shmot 40:34-35 works only if these psukim had indeed been the final psukim of the book. However, Shmot 40:35 is not the end of Sefer Shmot! Rather, there remain three more psukim (i.e. 40:36-38), which appear to 'interrupt' this logical progression. Let's read them:

"And when the **anan** lifted from the Mishkan, Bnei Yisrael would travel. If it would not lift, they would not travel... For the **anan** was upon the Mishkan during the day and fire would appear in it by night, before the eyes of Bnei Yisrael throughout all their travels" (see 40:36-38).

Even though all five psukim (40:34-38) relate to the topic of the **anan** that covered the Mishkan, these last three psukim discuss a topic which is quite different than the first two. While the first two psukim discussed Moshe entering the Mishkan, the last three discuss the effect of this **anan** on Bnei Yisrael's journey through the desert.

In fact, when you read these five psukim, the transition from 40:35 to 40:36 is rather disjoint. And when you consider the logical flow from 30:35 to Vayikra 1:1 (as we discussed above), then these final psukim seem to form an 'interruption'.

Furthermore, these final three psukim not only interrupt the natural flow of topic, they also appear to belong somewhere else!

You may recall from Sefer Bamidbar that we find a very similar set of psukim in Parshat Beha'alotcha, when the Torah describes how Bnei Yisrael were supposed to travel in the desert:

"On the day that the Mishkan was set up, the **anan** covered the **Mishkan**... and in the evening it appeared as fire... And when the **anan** lifted from the **ohel [mo'ed]**, then Bnei Yisrael would travel, and at the place where the **anan** rested Bnei Yisrael would set up their camp..." (See Bamidbar 9:15-23, compare with Shmot 40:17 & 40:34-38.)

Clearly, the opening pasuk (9:15) points us directly to Shmot chapter 40 - i.e. the assembly of the Mishkan and the 'anan' etc. The psukim that follow describe how Bnei Yisrael were to travel, with almost the identical words that we find at the conclusion of Sefer Shmot. Note as well how the next chapter in Sefer Bamidbar (i.e. 10:1-36) narrates Bnei Yisrael's actual departure from Har Sinai.

Thus, the three final psukim of sefer Shmot clearly 'belong' in Sefer Bamidbar, as one of the primary themes of that book is Bnei Yisrael's journey through the desert as they depart Har Sinai.

Now, we must explain why they are recorded 'prematurely' at the conclusion of Sefer Shmot.

TWO POINTERS

Note how our analysis thus far has shown that the final five psukim of sefer Shmot divide into two distinct topics, each of which points us to a different book of the Bible:

(A) 40:34-35 describes the **anan** dwelling upon the Mishkan, and continues directly into **Sefer Vayikra**;

(B) 40:36-38 describes how Bnei Yisrael journey through the desert in accordance with this **anan**, and continues directly into **Sefer Bamidbar**.

A very interesting structure emerges from this analysis. Sefer Shmot concludes with two 'pointers': one to sefer Vayikra (A) and one to sefer Bamidbar (B)!

This 'double pointer' may be significant as it highlights the return to God's original plan after the Exodus, despite the events of "chet ha'egel".

Recall the 'double purpose' of Yetziat Mitzraim, as discussed in our shiur on Parshat Shmot (re: God's hitgalut at the 'burning bush'):

- (A) - For Bnei Yisrael to receive the **Torah** at Har Sinai and
- (B) - to travel to (& conquer) the Promised Land.

As the events of chet ha-egel constituted a breach in the covenant between God and His People at Har Sinai, God consequently threatened to break His end of the deal, consequently taking His **shechina** away from the people (see Shmot 33:1-7). Had it not been for Moshe Rabeinu's intervention (see 33:12-17), Bnei Yisrael would not have received the remaining mitzvot [A], nor would they have been worthy of God's direct assistance in conquering the Land [B] (see 33:1-7 and our shiur on Parshat Ki Tisa).

Now that Bnei Yisrael have built the Mishkan and God's **shechina** has indeed returned, God once again commits Himself, as it were, to both elements of His original plan:

(A) In Sefer Vayikra, Bnei Yisrael continue to receive the special **mitzvot** that will reflect their special level of **kedusha**;

(B) In Sefer Bamidbar, Bnei Yisrael begin their travel towards the Promised Land, accompanied by God's **shechina**.

The **shechina**'s 'dwelling' upon the Mishkan thus yields a dual effect, reflected in the distinct themes of Vayikra and Bamidbar:

- (A) First and foremost, it affects the Mishkan itself, as explained and elaborated upon at length in sefer Vayikra. The **Shechina**'s dwelling upon the Mishkan allows man to approach God and offer korbanot (Vayikra / Tzav); forbids one's entry into the Mishkan when one is 'tamei' (Shmini, Tazri'a, Metzora); demands a special **kapara** (atonement) ritual every Yom Kippur and forbids the offering of korbanot outside the Mishkan (Acharei-Mot). Finally, this 'kedusha' emanates into all three

realms of existence: 'kedushat **adam**' (Kedoshim), 'kedushat **zman**' (Emor) and 'kedushat **makom**' (Behar).

[Iy"h, we'll discuss all this in our shiurim on Vayikra.]

- (B) Secondly, it affects the 'machaneh' - the camp of Israel, as reflected in sefer Bamidbar. The presence of the **Shechina** raises the entire camp of Israel to a higher level, as God travels, as it were, with them. The **camp** is arranged in a formation that surrounds the Mishkan (as described in parshiot Bamidbar and Naso), and Bnei Yisrael travel through the desert following the **anan** over the Mishkan (Beha'alotcha). Had Bnei Yisrael not sinned, Sefer Bamidbar would have concluded with the story of their conquest of the Land (Matot, Mas'ei). Instead, it explains **why** that generation didn't enter the land (Shlach, Korach), as well as the events of the fortieth year (Balak, Pinchas).

In this manner, the triumphant conclusion of Sefer Shmot thematically points us in two directions: one - to the laws of Sefer Vayikra, and two - to Bnei Yisrael's journey in Sefer Bamidbar.

ONE DAY IN THREE BOOKS

This interpretation can also help us appreciate why the events that transpired on the first of Nissan, the day when the Mishkan was first erected, are detailed in **three** different books instead of just one.

- (1) In Sefer Shmot (40:1-35), we find the commandment to assemble the Mishkan on the **first of Nissan**, and the details of how it was assembled on that day.

These details are found in Sefer Shmot, for they conclude the topic of building the Mishkan, as discussed in Parshiot Teruma, Tetzaveh & Vayakhel. Furthermore, Shmot concludes by describing how the **shechina** returned to the **Mishkan** on that day, signaling the its **return** despite the events of chet ha-egel, as discussed in Parshat Ki Tisa.

- (2) In Sefer Vayikra we find the details of the special korbanot offered on **yom ha-shmini**, and the tragic event which occurred on that day - the death of Nadav and Avihu. [See 9:1 thru 10:7.] According to most commentators, that day coincides with the first of Nissan.

As those events, as well as those special **korbanot** offered on that day, directly relate to many of the mitzvot found in Sefer Vayikra, the narrative of those events is recorded intentionally and specifically in Sefer Vayikra.

- (3) In Sefer Bamidbar (7:1-89), we find the story of the special gift brought by the **nesi'im** [the tribal leaders] to the Mishkan on the day of its dedication - six wagons and twelve oxen (see 7:1-4). As these wagons were used by the Levites to transport the Mishkan during their travel through the desert to the Land of Israel, this account appears in Sefer Bamidbar - the book that describes how Bnei Yisrael traveled thru the desert.

Hence, although all of these events took place on the same day - the first of Nissan, the Torah prefers to record them in three different books, corresponding to the theme of each sefer.

We will iy"h return to this theme in our study of both sefer Vayikra and sefer Bamidbar. Till then,

shabbat shalom
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Note the importance of the date of the first of Nissan in Shmot chapter 40. Relate God's selection and designation of this date to Parshat ha-chodesh / Shmot 12:1-20. Relate this as well to the importance of this date in Divrei Ha-yamim II 29:1-17.

B. Relate the main points of the above shiur to Shmot 29:45-46, specifically relating to the question if the purpose of Yetziat Mitzraim was to worship God in the desert or to inherit the Promised Land / see also Shmot 3:6-12. [Relate your answer as well to the main point of our shiur on Parshat Tetzaveh.]

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

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

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

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

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

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

These are some of the question 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