

Weekly Parsha VAYAKHEL
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The Torah reading of this week opens with a review and reiteration of the concept and laws of Shabbat. The rabbis of the Talmud used this juxtaposition of Shabbat and the detailed description of the construction of the Tabernacle to derive and define what type of work was forbidden on Shabbat. This is certainly very noteworthy as it forms the basis of understanding the values of Shabbat as they apply to us, especially as it provides a rest from the stresses of modern life.

However, there is another insight present in this discussion of Shabbat. The first word of the Torah reading indicates that it took place in a public venue with all gathered to hear Moshe explain this concept for them and for all their generations. We are thus informed that among the many facets of the diamond of Shabbat, there is not only the private one that is observed within the home and the synagogue but also the public one that can be seen and recognized and felt even on the street and in general society itself.

For a long period of time in Jewish history, over the past two to three centuries, both facets of Shabbat were seriously challenged within the Jewish world. With the growth of the Orthodox community, especially over the last 60 years, the pride in the Shabbat has been salvaged. Unfortunately, even though the majority of the Jewish people are not really Sabbath observers today, there are entire sections of the Jewish people that have preserved the Shabbat in all of its beauty and allowed its holiness to invest its homes and families.

The struggle for the public Shabbat is being waged here in Israel and wherever large Jewish communities exist in the world. There are entire neighborhoods in the Diaspora where the population is overwhelmingly made up of Orthodox Jews and the public Shabbat is observed and visible. In these Jewish neighborhoods there is practically no traffic on Shabbat nor any visible public desecrations of the holy day. However, here in Israel the public Shabbat is, and has been for the past century, to a strong bone of contention between the religiously observant and secular elements of Israeli society.

In cities such as Jerusalem and even Tel Aviv there is no public transportation that operates on the Shabbat. However, there is a constant demand from secular groups for this element of the public Shabbat to be eliminated and for the Sabbath to be confined to the home and the synagogue. But, it is the public Shabbat that is most necessary in Jewish society. It is the public Shabbat that defines us and reminds us of who and why we are and what our mission of service and devotion in life truly is. It is unfortunate that the public Shabbat like many other truly spiritual and apolitical values have been hijacked by politicians of all stripes and turned into contention and misunderstanding. I am confident, though, that the Shabbat will always win out, as it always has, even the public elements of Shabbat.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

The Beauty of Holiness or the Holiness of Beauty (Vayakhel 5779)
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

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 Haggada, 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.[3]

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.[4]

Rembrandt is known to have had a special affection for Jews.[5] 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.[6]

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.”[7] 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”).[8] 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.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayakhel (Exodus 35: 1- 38:20) **By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel – “And Moses assembled [vayakhel] all of the congregation of the children of Israel and said unto them: ...Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day shall be for you, a day of complete rest for the Lord. “ (Exodus 35:1–2)

The portion of Vayakhel opens with the command to keep the Sabbath. This raises once again that fundamental question of the very strange order of the last five portions of the book of Exodus, Sanctuary – Sabbath – golden calf – Sabbath – Sanctuary.

Thus the Torah commands us first to create a Sanctuary, to establish a center of the sacred, which is after all the purpose and ideal of a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But the sacred can easily be profaned – as history in modern life can testify – with holy wars, Iranian Khomeini-ism and fanatical stone-throwing and book burning. Hence, in the middle of the construction of the Sanctuary (the first two portions, *Teruma* and *Tetzaveh*, are dedicated to the Sanctuary) comes the travesty of the golden calf (the portion of *Ki Tisa*), which serves as an eloquent warning to subsequent generations not to pervert, or idolify, the holy. It then becomes perfectly logical, or rather psychological, to now return and conclude with the positive message of the Sanctuary as the Torah does in its two concluding portions of Vayakhel and Pekudei. And

the Sabbath is the beacon of light which teaches the essence of Judaism, preventing its perversion into a golden calf of idolatry.

The Sabbath is the most central pillar of our faith. It is no accident that the very first law which was given to the Israelites after the splitting of the Reed Sea – before the revelation at Sinai – was the Sabbath (Ex. 15:25; Rashi ad loc. citing Sanhedrin 56b), and the first law explained to a would-be convert (Jew by choice) is likewise the Sabbath (Yevamot 47). In all of my experience in attempting to expose Jews who have wandered far afield from their faith to the glories of their Jewish heritage, I have found that there is no more powerful introduction to returning to Judaism than the Sabbath experience.

And how does the Sabbath accomplish this? Certainly the delightful glow of the Sabbath candles, the warmth of the Kiddush wine, the familial and congenial togetherness of delectable Sabbath meals replete with angels of peace, praises to women, blessings of children, songs of holiness and words of Torah, all contribute to the creation of a special and unique day dedicated to physical relaxation, spiritual creativity and existential well-being.

But the Sabbath is more than that. It contains the essence of the Jewish ideal, the purpose for which we were chosen by God, and the mission which has the power to unite all of us in the pursuit of a common historic goal (*vayakhel*). The “oasis in time” evokes the three most seminal moments in Jewish history, three moments of past and future that more than any others serve to define our Jewish present. A description of these moments are to be found in each of three main *Amidot* (standing prayers) which are recited by observant Jews every Sabbath. On Friday evening we evoke and re-experience the creation of the world (“And God completed the heavens and the earth and all their hosts...”), on Sabbath morning we evoke and re-experience the revelation of the law at Sinai (“Moses rejoiced with the gift of his portion...the two tablets of stone he brought down in his hands”), and on Sabbath afternoon we evoke and attempt to experience the redemption (“You are One and Your Name is One” – and the prophet Zekhariah teaches that only “... on that day [of Messianic redemption and universal peace] will God be One and will His name be One”). Creation, revelation and redemption are the three pillars which form the bedrock of the Jewish message and mission.

Creation reminds us that there is one omnipotent creator, and the entire world consists of His limited, but still exalted, creatures created in His image: This serves to unite all individuals in a bond of inescapable unity. The very fact that we share the same Parent in Heaven means that we are all of us siblings on earth: whites and blacks, Israelis and Palestinians. The corollary of God the Creator is God the Redeemer, God who will not allow any of His children to be enslaved by any of His other children. Hence the two versions of the Decalogue as well as the Kiddush prayer define the Sabbath as both a memorial to creation as well as a memorial to the Exodus from Egypt. And the Sabbath remains an eternal reminder that any expression of the sacred which does not include sensitivity to every human being and respect for the freedom and integrity of each of God’s children can only lead to the perversion of the golden calf idolatry.

Revelation reminds us that there can be no freedom without structure, no respect for self without taking into account the needs of others, no love without law. The Torah remains our God-given blueprint for the kind of meaningful and sacred lives which lead to more perfect families and societies. In this sense, Judaism is a revolutionary concept, an idea and lifestyle which will not rest until human nature is perfected and the world is redeemed. Thus the final Sabbath *Amida* evokes that longed-for period when the world will be redeemed as a result of the Torah, which has the power and the purpose to perfect the universe under the kingship of God, in effect to revolutionize society.

The genius of Judaism lies in its ability to maintain the future ideal as an ever-present reality of our daily lives. In this way we can never forget what we are striving to accomplish, nor can we allow ourselves to become cynically disillusioned as to the possibility of our attaining it. Hence each workaday week of frustration and sadness is climaxed by a Sabbath – a taste of the World to Come, a glimpse into the longed-for period of peace and harmony. Each Sabbath reminds us of the pure taste of the Sanctuary, and prevents us from descending into the depths of golden-calf materialism and idolatry.

Post-Script

The story is told of a Hassidic rebbe who always rejoiced mightily upon sharing the Sabbath meals with his congregant-disciples. People who were bent over with burden and toil each week, whose brows were creased with anxiety and whose eyes were clouded with worry, would become almost miraculously transformed into tall and clear-eyed princes and princesses with their new-found freedom and faith at the advent of Shabbat. But alas, the picture would change during the “third meal” late on Shabbat afternoon. As the sun would begin to set, the songs would become somber and the mundane concerns would return to haunt the faces and backs of the Jews who were forced to return to reality. And the rebbe would look heavenwards and beseech: “How long, dear Father? Can you not redeem us now!?”

But at one particular Sabbath “third meal,” the rebbe’s eyes became animated with a strange glow. He banged on the table, crying out: “I have it, my beloved disciples. We shall force God’s hand, wage a rebellion against Heaven. We will bring about the redemption – now. The plan is breathtakingly simple. We will not recite the havdala [the prayer of “separation” which concludes the Sabbath and begins the week]. If the Sabbath never ends, redemption never ends. If there is no havdala, we will never have to return to the weekday world.”

The Hassidim were entranced. They danced and sang joyous tunes long past the appearance of three stars, long past the conclusion of the Sabbath in other congregations. But then their wives began looking for them; after all, the children had to be fed and bathed, clothes had to be washed, food had to be cooked. One by one each disciple embarrassedly returned to his family, leaving the rebbe as the lone revolutionary – until the rebbe’s rebbetzin entered the scene, complaining that the week had to begin, for there was much necessary work to do. With tears coursing down his cheeks, the defeated rebbe made havdala. A voice then came down from heaven: “Redemption shall come, and the world will experience a never-ending Sabbath. But this cannot occur until all of Israel really wants to be redeemed, really works to be redeemed, and until every Jew internalizes the message of the Sabbath and reaches out to every human being, making each day a Sabbath, creating a new world order, an eternal period of peace and love. Shabbat Shalom!

VaYakheil: Two Layers of Wisdom Rav Kook Torah

Two woven coverings stretched out across the roof of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle designated for worshipping God in the wilderness. The inner covering was a resplendent work of fine linen and colorful wool, dyed indigo, purple, and crimson. The outer covering was a simpler affair, made solely of goat wool.

One might think that the magnificent inner covering was the greater of the two. The Talmud, however, notes that weaving the outer wool covering required greater wisdom.

The Torah describes the women involved in spinning the colorful inner covering as being “wise-hearted.” Regarding the simpler, outer covering, on the other hand, the Torah indicates that the women employed an especially lofty wisdom. They were “women whose hearts uplifted them in wisdom” (Ex. 35:25).

What was this special wisdom? According to the Talmud in Shabbat 99a, the wool was washed and spun - while still attached to the goats!

Abstract and Practical Wisdom

The Sages compared the building of the Mishkan to the creation of heaven and earth. The details of how the Tabernacle was constructed correspond to the configuration of the universe, both physically and spiritually.

Rav Kook explained that these two Tabernacle coverings relate to two spheres of wisdom in the world, the basis of Divine influence and holiness. The first level of wisdom is abstract and general, while the second is practical and detailed. The abstract wisdom shines with brilliant flashes of the intellect and variegated hues of the imagination. This wisdom deals with inner, sublime matters, and therefore corresponds to the colorful inner covering.

Practical wisdom, on the other hand, would appear to be a simpler matter, serving primarily to protect and watch over the abstract concepts of the inner wisdom. But in truth, the practical wisdom of how to apply abstract principles in everyday life is profound and rare. Spiritual abstractions may be revealed through prophecy and Divine inspiration. But the practical Torah of mitzvot could only be revealed through the unique clarity of Moses’ prophetic vision.

“The women whose hearts uplifted them in wisdom” - these women were blessed with the gift of the highest wisdom. By virtue of its profound insight, their “hearts were uplifted,” thus elevating all feelings and emotions, all actions and deeds, all aspects of life. Their wisdom was so great that “they spun [on] the goats.” They were able to elevate the material world - even life’s vexing aspects, as symbolized by a mischievous goat - binding and tying it to the lofty eternal light.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 245-246)

See also: Vayakheil: The Dual Nature of the Tabernacle

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayakheil For the week ending 2 March 2019 / 25 Adar I 5779

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

With the Help of the Maestro

“Every man whose heart inspired him.” (35:21)

Apart from being Poland’s president, Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860-1941) is one of the greatest pianists of the last two hundred years. A large part of his success comes from his tremendous stage presence and charisma. In 1891 the pianist sets out on a tour of the United States, which brings him great acclaim. His name at once becomes synonymous with the highest level of piano virtuosity. But not everyone is equally impressed. After hearing Paderewski for the first time, Franz Liszt’s premier pupil Moriz Rosenthal comments with characteristic sarcasm: “Yes, he plays well, I suppose, but he’s no Paderewski”. America becomes the place Paderewski tours most often (over 30 times in 50 years) and his second home.

At one of his performances at the Metropolitan in New York City, there sits a lady named Sally Goldstein, together with her five-year-old son, Joey, neatly decked out in his tuxedo. Sally wanted Joey to be a pianist, so she thought it worth the high price of a ticket in the stalls for Joey to hear the master. Sally catches sight of an old friend in the row behind them and starts to talk to her. Joey becomes a little impatient and so he gets up from his seat and wanders towards the front of the theater toward a door marked NO ENTRY. Unable to read, Joey blithely saunters through the doorway. At that moment the lights started to dim. An expectant hush grips the audience. And out into the spotlights walks... Joey Goldstein! The crowd starts to murmur, but Joey, seeing the beautiful large Steinway in the middle of the stage, toddles over to it. He hikes himself up on to the piano stool, gives a casual flip of the tails to his tux, and with tremendous aplomb begins his favorite piece, “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.” “Plink plonk plink plonk, plink plonk plonk.” The crowd becomes agitated — where is Paderewski? Just then the master comes on stage, goes straight to the piano, and, placing his two relatively enormous hands on either side of Joey’s, he says quietly to the boy, “Young man, you’re doing fine. Just keep going!” And with this,

Paderewski begins to interweave the most sublime harmonies and counterpoint into Joey's plinks and plonks. They play on together. The piece rises to a crescendo, and as they strike the final chord the audience rises to a standing ovation. Paderewski leads Joey down to the front of the stage where they both bow deeply to the ecstatic applause of the audience.

"Every man whose heart inspired him."

From where could slaves who had spent hundreds of years in crushing captivity find the artisanal skills to construct something as fine and sophisticated as the Mishkan?

When a person tries to serve G-d, even though his efforts are about as sophisticated as a nursery rhyme, G-d says, "You're doing great! Just keep going!"

Out of our feeble attempts He builds the sublime. As long as we are sincere and humble the Maestro will elevate our paltry efforts into something we never dreamed possible.

§ Sources: based on the Ramban and a story heard from Rabbi Yirmiyahu Abramov

© 2018 *Ohr Somayach International*

OU Torah

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Culture, Counter-culture, and Creativity

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

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

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

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

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

We soon sat down together at a nearby bench and he began to share his story with me. Over the subsequent years I came to know him better and discovered that he had many "bones to pick" with Judaism and was in a perpetual rage against God. But that morning he confined his remarks to his disappointment with what he saw as the absence of fine art in the Jewish culture.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bezalel's genius lay in his ability to channel his substantial artistic gifts to the cause of the culture that was being constructed around him. He was not rebellious and certainly not withdrawn. He participated in a national project as part of the nation, and not as one whose role was to find fault. He was able to combine creativity with conformity, and that is no mean feat.

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

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

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

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

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

njop.org

Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message – Vayakhel 5779-2019

"Jewish Women and Jewish Destiny"

(Revised and updated from Vayakhel 5760-2000)

The vast majority of this week's parasha, parashat Vayakhel, deals with erecting the מִשְׁכָּן —Mishkan, the portable Tabernacle—in almost excruciatingly painful detail.

In Exodus 35:21, the Torah describes the various donations that were brought by the people as a “free-willed offering.” וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר נָשְׂאוֹ לִבּוֹ , Every man whose heart inspired him came, and everyone whose spirit motivated him brought the portion of G-d, for the work of the Tabernacle for all its labor and for the sacred garments. Exodus 35:22 adds that not only the men came, but that the men came with the women. Everyone whose heart motivated him brought bracelets, nose rings, rings, body ornaments, all sorts of gold ornaments. Emphasizing the people’s generosity, the Torah reiterates that everyone raised up an offering of gold to G-d.

The Hebrew expression, וַיָּבֹאוּ הָאָנָשִׁים עַל הַנְּשִׂים , that the Torah in Exodus 35:22 uses, is very unusual. Generally, these words would be translated as “the men came along with the women.” But according to the Ramban, this term implies that the men were secondary to the women’s special generosity. Apparently, since the jewelry enumerated in the verse was worn mainly by women, the Torah, in this manner, pays tribute to the women. For as soon as the women heard that precious metals were needed, they immediately removed their most precious possessions and rushed to bring them to the Tabernacle.

This verse, and the interpretation extolling the women for their devotion to G-d and commitment to the cause of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, is only one of a broad series of verses and midrashim that appear throughout the Book of Exodus that underscore the selfless devotion of the women to G-d. Particularly, when compared to the men, the women show remarkable faith throughout the ordeal of servitude in Egypt, the rescue from the Exodus, and the entire 40 year period of wandering in the wilderness.

As the story of the Exodus unfolds, the Torah, in Exodus 2:1 records, וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי, וַיִּקַּח אֶת בַּת לֵוִי , that a man went from the House of Levi and took for his wife a daughter of Levi. This, of course, is referring to Amram (the father of Moses, Aaron and Miriam), who marries his aunt Yocheved. Why does the Torah use the unusual expressions וַיֵּלֶךְ — va’yei’lech and וַיִּקַּח —va’yee’kach, he went and he took? Rashi cites the Midrash that maintains that Amram had separated from Yocheved, and lived apart from his wife. Now, the Torah informs us that there was a reconciliation, and Amram reunited with Yocheved his wife and entered into a second marriage with her.

Elaborating on the reason for the marital separation, the Midrash informs us that when Pharaoh decreed that all the male children who were born would be drowned, Amram, who was the head of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish High Court of Law, and the highest ranking leader of Israel at that time, separated from his wife, so that no children would be born who would be destined to be drowned.

Because of Amram’s position and prestige, most of the Jewish husbands did likewise and separated from their spouses. According to the Midrash, Amram’s young daughter, Miriam, then only 6 years old, approached him and said, “Father, you are worse than Pharaoh! Pharaoh only decreed that the male children should die, and you have decreed that both male and female children will never be born. Pharaoh only decreed that the children die in this world, and you have decreed that they will not have both this world or the next. Pharaoh is wicked, and it is doubtful whether his decree will be fulfilled. But you, Amram, are a righteous person and there is no question that your decree will be fulfilled.”

When Amram heard Miriam’s rebuke, he was filled with remorse. He brought Miriam to the Sanhedrin, where she repeated the arguments that she had presented earlier to her father. The Elders of the Sanhedrin said, “You Amram, were the one who discouraged us from being together with our wives, now you must go and publically announce that the men must return to their wives.” Amram contritely rejoined his wife. Little Miriam, of course, is depicted as having played a singular heroic role.

A second instance of heroic women is recorded in Exodus 15. After the Jews crossed the Red Sea, Moses led the people in the famous song, אֶזְרָא —Az Ya’shir. After the men concluded their song, Exodus 15:20 describes that the women also burst out in song: וַתִּשְׁחַח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אֶחָדָה . And Miriam the

Prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrels in her hand and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

And Miriam answered them:

Sing to the Eternal for He is gloriously sublime, the horse and his rider hath He hurled into the sea!

Rashi, once again citing the Midrash, notes that the righteous women in that generation were so confident that G-d would perform miracles for them, that they brought timbrels with them from Egypt, so they would be prepared to sing to G-d once the great salvation had taken place! In stark contrast, the men were fearful every step of the way and complained to Moses, arrogantly demanding why he had brought them out of the “wonderful” land of Egypt only to be drowned in the sea, or destroyed by the Egyptians.

In Exodus 32, the Torah once again describes a contemptible rebellion against G-d—the sin of the Golden Calf.

When the people mistakenly concluded that Moses’ return from Mount Sinai had been delayed, they assembled before Aaron and demanded that he make a “new god” for them. Scripture, in Exodus 32:2, relates that Aaron tried to delay the people and divert them from their nefarious intentions by instructing them: פָּרְקוּ נִזְמֵי הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵי נְשֵׁיכֶם בְּנִיכֶם . “Pull off the golden pendants which are in the ears of your wives, your sons and your daughters and bring them unto me.”

The Midrash indicates that Aaron calculated that, through this action, he would be able to stall the people. Had he instructed the men to bring their own gold and silver, they would have brought their valuables immediately. But, by telling them to bring their wives’ jewelry and that of their sons and daughters, he knew that this would cause delay.

When the women heard the demands of their husbands, they refused to take part in the outrage! The commentators note that the expression וַיִּתְּפְּרוּ —va’yit’par’koo—and they removed their jewelry—implies breaking off, indicating that when the women refused to give their jewelry, the men broke off their own jewelry from their own ears, and in their passion to defy G-d ripped their ear lobes in the process.

Toward the conclusion of this week’s parasha, Vayakhel, Exodus 38:8, the Torah describes the manufacture of the כִּיּוֹר —kee’yor, the Laver, the washing basin found in the Tabernacle. וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת הַכִּיּוֹר נְחֹשֶׁת, וְאֵת כַּנּוֹ הַנְּחֹשֶׁת . And he [Moses] made the laver, the sink, of copper, and the frame of it of copper, of the mirrors of the women who crowded at the entrance of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle.

Rashi, once again citing the Midrash, says that the Jewish women possessed mirrors of copper, which they would use to check their appearance as they adorned themselves. And, when they offered these mirrors of copper for the building of the Mishkan, Moses’ initial reaction was to reject them, since they were objects of vanity. But, the Holy One, blessed be He, instructed Moses: “Accept them! These [copper mirrors] are dearer to me than all the other contributions, because through them the women reared those huge hosts in Egypt.”

Rashi explains, that when the Israelite husbands would tire due to the crushing labor imposed on them by Egypt, the women would bring them food or drink to the fields where the men worked, and induce them to eat. The women would then take the mirrors, and each one would gaze at herself in her mirror together with her husband, saying endearingly to him, “See, I am more handsome than you!” Thus they awakened their husband’s affection, and subsequently became the mothers of many people. As it says in Song of Songs (8:5), “Under the apple tree I awakened thy love.” This is what is referred to when it says, Exodus 38:8, “The mirrors of the women who reared the hosts.”

Clearly, had it been up to the men, the Israelites would probably, to this very day, still be enslaved in the land of Egypt, unworthy of redemption. In Numbers 26:64, scripture relates, וְאֶהְרֹן, וְאֶהֲרֹן , that when they counted the Jewish people after 40 years in the wilderness, except for Caleb and Joshua, not a single male of the previous generation survived, because they had all died as punishment for the sin of the spies.

Rashi notes the emphasis in the verse that “No man of them that Moses and Aaron numbered survived,” but that the women of that generation did survive, because they held the Promised Land dear. The men, in

Numbers 14:4 cried out, “Let us appoint a chief and return to Egypt,” while the women declared, Numbers 27:4, “Give us a possession in the land.” The women loved the land of Israel; the men were ready to return to Egypt.

The key role of women in the redemption, may be summed up by the remarkable statement of the Talmud, found in Sotah 11b, בְּשֵׁכֶר נָשִׁים צְדָקָנִיּוֹת שֶׁהָיוּ בְּאוֹתוֹ הַדּוֹר, נִגְאָלוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם, In the merit of those righteous women who were in that generation, the Jewish People were redeemed from Egypt.

There are those who argue even further and maintain that not only was the generation of Egypt redeemed in their merit, but that each subsequent generation has been redeemed because of the righteous women of that generation. And, if we ourselves are to be redeemed in our generation, much of it will depend upon the commitment of the women in our generation to keep the faith, to keep the men faithful, to inspire the children with faith, and to create a generation devoted to G-d and His Torah.

This wonderful testament to women is even more remarkable because it was authored long ago by men! The Midrash, the legendary interpretation of the Bible, that is at least 2,000 years old, represents the feelings and values of the exclusively male hierarchy of Jewish leaders who did not shrink from depicting the men of the generation of the Exodus as being unworthy of redemption. And yet this “chauvinistic” male hierarchy was not at all reluctant to hail and praise the role of the ancient Israelite women, not only in the salvation of the Jews from the slavery of Egypt, but also promoting the crucial role that women would play in future redemptions, such as Chanukah and Purim, and in the times of the “Ultimate Redemption.”

May you be blessed.

Please Note: This Shabbat is Shabbat Parashat Shekalim. On this Shabbat, an additional Torah portion, known as Parashat Shekalim, is read. It is the first portion of four additional thematic Torah portions that are read on the Shabbatot that surround the holiday of Purim.

This week's supplementary Torah reading is found in Exodus 30:11-16 and speaks of the requirement for all the men of Israel, aged 20 and above, to bring a half-shekel in order to be counted as a member of the People of Israel. In later years, these shekels were donated to the Temple in anticipation of the festival of Passover, when funding for the daily sacrifice had to be renewed.

Drasha Parshas Vayakhel - Letting Go Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The Mishkan is completed in these portions, and the Torah recaps the stunning accomplishment. “These are the reckonings of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle of Testimony that was reckoned through Moshe’s bidding. And Betzalel son of Uri, son of Chur, did everything that Hashem commanded Moshe” (Exodus 38:21-22). The Torah calls the Mishkan a Tabernacle of Testimony. To what is it testifying? Architectural ability? A fund raising phenomenon? Or perhaps something even loftier?

Rashi tells us that the Mishkan, in fact, testified that Hashem forgave the Jewish people for the sin of the Golden Calf.

It always has bothered me. Forgiveness comes with a correction of a misdeed. Obviously, each account needs direct redress. Stinginess is forgiven with acts of munificence. Sins of uncontrolled rage are forgiven when the transgressor acts with undeviating gentleness.

What connection does the building of the Mishkan have with the forming of the Golden Calf? Why is the completion of the Mishkan a testimony to absolution?

The second verse is also disconcerting. “Betzalel did what Hashem told Moshe.” Did he not do what Moshe told him? It seems that he jumped the chain of command. It should have stated that “Betzalel did what Moshe told him.”

Dr. Abraham Twerski, in his book *Do Unto Others*, relates an amazing story that he personally experienced. Early in his career, Dr. Twerski would teach students by having them accompany him through psychiatric institutions. There he would introduce the young observers to the live subjects, rarely seen outside textbooks.

In a chronic care facility, Dr. Twerski pointed out a most difficult case, a male patient whom no doctor was able to cure. The man was mute and would not communicate. He had entered the facility 52 years earlier and was suffering from strange schizophrenic-like symptoms. Immediately following breakfast he would go into the corner of the large community room, contort his arms, palms outstretched in an upward manner and stand there until lunch. After lunch, he would resume his position until bedtime. No treatment nor medication, shock therapy, or cajoling was able to get the man off his feet. His condition was so severe that due to standing all day he developed excessive accumulation of serous fluid in tissue spaces in his feet.

On one visit, a student asked if he could talk to the patient. Dr. Twerski agreed, while wondering what the young doctor could offer that had not been explored by the experts.

After a brief conversation the man stared blankly at the young doctor. But then the student assumed the man’s exact contorted position and said to him, “I’ll stand here like this. You can go sit down.” The patient smiled, proceeded to a couch, and for the first time in 52 years he actually sat down!

Dr. Twerski surmised that the patient felt he was holding up the world. Without him, it would collapse. (He had no explanation for the meal or bedtime gaps.) The moment the patient was convinced that someone could carry the mission as well, he relaxed.

Commentaries explain that the sin of the Golden Calf began when Moshe did not return from Sinai on time. The minute that 40 days elapsed and Moshe was missing the nation panicked. No one, they felt, could lead them but Moshe, so they created a false deity. And they prayed and danced to a new-found god. The Mishkan, however, was an antidote. Moshe charged Betzalel with the tremendous task, and he accomplished it. In fact, our sages explain that he even challenged Moshe in certain directives, and Hashem concurred with him! Betzalel did what Hashem wanted exactly the way it was told to Moshe. He had the ability to perform as if he received the directive himself! That is the goal of mesorah. Tradition has the next generation holding the torch though passed from previous leaders as if it were passed from the Almighty Himself. The nation saw that it is possible to continue despite the former leader holding up the world every step of the way. There is room for young leadership to carry on the directives of the elder generation. That is the way the Torah carries on. And that is the way we hold up the world.

Good Shabbos

Dedicated in memory of George Fisch and Rebecca Stein by Mr. and Mrs. Lionel Fish

Text Copyright © 1999 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc.

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

Drasha is the e-mail edition of FaxHomily, a weekly torah facsimile on the weekly portion. FaxHomily is a project of the Henry and Myrtle Hirsch Foundation

Drasha © 2018 by Torah.org.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayakhel The Name a Person Gives Himself Is His Most Important Name

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

What does it mean that every person has three names? I saw a fundamental idea in the sefer *Milchamos Yehudah* that we have mentioned in the past. The pasuk mentions in Sefer Bereshis “...And all that Adam called them, every living soul; that became its name.” [Bereshis 2:19] Adam gave names to all the animals. Chazal say that this demonstrated tremendous wisdom, to be able to name appropriately each creature. We have said in the past that when Chazal say that Adam

named all the animals, they do not mean that Adam merely looked at an ox and said "Well, I will call this a shor; this is a donkey I will call it chamor; this is a dog I will call it kelev." Rather, Adam was capable of coming up with names that defined the essence of the animal.

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

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

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

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

Ultimately, a person must take responsibility for himself. His parents have a role and society has a role and a person can say that he received certain personality characteristics from his parents or his friends – for bad or for good – but ultimately you are responsible for who you become.

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

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

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

If you want to wear the heritage of your lineage proudly, you need to do something with it. In Parshas Ki Sisa, Bezalel is still undefined so Rashi

does not tell us who he really was. Now that we see what Bezalel has done, now is the appropriate time to say Bezalel can indeed proudly claim his *yichus* and say "I am an *oor-Einekel* [great grandson] of Miriam the prophetess."

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

Rav Frand © 2018 by Torah.org.

torahweb.org

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Maintaining the True Beauty of the Mishkan

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

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

There is a third interpretation of the word "v'anvehu" that encompasses the feelings that the Jewish people had for Hashem at the time of *krias Yam Suf*. Chazal in *meseches Shabbos* suggest that "v'anvehu" is related to the words, "Ani V'hu", "I and him." The Jewish people praised Hashem by saying that they wanted to emulate him. By following in Hashem's ways, we express our complete love and devotion towards Him. We imitate those whom we admire. There are many ways we emulate Hashem, such as being kind, patient, and forgiving. There is one *mitzvah* that the very essence of which is to follow in Hashem's ways. We observe *Shabbos* just as Hashem observed the first *Shabbos*, following *yetzias Mitzrayim*, as we became His Nation. What greater way to express our following in His ways than to observe His *Shabbos*. As we construct a beautiful Mishkan for Hashem's Presence to dwell in, our ultimate goal is to express our love for Him. What greater way to declare this love than by observing His *Shabbos*? A Mishkan that would be built on *Shabbos* would be nothing more than a fancy man-made

structure that did not demonstrate our love for Hashem. As we build an exquisite Mishkan to fulfill "V'anvehu," we reach the culmination of yetzias Mitzrayim. We do so by first observing Shabbos as we follow the model of our Beloved who rested on Shabbos. By doing so, our beautiful Mishkan is truly our expression of Ahavas Hashem.
Copyright © 2019 by TorahWeb.org.

www.israelnationalnews.com

Money is like fire

Rabbi Dr. Eliyahu Safran

It is a challenge to reconcile the possibility of atonement being realized using worldly and possibly defiled coins.

The Noam Elimelech explains that money is like fire; it can be used to create, protect and nourish, or it can be used to harm and destroy.

How to balance wealth, material beauty, comfort and desire with spirituality?

How we manage our inherent materialism speaks to how we manage the fundamental tension between the physical and the spiritual. It is not surprising that how we embrace (or don't embrace) materialism speaks directly to our sense of good and evil. Unfortunately, too often the culture in which we find ourselves pushes us in the direction of materialism rather than holiness. Our Torah portion speaks to the tension between the material and the holy.

To be counted in the first census, each male twenty years or older was to perform the mitzvah of donating a half-shekel coin. "This shall they give – everyone who passes through the census – a half-shekel of the sacred shekel, the shekel is twenty geras, half a shekel as a portion to Hashem. Everyone who passes through the census, from twenty years of age and up, shall give the portion of Hashem." (Shemot 30:13-14)

This is, at first glance, a curious method of taking a census. Why not simply... count? But when it came to the Jewish census, the people weren't to be counted as mere ciphers, as sheep or some number of inanimate objects. When a census was to be taken, the people were counted by inference. Their number was determined by having each contribute a half a shekel and then the coins would be counted to determine the census!

Our numbers then depended on our coinage! It wasn't enough to "stand up and be counted". Our contribution was the determinant of our presence.

Zeh yitnu - this shall they give! Rashi quotes a Midrash Tanchuma depicting God as showing Moshe a coin made of fire; weighing this required half a shekel and instructing Moshe, "This is what they shall give." The Midrash elaborates that Moshe had difficulty envisioning what this half a shekel looked like and so God had to show him. This, God tells Moshe. This is what they shall give.

We are left to contemplate an obvious question, why was Moshe having difficulty visualizing, understanding what God is expecting each to give. Why would the adon ha'neviim – the Father of Prophecy – have trouble visualizing what a half a shekel looked like? It's true, this is not the only time Moshe had trouble visualizing something. He struggled to picture the Menorah that was to be erected in the Mishkan. We understand that, as the Menorah had many detailed and intricate parts as outlined in Terumah. Likewise, we understand his difficulty in visualizing the many forms of impure sheratzim (insects and reptiles) listed in Parashat Shemini. But these things were intricate, never seen before. How hard could it be for Moshe to visualize a coin?

Rav Simcha Zissel, Chevroner Rosh Yeshiva, brings a perspective that resonates in our materialistic, over-commercialized, money-oriented time. He teaches that Moshe could well understand (and visualize) that there are things in the world that are categorized as cheftza shel mitzvah – things used to perform mitzvot. Some of these objects are natural products, such as an etrog or lulav. Others are "manufactured" like the cow's hide made ready to receive the sacred words of a Sefer Torah, tefillin, or mezuzah. The process of rendering cow hide to parchment is

a man-made endeavor but the sofer, with his sacred kavanah, his focus and holy endeavor transforms the hides and the strokes of ink he inscribes on them to become cheftza shel mitzvah.

But a coin?

How is a coin, the epitome of materialism, to be transformed into a holy thing? How can a coin, minted by secular – often ruthless, oppressive and certainly non-sacred – governments and authorities become cheftza shel mitzvah? And let's also keep in mind that these coins, used to count everyone under God's canopy, were also intended to l'chaper al nafshoteichem - to atone for your souls.

It is a challenge to reconcile the possibility of atonement being realized using worldly and possibly defiled coins.

It was this challenge that Moshe struggled to comprehend; that coins could be a cheftza shel mitzvah, not what the half-shekel looked like in their physical form. And so, God affirms to him that yes, indeed, even a coin can be uplifted and sanctified to the point of not only counting souls (and in doing so taking note of the significance and uniqueness of each Jew) but in aiding in their atonement. The very coin that is required for every earthly, physical, and mundane exchange is also capable of spiritual currency!

We are familiar with the balance of good and evil, of man's physicality and spirituality, but to see in physical currency the very same tension and promise? That seems to be a step too far! Money is the root of all evil – we know this from experience and from adage. How can it also be a means of holiness? And yet, this is what God describes as kesef ha'kipurim. "You shall take the silver of the atonements from the Children of Israel," God says, "and give them for the work of the Ohel Moed...to atone for your souls."

Lucre is what Hamas pays terrorists who murder innocent Jews. It is the lubricant which oils drug transactions, turning a generation of children into addicts. It is the reason an elderly shopkeeper is held at gunpoint on a lonely night. How can this same evil bring man closer to God? How can this mere coin, a half-shekel mind you, not even an entire shekel! be used to be counted as an entity before God even as it is also used as "a remembrance before Hashem ... to atone for your souls"?

This question certainly must have tormented Moshe and it is the reason God showed him a coin made of fire.

Is fire good or bad? Constructive or destructive?

Without question, fire can be the most destructive element in the world. Even so, it can provide warmth and protection; with it, we can prepare food that is delicious to eat and not merely sustenance for our bodies; with it, we lit the flame of the holy sacrifices on the Temple Mount.

The world does not exist without fire.

Therefore, the Noam Elimelech compares money to fire. It can be thrown at our feet to "reward" demeaning behavior or it can elevate the essence of our goodness and generosity. It is essential to expressions of tzedakah and chesed.

God's command that to count the children of Israel each is to give the half shekel begins, ki tisa. That is, "when you count". But ki tisa means, literally, "when you raise up." The Talmud in Bava Basra 10b recounts a conversation between Moshe and God, "How can the Jews rise to a higher level as a nation?" Moshe asks. God responds, Ki tisa – "when you raise them up by collecting charity from them." In other words, money is no different from the essential aspects of life, earth, water, fire. There is no way to make one's way in the world without it. The challenge is to make one's way with it in a way that is dignified, spiritual, caring and good.

Money can be the source of evil. It can also be used to feed the hungry, clothe the needy, educate the forgotten. As with all other aspects of life, God wants us to engage in the world for good. So, He teaches Moshe to inculcate in the Jewish psyche ki tisa – the notion that money can be used to raise up, to raise themselves and others. But to remember that, as with fire, left untended, forgotten, or dealt with unthinkingly, money can bring an inferno of destruction and pain.

We call charity tzedakah because "tzedakah" is derived from tzedek, righteousness. Giving is the right thing to do. It is not a choice; it is not merely an ethical response. It is just, it is right. This is why Rabbi

Soloveitchik notes that halacha requires that the poor also give tzedakah to one another. Neither actually “gains” much, but in the giving, in the act of performing the mitzvah, they are raised up.

And to that the Kotzker adds, why did God show Moshe a coin of fire? To teach that all giving of tzedakah, as all acts of giving to others, should always be done with “fire”, with enthusiasm and passion. Not as an obligatory act but with an unstoppable inner need to raise others while raising oneself.

In giving, we are counted among those who stand up and raise up. Rabbi Dr. Elyahu Safran is a long time educator, author and lecturer. His highly acclaimed “Something Old, Something New - Pearls from the Torah” has recently been published by KTAV. His “Kos Elyahu - Insights into the Haggadah and Pesach” was translated into Hebrew and published by Mosad Harav Kook. His writings regularly appear on the web.
7 חדשות ערוץ © Arutz Sheva

Shema Yisrael Torah Network
Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Vayakhel

פרישת ויקהל תשע"ט

ביום השביעי יהיה לכם קדש שבת שבתון לד'

But the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem. (35:2)

The Zohar HaKadosh (Parashas Korach) writes: “The Shechinah, Divine Presence, did not move away from Klal Yisrael on Shabbos and Yamim Tovim – even on Shabbosos of chol, weekday.” Obviously, the term Shabbosos d'chol, weekday Shabbos, or Shabbos weekday is fraught with ambiguity. Shabbos and chol are incongruous to one another. How do they weave together to create a Shabbos of weekday? Each in his own inimitable manner, the commentators address this Zohar. In U'Masuk Haor, Horav Shlomo Levenstein, Shlita, cites a number of expositions. I have selected a few that offer food for thought.

The Pri Megadim (Kuntros Mattan Secharan shel Mitzvos) posits that Chazal are addressing Tosfos Shabbos, the supplemental minutes that we add either preceding or at the end of Shabbos. Hashem considers this Shabbos a supplementary sanctification of chol, weekday, and He graces it with His Divine Presence.

Likutei Tzvi cites the divergent attitudes of Bais Shammai and Bais Hillel concerning their preparations for Shabbos. The Talmud (Beitzah 16a) says that the proponents of Bais Hillel waited until Erev Shabbos, relying on Hashem to provide them with the finest and best foods l'kavod, in honor of, Shabbos. The proponents of Bais Shammai, however, spent the entire week preparing for Shabbos. Whenever they came upon a delectable food, they would purchase it and set it aside for Shabbos. If, later on during the week, they chanced upon something better, they would sell the first item and purchase the second. Thus, their entire week was infused with a Shabbos-like atmosphere. This epitomizes preparation for a mitzvah in a manner such that the hachanah becomes part of the mitzvah.

Furthermore, explains Likutei Tzvi, one who lives in such abject poverty that he does not have the funds necessary to purchase tzarchei Shabbos, his Shabbos needs, and has no incoming money with which to repay a loan – he should do without the Shabbos foods and not borrow money which he is unable to pay back. (This should be true for all other borrowing purposes.) Such a person, who is spending his Shabbos without the positive accouterments to enhance the sacred day, might think that the Shechinah does not repose over his Shabbos celebration; he is wrong. It may be a Shabbos shel chol, a Shabbos that appears like a weekday, but, in Hashem's eyes, it is not so.

Last, Likutei Tzvi suggests that the Zohar is addressing those Jews who are coerced not to observe Shabbos to its fullest. For example, soldiers in the Czar's army were forced to profane Shabbos kodesh, kashrus and other Jewish precepts. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, said that if they absolutely must consume non-kosher food (such as meat), they should not suck the bones. In other words, eat only what is necessary for survival. Likewise, on Shabbos, when one is required to do something as a soldier, he has no alternative but to do it. This does not, however,

constitute a dispensation to disregard the holy Shabbos. Thus, smoking and anything that is not vital to living (as a soldier) is still prohibited. This, too, is a form of Shabbos shel chol.

Nachalas Tzvi quotes the Zohar Hakadosh that likens talmidei chachamim, Torah scholars, to Shabbos, in that their demeanors during the week are similar to the manner in which they act on Shabbos. They live their lives with a greater element of kedushah, sanctity. Thus, they model Shabbos shel chol.

Rav Levenstein cites the Tzlach in his drashos (37) who explains the well-known Chazal that teach us that when Klal Yisrael properly observes two Shabbosos, we will be redeemed by Moshiach Tziddkeinu. The accepted interpretation is that Chazal refer to two Shabbosos. The Tzlach suggests that the first Shabbos is Shabbos Bereishis, the seventh day of the week, which we are enjoined to observe. The second Shabbos (as explained earlier) refers to the respect we must accord to the talmid chacham, who is likened to Shabbos. Thus, an individual who disrespects a talmid chacham – even if he simply speaks to him in the same manner in which one speaks to a common person -- is considered an apikores, heretic. It is as if he apostatized himself and worshipped an idol. One who is mechallel Shabbos, knowingly profanes Shabbos, is considered a kofer, one who denies Hashem. A talmid chacham is parallel to Shabbos. I believe the reader can “do the math.” No more need be said.

Perhaps we might suggest an innovative approach to Shabbos shel chol, along the lines of the Likutei Tzvi. Shabbos shel chol refers to the baal teshuvah, the penitent, who is slowly making his way back, returning to a life of faith. He is required to take baby steps. It is difficult for one who has lived without the sanctity of Shabbos as a vital part of his life to pick himself up and suddenly commence a life of Shabbos observance. Likewise, one who was there and -- for one reason or another (we do not and should not judge) -- left the fold, returns slowly. It does not happen overnight; generally, an extraordinary inspirational experience arouses the individual and catalyzes his return.

The following story represents one of those experiences that has lain dormant for many years until the moment it was needed. A young man in Bnei Brak from a fine, frum, family, sadly left religious observance and, after a while, committed the ultimate defection and became engaged to a gentile girl. At that point, the young man was living with his cousin, who became quite upset with this turn of events. While often a disaffected young man or woman turns off and deviates from an observant lifestyle, marrying out of the faith is a rejection of Hashem that estranges one from Jews and Judaism. Although the cousin could not convince him to change his mind, he did prevail upon him to go with his fiancé to tell his parents of their upcoming nuptial plans.

The young man agreed and invited himself to his parents' home on the condition that he would not be “forced” to be observant during Shabbos. Indeed, they spent Friday night smoking on the porch, and he devoted Shabbos morning to his cell phone. Clearly, this young man had a major issue with religion and with himself. Yet, when his father invited him to go to a class given by Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl, he surprisingly agreed. When the class was over, the participants lined up to bid the Torah giant a Gutt Shabbos. Father and son waited patiently to greet the Rav and receive his blessing.

When Rav Shteinman said “Gutt Shabbos” to them, the father told him that, alas, his son no longer observed Shabbos. “For how long have you not been observing Shabbos?” Rav Shteinman asked.

“For two years,” he answered.

“And during that time, did you ever regret the fact that you were profaning Shabbos?” Rav Shteinman asked.

“Yes,” the young man replied. “About four times.”

“And for how long, each time, did you regret not observing Shabbos?” Rav Shteinman asked.

“For approximately ten minutes,” was this young man's response. “So,” Rav Shteinman concluded, “for forty minutes, during the past two years you were a true baal teshuvah. Chazal teach that where baalei teshuvah stand, even righteous people are unable to stand. It is for that reason that I envy you. Gutt Shabbos.”

Rav Shteinman's poignant words pierced through the spiritual dross that had heretofore prevented words of reason from penetrating this young man's heart until this point. It took some time, but he broke his engagement and slowly transitioned back into the *frum* world as a fully-observant Jew.

Once the dust had settled, the young man was asked why he had made the surprising (unlikely and unexpected) decision to attend *Rav Shteinman's shiur*, class. He explained that it went back to fourth grade, when *Rav Shteinman* had tested his class. The questions were not difficult; they were meant to encourage and embolden. Every child who gave the correct answer received a toffee candy from *Rav Shteinman*.

"Everybody knew the answer to his question – but me," he said. I was not much of a learner and, as a result, I did not know very much. When *Rav Shteinman* saw that I could not answer the question, he asked me another, much easier, question. I could not answer the second question either. One more time, *Rav Shteinman* attempted to help me earn a reward. This last question fared as well as the previous two. I was clueless. I did not know a thing. At the end of the test, every boy in the class had received a toffee from *Rav Shteinman* – everyone except me.

As the children filed out respectfully from *Rav Shteinman's* study, he asked me to remain behind. He told me, 'In the Torah and in Judaism, we receive rewards commensurate with the effort that we expend – not according to the results. All of your classmates tried to answer one question; therefore, they each received one toffee. However, you, my dear son, tried to answer three questions.' With a smile on his face, the great *Rav Shteinman* handed me three toffees."

An elderly *gadol's* sensitivity to each child, his awareness of what failure can do to a child, not only heartened a young boy, but inspired him to return to *Yiddishkeit* years later in life.

לא תבערו אש בכל משבתכם ביום השבת

You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwellings on the *Shabbos* day. (35:3)

The Torah can be understood only through the interpretive eyes of the Oral Law. This prohibition is a classic example of this verity. *Chazal* teach that only the creation of fire and use of it for cooking or baking are prohibited. There is, however, no prohibition against enjoying its benefits, such as light and heat. The *Tzedukim*, Saducees, forbade all use of fire. Thus, *Shabbos* was a day during which they sat in the dark and consumed cold food. (How fitting that one who does not allow the Torah (as given on Har Sinai – both written and oral) to illuminate his life sits in "darkness" the entire *Shabbos*.) *Chazal* (*Talmud Yevamos* 6b) derive from this *pasuk* that *bais din*, Jewish court, shall not administer the death sentence on *Shabbos*. While its focus is primarily on one who has been sentenced to death by burning, it applies equally to all forms of execution.

The *Sefer HaChinuch* explains that the *shoresh*, root, of the *mitzvah*, is that Hashem sought to honor the day of *Shabbos*, so that everyone – even sinners and guilty people– find rest on this hallowed day. It is relevant to a parable about a great king who invited the people of his country to a lavish feast, such that no man be prevented from attending. Whoever was to receive the king's justice would receive it the following day (after the feast). So, too, did Hashem want to honor His *Shabbos* by commanding us to sanctify and honor it for our own good and merit.

As an aside, it is truly regrettable that those who either due to choice, or lack of knowledge, do not observe *Shabbos Kodesh* are unaware of the esteem that *Hashem Yisborach* has for it. Hashem gave us *Shabbos* as His special treasure, which He wanted to share with us. He gave us this day of the week, a day replete with spiritual sublimity, as a gift, as a token of love. Yet, so many reject this gift, "Thanks – but no thanks." As the *Sefer HaChinuch* writes, "It is the feast prepared by the King, Who invites all of His subjects to attend." Imagine telling the King, "Not interested." This is what we do when we denigrate the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos*.

A story which has made the rounds is worth sharing. Kivi Bernhard is a resident of Atlanta, Georgia, the son of a distinguished

South African *Rav*. He authored a book, "Leopardology: The hunt for profit in a tough global economy." Published in 2009, it became an instant best-seller. The book gave the businessman insights and strategies to engage in critical business thinking – all gleaned from the hunting habits and the techniques of the African leopard, who is probably the most successful predator on earth. As Kivi writes: "Not unlike the world of commerce, in the bush-lands of Africa, if one is not hunting to survive, one will simply survive to be hunted."

R' Kivi was invited to speak all over the world. Soon he became one of the world's top ten platform speakers. Speaking to the *Chabad* of Melbourne, Australia, he told of the many fortune 500 companies to whom he had previously spoken. He regaled the crowd with stories concerning how a *frum*, observant, Jew is able to navigate the secular/gentile business world. One of his well-known stories took place when the senior Vice President at Microsoft called him and asked him (he was the senior assistant to Bill Gates, Chairman of Microsoft) to be the platform speaker for a Microsoft conference on February 11, which happened to be *Shabbos*. Kivi replied that he could accommodate them on any other day – but *Shabbos* was unacceptable.

Two days passed, and they called back. They offered to double his fee. They also reminded him that this was Microsoft speaking, and it was no ordinary conference. It was their preeminent conference of the year. R' Kivi was immovable. The next time it was Bill Gates who called. Being an individual of such enormous wealth, the thought of someone declining his request was unfathomable: "Perhaps it is more money that you are seeking. I am prepared to pay you three times the going rate." "I am sorry," R' Kivi replied. "I do not work on the Sabbath." The convention was reorganized, and he spoke on Sunday, Feb. 12. Bill Gates told his assistant that he had never before met anyone that did not have his price. Everyone can be bought one way or another. Kivi Bernhard could not be bought, because *Shabbos* is not for sale. To paraphrase Bill Gates, "That is what happens when you have something money cannot buy."

This incident continues to be an enormous *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of Hashem's Name. If we think about it, this is the standard behavior for a *frum* Jew. Our religious commitment cannot be bought. No truly observant Jew can be swayed or bought to relinquish putting on *Tefillin* for a day – for any amount of money. This is the meaning of commitment. Anything less is just not *frum*.

ראו קרא ד' בשם בצלאל... וימלא אתו רוח אלקים בחכמה בתבונה ובדעת... ולהרות נתן בלבו

"See, Hashem has proclaimed by name Betzalel... He filled him with G-dly spirit, with wisdom, insight and knowledge...He gave him the ability to teach. (35:31,34)

Hashem selected the young Betzalel to become the master architect of the *Mishkan*, as he was endowed with exceptional wisdom, insight and knowledge. He had the necessary knowledge vital to creating a dwelling place for the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence. *Chazal* (*Tanchuma Mikeitz* 69) teach that Betzalel manifested his extraordinary qualities and talents even before his appointment to this distinguished position. Hashem grants wisdom to one who already possesses wisdom. *Yahiv chochma la'chakimi*; "He grants wisdom to the wise" (*Daniel* 2:2).

It makes sense to grant wisdom to the wise. After all, they will know what to do with it. *Chazal* (*Midrash*) relate that a Roman matron once asked Rabbi Yosi ben Chalafta why Hashem gave wisdom to the wise, when it is the one who is not wise that can use it most. He explained that if one were to lend money, and he has a choice between lending to a poor man or a rich man, common sense would dictate that he give the loan to the one who has the means to pay it back. Likewise, Hashem gives wisdom to the individual who will not waste it, to who he will not tarnish it, to who he will use it properly.

This would indicate that the definition of wisdom is the ability to use the gift for the greater good, to make the most out of it. One who either does not know how to apply his G-d-given wisdom, or uses it inappropriately, does not deserve it, because he does not appreciate it.

Thus, a wise person is he who appreciates wisdom, who knows what to do with it, who will care for it.

Horav Avraham Pam, zl (quoted by Rabbi Sholom Smith in “*Messages from Rav Pam*”), asks the source of the original wisdom. He cites Shlomo *Hamelech* (*Mishlei* 4:7): *Reishis Chochmah knei Chochmah*, “The beginning of wisdom is to require wisdom.” The desire for wisdom determines one’s “wisdom.” One must appreciate it sufficiently, such that it is so meaningful and vital to his life that he searches for it relentlessly. Thus, he demonstrates that no commodity is more precious to him than wisdom. Such a person deserves to be granted wisdom. This person was Betzalel, who valued wisdom and knew how to utilize this Heavenly gift. It was not simply in his mind; it was in his heart. His heart inspired him to make the *Mishkan*. He knew how to apply the wisdom for the greater good.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* notes that possessing a high IQ, a superior mind, does not ensure that one is wise. If one employs his wisdom as a means for committing inappropriate activities, hurting others, manipulating and taking advantage of those who require his assistance, he is far from wise. His wisdom is all in the brain – not in his heart.

How many students who are not blessed with abundant natural intelligence make it to the pinnacle of Torah erudition? Greatness in Torah is not dependent upon *kishronos*, natural intellectual ability, but rather, on one’s willingness to toil diligently in the field of Torah, to grow slowly, day by day, until he receives the blessing from on High. That is his second dose of wisdom. The first dose was manifest by his appreciation of the critical importance of Torah to his life.

Perhaps there is another manner in which to show one’s appreciation for the value of wisdom. When someone truly values an object, he seeks to share its beauty with others. Imagine purchasing an exquisite piece of jewelry, an expensive, ornate piece of silver or gold, or a rare manuscript, etc., and keeping it under wraps. One who takes the object and conceals it, so that no one is able to gaze upon it, is a fool who does not appreciate what he has. He should be proud of his purchase and seek every opportunity to share its beauty with others.

Betzalel, the master architect of the *Mishkan*, was blessed with extraordinary talents, with which he was able to build the resting place for the *Shechinah*. The Torah implies that he possessed another exceptional skill: the ability to teach, to train, to inspire and infuse others with the skills necessary for the construction of the *Mishkan*. He understood that being blessed with a unique talent, but keeping it to himself, would constitute a gross dereliction of his mission. It would also indicate that he did not value his G-d-given gift. To be blessed and hoard the blessing solely for oneself indicates that he neither values nor appreciates his gift.

It was at a Torah Umesorah convention that a well-meaning lay leader presented *Rav Pam* with a query. The significance of training *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars, to become Torah educators notwithstanding, would it not be more beneficial and more productive to have these talented young men enter the world of commerce or other profession so that they (hopefully) do well and achieve the financial success necessary to support their own families and become learned, *machzikei Torah*, supporters of Torah study? [The *yeshivos* rely on the support of people. The need is great, and individuals with the sensitivity for Torah which comes from learning and grasping the value of Torah are not necessarily that abundant.] Would it not be a better service to the community to prepare *baalei batim bnei Torah*? [Since not everyone is appropriate for *chinuch*, why not prepare them for another vocation – following their stay in *Kollel*?]

Rav Pam replied that it would be an unforgivable waste of talent, quite akin to Betzalel ignoring his extraordinary talents and entering another field of endeavor. [Not one to look askance at lay leaders, the questioner, by his very question, indicated that he was clueless concerning the inestimable value of Torah, and the extraordinary talents and character required of a master rebbe. It is people such as this distinguished leader who impose their distorted outlook on the world of Torah *chinuch*. They are not *machshiv*, do not value/appreciate, the world of a *rebbe*, because they do not consider

chinuch a worthy profession. Obviously, their understanding of Torah is either limited or stunted. Would they let a second-rate physician treat their precious child? Certainly not. Why should their spiritual education be any different?]

Who would have built the *Mishkan*? Hashem granted Betzalel his unique talents for a purpose. Likewise, a *ben Torah* who has spent years immersed in the sea of Torah, growth in *middos*, character refinement, and fear of Heaven has the ability to transmit his Torah knowledge to the next generation. Why would we want or settle for anything less than a superstar?

Betzalel’s power was his personal brilliance and unique ability to transmit his knowledge and skill to others, so that they, too, could one day be like him and demonstrate that they valued *chochmah*, Torah wisdom.

Va’ani Tefillah

ולירושלים עירך ברהמים תשוב – *V’Yerushalayim Ircha b’rachamim tashuv*. And to Yerushalayim, Your city, return in compassion.

In *Sefer Tehillim* (122:3), David *Hamelech* praises the Holy City: *Yerushalayim ha’benuyah k’ir shechubrah lah yachdav*: “The built-up Yerushalayim is like a city that is united together.” Indeed, Yerushalayim was a unifying force in the sense that three times each year, pilgrims from all over the Land came to Yerushalayim to celebrate the *chagim*, festivals. Groups and individuals who throughout the year had been separated geographically by distance, and socially by tribal culture and stations within the pedigree of *Kohen, Levi* and *Yisrael*, all converged and became one *Am Yisrael*. The city was *mechaber* (*chubrah*) joined and integrated them as family, as comrades, as Jews – all parts of the larger conglomerate of *Klal Yisrael*.

A noted secular author once asserted “that nowhere does one feel as lonely and lost as in the metropolitan crowd.” Although the people are under the single banner of their common city, they remain alone and separated from one another. Not so Yerushalayim, where every Jew experiences a personal relationship with Hashem. Their individuality is realized only with regard to their personal encounters with G-d. Otherwise, they all comprise a comprehensive family, together, indivisible, as one.

In honor of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Schabes on their 65th anniversary and Mr. Herbert Schabes on his 90th birthday.

The Schabes and Miller Families

Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved

prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

Weekly Halacha Parshas Vayakhel

Respect And Honor: How To Treat A Kohen

Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

The following is a discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

Included in Hashem’s commandment to Moshe to appoint his brother Aharon and his sons as kohanim is the Biblical command: You shall sanctify him... he shall remain holy to you[1]. The Torah commands us to acknowledge the sanctity of kohanim by showing them respect and giving them preferential treatment, since they are the ones who are entrusted to perform the sacred Service in the Mishkan and Beis ha-Mikdash. This mitzvah is divided into two parts: a) the mitzvah of honoring a kohen; b) the prohibition against using the services of a kohen for one’s needs. Let us elaborate:

The Mitzvah of Honoring a Kohen

Question: How do we honor a kohen?

Discussion: Whenever a blessing is recited in public, a kohen should be the one asked to recite it. Thus a kohen is the first one to be called up to the Torah whenever it is read. At meal time, he is the one who is asked to recite Kiddush, Birkas ha-Motzi and Birkas ha-Mazon. In addition, a kohen is served first, he is asked to speak first and is generally given more respect than a yisrael or a levi[2]. Some poskim mention that a levi is given priority over a yisrael in all of the above honors, just as he is called to the Torah before a yisrael[3]. Other poskim hold that a levi does not take precedence at all.[4]

Question: May a kohen forego his honor?

Discussion: A kohen may be *mochel* (lit.: release others from paying him) the honor due him (except being called up first to the Torah[5]). The reason why a kohen may be *mochel* his honor is based on the Rabbinic dictum[6] that “one honors a man by doing his will.” Since the kohen wants to bestow upon someone else the honor due him, that, in turn, becomes his honor[7]. If a yisrael recites Birkas ha-Mazon in the presence of a kohen, he must ask for the kohen’s permission. It is not sufficient to merely say ‘bi-reshus ha-kohen’, if there is a possibility that the kohen would object[8]. As stated above, the only exception to the rule that a kohen may forego his honor is that he must be called up first to the Torah. This is a rabbinic edict instituted by the Sages, who insisted that the kohen always accept his aliyah lest he defer to some people and not to others, and thus cause discord among members of the shul[9].

Question: Are there any exceptions to the requirement of honoring a kohen?

Discussion: The following situations are considered exceptions to the mitzvah of honoring a kohen:

- The head of a household is not obligated to offer a kohen guest the honor of reciting ha-motzi[10] or Birkas ha-Mazon.[11]
- If the kohen is a learned person but the yisrael is a greater talmid chacham than he, the yisrael is not obligated to honor the kohen. It is, nevertheless, proper for him to do so, and one who does so is rewarded with longevity[12].
- If the kohen is a *bona fide* *am ha-aretz*, a yisrael—who is a talmid chacham—is not permitted to honor the *kehunah* of such a kohen, since he is thereby degrading the honor of the Torah[13].

The Prohibition of Using the Services of a Kohen

The second half of the obligation to honor a kohen is the prohibition against having him perform “services” for the benefit of a Yisrael[14]. It is forbidden to ask a kohen to serve a yisrael or to send him on an errand, etc. Even if a kohen waives his status and allows a yisrael to use his services, this should not be done *l’chatchilah*, and certainly, the yisrael should never ask a kohen to perform a lowly task for him like emptying the garbage[15], etc. For this reason, it is preferable that a kohen not enter a profession which may require his yisrael employer to order him to engage in degrading types of work[16].

Question: When is it permitted for a yisrael to benefit from the services of a kohen?

- If a kohen receives payment or if he is serving a distinguished person and derives pleasure from serving him, it is permitted to ask the kohen to serve a yisrael[17]. Similarly, if a kohen offers to serve a yisrael without being told to do so, it is permitted to accept his offer[18].
- Some *poskim* allow a yisrael to use the services of a kohen *am ha’aretz*, although not in a demeaning manner[19]. A kohen who violates the sanctity of the *kehunah* by marrying a divorcee or entering a cemetery when he is forbidden to do so, etc., forfeits the privileges of the *kehunah*. It is not a mitzvah to honor him, nor are there any restrictions on asking him to perform services. Such a kohen is excluded from *nesias kapayim* as well[20].
- The *poskim* debate whether these halachos pertain to a kohen who is a minor[21] or who has a blemish which renders him unfit for Service in the Beis ha-Mikdash[22].

Question: Why are some people not careful to observe these halachos?

Discussion: The *poskim* offer two possible reasons for their behavior:

- Now that the Beis ha-Mikdash is destroyed, this mitzvah does not apply—except for those who conduct themselves *lifnim mi-shuras ha-din*[23].
- With the passage of time, the lineage and *yichus* of the *kohanim* have become blurred. Thus we are not positive who is a kohen[24].
- These objections notwithstanding, the majority of the *poskim* agree that the mitzvah of honoring a kohen applies even nowadays[25] and we should not doubt the purity of lineage of our *kohanim*[26].

1. *Vayikra* 21:8. There is a dispute among the *Rishonim* if this is a mitzvas *assei min ha-Torah* or *mi-deRabbanan*; See *Magen Avraham* 201:4 and *Korban Nesanel* 300 (*Rosh*, *Gittin* 5:20).

2. *Mishnah Berurah* 201:13.

3. *Mishnah Berurah* 201:12; *Kaf ha-Chayim* 167:101.

4. *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 201:4. This is the prevailing custom; *Ben Ish Chai* (*Korach* 14).

5. *Rama* 128:45; *Mishnah Berurah* 201:13.

6. Originally appearing in *Sefer Chasidim* 152.

7. *Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav* 128:60; *Eishel Avraham* 128:45.

8. *Mishnah Berurah* 167:75. See *Piskei Teshuvos* 201:3.

9. *Mishnah Berurah* 135:9. The custom is that even a private *minyán* always calls up the kohen first. See *Sha’ar ha-Tziyun* 12. See *Igros Moshe*, O.C. 2:34 and 3:20 for possible exceptions.

10. *Mishnah Berurah* 167:73.

11. See *Sha’ar ha-Tziyun* 167:65 and *Beur Halachah* 201:1, s.v. *v'im*; *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 201:4.

12. O.C. 167:14 and *Mishnah Berurah* 71; 201:12.

13. O.C. 201:2; *Mishnah Berurah* 167:70.

14. According to some *poskim*, a kohen cannot serve another kohen either. Others allow this; see *Kesav Sofer*, O.C. 15; *Beur Halachah* 128:45, s.v. *assur*; *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 128:75; *Kaf ha-Chayim* 128:283.

15. *Mishnah Berurah* 128:175; *Yabia Omer* 6:22. See also the *Chafetz Chayim’s* opening remarks to *Shemiras ha-Lashon* where he rules that one who speaks *lashon ha-ra* about a kohen (in the presence of the kohen) transgresses the halachah of honoring a kohen.

16. *Rav S.Z. Auerbach*, quoted in *Nishmas Avraham*, O.C. 128:10.

17. *Mishnah Berurah* 128:175.

18. *Eishel Avraham* 128:45; *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 128:72; *Kaf ha-Chayim* 128:282.

19. *Beur Halachah* 128:45, s.v. *assur*. *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 128:72 disagrees.

20. O.C. 128:40-41.

21. *Mishnah Berurah* 282:12 and *Sha’ar ha-Tziyun* 15 quotes a dispute between *Magen Avraham* and *Rav Akiva Eiger* concerning this. See *Emes l’Yaakov al ha-Torah*, *Vayikra* 21:8.

22. Most *poskim* maintain that a kohen who has a blemish is included in this mitzvah. See, however, *Minchas Chinuch* 269, *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 128:72 and *Teshuvos Avnei Cheifetz* 71.

23. *R. Tam* (quoted by *Taz* 128:39); *Mekor Chayim* 128:45.

24. *Magen Avraham* 201:4. Many other *poskim* are also of the opinion that the *kohanim’s yichus* is questionable; see *Y.D.* 322 *Taz* 5 and *Shach* 9; *Sh’ealas Ya’avetz* 155; *Chazon Ish*, *Shevi’is* 5:12. See also *Rama*, O.C. 457:2 and *Mishnah Berurah* 22.

25. *Mishnah Berurah* 128:174; *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 71. See *Rivash* 94.

26. *Maharit* 1:149; *Be’er Heitev*, O.C. 128:83; *Aruch ha-Shulchan*, O.C. 128:72; *Y.D.* 305:55.

Weekly-Halacha, Text Copyright © 5759 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and *Torah.org*.

Weekly Halacha © 2018 by *Torah.org*.

Shul Building

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: One shul

“May we merge together two existent shullen, when each has its own *minhagim*?”

Question #2: Two shuls

“Is it permitted to leave a shul to start our own?”

Question #3: Old shul

“In our town, almost everyone has moved away from the ‘old neighborhood,’ which has now, unfortunately, become a slum. The sprinkling of Jewish people still there can no longer maintain the shul. Are the people who used to live there still obligated to maintain the old shul building?”

Question #4: New shul

“We have been comfortably davening in different people’s houses, three times a day, seven days a week. Now, some individuals are clamoring that they want us to build a shul, which is a huge expense. Isn’t this *chutzpah* on their part, when we are all struggling to pay our mortgages?”

Introduction:

Our *batei kenesiyos* and *batei midrashos*, the buildings that we designate for prayer and for study, are referred to as our *mikdash me’at*, our holy buildings reminiscent of the sanctity of the *Mishkan* and the *Beis Hamikdash*.

There is a halachic requirement to build a shul. To quote the *Rambam* (*Hilchos Tefillah* 11:1-2), Any place that has ten Jews must have available a building that they can enter to pray at every time of prayer. This building is called a *beis hakenesses* (synagogue). The members of the community can force one another to build a synagogue, to purchase a *sefer Torah* and books of the prophets and of the *kesuvim*. When you build a synagogue, you must build it in the highest part of the town... and you must elevate it, until it is taller than any of the courtyards in town.

We see from the words of the Rambam that it is not sufficient to have an area available in which one can daven when necessary – it is required to have a building designated specifically for this purpose, even if the shul will be empty the rest of the day (Shu”t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim, 2:44). Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that a community is required to have a building designated to be their mikdash me’at.

Since it is a community responsibility to have a shul building, the minority of the membership of a community may force the majority to raise the money to build a shul (Rema, Choshen Mishpat 163:1). In earlier generations, communities had the authority to levy taxes on their members. Since building a shul is a community responsibility, they could require people to provide the funds necessary for this project.

Must we build a shul?

At this point, let us address one of our opening questions: “We have been comfortably davening in different people’s houses, three times a day, seven days a week. Now, some individuals are clamoring that they want us to build a shul, which is a huge expense. Isn’t this chutzpah on their part, when we are all struggling to pay our mortgages?”

The answer is that, not only is it not chutzpah on the part of those individuals, the halachic right is on their side. The community is required to have a shul, and it is unsatisfactory that the minyan takes place in a home that is not meant to be a beis tefillah. Therefore, individuals can certainly force the rest to build a shul.

I cannot resist telling over the following story from my experience as a shul rav. At one time, I was invited for an interview to a new shul that was located in an affluent area. I made a trip to meet the shul search committee, which was very interested in engaging me as their rav. They showed me the converted house that they were using as the shul, and mentioned that when they had renovated the building, they did so in a way that there would be an apartment in the building for the rav to use as his residence, since they did not have much money for a respectable salary. In their minds, since the rav could now save himself mortgage or rent money, that was a hefty part of what they intended for his salary.

I noted to them that in the position I had at the time, I could devote myself fully to rabbinic duties, something that would be quite impossible in the circumstances that they proposed. Their response was that although they understood my predicament, this was all they could afford, since most of their members were paying very huge mortgages for the zechus of living in this neighborhood. I made a mental note that none of them seemed to feel that the apartment part of the shul building that they were proposing was certainly nothing that any of them would consider suitable residential accommodations, nor would they consider the shul building representative of the high-class lifestyle that they had chosen for themselves.

How do we assess?

In earlier generations, the Jewish community had the ability to levy taxes and other fees on its membership. Virtually all Jewish communities had fairly strong authority over its membership because the community levied taxes and also was responsible for collectively paying taxes to the local monarch.

When assessing individuals for the construction of a local shul, do we charge according to people’s financial means, or does everyone share equally in the costs of the building?

The Rema rules that when raising the money for a shul, we take into consideration both the resources of the individuals and also who will be using the facility. Therefore, when assessing people for the building of a shul, the costs are allocated both according to the financial means and according to individuals. Thus, the wealthier members of a community will be paying a somewhat higher percentage of the costs.

Rent a shul

If the community does not have the resources to build or purchase a shul, they can force one another to put up enough money to rent a place (Mishnah Berurah 150:2)

Where not to rent

In a responsum in Igros Moshe (Shu”t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 3:25), Rav Moshe Feinstein was asked the following: There is no orthodox shul in town, and they have been davening in houses. Now, they want to rent space from a local conservative congregation. May they do so?

Rav Moshe prohibits this for two reasons:

1. This arrangement provides some credibility to the conservative congregation.
2. When people see the orthodox people entering or exiting the building of the conservative temple, they may think that these people are intending to pray in the conservative facility, which is prohibited. This involves the prohibition of maris ayin, doing something that may raise suspicion that one violated halacha.

Changing neighborhoods

Let us now address a different one of our opening questions: “In our town, almost everyone has moved away from the ‘old neighborhood,’ which has now, unfortunately, become a slum. The sprinkling of Jewish people still there can no longer maintain the shul. Are the people who used to live there still obligated to maintain the old shul building?”

This question was asked of Rav Moshe Feinstein (Shu”t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 3:28).

In the case that he was asked, the shul had already opened a new facility in a nicer area and, until this point, the expenses of the old shul were being covered from the budget of the new shul. However, the members no longer saw any gain from doing so, since it was only a question of time until the old shul would no longer be at all functional. They would like to close down the old shul and sell the building. Are they permitted to?

The general rule is that a shul is considered communal public property and, as long as it functions as a shul, no one has the right to sell or modify its use. This is because the “owners” of the shul include anyone who might visit the area and want to find a minyan in which to daven. This is true, providing that there are still minyanim that meet in the shul on a regular basis -- they cannot sell the building or close it down (Shu”t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim III #29).

In the case at hand, Rav Moshe rules that those who have moved out of the neighborhood of the old shul have no responsibility to pay for the upkeep or repairs of the shul building that they are not using. The fact that the community has been treating the two shul buildings as one institution does not change this. Rav Moshe then mentions that, since the old shul is in a bad neighborhood, they may have a responsibility to remove the sifrei Torah from the shul, and perhaps even the siddurim, chumashim and other seforim, in order to protect them. He concludes that, since those who still daven in the old shul have no means of their own to keep the shul going, it is permitted to shutter the shul building and sell it. He also mentions that, if the bank will foreclose on the mortgage and re-possess the building, this does not require them to continue paying the mortgage. Nor does the bank’s decision as to what it will do with the shul property after the foreclosure require them to continue paying the mortgage.

Regarding those who still live in the old neighborhood, Rav Moshe rules that they should conduct the minyanim in a house where the sifrei Torah and the other seforim will be secure (Shu”t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim III #28).

An interesting teshuvah from Rav Moshe relates to a shul building that had been originally planned to have a lower level to use as a social hall, with the shul intended to be on the upper floor. They began to use the social hall for davening until they built the shul on top, but the neighborhood began to change, and it became clear that they would have no need to complete the structure of the building. They never finished the building, and instead, directed the efforts and finances toward purchasing a new shul in a neighborhood to which people were moving. The old shul, or, more accurately, the “social hall” part of the old shul building, is at the stage where there is barely a minyan left, and the

dwindling numbers imply that it is not going to be very long until there is no functioning minyan. The question is that they would like to sell the old building and use the money to complete the purchase of the new building. Furthermore, the mikveh in the town is now in a neighborhood to which women are hesitant to travel, so they want to use the funds from the old shul building to defray the construction costs of a necessary new mikveh.

Because of the specific circumstances involved, including that it is unlikely that people from the outside will drop in to daven in this minyan anymore, Rav Moshe rules that they are permitted to sell the building.

A similar responsum from Rav Moshe was when they needed to create a shul in a neighborhood where there was a good chance that the Jewish

community there would not last long. Rather than declare their building a shul, they called it a library and used it as their shul. Rav Moshe suggests that this was a good suggestion, since they knew from the outset that the days of the Jewish community were numbered (=Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim, 2:44).

We will continue this article next week...

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה