

**In My Opinion PRAYER AND CONCERTS**

**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

There is always an element of musical performance associated with Jewish prayer. In Temple times, Levites presented a musical performance every day in the Temple in Jerusalem, as part of the temple service itself. This presentation included musical instruments as well as a male choir.

Josephus describes how many non-Jews from all parts of the Roman Empire visited the second Temple to gaze at the architectural wonder and ornate splendor of the building that Herod built. The Talmud records for us that one who did not see the building of the second Temple that Herod built never saw a beautiful building in his lifetime.

The second Temple was beyond comparison, even in an age of the Parthenon and the Roman Forum. All this opulence and grandeur was, unfortunately, only fleeting, and temporary in historical terms. The second Temple was destroyed, Levites no longer performed daily concerts, and the Jewish people were exiled from their homeland in the land of Israel, forced by circumstances and the divine will, to wander over the face of many continents.

The service of the Temple in Jerusalem was canceled by the exile of the Jewish people and the destruction of the Temple building itself. However, in its place the prayer services of Judaism, with which we are all familiar even today, was substituted. The Lord himself allowed for the service of our lips in prayer to be a replacement for the lack of the sacrificial services that were the centerpiece of Temple service in Jerusalem.

The prayer services have now become the central role in Jewish communal life. They are not to be mere ritual and rote, but rather emotional, heartfelt expressions of praise to the God of Israel and the Creator of the universe. As such, the prayer services were never conducted without some sort of melodic intonation and musical rhythm. Musical instruments themselves, reserved for the Temple in Jerusalem, now morphed into cantorial renditions and male choir selections.

Depending upon the location of Jews in the worldwide diaspora, different musical revisions of the prayers entered Jewish cultural and historical life. The Jews who lived within Moslem dominated countries adopted the melodic innovations of that dominant culture, so Arabic music and Sephardic music seem to be one and the same. It was the same thing for Jews who lived in Greece and Turkey, as well as Jews who lived in the Iberian Peninsula. Ashkenazic Jews adopted the rhythms of melodies similar to the music of Germany, and these became the standard prayer melodies of Polish, Lithuanian and Russian Jewry.

In the 19th century, great cantors began to appear in both the Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities. They developed operatic voices and many different variations on traditional melodies used for prayer. They also adopted non-Jewish melodies from the outside environment of their societies and introduced these melodies into Jewish prayer service as well. Thus, in today's melodic liturgy of the synagogue, it is difficult to find true Jewish music, in the sense of it being completely and authentically Jewish.

The Halachic prohibitions against the use of musical instruments during prayer services remains binding and in force even today. One of the major breaches of Reform in the 19th century was the introduction of musical instruments, especially the organ, used in church services, incorporated into their prayer services. In today's world, Reform Judaism substitutes guitars, saxophones, clarinets, drums, and violins instead of the original organ music. All these attempts to make prayer more relevant, so to speak, have pretty much fallen on deaf ears.

People who wish to hear musical concerts go to theaters and concerts, not to synagogues and houses of prayer. Reform services have become so modern that they are already considered to be obsolete and out of date. There has been a revival of cantorial music and performers over the past decades in the Orthodox Jewish world, with cantorial concerts and performances as well. However, all agree that it is only during the prayer services itself, when there is true intent to attempt to reach spiritual heights, that these melodies and brilliant voices take on proper dimension.

In the Chasidic world, music and melody has always played an important role, not only in prayer but also in general communal life. This trend continues today with many civic groups and individuals serving as musical performers at concerts and private events. This reflects the process of acculturation that accompanies Jewish life throughout all the ages. Music enlightens the soul and is a crucial element of fervor and concentration during prayer services.

Shabbat shalom

Berel Wein

**Weekly Parsha VAYAKHEL – PIKUDEI 5781**

**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

The book of Shemot concludes with the detailed accounting of the materials collected and used in the building of the Tabernacle. Even

though this accounting may appear to us to be superfluous and even overly detailed, the words and letters that appear in this week's Torah reading are as holy and important as any others that appear in our holy Scriptures.

There is an important overriding lesson – a moral imperative – that is being imparted to us in the words of the reading of this week. That lesson can be summed up in that we are responsible for each of our actions and behaviors during the year, and during our lifetime. It is as if each of us signs our name at the bottom of the pages that record each of our activities in life with one word: accountability.

Judaism holds its adherents to strict standards of accountability. Accountability in speech, in deeds and action, regarding financial income and expenses, and in all other matters of human interaction and relationships. We are informed by the prayer services of the High Holy days that each of us has pages in God's ledger book, so to speak, and that each of us signs with our own signature at the bottom of those pages to attest to the accuracy of that accounting.

The basis of all responsible human behavior is accountability. Without that, having good intentions and high hopes by human beings to accomplish good things are mostly doomed to failure and disappointment. It is only the concept of accountability that is the driving force that creates efficiency, and the feeling of spiritual advancement and accomplishment within us. Educational institutions that never administer exams or do not make demands upon its students are really cheating them out of the benefits that an education can bring to a person.

The Torah is exacting and meticulous in recording for us all the activities, donations, and actual results regarding the enormous task of constructing the Tabernacle in the middle of a wasteland, by a people just recently freed from physical and mental bondage. One could be fooled to say that in such circumstances any demand for accountability should be lenient, if not even muted. However, we see that the Torah makes no allowance for the inherent difficulties and stress that must have been involved in building the Tabernacle in the desert. In general, we can say that Judaism rarely, if ever, accepts excuses for poor performance or lack of effort, no matter how seemingly valid they might be. No excuse, no matter how good and valid it may be, ever equals accomplishing the task that was set out before the person to realize and fulfill.

The Torah wishes to impress upon us that accountability requires exactitude, paying of attention to what otherwise may seem to be small and unimportant, and an understanding that in the great picture of life there really are no small events or minor incidents that can be glossed over as though they never occurred. That is not our method of accountability. The Torah is never sloppy in dealing with human events.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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**Celebrate (Vayakhel-Pekudei 5781)**

**Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l**

*Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.*

If leaders are to bring out the best in those they lead, they must give them the chance to show they are capable of great things, and then they must celebrate their achievements. That is what happens at a key moment toward the end of our parsha, one that brings the book of Exodus to a sublime conclusion after all the strife that has gone before.

The Israelites have finally completed the work of building the Tabernacle. We then read:

So all the work on the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, was completed. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses ...

Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. So Moses blessed them. (Ex. 39:32, 43)

The passage sounds simple enough, but to the practised ear it recalls another biblical text, from the end of the Creation narrative in Genesis: The heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. On the seventh day God finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done. (Gen. 2:1-3)

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

The closer we examine the two texts, the more we see how intricately the parallel has been constructed. The creation account in Genesis is tightly organised around a series of sevens. There are seven days of Creation. The word “good” appears seven times, the word “God” thirty-five times, and the word “earth” twenty-one times. The opening verse of Genesis contains seven words, the second fourteen, and the three concluding verses 35 words. All multiples of seven. The complete text is 469 (7×67) words.

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

A remarkable parallel is being drawn between God’s creation of the universe and the Israelites’ creation of the Sanctuary. We now understand what the Sanctuary represented. It was a micro-cosmos, a universe in miniature, constructed with the same precision and “wisdom” as the universe itself, a place of order against the formlessness of the wilderness and the ever-threatening chaos of the human heart. The Sanctuary was a visible reminder of God’s Presence within the camp, itself a metaphor for God’s Presence within the Universe as a whole.

A large and fateful idea is taking shape. The Israelites – who have been portrayed throughout much of Exodus as ungrateful and half-hearted – have now been given the opportunity, after the sin of the Golden Calf, to show that they are not irredeemable, and they have embraced that opportunity. They are proven capable of great things. They have shown they can be creative. They have used their generosity and skill to build a mini-universe. By this symbolic act they have shown they are capable of becoming, in the potent rabbinic phrase, “God’s partners in the work of creation.”

This was fundamental to their re-moralisation and to their self-image as the people of God’s covenant. Judaism does not take a low view of human possibility. We do not believe we are tainted by original sin. We are not incapable of moral grandeur. To the contrary, the very fact that we are in the image of the Creator means that we humans – uniquely among life forms – have the ability to be creative. As Israel’s first creative achievement reached its culmination Moses blessed them, saying, according to the Sages, “May it be God’s will that His Presence rests in the work of your hands.”[1] Our potential greatness is that we can create structures, relationships and lives that become homes for the Divine Presence.

Blessing them and celebrating their achievement, Moses showed them what they could be. That is potentially a life-changing experience. Here is a contemporary example:

In 2001, shortly after September 11th, I received a letter from a woman in London whose name I did not immediately recognise. She wrote that on the morning of the attack on the World Trade Centre, I had been

giving a lecture on ways of raising the status of the teaching profession, and she had seen a report about it in the press. This prompted her to write and remind me of a meeting we had had eight years earlier.

She was then, in 1993, the Head Teacher of a school that was floundering. She had heard some of my broadcasts, felt a kinship with what I had to say, and thought that I might have a solution to her problem. I invited her, together with two of her deputies, to our house. The story she told me was this: morale within the school, among teachers, pupils and parents alike, was at an all-time low. Parents had been withdrawing their children. The student roll had fallen from 1000 children to 500. Examination results were bad: only 8 per cent of students achieved high grades. It was clear that unless something changed dramatically, the school would be forced to close.

We talked for an hour or so on general themes: the school as community, how to create an ethos, and so on. Suddenly, I realised that we were thinking along the wrong lines. The problem she faced was practical, not philosophical. I said: “I want you to live one word: celebrate.” She turned to me with a sigh: “You don’t understand – we have nothing to celebrate. Everything in the school is going wrong.” “In that case,” I replied, “find something to celebrate. If a single student has done better this week than last week, celebrate. If someone has a birthday, celebrate. If it’s Tuesday, celebrate.’ She seemed unconvinced, but promised to give the idea a try.

Now, eight years later, she was writing to tell me what had happened since then. Examination results at high grades had risen from 8 per cent to 65 per cent. The enrolment of pupils had risen from 500 to 1000. Saving the best news to last, she added that she had just been made a Dame of the British Empire – one of the highest honours the Queen can bestow – for her contribution to education. She ended by saying that she just wanted me to know how a single word had changed the school, and her life.

She was a wonderful teacher, and certainly did not need my advice. She would have discovered the answer on her own anyway. But I was never in any doubt that the strategy would succeed, for we all grow to fill other people’s expectations of us. If they are low, we remain small. If they are high, we walk tall.

The idea that each of us has a fixed quantum of intelligence, virtue, academic ability, motivation and drive is absurd. Not all of us can paint like Monet or compose like Mozart. But we each have gifts, capacities, that can lie dormant throughout life until someone awakes them. We can achieve heights of which we never thought ourselves capable. All it takes is for us to meet someone who believes in us, challenges us, and then, when we have responded to the challenge, blesses and celebrates our achievements. That is what Moses did for the Israelites after the sin of the Golden Calf. First he got them to create, and then he blessed them and their creation with one of the simplest and most moving of all blessings, that the Shechinah should dwell in the work of their hands.

Celebration is an essential part of motivating. It turned a school around. In an earlier age and in a more sacred context it turned the Israelites around. So celebrate.

When we celebrate the achievements of others, we change lives.

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

*Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya*

#### **A Tzadik on Someone Else's Back**

Why Didn't the Mishkan Have a Spare Parts Warehouse?

The Torah says that after Moshe told the people to donate to the Mishkan, the voluntary donations surpassed the amount of material required. Moshe Rabbeinu had to tell them to stop bringing material, and they were left with more material than needed. (See Shemos 36:4-7).

The Sforno comments: Hashem stated the exact amount of materials needed to build the Mishkan. X amount of gold, Y amount of silver, Z amount of copper, and so forth. He gave a precise measure for every item in the Mishkan, specifying no more and no less than the exact amount required for the structure and the keilim (vessels) of the Mishkan. The Sforno points out that this was not the case with either Shlomo's construction of the First Beis HaMikdash or Herod's (re-

construction of the Second Beis HaMikdash. In both those cases, they initially sought out and collected more than enough funds and raw materials, however, in the Mishkan, it was the exact amount necessary that was sought – no more and no less.

The Talmud Yerushalmi says that they had duplicates and triplicates of all the keilim in the Beis HaMikdash. This was not unreasonable. Keilim break, wear out, and become impure (Tameh). Any serious enterprise must maintain an inventory of spare parts. Take, for example, a caterer. He does not keep only X numbers of sets of china for the maximum number of servings he expects to prepare. He always must be prepared for breakage, loss, or theft. The Beis HaMikdash also needed to have “back up” to be prepared for foreseen or unforeseen occurrences.

The question must be asked – did the same problem not exist in the Mishkan? Was there no breakage in the Mishkan? Why not maintain an inventory of “backup parts” for the structure and the keilim of the Mishkan? Why didn’t they make extra?

Listen to the following very interesting Daas Zekeinim m’Baalei HaTosfos (in Parshas Teruma): The Aron HaKodesh, in which they kept the Luchos HaBris (Tablets of Stone containing the Ten Commandments), was gold on the outside but wood on the inside. The Daas Zekeinim says it would have been fitting for the Aron to be made completely from gold. However, since it needed to be made portable and be transported by the Leviim on their shoulders, the Aron was made to weigh less. Pure gold would make it much heavier to carry. And even though, the Daas Zekeinim writes, Chazal say that “the Aron lifted up those who were supposedly carrying it”, that was not always the case. In other words, there was a period of time when it was that way, but it was not like that forever. The same, he writes, regarding the Golden Mizbaeach (on which the incense was burnt). It was made of lighter Shitim wood and only overlaid with gold on the outside, to make it lighter to carry.

So, the reason they did not have spares – duplicates and triplicates in the Mishkan – was because “someone has to schlep all this.” The Jews moved from place to place during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. When someone needs to schlep, you make it as light as possible.

Herein lays a very important principle in Yiddishkeit, which says, in effect, “Do not be a Tzadik on someone else’s back!” In other words, if someone needs to carry this – we are going to make it as light as possible. It is like packing. I do not know how it is in most houses, but my assumption is that men travel lighter than women. But who schleps the suitcases?

This is akin to the famous incident they say about Rav Yisrael Salanter (1809-1883). He came to someone’s house for a Shabbos meal. He had to wash for Netilas Yadayim. Based on the Gemarah (Chullin 106), the halacha (Orach Chaim 161:4) is that ideally (l’chatchilah) a person should wash Netilas Yadayim up until the wrists. In special circumstances (b’dieved), a person fulfills his obligation for washing his hands by only washing until the knuckles. Rav Yisrael did not wash his entire hands. He relied on the opinion that he only needed to wash to the point where his fingers bend.

The observers asked him why he was being so lenient with his handwashing. After all, they told him, the Shulchan Aruch ideally requires that water comes up to where the hand meets the arm. Those were the days before running water. The answer was that there was a well down the hill and Rav Yisrael knew someone had to schlep the water up from the well to the kitchen. He saw that the hired help was a poor girl who would be the one schlepping the water, and he was not going to be a “Tzadik” at her expense! Better, too, to make the Aron HaKodesh out of wood rather than gold, because someone needs to schlep it.

There is another famous story with Rav Yisrael. When he was older, he no longer went to bake his own matzah before Pesach, but rather he asked his students to bake his matzas mitzvah for him. The students asked their teacher, “What are the ‘Chumras’ (stringencies) the Rebbe practices during the time he bakes matzah?” All sorts of different stringencies are practiced by righteous individuals while baking their

Seder Matzahs. They asked Rav Yisrael Salanter which Chumrah he was particular about. He told them “Be careful not to yell at the woman who cleans up between every batch of matzah baking. She is a widow. Please do not yell at her. That is my ‘chumrah!’”

This is why there were no duplicates or triplicates in the Mishkan.

### ***Even When We Are Camped, We Are Travelling***

I heard the following beautiful homiletic observation on the last pasuk in Sefer Shemos from Rav Isaac Bernstein, z”l: “For the Cloud of Hashem would be on the Mishkan by day, and fire would be on it at night, before the eyes of all of the House of Israel throughout their journeys.” (Shemos 40:38). The Cloud was upon the Mishkan in all of their travels. Rashi explains that whenever they would camp, the Cloud would cover the Mishkan. However, he asks, the pasuk is imprecise. It says that the Cloud was on the Mishkan when they travelled. However, in actuality, it was not on the Mishkan when they travelled – only when they camped! It should say “The Cloud was on the Mishkan in all their encampments!” Rashi answers that when they camped—that was also part of their travels. Even when they were stationary, it was considered “mas’eyhem” (their travels).

This is a thought, Rav Bernstein says, that we all need to remember: Even when we are encamped, we are still travelling. Jewish history is replete with a mindset (we are as guilty of this as anybody else) which assumes that wherever we happen to be residing, “this is our place.”

Jews were in Poland for one thousand years. They used to quip in Yiddish that Poland was a transliteration of the Yiddish expression ‘Po Lin’ (Here we will sleep). In other words, this is where we are and this is where we will stay. When people are in the same location for a thousand years, they can easily assume that “this is it”, “this is our home.” The Jews were in Spain for hundreds of years. Unfortunately, Jewish history is a testimony to the fact that no matter how comfortable we may get, we are not home yet!

America is no exception. This is a Malchus shel Chessed. It is the most hospitable place that the Jews have settled in their long history. One can easily make the mistake that “we have come to the resting place and to the inheritance.” (Devorim 12:9).

This Rashi is implicitly teaching that this assumption is not to be relied upon. The places of their encampments are part of their travels. Even where we find ourselves encamped, it is still just part of our long journey forward. We are on this long journey until we finally see the rebuilding of Zion and the comfort of Yerushalayim with the coming of Moshiach, may it be speedily, in our time.

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### ***Vayakhel-Pekudai: The Meaning of Work***

#### ***Ben-Tzion Spitz***

*My share of the work may be limited, but the fact that it is work makes it precious. - Helen Keller*

Perhaps one of the commandments that are most repeated throughout the Torah is regarding observing the Sabbath. It has proven to be a central pillar of Jewish practice and tradition. The poet, Ahad Ha’am, famously stated that “More than the Jews have kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept the Jews.” The Sabbath has undoubtedly been a major factor in keeping the Jewish people as an unbroken, cohesive entity throughout generations and millennia.

The Torah, in each mention of the Sabbath, adds another detail, another nuance, to flesh out what the Sabbath experience is meant to entail. The Bechor Shor on Exodus 35:2-3 teases out additional clues as to what the Torah is prescribing regarding Sabbath observance.

The verse states: “Six days shall you work and on the seventh day it shall be holy for you.”

The Bechor Shor explains that during the six days of the week we are commanded to do the work that God has ordered (in this context the work of building the Tabernacle). However, on the seventh day, on the Sabbath, you shall perform no labor, even sacred, divinely commanded

labor that God Himself ordered is forbidden to be performed on this day of rest, much less any labor that was not directly ordained by God.

The next verse provides additional detail: “You shall not kindle a fire in all your dwellings on the Sabbath.”

The Bechor Shor explains that the act of transferring fire may not seem arduous. To move a flame from an existing fire and let it take hold someplace else cannot be considered strenuous and involves almost no exertion. Nevertheless, the Torah considers it a form of labor. The many prohibited labors of the Sabbath may not seem to be “work” nor would we classify them as toil by any stretch of the imagination. Nonetheless, it is not only “work” in the modern sense of the word that is prohibited on the Sabbath but any type of creative action which changes or transforms the world around us. The Sabbath is not only a day to hold back from affecting the world, but a day to recharge our physical, emotional, and spiritual beings by retreating from creative activities for a day. If we’re constantly busy, constantly active, constantly absorbing and transmitting bits and bytes, our souls will never know inner peace or quiet. Especially in our era, the sounds of modernity threaten to drown out what is left of our humanity.

May we each achieve the next level of peace that a Sabbath respite offers.

*Dedication - To the Pesach Haggadah. It boggles the mind how every year there seems to be an exponential number of commentaries on it being published.*

*Shabbat Shalom Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.*

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#### Rav Aviner

**Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:**

##### Taxes

Q: I purchased a \$300 item and the overseas company notified me that the cost recorded was less than \$100 (apparently to expedite delivery and avoid tax). How can I reimburse the parties involved?

A: Donate money to the Israel Defense Forces.

##### Literature

Q: Is Sefer Ha-Razim (a book containing cryptic mystical content) considered authentic Jewish literature?

A: No. It's nonsense and heresy.

##### Kashrut

Q: Is every tea essence Kosher, for example 'Combochia'?

A: If it's pure tea essence without additional ingredients it's Kosher.

##### Stringencies

Q: The Rambam states that the middle path in life is preferable. This being the case, are stringencies in lifestyle recommended?

A: Stringencies are recommended for very few individuals as we learn in the Guide for the Perplexed (Moreh Nevuchim, written by the Rambam). Everyone may carefully and gradually add stringencies to his lifestyle (see the first chapter of Hilchot Deot).

##### Netilat Yadayim Vessel

Q: Is Netilat Yadayim permitted with a vessel manufactured from non-Kosher materials?

A: Yes, but preferably not.

##### Different interpretations of Jewish Law

Q: How can I distinguish between authentic differences of opinion within Jewish Law and what is extraneous to Judaism?

A: Check the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Messilat Yesharim or any book of Halacha.

##### Eating Chumus

Q: Is dipping pita, crackers etc. into a plate of Chumus acceptable?

A: No. It's respectable to use cutlery.

##### Beit Knesset

Q: Is it permissible to pray in a Shul where the Mechitza not in accordance with Jewish Law?

A: No. The Shul is an official place of prayer, supplication and service of the Creator.

##### Kaddish

Q: When a grandson has been delegated the responsibility of reciting Kaddish (according to the Rama), should he, in addition to saying it during the first eleven months, also recite Kaddish on the Yahrzeit?

A: Out of reverence he should recite Kaddish on the Yahrzeit as well (based on Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah and Sefer Mateh Ephraim) Parents and Children

Q: What is the appropriate reaction of a parent whose devout and learned son apparently abandoned his religious lifestyle? In such a case would one say that the child's decision is Hashem's will?

A: Hashem wants us to perform the Mitzvot. Beseech Hashem with all your might and sincerely pray that your son will repent.

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#### Insights Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei Adar 5781

#### Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

#### Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Soro Beila bas Shimon. “May her Neshama have an Aliya!”

#### Haziness of Laziness

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

Rashi (ad loc) points out that by the inauguration of the Mizbeach (Bamidbar 7:1-2) the Nesi'im were the first to contribute, yet by the construction of the Mishkan they lagged behind everyone else. Rashi explains that by the Mishkan the Nesi'im decided that they should wait to see what everyone else would contribute, and then they would supply whatever was still missing.

Yet the Nesi'im underestimated the generous spirit of Bnei Yisroel; almost everything necessary for the Mishkan was donated. The only thing left to bring were the stones mentioned in the possuk. For this reason, they were the first to contribute by the inauguration of the Mizbeach. Rashi continues; “Because they were lazy [by the construction of the Mishkan], a letter was removed from their title” – וְהַנְּשִׂאִים is written without a letter yud.

Rashi's characterization of the Nesi'im as being lazy can be difficult to comprehend. After all, the Nesi'im offered to complete whatever was missing from the communal contributions. In essence, they were offering to deficit fund the construction of the Mishkan. This is every fundraiser's dream. Obviously, they cared enough to make sure that the Mishkan would be completed properly; so, why are they referred to as lazy?

What is the definition of lazy? Most people assume that being lazy has something to do with how slow you move. In fact, the very slow moving animals of the Central and South American jungles are known as sloths – a synonym for lazy. Just how slow does someone have to be in order to be considered lazy?

In truth, laziness has nothing to do with how fast or slow one moves. Shlomo Hamelech characterized the thought process of a lazy person; “A lazy person says there is a lion on the road” (Mishlei 26:13). Why is this the quintessential example of laziness? If there is a lion in the road then he is right for staying at home and not venturing out. However, if there is no lion outside, then he isn't lazy, he's delusional! What does Shlomo Hamelech mean?

The key to understanding laziness is the analysis of individual motivation. Is the motivation internal or based on external factors? In other words, do I go to work because I want to be productive or because I need to pay for groceries and rent?

Many people say that they work best under pressure – and this is the reason they leave important projects or term papers to the very last moment. In truth, they are just lazy and unmotivated to excel unless there is an external pressure forcing them to achieve.

Shlomo Hamelech is saying that of course there is a lion on the road, but a lazy person sees it as an insurmountable obstacle, while an industrious person just looks at the situation as a problem that he must overcome. After all, there is no shortage of solutions to almost any situation. Lazy people find excuses while motivated people find solutions. The key to curing laziness is to have goals that both inspire and motivate you.

There are dozens of excuses as to why one cannot contribute to communal projects like Shuls and schools; “The Rabbi isn’t inspiring enough” or “The board isn’t transparent enough” or “The education isn’t as good as it could be.” At the end of the day, these are all merely the excuses of lazy individuals who do not have the community’s best interest at heart. Committed community minded individuals are inspired and motivated to look for solutions, not excuses.

This was the mistake of the Nesi'im. They weren't motivated enough to actually help with the building of the Mishkan; they were only motivated by the external pressure of not having a Mishkan. This is why they only offered to deficit fund the Mishkan, in case Bnei Yisroel did not come through. However, as community leaders, they should have led the contributions. For this reason, the Nesi'im are called lazy and had a letter removed from their name. The Torah tells us in Sefer Bamidbar that they actually learned from their mistake and by the inauguration of the Mizbeach they were the first to contribute.

### **Creating Shabbos**

And Moshe assembled the entire assembly of Bnei Yisroel and said to them: “These are the things that Hashem commanded to do them...” (35:1)

Moshe Rabbeinu gathers all of Bnei Yisroel to instruct them on the laws of Shabbos and the commandment to construct a Mishkan. The Gemara (Shabbos 97b) derives from the words “these are the things” that there are thirty-nine creative acts that are forbidden on Shabbos (See Rashi ad loc for a detailed explanation).

Yet the Torah’s characterization that “these are the things that Hashem commanded to do them” seems a little odd. After all, these are things that Hashem is very specifically asking us not to do! Why doesn’t the Torah just simply state, “These are the things that Hashem has forbidden us to do on Shabbos?”

Additionally, all of the Torah is meant to apply to all of Bnei Yisroel; so why does Moshe specifically gather everyone as an assembly to teach them about Shabbos?

The Torah is teaching us a remarkable aspect of Shabbos, one that we are all responsible to see fulfilled. If one drives down the street early on a Sunday morning, or on a national holiday like Thanksgiving, it is readily apparent that it is not a typical weekday. The normal hustle and bustle of everyday life is missing and the day actually feels different.

This is what the Torah is teaching us; each and every one of us has a responsibility to create an environment of Shabbos. For six days a week, we are enjoined to do creative acts (35:2). Yet, on the seventh day, we are prohibited from doing those very same acts. By abstaining from the thirty-nine melachos we are actually differentiating Shabbos from every other day of the week and doing something much greater – we are creating a feeling of Shabbos in our community.

There are many things that one can do on Shabbos that doesn’t technically violate any of the Torah prohibitions: One can move furniture around for hours, go jogging, reorganize cabinets and freezers, etc. However, these activities actually detract from the feeling of a Shabbos environment, and therefore should not be done.

This also explains a Gemara in Bava Kama (37A), which says that a bull that only gores on Shabbos isn’t considered dangerous on weekdays. Tosfos (ad loc) asks; how is this possible? An animal doesn’t know what day of the week it is! Tosfos answers that perhaps it recognizes that it’s a different day because people dress differently. Perhaps we can add that, in a proper Shabbos environment, the atmosphere feels so different that a bull feels that he can do whatever he wants.

This is why Moshe gathered everyone together to teach them about Shabbos. It is incumbent on every single person to promote this environment and create a special atmosphere of Shabbos. Each individual has to recognize that his/her actions also effect everyone else’s feeling of Shabbos.

### **Did You Know...**

In this week’s double parsha, Hashem commands Moshe to anoint everything in the Mishkan, including Aaron, his sons, and the Mishkan itself. Moshe himself made the special anointment oil, under Hashem’s

instruction. This oil was used to anoint all high priests, kings, and the vessels of the Mishkan. Here are a few interesting facts about the oil:

1. This oil was very fragrant; it was made with four of the finest perfumes, though there is some dispute as to what they were exactly. The perfumes are Mor Deror (musk, or myrrh, or a certain root), Kinman Besem (aloe wood, or Mecca straw, or a type of grass), Keneh Bosem (probably cinnamon), and Kidah (cassia or ginger).
2. Another opinion of what Keneh Bosem is that it is marijuana (The Living Torah on Ki Sisa). This is based on the fact that cannabis and Keneh Bosem have almost the same pronunciation. This certainly brings a new meaning to the term “high priest.”
3. The oil was made by soaking the different ingredients in water, until the fragrance was fully removed. They then added a gallon of oil and boiled away the water to infuse the oil with the scent.
4. Interestingly, this oil was only made once (by Moshe).
5. Furthermore, even though it was only made once – with just a single gallon of oil – they never ran out of it. Obviously, this was an enormous miracle as all the vessels and every high priest and king was anointed with it.
6. The oil was not used in the second Beis Hamikdash; the high priests were anointed by wearing the holy clothes. The oil will be hidden until the times of Moshiach, when Bnei Yisroel is worthy again.
7. There was a very specific way of anointing everything, and of course there are different opinions on this as well. The high priests would be anointed by first placing oil on their head and above their eyebrows, then joining them together to make the letter chaf (for Cohen). All the vessels were anointed in the same way, but kings had the oil placed all around their head like a crown. The Gemara (Kereisos 5b) says that the symbol made on the high priest’s head was actually the Greek letter chi, which looks just like the letter X.

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

*For the week ending 13 March 2021 / 29 Adar 5781*

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

*Parshat Pekudei*

*The New Israel*

*"And he made the breast-plate as a craftsman, like he made the ephod, from gold, turquoise, purple and crimson wool..." (39:8)*

At the beginning of Megillat Esther, Achashverosh throws a party to end all parties. The party of the millennium. He was celebrating his unassailable grip on the throne of the Persian Empire. At this party, Achashverosh brought out the vessels of the Holy Temple which the Babylonians had plundered and caroused with.

But he didn’t stop there. Achavshverosh’s party attire consisted of the vestments of the High Priest. Why did he do this? Was it some elaborate spoof? Was Achavshverosh poking fun at the Jewish People and their prophecies of the demise of his all-mighty kingdom? Or was there something more sinister behind this charade?

"And the land was formless and empty and darkness on the face of the deep." (Bereishet 1:2)

These words form part of the opening words of the Torah. They hint to four mighty empires that will subjugate the Jewish People. The first, Babylon, will snatch the crown of Empire from the Jewish People, and then the Persian, Greece and Roman empires will successively snatch world domination, one from the other. Eventually, the last of those empires, Rome and its cultural heirs, will return the kingship to the Jewish People.

When that happens, “The lost ones will come from the land of Ashur” (Yeshayahu 27:13) — and the final exile will end. The name Ashur is related to the Hebrew word ishur. An ishur is a certification. Each nation who takes the kingship from the Jewish People seeks to “certify” itself as being the true and final recipient of the crown of the world. But they can only do this by proclaiming themselves the true heirs. They claim to

be the "New Israel," so to speak. They claim that the testament of faith of the Jewish People is old and that they have a new one.

This, in essence, was what Achashverosh was attempting to do at his millennial party. He was certifying himself as the "New Israel." His party was a grotesque replication of the Temple service. The vessels of the Temple were there and were being used. He was dressed as the Kohen Gadol, the high priest. He even went so far as to name his ministers after the offerings of the Holy Temple. He was trying to utilize those forces of holiness for his own means, to set his own seal on world domination, using the higher spiritual forces. This was no charade.

But we know what transpired. The truth and eternity of Hashem, His Torah and His nation of Israel prevailed, and will always prevail.

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*Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message*

*Vayakhel-Pekudei 5781-2021*

**"The Original Jewish Renewal Movement"**

*(Updated and revised from Vayakhel-Pekudei 5762-2002)*

**Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald**

This Shabbat, two parashiot, Vayakhel and Pekudei, are read, which conclude the book of Exodus. These parashiot describe the actual erecting and dedication of the Mishkan—the Tabernacle.

This Shabbat, an additional portion, Exodus 12:1-20 is read from a second Torah. Known as parashat Hachodesh, this portion announces that the month of Nissan, the first month of the year, is soon to commence. In the year 5781, Rosh Chodesh Nissan occurs on Saturday night and Sunday, March 13th and 14th. Passover, of course, will be observed 15 days after Rosh Chodesh Nissan.

Exodus 12:2 reads: *הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה*, This month shall be for you the head of the months, it shall be for you the first of the months of the year. The rabbis point out that the word *לָכֶם*—"lachem," to you, is composed of the exact same letters as the word *מֶלֶךְ*—"melech," king, indicating that the month of Nissan should be honored more than any other month. By reading the special Torah portion and the special Haftarah (prophetic message) on the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh Nissan, we publicize that this month is indeed honored and hallowed.

The Jewish calendar has several important propitious times. The month of Tishrei, is a propitious time for teshuva, repentance. The month of Av, is an inauspicious time for calamity and misfortune. The month of Nissan is the propitious time for *גְּאֻלָּה*—"geulah," redemption. The Hebrew word *חֹדֶשׁ*—"Chodesh," month, has the same root letters as the Hebrew word *חָדָשׁ*—"chadash," which means new, obviously, related to the fact that the new moon appears at the beginning of the month. Chodesh also emphasizes renewal, renaissance, and rebuilding. The dark, cold winter has come to an end, and spring blossoms forth with hope and promise. The festival of Passover reflects that hope as well.

Eliyahu Kitov, writes in his landmark work, "The Book of Our Heritage":

Our sages tell us that the word "redemption" applies only to one who emerges from darkness into light. One who has never experienced the suffering of bondage and oppression, cannot appreciate redemption. The very essence of redemption is the freedom, which comes from the oppression itself. Had the children of Israel never been enslaved, they would never have experienced true freedom. Once they were enslaved, the slavery itself gave rise to the redemption, and from the midst of the darkness, the light burst forth. Thus said our sages: "The Israelites said to the Holy One, Blessed be He, 'Oh Lord of the universe when will You deliver us?' The Holy One, Blessed be He answered: 'When you will have reached the lowest steps, at that moment I will redeem you.'" (Yalkut Hasheva 533, cited by KiTov, page 121.)

KiTov provides examples of how our people rise up from the depths of despair. When Isaac was born, the people of the world said that he is destined to be a slave because of the promise of G-d to Abraham (Genesis 15:13) that, "Your children will be slaves in a land which is not theirs." Instead, Isaac became the father of the great nation and the free people.

When Isaac was bound on the altar, it seemed as if there would be no future to Abraham, and that his progeny would perish from the face of the earth. And, yet, Isaac survived to have his own children, and to preserve life for future generations.

When Jacob put on the garments of his brother Esau, he was afraid that his father would discover his deception, which would bring a curse upon him rather than a blessing. Despite the deception, Jacob was blessed for all generations.

And, so, points out KiTov, "In the long history of Israel, troubles and dark sorrows became the basis for salvation and light." In fact, says KiTov, "the darker the troubles, the greater was the light which came forth afterwards."

Nissan is the month of redemption. G-d has made Nissan the month and the time of salvation. The redemption will burst forth from the midst of darkness, and, as we tremble to the point of despair, the glory of G-d will shine forth.

There is a special Psalm, which Jews recite on the Sabbath day. The psalmist, in Psalm 92:3, writes: *לְהַגִּיד בְּבִקְרַת הַקֹּדֶשׁ, וְנִצְמְרוּתָהּ בְּלִילֹתָהּ*. We speak of G-d's loving-kindness in the morning, and of His faithfulness at night. In the morning, when everything is bright and shiny it's easy to speak of G-d's loving-kindness. At night, in the dread of darkness, it is very difficult to see any light emanating from G-d, and almost impossible to express a sense of hopefulness. That is why throughout the night we must rely on "Emunah," faith.

These past months of the ubiquitous pandemic have been a period of great darkness for all people. Hundreds of thousands of wonderful, otherwise healthy, humans, of all stripes and colors, have succumbed to the dreaded COVID-19 virus. Normal life routines have come to a halt, freedom to congregate with others has been profoundly limited, and even the ability to visit with children and grandchildren have been sharply curtailed.

While it is very difficult in times such as these to see light, we need to be strong, and faithfully declare G-d's faithfulness in this night.

We pray, that the month of Nissan, which begins next week, will usher in a season of renewal—renewal of spirit, renewal of courage, renewal of faithfulness, and a renewal of peace.

We pray that the remarkable development, and aggressive distribution, of the COVID vaccine will finally bring the COVID nightmare to an end.

We hope that the enemies of the Jewish people, who have exploited these perilous times to attack our people and the State of Israel, will see the light in this new month of Nissan. May their desire be to see goodness for their children, as we desire for ours. May they lay down their swords, and pick up their pruning hooks. May we all plant in joy and reap together in good health and abundant happiness.

*May you be blessed.*

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[chiefrabbi.org](http://chiefrabbi.org) Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

***Dvar Torah Parshat HaChodesh: Rosh Hashana is at the commencement of the seventh month of the year!***

Yes, it is true. Rosh Hashanah takes place at the commencement of the seventh month of the year. This anomaly is a feature of our Jewish calendar thanks to a portion in the book of Shemot, which we will be reading this coming shabbat – Parshat HaChodesh. The Torah says:

"HaChodesh hazeh lachem rosh chadashim." – "This month of Nissan shall be for you the head of the months of the year."

So Nissan starts the months of the year while Tishrei starts the year itself.

Freedom

Why is Nissan so central and significant for us? It is because in this month we attained our freedom from slavery in Egypt. This unusual phenomenon on our calendar comes to teach us four important lessons:

First of all, 'zecher lemaasei Bereishit' – remembering the acts of creation – takes us back to the commencement of life on earth. In a similar way, 'zecher leytziat Mitzrayim', remembering the Exodus from Egypt, during Nissan, takes us back to the commencement of the Jewish nation.

Secondly, we are reminded here of the greatness of Hashem, who against the odds was able to deliver our people. And as is very often the case, Hashem asks us to have 'bitachon', trust in Him. He also calls upon us to do 'hishtadlut' – to try our best to attain our own freedom. Moshe went back to Egypt; he stood

before Pharaoh; he devised a plan – and all the miracles that transpired in Egypt for our people came about in the context of the Jewish people trying our best. The third lesson – the month of Nissan, reminds us of the persecution of our people in Egypt. Here, there is a call for us always to speak out; to try our utmost to neutralise the forces of persecution and never to be silent when we witness the suffering of others. Here too there is a further reminder that no nation on earth, however powerful, should ever presume that it can indefinitely persecute innocent people, because ultimately history shows us that what is right will prevail. The fourth lesson – we attained our freedom from Egypt in Nissan not merely just to exist as a people but as a means towards leading a responsible way of life. That is why the counting of the Omer serves as a bridge between Pesach and Shavuot – taking us from Nissan through to Mount Sinai where we received the Torah. We are privileged not just to have a physical existence – to have something to live with – but in addition, to have something wonderful to live for. And as a result, thanks to our Torah, we can inspire others and have a joyous and meaningful life always.

Nissan

So yes, it is true. Rosh Hashanah takes place in the seventh month of the year but Nissan is the head of the months of the year, and from Shabbat Parshat HaChodesh we learn so many important lessons for our lives.

*Shabbat shalom.*

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

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**Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz**  
**Parashat Vayakhel – Pekudei**  
**Who Produces Our Medicine**  
24 Adar 5781 March 8, 2021

In this week's two parashot of Vayakhel and Pekudei, we read about the implementation of the directions on how to build the Mishkan (Tabernacle), how to make the clothing for the kohanim, etc... which we read in Teruma and Tetzaveh. While reading these two parashot, we notice a phrase that is repeated often while the Torah describes the execution of the directions: "As the Lord commanded Moses." This phrase is repeated no fewer than nineteen times. At every stage, we are reminded that things were done precisely as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Couldn't we have understood this after being told once? Was it necessary to "plant" this phrase in each stage of the execution? Clearly, the Torah is trying to direct our attention to the fact that the Mishkan and its utensils were made exactly according to the directions.

When we examine this closely, we realize that sticking to directions does not come naturally at all. The people chosen to create the Mishkan were distinguished artists, led by Bezalel, the son of Uri from the tribe of Judah, about whom the Torah writes, "He has imbued him with the spirit of G-d, with wisdom, with insight, and with knowledge, and with [talent for] all manner of craftsmanship to do master weaving, to work with gold, silver, and copper...to work with every [manner of] thoughtful work" (Exodus 35, 31-33). However – isn't unconstrained freedom a prerequisite for art?

When we delve into the words of Chazal, we wonder about this even more. Chazal teach us that the Mishkan was not built to fulfill a need of G-d's, but rather of people. The building of the Mishkan was due to a demand of the Children of Israel. Therefore, who could fulfill the spiritual aspects more than those who required them? It would have made sense that the Children of Israel invest their efforts and build the perfect creation as they saw it. But that is not what occurred. They created the Mishkan "as the Lord commanded Moses."

Rabbi Yehuda Halevi (1075-1141), one of the greatest authors of Spanish Jewry's Golden Age, wrote a book that became one of the foundational books of Jewish philosophy: *The Kuzari*. In this book, he wonders about the need for detailed commandments. Wouldn't it be better to direct humans to behave as their hearts tell them to behave, according to what draws them spiritually? He responds to all the questions using an allegory of a man who enters a famous physician's treasure-trove of medicines. When he saw people waiting to get medication from the doctor, he distributed medicine to each waiting patient without knowing what kind of medicine it was or if it suited the patient's illness. This fool did not help, and even harmed, those who took the medicine based on his instructions.

This is how Rabbi Yehuda Halevi viewed a person trying to create his own values and act according to his needs, even if these were worthy spiritual needs. A person trying to attain wholeness of his soul, without divine revelation, cannot help himself. Ideologies and theories rise and fall one after another because human wisdom does not have the power to find a remedy for a person's spiritual needs!

Repair of the human soul can only take place when a person takes on values external to himself. The most accurate and efficient art is that which follows the directions "as the Lord commanded Moses." Even Moses, the greatest prophet, is the not the source of spiritual direction a human strives for. Only G-d, the Creator of the Universe, knows the depths of the human soul and the secrets of

existence and creates the correct "medicine" for people. Only He Who created humans knows what they need to redeem their souls and transcend to a spiritual and moral life.

Judaism believes in living a life directed by the Torah – "as the Lord commanded Moses." We do not try to create medicines by ourselves. We know the greatest physician and follow His directions. Thus, we can live an exemplary life of spirituality and humaneness, in the light of the Torah and its commandments.

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

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**Shema Yisrael Torah Network**  
**Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Vayakhel**

**פרשת ויקהל - פקודי תשפ"א**

**לא תבערו אש בכל משבתכם ביום השבת**

**You must not kindle a fire in all your dwelling places on the day of Shabbos. (35:3)**

Chazal (*Shabbos* 70a) debate the reason for the singling out of *melechtes havarah*, kindling a fire, on *Shabbos*. Some say *l'laav yatzah*, it is singled out to teach a negative precept, (*lo saaseh*) that one who lights a fire is subject to the death penalty, *kares*, Heavenly excision, or bringing a sin-offering – as is the law regarding any other one of the *avos melachos*, 39 primary categories of labor prohibited on *Shabbos*. The other position vis-à-vis *havarah* is *l'chalek yatzas*, it was singled out to separate the *melachos* of *Shabbos*. This means: If one, out of ignorance, transgresses the various major labors on *Shabbos*, they are considered separate, distinct and unrelated. Thus, he must bring a separate *Korban Chatas*, sin-offering, for each and every *melachah*. This is in contrast to when one commits the same *melachah* over and over again, in which case he brings only one *korban*.

This is the third instance that *Shabbos* is mentioned in *Sefer Shemos*. First, in the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, "You must not do any work... (on *Shabbos*)" (*Shemos* 20:10). Second, in *Parashas Ki Sisa* (*Shemos* 31:14), "You shall preserve the *Shabbos*... for whoever does work on it, shall be cut off from the midst of the people."

*Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, zl*, writes that he heard from the *Brisker Rav, zl*, that these citations concerning the prohibition of *Shabbos* follow a specific sequence. In the *Aseres HaDibros*, the Torah begins by introducing the concept of *Shabbos*. It follows up in *Parashas Ki Sisa* with an exhortation concerning the punishment (*sekillah*, stoning, or *kares*) for one who desecrates *Shabbos*. Last, once the Torah teaches the concept of *Shabbos*, then follows up with its punishment, it can now distinguish between *havarah*, a *lo saaseh*, which incurs punishment, and a *l'chalek*, which teaches that *melachos* are separated. The *Rosh Yeshivah* noted the *Brisker Rav's* brevity, making a comment (which is laden with commentary) allowing for it to sink into the listener's mind – and moving on.

At another occasion (*Rav Moshe Shmuel reminisces*), the *Rav* spoke at the *bar mitzvah* of his son, *Horav Meir, zl*, which was attended by *Horav Isser Zalmen Meltzer, zl*. The *Brisker Rav* held forth concerning the *nusach ha'Tefillah*, text of the *siddur, Shabbos Shacharis: V'chein kasuv b'sorasecha, v'shomru Bnei Yisrael es ha'Shabbos... b'ris olam*; "It is written in your Torah *Bnei Yisrael* will guard the *Shabbos*... (to make *Shabbos*) an eternal covenant (for all their generations). He asked why *Chazal* selected this *pasuk* rather than any other *pasuk* relating to the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos*. He explained that it follows the statement (in *Shemoneh Esrai*) that relates to *Moshe Rabbeinu's* descending *Har Sinai* with the *Luchos*, upon which were engraved the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos*. It is well-known that Hashem gave the *Luchos* as a covenant between Hashem and the Jewish People. Thus, every *mitzvah* engraved on the *Luchos* retains "covenant status." Likewise, *Shabbos* is a covenantal *mitzvah*. Therefore, the *nusach*, version, of the *Shemoneh Esrai* follows with a *pasuk* that addresses *Shabbos* as an eternal covenant.

This was the gist of the *Brisker Rav's* remarks at his son's *bar mitzvah* – rendered in the presence of the senior *Rosh Yeshivah* in *Eretz Yisrael, Rav Isser Zalmen Meltzer*. Once again, the *Rav* was succinct and brief, making his statement and allowing for it to be absorbed in its unembellished, almost abrupt form.

Rav Moshe Shmuel explains that was the *Brisker Rav's* approach to speaking (veritably to everything). He spoke the truth in its unvarnished form. What can one add to the truth? On the contrary, the more one speaks, the more he detracts from the truth. The more one repeats himself, the more he is likely to give the impression that what he says requires qualification. Truth needs no qualification. It is an absolute, and, as such, is pristine in its brevity.

*Horav Koppel Reich*, *zl*, Rav of Budapest for over half a century and leader of Hungarian Orthodox Jewry, was a prolific orator, a brilliant *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar; his message was profound, his oratory dynamic and compelling. Nonetheless, he never spoke without first preparing. Regardless of the audience, he spoke only after having reviewed in his mind and collected his thoughts in such a manner that his words would have the greatest efficacy. One day, prior to a *bar-mitzvah* celebration in which he was scheduled to speak, his grandson observed him pacing back and forth in his study speaking to himself. "Zayde, what are you doing?" the young man asked. "I am preparing my *drashah*, speech." "Zayde, over the years you must have delivered hundreds of *drashos*. Do you still need to prepare your speech?" Rav Koppel's reply should serve as guidance for every speaker, "I am not preparing what to say – but what not to say!" Redundancy, repeating phrases and words, while, at times used for the purpose of emphasizing an idea, is more often an indication that the speaker is concealing something. He may be struggling to gather his thoughts or trying to convince the listener to accept his deception. Someone who is sure of himself and what he has to say need not be verbose.

ויבאו כל איש אשר נשאו לבו... ויבאו האנשים על הנשים... וכל איש אשר נמצא אתו... וכל הנשים אשר נשא לבן

**Every many whose head inspired him came... the men came with the women... every man with whom was found... all the women whose hearts inspired them. (35:21,22,23,26)**

*Horav Yeshaya Pik*, *zl*, posits that these *pesukim* address four types of donors. (Charitable donations usually fall under the rubric of these four circumstances.) Some men/husbands will not donate before going home and speaking it over with their wives. This type of husband is in a situation in which their bank accounts are joint, and his wife has a dominant role in the home (as it should be). Therefore, whatever money goes out must have her acquiescence. Concerning this type of man, the Torah writes: "The men came with the women." These men had their wives' consent. Next is the man who knows that he will never receive his wife's compliance. Whatever he does has to be behind her back, from a secret cache of funds. Regarding him, the Torah writes, "every man with whom was found." He kept some money for himself, so that he could contribute to *tzedakah*."

The next fellow is he who is not dependent upon his wife's permission. He either has sufficient funds to act on his own or his wife is of the same mind and/or trusts her husband's decisions. He is the one concerning whom the Torah writes, "Every man whose heart inspired him came." Last is the woman who has access to her own funds, who does not require her husband's involvement in her monetary decisions. Her husband respects her ability to make financial decisions and is, thus, in complete accord with her donations.

Interestingly, if we peruse the sequence of *pesukim*, the one who gives freely with his money – and either does not have to consult his wife or she is likeminded and in agreement with his decisions – is listed first among the donors. He can write a check immediately, since no hassle will occur concerning his contributions. Next comes the husband who has to check with his wife just to make sure that she agrees with him, followed by the poor fellow who has to donate surreptitiously behind his wife's back. The last case is the wife who gives freely of her own volition, either because she has her own funds or because her husband respects her decisions. Why is she last? I would think that she would be second – right after the husband who is in control of his checkbook. Perhaps, it is specifically because she is so circumspect and careful that she has earned her husband's respect concerning monetary decisions. Thus, she is last, because she takes her time to render each decision.

ראו קרא ד' בשם בצלאל בן אורי בן חור

**See, Hashem has proclaimed by name, Betzalel, ben Uri, ben Chur. (35:30)**

It was necessary for Moshe *Rabbeinu* to announce that Hashem had selected Betzalel, his sister's grandson, to be the *Mishkan's* chief artisan. As a result, the usual malcontents, who derive their greatest pleasure from finding fault and expressing their dissatisfaction, should be aware that it was Hashem's decision – not Moshe's. Why was Betzalel selected for this august position? *Chazal* (*Tanchuma Vayakhel* 4) explain that Hashem wanted to reward Betzalel's grandfather, Chur, who had given up his life *Al Kiddush Hashem* when he stood up to the sinners that committed idol worship with the Golden Calf. Hailing from the tribe of Yehudah, religious devotion was part of the tribe's DNA. Nachshon ben Aminadav had been the first to enter the Red Sea. Chur's father, Calev ben Yefuneh, stood up to the *meraglim*, spies. Indeed, David *Hamelech* descends from the tribe of Yehudah. Thus, Chur's selection brings the construction of the *Bais Hamikdash* full circle. The Jews gave gold in order to create the Golden Calf, which was the catalyst that led to Chur's murder. Now, they were giving gold to make the *Mishkan* which Betzalel, Chur's grandson, would construct, so that the *Mishkan* could atone for the Golden Calf and – by extension – in some way expiate Chur's murder. We now know the identities of Chur and Betzalel. Who was Uri, and what role did he play in this story?

Simply, we might suggest that Uri was the necessary link between Chur and Betzalel. The lesson is: Not all of us are destined to have prestigious positions, illustrious pedigrees, change the world. Some of us are "links" in order to serve as the generational conduit to transmit the legacy that we received from our parents to our children. We are just as vital as the ones who have the positions and the pedigrees, because, without the link, the pedigree is irrelevant. I think if we delve deeper into "Uri, the father," however, we might suggest that, without Uri, Betzalel might not have been able to function in his new role. Imagine Betzalel being told to construct the edifice that would atone for the Golden Calf that was the antecedent to his grandfather's murder. He probably looked at his father for advice. Apparently, his father "intimated" that he, too, had watched in horror as his father was murdered by the idol-worshipping revelers. By inference, he sanctioned Betzalel's participation. In other words, Uri quite possibly was the one who enabled the *Mishkan's* construction via his son.

Not all fathers are dynamic; not all *rebbeim* are dynamic. Some are "just" hardworking, devoted, sincere, authentic human beings, who are conscientious, compassionate – who educate with love. That is how a community nourishes a Betzalel to distinction.

**Parashas Pekudei**

ויברך אותם משה

**And Moshe blessed them. (39:43)**

*Rashi* teaches that Moshe *Rabbeinu's* blessing was: "Yehi *ratzon*, May it be His will that the *Shechinah* rest on the work of your hands; *Vihy noam*, May the pleasantness of our G-d be upon us." What greater blessing can there be than knowing that Hashem's *Shechinah*, His Divine Presence, rests upon his work? One can have no greater prize than having the Divine Presence crown his finished product. How did the people warrant such an extraordinary blessing? They were sincere in their contributing. Their donations – whether it was their best material or themselves – was all *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven. There was no "self" involved. It was all for Hashem. When one's intentions are pure, he is blessed.

Growing up in Antwerp, Belgium, prior to World War II, "Chaim" purchased a parcel of land in Bnei Brak. When the winds of war were beginning to blow, he, like many of his co-religionists, fled to France. It did not take long before the accursed Nazis moved their war machine through Western Europe reaching France. Those Jews who were fortunate to escape, found safe haven in other countries. This Jew from Antwerp was able to escape to Portugal where he rebuilt his life – unfortunately, not in accordance with Torah dictate. The Jewish community was small, comprised now primarily of refugees. They were in a country that, at best, tolerated their Jewish immigrants. The best



way to earn a living and raise a family was to acculturate and eventually assimilate.

Once one begins to descend into the abyss, he freefalls quickly. Chaim soon forgot his religious upbringing. He eliminated *Shabbos* and *kashrus*, together with *davening* and *Tefillin*. To add insult to injury, he married out of the faith. His heirs were now *goyim*, as well. He invested in a small fish business, which, over time, grew into a large successful enterprise. Now, years later, he was a wealthy Portuguese citizen who happened to have a biological Jewish pedigree.

Let us now return to Bnei Brak where Chaim had purchased a parcel of land. Since he had not laid claim to it his real estate purchase, according to Israeli law, it was up to the first person who claimed it. Two Torah organizations debated over its ownership, with each claiming that his organization had been there first. Back and forth, they presented their litigation before the judge, who now had access to Chaim's deed on the property. Apparently, this property belonged to a Belgium Jew who had purchased it in 1935.

We return to Portugal where Chaim became interested in a small abandoned *shul* situated in the suburb where he lived. This *shul* was built prior to the Inquisition, making it approximately 500 years old. He decided to do one good thing with his now defunct spiritual life: rebuild the *shul*. Having been made aware of the litigation that was going on in Bnei Brak, he decided that he would use the proceeds of that sale (the money paid by whichever institution was prepared to pay his asking price) to rebuild the *shul*. This came as a surprise to the members of the Jewish community who were well aware of his hefty financial portfolio. Why use the funds generated by his sale of land in Bnei Brak? He explained that he had once been a devout Jew, wholly committed to Torah study and *mitzvah* observance. It was during that period in his life when he felt that his relationship with Hashem was satisfactory. He was acting in consonance with Hashem's commands. Once the war ravaged European Jewry, it took its toll on his spiritual demeanor, as well. He had, over the years, distanced himself from Hashem, and he had profited financially from his decision to renege his spiritual affiliation with Judaism. While he felt strongly about his Jewishness, he acknowledged that his conduct in the spiritual arena was less-than-acceptable. As such, he wanted to designate those funds earned from monies he spent while his commitment to religious observance was unambiguous to be used to rebuild the synagogue.

We should neither judge nor fault our Jewish brothers and sisters who do not practice as we do. Some never had access to a Jewish education; others grew up at a time or in a place where religious observance was a difficult, almost insurmountable, challenge. Some suffered more than the average human body or mind can endure. Whatever their reason, they still know and acknowledge their ancestry. They just have a different way of expressing it.

**ביום החדש הראשון באחד לחדש תקים את משכן אהל מועד**

**On the first day of the first month, you should set up the *Mishkan* of the *Ohel Moed*. (40:2)**

*Chazal* (*Midrash Tanchuma, Pikudei* 11) teach that the construction of the *Mishkan* was completed within three months. *Tishrei, Mar Cheshvan, Kislev*. The people did not set up, however, until *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*, because Hashem wanted the festivities surrounding the erection of the *Mishkan* to be combined with the celebration of the birth of Yitzchak *Avinu*. What is there about Yitzchak *Avinu's* birth, his entrance into the world, connects with the *Mishkan*? How do these two celebrations mesh, and what is the message for us?

Let us focus on Yitzchak's name, its source and what it represents vis-à-vis our nation. The angels appeared before Avraham *Avinu* with the Heavenly message: "You will have a son!" Sarah *Imeinu* overheard and reacted with "laughter"/incredulity. When Yitzchak was born, Sarah said, *Tzchok asah li Elokim, kol ha'shomea yitzchak li*, "G-d has made laughter for me, all that will hear will laugh for me" (*Bereishis* 21:6). As a result of this laughter (earlier, when Hashem had informed Avraham of the impending birth of Yitzchak, he, too, had laughed), the child was named Yitzchak. Nothing about having a baby is mirthful – especially amid such miraculous circumstances. Furthermore,

it seems strange – almost incongruous – that the Patriarch who exemplifies *Middas HaDin*, the Attribute of Strict Justice, and the *middah* of *Gevurah*, strength, would be give a name based upon a parent's reaction to the absurdity of his birth.

Indeed, *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, observes that the term "yitzchak" (*kol ha'shomea yitzchak li*) sounds like a combination of the *kal*, simple pure conjugation, and *piel*, intensive conjugation of the verb, *tzchok*. In the *kal*, *tzchok* bespeaks a natural, almost involuntary, laughter, which we are unable to control due to the absurdity we face. *Tzachek*, in the *piel* form, alludes to the intentional mocking laughter, through which we jeer at the incongruity between the intention/plan and the act, between the desire and the achievement. Two words *tzchok* and *tzachek*, which seem to be pulling in different directions – one involuntary laughter, the other purposeful mockery.

Avraham and Sarah lived a life in which they swam against the tide of world opinion and culture. This "elderly couple" even believed that their work would continue with the "heir" to their legacy. How absurd! Can we really believe anyone for involuntary smirking – even laughter? There will always be the contemptuous scoundrels who secure their high from mockery and jeering others. At the end of the day, conceiving, giving birth, and raising Yitzchak to follow in their footsteps and continue their noble legacy were really implausible and given somewhat to catalyze laughter. When we take into consideration that Yitzchak advanced to Patriarchal status as a result of the *Akeidah*, binding, this was a moment that personified *Din*, Strict Justice, at its apex. This was certainly no laughing matter. Indeed, what an idiosyncratic name for such a serious Patriarch.

Laughter is a natural response to the absurd, to that which is incongruous. The greater the absurdity, the more pronounced the incongruity, the more conspicuous the paradox, the more one is inclined towards an expression of amusement. Yitzchak's birth was preposterous and outlandish, thus, Sarah was moved to laughter. Hers was a laughter of incredulity, of surprise and almost shock.

The *Akeidas Yitzchak* went against all rationale. After finally producing a son that would carry on his legacy, Avraham was commanded to slaughter him. Nothing within the realm of cogency can rationalize the *Akeidah* – other than this is the way a Jew lives. We do not demand "fair," or cogent. Our conviction remains firm, even when the irrational confronts us. We live by the will of Hashem. What matters most in life is how one lives it. If his life conforms with Hashem's will – then he has lived. If he lives against Hashem's Will – that is absurd!

The world laughs at us. They mock us with derision and ridicule. Their laughter hails back to Yitzchak. They laughed at his conception, his birth, his binding at the *Akeidah*. Our presence in the world after all these years of persecution is absurd. Now, who is laughing? They have tried countless times to destroy us, but we are here. Is anything more unimaginable than our existence? Nothing is inconceivable before Hashem, because, when He does something – it is real; it is in order; it is appropriate; it is congruous. He – and only He – determines what is absurd. So the world can foolishly laugh. We, however, laugh back. Yitzchak laughs. Our nation laughs.

We now understand why Hashem wanted the celebration of the *Mishkan* to coincide with Yitzchak's "birthday." Our nation has been bereft of its *Bais Hamikdash* for over 2,000 years. Our *Mikdash/Mishkan*, our Sanctuary, is no longer with us. We have been the focus of much derision during our exile. Hashem tells us: "Do not worry, you will yet laugh at the world, when the *Mishkan/Mikdash* is rebuilt." Yes, we will laugh!

***Va'ani Tefillah***

**עלינו ועל כל ישראל עמך – *Aleinu v'al Kol Yisrael Amecha*. Upon us and upon all of Yisrael, Your People.**

"Upon us" refers to those present in the congregation in which we are praying. We pray that this blessing of peace extend outward to Jews all over. *Kol Yisrael*, "All of Yisrael, Your People." *Amcha*; "Your People" explains *Horav Avigdor Miller, zl*, is a derivative of *Imcha*, "With You," those loyal to You. *Am Yisrael* and *Bnei Yisrael* have

diverse translations, with *Am* focusing on loyalty and subservience, and *Bnei*, as in *ben*, son/child, disregarding loyalty and focusing on patience.

We immediately follow up *Amcha* with *barcheinu Avinu* – “Bless us, Father,” a term which, by its very nature, includes all in the “family.” A father is father to all his children – even if one of them slips away. He remains part of the family. Thus, I think the blessing implies that we are unique as a nation, since we are a nation built upon family and pedigree. So, if one is in the “family,” he is part of the “nation.”

*In memory of our Father and Grandfather - Martin Nisenbaum*

ל מרדכי בן ר' אפרים ז"ל - נפטר ל"ח ניסן תשל"ג

זוכה לראות דורות עוסקים בתורה ויראת שמים

*Sponsored by Yaakov and Karen Nisenbaum and Family*

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*prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum*

## **The Pesach Sleuth Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

Imagine walking into a factory, noticing the ceiling, 25 feet overhead, lined with rows upon rows of similar-looking pipes. “How am I possibly supposed to know what goes through these pipes? How can I possibly check if they have been cleaned properly, and how can I possibly kasher them?”

When we purchase products for Pesach, we look for a hechsher that we respect, and we rely on that hechsher to make sure everything is done properly. Fortunately, an experienced mashgiach will know how to trace all those pipes and figure out what each one contains, although it will take him time to do so. Yet, most of us do not know what it is like to be in a factory that is supervising a Pesach-dik production run, nor do we know what it is like to be checking a factory to see if it is maintaining its kashrus program. We also don't really know why one hechsher is acceptable and another is not. Most people apply the “What do the neighbors use?” system, or, more accurately, “What does the chevrah use?” or “Do bnei Torah eat from that hechsher?” approach. Although one article cannot answer most of these questions, it can provide some direction and background.

**Pesach-dik ketchup**

Let me begin with a typical kosher-for-Pesach story. Ketchup, a common North American household product that, in some households, is an irreplaceable staple, is a relatively simple product containing tomato paste, water, corn sweetener, vinegar, salt, spices and flavoring. Several of these ingredients require replacement for a Pesach-dik product. Corn sweetener is kitniyos, and would require replacing, probably with a kosher-lePesach sugar made from either cane or beets. Pure spices ground for industrial use should be fine, but spice extracts or oleoresins will require more research. The water should not present any problem, and the tomato paste and salt used for commercial production should also be fine, but it always pays for the hechsher to double check the manufacturer.

Both the vinegar and the flavoring could contain chometz, and almost certainly contain kitniyos if they did not come from a specially-made Pesach run. Let us see how these sensitive ingredients will be handled:

**Vinegar**

Regular vinegar, usually called white vinegar, is manufactured from alcohol processed with yeast, vinegar food, and perhaps other raw materials, until the alcohol turns to vinegar. Every one of these ingredients can involve a potential chometz issue: Alcohol is commonly produced from grain. Vinegar food may also include chometz ingredients. Kosher lePesach vinegar would require that the alcohol, the yeast and the vinegar food all be specially made from a non-chometz, non-kitniyos source. Assuming that the hechsher certifying the production of the ketchup is not the one that certified the vinegar, the rabbonim or poskim of the hechsher on the ketchup will decide which hechsher for Pesach-dik vinegar they will accept.

In theory, kosher lePesach vinegar could be produced in a much easier way with virtually no halachic complications. Chemically, white vinegar is a solution of acetic acid and water. Pure acetic acid can be produced synthetically, and, therefore, a product identical to vinegar can be produced by simply mixing glacial acetic acid and water, which would be a very easy item to produce, simple to supervise, and less expensive than kosher-lePesach vinegar.

So why not?

If it is much easier to produce kosher-lePesach vinegar this way, why is it not done? The answer is that it is illegal in the United States to call this product “vinegar,” notwithstanding that it is perfectly safe to use and will accomplish whatever the “vinegar” in your product will. In the United States, this ingredient must be labeled as “diluted glacial acetic acid” or something similar, and companies are concerned that customers will not purchase a product with this ingredient listed on the label.

Vinegar in the United States must be produced by the fermentation of alcohol, and the alcohol used for this production must also be fermented and distilled from sugars or starches. Nevertheless, there are many countries of the world where it is perfectly legal to use synthetically produced vinegar in food production and to label it as “vinegar.”

**Flavoring**

Ketchup requires the addition of herbs, spices or flavoring. The size of flavor-producing companies varies in as great a range as you can imagine. I have seen flavor companies that are quite literally mom-and-pop shops, and I have also been inside flavor factories the size of a small city. Some flavor companies manage without any major sophisticated equipment, whereas others own hundreds of production machines that each cost in the millions of dollars.

**Spray towers**

Here is a very practical example: Many products are dried today in a massive piece of equipment called a spray dryer or spray tower. The purpose of this piece of equipment, usually about the height of a three-story building, is to convert a liquid product into a powder. It does so by pumping the liquid until it is dropped through the top of the spray tower. In the tower, which is usually gas-fired, very hot air, usually about 500 degrees Fahrenheit, is forced along the inside walls of the tower, and the liquid product is dropped through the middle. The temperature is hot enough so that all the liquid evaporates, leaving behind a powder that drops to the bottom of the spray tower, where it is boxed or bagged.

Many thousands of spray towers are used in the United States alone. Possibly the most frequent use is to powder skim milk, which is highly perishable, into nonfat dry milk, which occupies a fraction of the space of the liquid product, and, if kept dry, has an indefinite shelf life without any refrigeration, thus making it very easy to store and ship.

Assuming that this spray tower is used only for milk, the major question that will occur is how to kasher it for a cholov Yisroel production. There are many halachic issues here, including that a spray tower physically cannot be filled with water and brought to a boil, which constitutes hag'alah, the most common way of kashering. Furthermore, it is unlikely that this method suffices to kasher the tower, since the absorption into the walls of the spray tower is without liquid.

Another option is to kasher the tower by use of a flame thrower, basically a larger form of a blow torch.

On the other hand, there are halachic authorities who contend that the spray dryer does not even require kashering, since the product is not supposed to touch its walls. Because of the tremendous heat that absorbs into the stainless steel walls of the dryer, product that touches them burns, and will probably pass distaste, nosein taam lifgam, into the final product. Some of these last-quoted authorities contend that a spray tower does not require kashering.

There are also companies that have contract spray-dry equipment. This means that the spray tower is not constantly in use for their product, and, not wanting to leave a very expensive piece of equipment idle, they will spray dry other products during the “down” time, when they are not producing their own products. For example, I have seen wine powder, powdered meat extract, medicinal items, and even blood, spray dried on equipment that was also at times used for kosher supervised products.

At this point, let us return to our special kosher-for-Pesach ketchup production. A flavor whose components were spray dried, which is a fairly common procedure, would require researching what else was produced on this spray dryer, or attempting to kasher the spray dryer. All of these complicate the research involved in producing our kosher-lePesach ketchup.

To resolve all these potential complications, the flavors used for the production of this kosher-lePesach ketchup were ordered from a small manufacturer. The order was to use only pure essential oils that would be extracted by pressure -- in other words, oil that is squeezed out of the spice source in what is called a “cold press” operation and without any extracting aids. Many essential oils are extracted using alcohols such as ethanol or glycerin, which could compromise the kashrus of the product.

Of course, a knowledgeable field representative was dispatched to oversee that the flavor company indeed followed the instructions and used only cold press essential oils. The flavor company blended together these liquid oils and then added a significant amount of salt to the product. The reason for the addition of the salt was to dry out the finished spice so that it could be easily shipped and stored. From a kashrus perspective, this was certainly a far better alternative to using a spray-dried product and kashering the spray dryer.

Now our hechsher has successfully located all the ingredients and overseen the production of all the raw materials for the kosher-lePesach ketchup. The next step

is to send a knowledgeable mashgiach to the production facility where the ketchup is to be manufactured, to ascertain how that equipment will be kashered prior to the Pesach run, and to clarify with the company its production schedule prior to the dates when the equipment will be kashered and the Pesach product manufactured. He also needs to check whether other products are being made in the facility, or a nearby facility, that uses the same heating system to produce chometz products.

And this is for a relatively simple product.

Having shown how a relatively simple Pesach-dik product is made, I will shift from the simple to what is possibly the most complicated: the kashering of hotels for Pesach, which has become a colossal international business. A glance at any frum newspaper includes advertisements marketing opportunities to spend Pesach on any continent, always only with non-gebrotcht, shemurah matzos, cholov Yisroel, and glatt kosher, under a rav's strict supervision, with several prominent English speakers as scholars-in-residence, babysitting provided during the lectures, and many sightseeing activities available for Chol Hamo'eid. Yet, individuals interested in experiencing Yom Tov this way should be aware that kashering a hotel for Pesach is a mammoth and difficult process. It is even more difficult to do when the entire hotel is not being kashered for Pesach, when the hotel's regular kitchen staff are used, or when the chef and sous-chefs are not halachically observant themselves.

By the way, travel tours create the most difficult issues regarding kashrus supervision. Many hechsherim will simply not supervise them because of the complications involved with traveling to different places and using products that are available locally. These issues become even more complicated when it comes to Pesach supervision.

Aside from the many nightmares I have heard regarding Pesach hotel hechsherim, I will share with you just one nightmare story of which I have firsthand knowledge. At one point in my career, I was in charge of the hechsherim in an area that encompassed a well-known tourist area. Simply put, if anything was supervised kosher in our area, I knew about it. There indeed were several reliably kosher tours, some of whom used our kashrus organization to supervise their activities and some who did not, but, it seemed to me, still maintained a fairly respectable kashrus standard.

Once, I saw an advertisement in the Anglo-Jewish press for a "glatt kosher tour" through our area. Since none of the tour companies with which I was familiar was involved, I called the number listed for reservations and inquired who was overseeing their kashrus in the area. The woman who answered the phone dutifully notified me that "Jim Klein oversees all food production and kashrus arrangements in that area." I knew Jim well. Not only was he completely non-observant – he was married to a non-Jewish woman! Yet, the tour was advertised as glatt kosher, chassidisha shechitah. I have no idea if it was chassidisha shechitah, but it was certainly not glatt kosher, and halachically was not kosher at all!

For sure, we know not to use anything "supervised" by Jim. Can we eat something supervised by Yossel? The answer is that we rely on a hechsher that uses yir'ei shamayim personnel who are knowledgeable both in halacha and in the technical aspects of modern kashrus. Particularly, when we decide which Pesach products we allow into our home to enhance our simchas Yom Tov, we use only hechsherim that impress us with their expertise and their concern about the important role they play in our lives.

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#### **Parshat Vayakhel-Pekudai (Exodus 35:1 – 38:20)**

##### **Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

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

Why repeat all the details of the construction of the Mishkan after we have already heard them when they were initially commanded? Would it not have been simpler to deal with the entire execution of external building, furnishings and

priestly garb with the single verse: "And the People of Israel built the Mishkan exactly as God commanded"?

In order to understand the significance of the repetition, it is important to remember that the Almighty desires an intimate relationship between Himself and the People of Israel. That is why they are commanded to build a Mishkan in the first place: "that I may dwell among them" [29:46].

However, worshiping the golden calf was a betrayal of the ideals given at Sinai. In effect, the Israelites committed adultery, scarring the love and intimacy God had just bestowed upon them. Were God only a God of justice, this would have been the demise of the Jewish people, their sin mandating a punishment that would have meant the end of the Abrahamic mission.

But since God is also a God of compassion, He forgives. However, can we legitimately expect forgiveness for as heinous a crime as idolatry? Will the Almighty take Israel back even after they have committed adultery?

Herein lies the true significance of the repetition of each and every painstaking instruction regarding the Mishkan. God places his nuptial "home" with Israel before they sin with the golden calf, and God accepts their construction of the nuptial home after they have sinned with the golden calf. The repetition is a confirmation that the intimacy between God and Israel has been restored, that the relationship between God and His bride, Israel, has returned to its original state of mutual commitment and faith. The repetition of the exact details is essentially God's gift of forgiveness.

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

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

The second special Sabbath – immediately preceding Purim – is Shabbat Zakhor: "Remember" to destroy the evil Amalek. Shabbat Zakhor always precedes Purim because in Shushan there were two threats: externally, from Haman, the descendant of Amalek; while internally, the Jews themselves, who, deep in the amnesia of assimilation, were seduced by the invitations to the parties at the palace of Ahashverosh, with all the non-kosher wine and shrimp one could enjoy. Israel, betrothed by the shekel to God, had succumbed to the temptation of Amalek, substituting the temptations of gold and licentiousness for their God-room.

The third special Sabbath, Parah, symbolizes the process of purification. The People of Israel, having defiled themselves, are reminded by God that even when our impurity stems from death, the highest degree of impurity, He has provided the red heifer to spiritually cleanse us.

Finally, the namesake for this Sabbath's special reading, HaHodesh, brings us towards a new beginning. "Hodesh," the Hebrew word for month, is also bound up with "hadash" [new] and "hidush" [renewal]. In effect, the moon is the messenger of change and renewal, the ability to emerge from total darkness to a state of fullness and perfection.

Thus the special portions of Shekalim, Zakhor, Parah and HaHodesh parallel the portions of Terumah, Tetzaveh, Ki Tissa and Vayakhel-Pekudei. The journey begins with commitment and love, stumbles through failure and sin, and concludes with the possibility of purification and renewal. These stages mark the path of individual and national freedom, culminating in the festival of freedom, Passover.

Shabbat Shalom!

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לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה  
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה