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Vayakhel-Pekudei 5770

Where does the Divine Presence live?

Finally the long narrative of the construction of the Tabernacle - to which the Torah devotes more space than any other single subject - is at an end. The building, its frame, drapes and sacred furniture, were complete. Moses inspects the finished project. We then read:

The Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Moses saw all the work, and behold - they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. So Moses blessed them. (Ex. 39: 43) Like many other passages in the description of the making of the Tabernacle, this echoes a line from the creation narrative: "G-d saw all that He had made, and behold - it was very good" (Gen. 1: 31 - the words in common are Vayar, "he saw", et kol, "all" and ve-hineh, "and behold").

The literary parallels between the Divine creation of the universe and the Israelites' construction of the Tabernacle are intentional and consequential. The Tabernacle was a micro-cosmos, a universe-in-miniature. In creating the universe, G-d made a home for humanity. In building the sanctuary, humanity made a home for G-d. And just as, at the beginning of time, G-d had blessed creation, so Moses blessed those who had a share in its human counterpart.

What, though, was the blessing Moses gave? The Torah itself is silent on this point, but the sages supplied the missing information.

With what blessing did Moses bless them? He said to them: "May it be G-d's will that His presence rests in the work of your hands." They responded: "May the pleasantness of the Lord our G-d be upon us. Establish for us the work of our hands, O establish the work of our hands" (Psalm 90: 17). (Sifre to Bamidbar, 143) The midrash is based on the following stream of thought. One, and only one, psalm is attributed to Moses: Psalm 90, which bears the superscription, "A prayer of Moses, the man of G-d." It ends with the verse cited above, "May the pleasantness (noam) of the Lord our G-d be upon us". The reference in the verse to "the work of our hands" must surely refer to the Tabernacle

- the only "work", in the sense of constructive achievement, the Israelites performed in Moses' day. Hence the phrase "a prayer of Moses" must be understood as the prayer/blessing he pronounced on the completion of the Tabernacle.

The question then arises as to the meaning of the words "the pleasantness of the Lord". Another Psalm (27: 4) uses an almost identical phrase: "One thing I ask of the Lord, only this do I seek: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the pleasantness (noam) of the Lord and worship in His temple." This suggests that both psalms are a reference to the sanctuary (in the wilderness, the tabernacle; in a later era, the temple), and that "the pleasantness of the Lord" is a poetic way of describing the cloud of glory that filled the Tabernacle ("Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle", Ex. 40: 34) - in other words, the Divine presence. Thus when Moses said, "May the pleasantness of the Lord our G-d be upon us", he meant: "May it be G-d's will that His presence rests in the work of your hands."

It is a beautiful idea. Is it, though, something more? There is a hint here of a principle that has immense implications for the entire structure of Judaism. We can summarize it simply: It is not objects that are holy. It is human action and intention in accordance with the will of G-d that creates holiness.

Consider the following ruling of the sages (see Gittin 45b; Mishneh Torah, Yesodei ha-Torah 6: 8; Tefillin 1: 13): A Torah scroll, or tefillin, or a mezuzah, written by a heretic, is to be burned. Normally, to destroy a document containing G-d's name is absolutely forbidden. However, in this case, as Maimonides explains: "Since the person who wrote it does not believe in the sanctity of the name of G-d, and therefore did not write it with the requisite intent but merely as any other [secular] text, the [document containing] G-d's name is not sanctified [and may be destroyed]. Indeed it is a mitzvah to burn it so as to leave no record of heretics and their works."

Imagine two Torah scrolls, one written with the requisite intention and sanctity, the other written by an atheist. Physically, they may be indistinguishable. One cannot imagine any scientific test that - by examining the scrolls themselves - would establish which was holy and which not. Yet one is to be held in the highest possible sanctity, and the other to be burned. Holiness is not a property of objects. It is a property of human acts and intentions.

It is this idea that lies behind the very precise formula we use when we recite a blessing over the performance of a command: "Blessed are You . . . who has sanctified us by His commandments, and has commanded us to . . ." It is the commandments that make us holy: nothing else. When G-d said to the Israelites, before the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19: 6), He meant that the Israelites would become holy through their performance of the commands he was about to reveal to them, not that there was anything intrinsically holy about them, prior to and independent of the commands. As Issi ben Judah said (Mekhilta, Massechta de-Kaspa, 20): "When G-d enjoins a new mitzvah on Israel, He endows them with new holiness."

The great commentator and halakhist R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843-1926, often known by the name of one of his commentaries, Ohr Sameakh) was tireless and forceful in stressing the point. Mount Sinai was - as the site of the greatest ever revelation of G-d - momentarily the holiest place on earth, yet as soon as the revelation was over, even animals were permitted to graze on it (Meshekh Chokhmah to Ex. 19: 13). The first tablets Moses brought down the mountain were supremely sacred. They had been hewn and written by G-d himself. Yet Moses broke them to show the Israelites that nothing is holy except in the context of fulfilling G-d's will (Meshekh Chokhmah to Ex. 32: 19). We endow objects and places with holiness, through our intentions, our words and our deeds. There is no such thing as ontological holiness, intrinsic sanctity.

Returning to the sanctuary, the very idea that there can be a "house of G-d" - that we can create, in finite space, a home for the Infinite - seems

a contradiction in terms. Indeed, Israel's wisest king, Solomon, and one of the greatest of its prophets, Isaiah, said so explicitly. On dedicating the Temple, Solomon said: "But will G-d really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain You. How much less this temple I have built." (I Kings 8: 27). Likewise Isaiah said, "This is what the Lord says: Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. Where is the house you will build for Me? Where will My resting place be? (Isaiah 66: 1).

The answer was given by G-d to Moses at the very outset, before the construction of the Tabernacle was begun: "Let them make a sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell in them" - not "in it" but "in them" -- not in the building but its builders, not in wood and metal, bricks or stone, but in those who build and those who worship. It is not objects, buildings, or places that are holy-in-themselves. Only acts of heart and mind can endow them with holiness.

That is the deep meaning of Moses' blessing to the Israelites: "May it be G-d's will that His presence rests in the work of your hands." G-d does not inhere in things - not in Mount Sinai, not in the tablets, not in the Tabernacle. His presence (the word Shekhinah, Divine presence, comes from the same root as Mishkan, sanctuary or tabernacle) lives in "the work of our hands" - whatever we do in accordance with His will. There was nothing grand about the tabernacle. It was small, fragile, portable. What made it holy was one thing only, that the Israelites "had made it just as the Lord had commanded". The simplest human act, if done for the sake of G-d, has more sanctity than the holiest of holy objects. That, to me, is a remarkable principle of faith.

Why the Ancient Greeks were wrong about morality Credo, The Times – February 2010

Do you have to be religious to be moral? Was Dostoevsky right when he said, If God does not exist, all is permitted? Clearly the answer is No. You don't have to be religious to fight for justice, practise compassion, care about the poor and homeless or jump into the sea to save a drowning child. My doctoral supervisor, the late Sir Bernard Williams, was a committed atheist. He was also one of the most reflective writers on morality in our time.

Yet there were great minds who were less sure. Voltaire did not believe in God but he wanted his butler to do so because he thought he would then be robbed less. Rousseau, hardly a saint, thought that a nation needed a religion if it was to accept laws and policies directed at the long term future. Without it, people would insist on immediate gain, to their eventual cost. George Washington in his Farewell Address said "Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion . . . Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

Were they wrong? Yes in one sense, no in another. Individuals don't need to believe in God to be moral. But morality is more than individual choices. Like language it is the result of social practice, honed and refined over many centuries. The West was shaped by what nowadays we call the Judeo-Christian tradition. Lose that and we will not cease to be moral, but we will be moral in a different way.

Consider what moves people today: the environment, hunger and disease in third world countries, and the growing gap between rich and poor. These are noble causes: nothing should be allowed to detract from that. They speak to our altruism. They move us to make sacrifices for the sake of others. That is one of the distinguishing features of our age. Our moral horizons have widened. Our conscience has gone global. All this is worthy of admiration and respect.

But they have in common the fact that they are political. They are the kind of issues that can only ultimately be solved by governments and international agreements. They have little to do with the kind of behaviour that was once the primary concern of morality: the way we relate to others, how we form bonds of loyalty and love, how we consecrate marriage and the family, and how we fulfil our responsibilities as parents, employees, neighbours and citizens. Morality was about private life. It said that without personal virtue, we cannot

create a society of grace.

Nowadays the very concept of personal ethics has become problematic in one domain after another. Why shouldn't a businessman or banker pay himself the highest salary he can get away with? Why shouldn't teenagers treat sex as a game so long as they take proper precautions? Why shouldn't the media be sensationalist if it sells papers, programmes and films? Why should we treat life as sacred if abortion and euthanasia are what people want? Even Bernard Williams came to call morality a "peculiar institution." Things that once made sense – duty, obligation, self-restraint, the distinction between what we desire to do and what we ought to do – to many people now make no sense at all.

This does not mean that people are less ethical than they were, but it does mean that we have adopted an entirely different ethical system from the one people used to have. What we have today is not the religious ethic of Judaism and Christianity but the civic ethic of the ancient Greeks. For the Greeks, the political was all. What you did in your private life was up to you. Sexual life was the pursuit of desire. Abortion and euthanasia were freely practised. The Greeks produced much of the greatest art and architecture, philosophy and drama, the world has ever known. What they did not produce was a society capable of surviving.

The Athens of Socrates and Plato was glorious, but extraordinarily short-lived. By now, by contrast, Christianity has survived for two millennia, Judaism for four. The Judeo-Christian ethic is not the only way of being moral; but it is the only system that has endured. If we lose the Judeo-Christian ethic, we will lose the greatest system ever devised for building a society on personal virtue and covenantal responsibility, on righteousness and humility, forgiveness and love.

[Adar 29 is the 25th Yahrzeit of Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky (1891-1986)]

From Ateres Hashavua <atereshashavua@gmail.com> date Thu, Mar 3, 2011 at 6:40 PM

Dear Subscribers,

We hope you enjoy this week's special edition of the Ateres Hashavua which is dedicated in memory of HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l and have a good shabbos. Editors in Chief Moshe Chait Boruch Warsawsky

Focus on Reb Yaakov

Rabbi Solomon Shapiro shlit"a, mora d'asra of Congregation B'nai Avrohom in Queens, learned at Ye- shiva Torah VoDaath before Rav Yaakov came to be the Rosh Yeshiva, but he still had the privilege of meeting Rav Yaakov, and forging a relationship with him. Rabbi Shapiro remembers the great care and concern that Rav Yaakov exercised in ensuring that every word that came out of his mouth was the pure and total emes. This certainly applied to everyday talk, and applied to learning as well. Before Rav Yaakov would say a pshat, he would always ensure that it was the emes haTorah in all ways. Rav Yaakov also had a tremendous chashivus for time. He would always arrive ex- actly on time for any appointment. Never late, so as not to waste anyone else's time, and never unnecessarily early, as to Rav Yaakov, every minute was precious. Rav Yaakov also had a special love for Tanach, and it is known that he knew the entire Tanach baal peh. In particular, Rav Yaakov would concentrate on the dikduk and on the trop, from which he felt one could gain a true appreciation for Tanach.

Rav Yaakov tried to instill in his talmidim a desire to learn with a bren, and with all their energy and capabili- ties. One day, Rabbi Shapiro was walking with Rav Yaakov outside Torah VoDaath, when Rav Yaakov suddenly stopped, and began to watch a group of boys playing handball in the Yeshiva's yard. After a few minutes, Rav Yaakov sighed and continued walking. Somewhat puzzled by Rav Yaakov's reaction, Rabbi Shapiro inquired as to what had upset the Rosh Yeshiva. Rav Yaakov smiled, and said, "If only he put as much effort into his learning as he did into playing handball, he would be a talmid chochom." Rav Yaakov asked Rabbi Shapiro if he knew the boy,

and Rabbi Shapiro replied that he did. "Go talk to him," Rav Yaakov said. "You know what to do." Rabbi Shapiro spoke to the boy several times over the next few weeks, during which he repeated Rav Yaakov's comment to the boy. Those few weeks proved to be a turning point in the boy's life. The boy began to apply his talents to learning, he became a talmid chochom, and today he is a Maggid Shiur in a Yeshiva. Rav Yaakov saw the great potential in his talmidim, and with his usual clear insight and characteristic warmth, he ensured that his talmidim grew to their fullest.

A certain principal of a local Yeshiva remembers an incident that occurred while he was a dorm counselor in an out-of-town Yeshiva. There was a boy in the Yeshiva who came from a difficult background, and in addition to all the difficulties that the Yeshiva had to deal with regarding this boy, he was also known to have an extremely hot temper, and was constantly fighting with other talmidim. It got so bad, that one day the dorm counselor saw this boy chasing another boy with a butcher knife! Not knowing whether or not the boy really had intention of using the knife, but unwilling to take the chance, the dorm counselor chased the boy through a first floor window, and tackled him to the ground, where he held him until the Menahel arrived on the scene. The Menahel, in his infinite patience, explained to the boy that it was unacceptable to chase another boy with a knife, and after a while he succeeded in calming the boy down for the time being. That night, the Menahel met with the Rosh Yeshiva, and they discussed the possibility of asking the boy to leave the Yeshiva. Unwilling to take such a drastic step on their own, they decided to seek guidance from HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l. The Menahel asked the dorm counselor to drive him to Monsey, so that he could discuss the situation with Rav Yaakov. Upon arriving in Monsey, the Menahel outlined the situation to

Rav Yaakov, explaining the difficulties that the boy presented, and the dangers that his quick and violent temper were bringing to the Yeshiva. The Menahel then suggested that they ask the boy to leave the Yeshiva. Rav Yaakov looked at the Menahel, and asked, "Is he a chotei u'machti es ha'rabim? Does he cause other boys to sin?" The Menahel responded that no, thankfully the boy was having no detrimental effect on any of the other boys. Rav Yaakov then asked, "Is he mechalleh Shabbos in public, or in front of any other boys?" The Menahel answered that the boy was not mechalleh Shabbos in public, but probably did so in the privacy of his dorm room. "That's between him and the Ribono Shel Olam," Rav Yaakov replied. "What's important is that he is not a negative influence on any other talmidim." Rav Yaakov then said, "I agree that the boy is trouble, and is causing you much difficulty. However, your job is to get the boy past that. If the boy is having difficulties, you must work harder to help him overcome them. If the boy has a terrible temper that makes the situation all the more difficult, but then you must work even more to help the boy grow.

As long as he does not pose a threat to the spiritual well being of any other talmidim you are not exempt from your task, and you must allow the boy to remain in Yeshiva." The Menahel, strengthened by Rav Yaakov's words, returned to the Yeshiva, where he redoubled his efforts into helping this boy. His efforts paid off, and today the boy is a stable father and husband, raising a true Torah family, because even when everyone else had given up in despair, Rav Yaakov refused to give up on this boy's future. Rav Yaakov with his foresight just knew this boy needed more compassion and care.

Mr. Sholom Parnes, currently residing in Efrat, Israel, was one of Rav Binyomin Kamenetzky's first talmidim at Yeshiva Toras Chaim, after the Yeshiva moved to Hewlett from East New York. He recalls Rav Yaakov's first visit to the fledgling Yeshiva, and the nachas that Rav Yaakov got from meeting Rav Binyomin's talmidim. One of the first lessons that Rav Binyomin would teach his talmidim was never to be overwhelmed by a task that seemed too difficult to achieve. When Rav Yaakov was living in Toronto his sons complained about the long hike that they had to take every day to get to school. To encourage his sons, Rav Yaakov advised them to take it 'one pole at a time.' Concentrate on a small, easily attainable goal, such as making it to the next light pole.

When you have achieved this, look towards the next pole, always focusing on an objective which you know you can achieve. In this way, you will be able to accomplish things that you never thought possible. This was Rav Yaakov's usual advice to anyone who felt overwhelmed by a task that they had undertaken; take small steps, focus on small achievements, and in the end you will accomplish a great deal.

Reb Yaakov zt"l once told over something that he witnessed on his way to shul one Shabbos. When he lived on Bedford Avenue, Reb Yaakov used to pass a shteibel on his way to Yeshiva Torah Vodaath. As he walked passed the shteibel that day, he noticed a tallis lying on the floor, while a father who was screaming at his young son stood over it. When this took place over forty years ago, there was no such thing as an eiruv, and it was common for some people to allow their young sons to carry their tallis to shul Shabbos morning. Apparently, the young child didn't want to carry on Shabbos, and threw down the tallis in protest. The father was berating his child for this behavior.

When Reb Yaakov saw this, he softly asked the man, "How can you berate your son for not wanting to be mechaleh Shabbos?" The man was taken aback by Reb Yaakov's inquiry, and replied, "But rebbe, my tallis is now ruined, and I can't even pick it up to brush it off – I myself am helpless to do anything!"

Reb Yaakov heard the retort, and then responded, "If you're upset about your son ruining your tallis, you can take him to a Beis Din (Jewish Court System) after Shabbos. But can you berate your child for not wanting to desecrate the holy Shabbos?" We see here how Reb Yaakov was able to clearly define the importance of chinnuch and priorities one must have when guiding children in their youth.

Rav Yehoshua Balkany shlit"a, who was meshamesh Rav Yaakov for many years, addressed the Mesivta last year on Rav Yaakov's yahrzeit. He related that Rav Yaakov was really one of a triumvirate. Whenever their were issues affecting Yeshivos or the Klal in America, Rav Yaakov, Rav Moshe Feinstein, and Rav Aaron Kotler would come together. As a bochur, Rav Balkany was present at these meetings serving the Roshei Yeshiva drinks. He listened to how they sized up what steps they should or should not take. At the conclusion of these types of gatherings, Rav Moshe and Rav Aaron always turned to Rav Yaakov and asked him how he felt they should proceed. Besides being the gadol that Rav Yaakov was, he had a strategic proficiency that was unbelievable. He would respond quite often and say that this segment would respond like this and this one like this. He was always right on target and was able to understand what they were dealing with. Then Rav Yaakov would conclude and say how he felt they should proceed, and that is what they did. Many times there was not enough time for them to get together in person and they would call each other from their respective Yeshivos. They would talk about an issue that was present like an emergency and they wanted to know where Rav Yaakov felt they should proceed from that point and how they should deal with it.

Rabbi Chanina Herzberg shlit"a, Menahel of Yeshiva Toras Chaim, once went up to Camp Ohr Shraga together with a rebbe in the yeshiva to speak with Reb Yaakov zt"l. Rabbi Herzberg enjoyed a close relationship with Reb Yaakov that allowed him to discuss many different important matters with him, and this time's reason for a visit warranted the same guidance. There was a certain boy in the yeshiva who was a big troublemaker; always playing tricks and being malevolent to fellow classmates, as well as being disrespectful to his rabbeim. This rebbe accompanying Rabbi Herzberg was nervous that such a boy in his class for the upcoming year would disrupt the flow of the learning and cause much damage. Therefore, Rabbi Herzberg went along with this rebbe to Reb Yaakov to seek guidance in possibly taking this boy out of the yeshiva.

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The Personal Touch
By Rabbi Eliyahu Safran.
Orthodox Union

www.ou.org The Personal Touch

Rabbi Eliyahu Safran IN SEEKING to summarize Sefer Shemot, the creation of the nation of Israel's emerges as the central theme. Crisis, triumphs, sin and penitence all manifest themselves throughout Am Yisrael's creation and development.

It seems so anticlimactic then, for this monumental book of Jewish development to end with repetitious lists of building materials, contributions, measurements and more details associated with the Mishkan's construction. Details that were so painstakingly outlined in Teruma, Tetzaveh and part of Ki-Tisa engage our attention yet again in this Parasha. What's the point? Moreover, why reemphasize eighteen times that Bnai Yisrael faithfully followed the instructions "just as G-d commanded Moshe"? Even if there may be good reason to repeat the many details and instructions associated with building the Mishkan, why repeat incessantly that they complied with G-d's command?

Ramban and Or Ha-Chayim both explain that the repetition of the Mishkan's construction is similar "to that advanced by our Sages with regard to the recapitulation of the conversation of Avraham's servant Eliezer. Since the story was so precious to Him, it was recorded twice over. Similarly, the story of the Mishkan was recorded twice because it was beloved by Him."

We can well understand the repetition of Eliezer's conversation. The "table-talk of the Avot's servants is more precious to HaShem than the Torah of their descendants." G-d is thrilled even with the "repeats" of those who find themselves in the company of the Avot; He never tires of listening to what they have to say, even more so when there are additions and variations between the original story and Eliezer's repetition. But what enjoyment would He derive from a re-run of the Mishkan's construction?

Great enjoyment! One of G-d's utmost pleasures is anticipating man's ability, inner strength and courage to repent. G-d is cognizant of man's frail state which leads to his repeated sin and error. That, after all, is what prompted G-d to gift man with His greatest concession and kindness – teshuvah, a spirit of forgiveness. The repetition of the instructions to build the Mishkan, then, is not a simple re-run. It emanates from G-d's love for His children, who were crushed and defeated after displaying their own short-sightedness and inadequacies in making an Egel Ha'zaav. Now that they have regained perspective with rejuvenated spirits and are able to again hear the call to build a Mishkan, "it was beloved by Him." G-d's pleasure in seeing a community enthusiastically repent brought forth a renewed call, not a mere repetition, to build a Mishkan. "It was beloved by Him" to issue instructions to a spiritually resurrected people, and know they will respond "just as He commanded." HaShem, HaShem. "I am the Lord before man sins, and I am the Lord after man sins." G-d's repeated call to build the Mishkan, including the repeated details and specifications, is the call of HaShem "after man sins." It is a new call. It is the call to the ba'al teshuva whose spiritual auditory skills are sharper than the tzadik gamur who never experienced G-d as a sinner. How could he possibly hear the new call?

Nevertheless, why reissue the new call with all of the details, and why reiterate eighteen times that all was done "just as G-d commanded"?

Details serve as the foundation of a meaningful life. Human greatness is achieved not by one time spectacular events or accomplishments, but rather by consistent, steady performance of simple, good deeds, with all their details. Human greatness is manifest not by sporadic, one time, heroic acts of devotion and self sacrifice, but rather by reliable and consistent life-long, day by day dedication to good, noble, at times even boring, common place details of life. Who deserves commendation and compliment? The student who attains a one-time perfect paper or the conscientious student who day in, day out performs to the best of his

abilities? The one time magnanimous donation by the publicity hungry philanthropist or the modest contributions given daily for important charitable causes? The soldier who with a one time daring exploit gained national fame, or the husband or wife whose daily life is filled with countless, seemingly mundane good deeds, each in itself a small pearl, but together a magnificent, precious necklace of so many such pearls? Is society to be hailed as thoughtful and considerate because people respond humanely during a rare blackout, or should we count the humane responses everywhere, anywhere, everyday?

Moshe Rabeinu saw greatness in the human achievement of small things; in the precise execution of minute details, in the self discipline of faithful, caring, loving attention to seemingly insignificant instructions which "were heard already."

We recite Brachos in recognition of the minute and repetitious. When eating one little apple, orange or grape, we take note of G-d's ability to bring forth fruit from the tree. The consumption of one carrot or one gulp of water elicits recognition of the Source of all details. G-d could very well have created billions of men and women simultaneously. Instead He created one Adam and one Chava. Their value is equal to the worth of the entire world. Human concern means not saving the entire world, not even an entire country, city, or neighborhood, but rather, "He who saves one soul is considered to have saved an entire world." Judaism's primary focus is on the one life; on the details assuring one human being's well being, safety and security.

As to the repetition eighteen times that the Israelites followed G-d's instructions "just as God commanded," the Jerusalem Talmud comments that it is to be compared to the eighteen blessings of Shmoneh Esreh. What's the comparison? More than in any other prayer, in Shmoneh Esreh we understand that life in not a conglomerate of generalities or a series of one time needs and pleasures. In Shmoneh Esreh we focus on every individual's never ending reliance on the One G-d Who is capable of providing and responding to every single one of our countless, specific needs and requests. He can forgive my inequities, He can heal my ailment, and He can sustain my needs. Prayer is a highly personal religious experience. Just as the details of requests vary from one individual to the next, so do the G-dly responses. G-d, then, anticipates that we imitate His ways. Just as He needs to pay precise and constant attention to the minutest human needs, so He expects that we heed the minutest details of His call and the call of His creation, always.

Rabbi Dr. Eliyahu Safran, serves as OU Kosher's Vice President of Communications and Marketing. The second edition of his Sometimes You Are What You Wear, Xlibris Corp. was republished in 2010.

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From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein
<info@jewishdestiny.com>
Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Jerusalem Post :: Friday, March 4, 2011
HISTORY :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Jewish history is a very neglected subject. Mainly it has been relegated to cramming for bagrut exams and for the rarified and often societally irrelevant strata of higher academia. In the religious school systems, the yeshivot and women's seminaries, it also never receives its due. Not only that, oftentimes history is embellished, bent and tweaked, and sometimes given to outright falsification in order to make it fit current trends and political correctness. False history thus becomes more dangerous than no history at all.

The secular Zionist movement taught a very negative history regarding the story of the Jewish people in exile. It denigrated all of the great achievements of the Jews over two millennia of dispersion and thereby intended to create a new Jew that would in effect sever all ties to its past.

This action brought about a reaction within traditional Jewry that attempted to glorify its achievements, to invest great humans with superhuman powers and to create a history of stories, legends and anecdotes which were meant to be inspirational but were rarely factual.

The secular Jew was rendered ignorant of the richness of the mainly religious and Torah-oriented past of his people while the religious Jew was deprived of knowledge of the past troubles, vicissitudes and conflicts that have always marked Jewish life.

Instead, what was presented was a hagiographic, fantastic and rosily distorted view of the past that has weakened the ability to deal with the real and pressing problems that currently face the Jewish people generally and especially the religious Jewish society.

Part of the rootlessness of many modern Jews who cannot attach themselves positively to any Jewish cause, the state of Israel or marrying Jewish is a complete ignorance of the Jewish past. People who have no recollection of the past suffer from identity amnesia. They become very frustrated with themselves because they seem to have materialized from nowhere. Many times this leads to various forms of self-hatred and to Jews who are prone to anti-Jewish thought and behavior.

Shlomo Carlebach once said that when he performed on college campuses and asked a student who he or she was, the student would answer "I am Catholic." Carlebach said that then he knew that that person was Catholic. If another student told him he or she was Lutheran, he knew that that student was Lutheran. But if the student's answer was that he or she was a human being, then Carlebach knew that person was Jewish.

Jews who know nothing about their familial and national past are truly mere human beings because their connection to being Jewish no longer exists. Robbed of their past they suffer a very dangerous and counterproductive present. History is not only facts and books, dates and biographies. It is also identity, inspiration and guidance. It grants humans the resilience to overcome disappointments and tragedies. It prevents us from being constantly blindsided by current events once we gain the realization and knowledge that all of this has somehow occurred before. And that is an important weapon in our struggle for personal and national survival and success.

Heinrich Graetz, the foremost Jewish historian of the nineteenth century, because of personal experiences and other forces, was a fierce foe of rabbinic Judaism. His work on Jewish history was magisterial and pioneering and, to a great extent, all later historians of the Jewish world were influenced by it. Nevertheless his terribly negative attitude towards rabbis and Jewish observances poisoned the well of the study of Jewish history.

The scholars of the Haskala/Enlightenment continued in his footsteps and thus the subject of Jewish history itself became almost taboo in religious education and circles. Religious Jewish historians such as Zev Yaavetz and Meir Balaban attempted to repair the damage but their works, magnificent as they are, never gained wide popular acceptance.

For instance, there is no way to understand our current conflicts without knowledge of the past of the Moslem-Jewish struggle. The State of Israel does not rest upon the Holocaust, President Obama notwithstanding. The Moslem denial of Jewish existence, let alone Jewish rights within the Land of Israel is the root problem of the struggle.

Arafat rewrote history and the world, including large sections of the Jewish world, let him do it. For this grievous error of not dealing with true history, all of us are currently paying a heavy price. It was not for naught that the Torah challenged us to remember the days of yore and to study the events of past generations. This Godly advice is to be taken seriously in our schools, homes and society.

Shabat shalom.

From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein
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Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha :: PEKUDEI :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 13th century Barcelona) points out that the conclusion of the book of Shemot, with its detailed recording of the construction and expenditures involved in the completion of the Mishkan/Tabernacle, places the Jewish people as a whole at the level of spirituality that was present in the homes of our patriarchs and matriarchs at the conclusion of the previous book of Bereshith.

Just as the spirit of the Lord hovered over the tents of our forbearers, so now did it become recognizable and present amongst the nation of Israel. Constructed for that purpose, the spirit of the Lord dwelled within the Mishkan/Tabernacle. There is an important message contained in this observation.

This Jewish tradition teaches us that there are two places, so to speak, where the Lord's presence may be experienced and should be cultivated. God's glory fills the entire universe; He is omnipresent. But the puny human being cannot encompass the entire universe in all of its vastness and complexity. We need a personal God that we can relate to somehow.

That God can be found according to Jewish tradition in two places in our small and narrow world. One place is in our home, our family and our daily lives. The second place of Godly encounter is in the house of worship and study and Torah service. That is our substitute Mishkan/Tabernacle where the spirit of God hovers over those buildings and is recognizable to us only if we are attuned and sensitive enough to experience it. These two pillars of Jewish life have accompanied us on our long journey the world – and through our history.

Both of these bastions of Jewish strength and vitality – the home and the synagogue/study hall – the meeting places so to speak of Israel with its God, are under siege and attack in today's modern society. The home, marriage, children and the sense of family has given way to relationships, moving-in and out, later marriages, a large number of divorces and spousal abuse, and the sacrifice of children and family on the altars of career and hedonism.

Without strong Jewish families there cannot be a strong State of Israel or a viable Jewish nation. Certainly intermarriage has eroded the concept of Jewish family but even when this does not occur, the bonds of family are frayed by television, the internet and the society generally. Sometimes even well meaning gestures are counterproductive.

During my years as a rabbi in Miami Beach we always had many Shabat guests and because of that, contact between us and our own young children was pretty much eliminated. One Friday one of our younger daughters said to my wife: "Mommy, are children also guests?" We got the message and then made certain that one of the Shabat meals would be exclusively with our children.

The synagogue also has lost much since it became the matter of the whims and comfort of the attendees and no longer the House of God where He is to be glimpsed and served according to His wishes as expressed in Torah and halacha. I hope that the message of the Ramban will certainly not be lost upon us.

Shabat shalom.

From Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

To weekly@ohr.edu

Subject Torah Weekly

TORAH WEEKLY * Parshat Pekudei

For the week ending 5 March 2011 / 28 Adar I 5771

from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

OVERVIEW

The Book of Shmot concludes with this Parsha. After finishing all the different parts, vessels and garments used in the Mishkan, Moshe gives a complete accounting and enumeration of all the contributions and of the various clothing and vessels which had been fashioned. Bnei Yisrael bring everything to Moshe. He inspects the handiwork and notes that everything was made according to G-d's specifications. Moshe blesses the people. G-d speaks to Moshe and tells him that the Mishkan should be set up on the first day of the first month, i.e., Nissan. He also tells Moshe the order of assembly for the Mishkan and its vessels. Moshe does everything in the prescribed manner. When the Mishkan is finally complete with every vessel in its place, a cloud descends upon it, indicating that G-d's glory was resting there. Whenever the cloud moved away from the Mishkan, Bnei Yisrael would follow it. At night the cloud was replaced by a pillar of fire.

INSIGHTS

We Have The Technology

"...As G-d had commanded Moshe." (39:1)

One guaranteed way to increase sales of a product is to put a flash on the box saying "NEW!!! IMPROVED!!!"

Inevitably, the veracity of this claim is in inverse proportion to the number of exclamation marks which follow it.

We seem to have an almost insatiable desire for 'new'. Our society is founded on the self-evident premise that everything can and needs to be improved.

There's an old American folk saying "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

In this week's Torah portion the words "...As G-d had commanded Moshe" appear over and over again. Twenty-two times. At the end of every single detail of the Mishkan: "...As G-d had commanded Moshe. "...As G-d had commanded Moshe. "...As G-d had commanded Moshe." What was the need for this seemingly redundant repetition?

The purpose of the Mishkan was to atone for the making of the golden calf. And the underlying flaw that was evinced by the golden calf was the desire to be smarter than G-d.

The Jewish People had seen that Moshe had acted as an intermediary between them and G-d. After Moshe failed to come down from the mountain they saw in the clouds a vision of his dead body being carried on a bier. In their confusion the Jewish People surmised they would need someone, or something, to replace Moshe; something that would be a vehicle for the Divine Presence to rest amongst them.

In fact, in this assumption they were not far off the mark. However, not being far from the mark can be as far as day is from night.

It was true that there would be a vehicle through which the Divine Presence would rest on Yisrael, and its name was the Mishkan. However, the Mishkan could only be built according to the original Maker's instructions. No improvements are possible in His Instructions. And when we try to make improvements, we end up with a golden calf. When we try and modernize, democratize, pluralize - we end up with a golden calf.

The word of G-d is perfect. It "restores the soul". It is like no man-made panacea. If we want G-d's presence to dwell in our lives, the only way is through following the Maker's instructions - to the letter of the Law. Otherwise we end up with a golden calf.

It is for this reason that after each detail of the Mishkan the Torah says "...As G-d had commanded Moshe."

The essence of the Mishkan was that it was 'as G-d had commanded Moshe' - not through the mistaken good intentions of man.

Written and compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

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From Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>

To Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com>

Subject Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parshas Pekudei

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

From a spiritual standpoint, the Mishkan was an architectural marvel. It was an edifice that endured, in the sense that it was never captured or destroyed. This is unlike the two Batei Mikdash which, due to our sins, were destroyed. Sforno addresses this phenomenon, positing that the uniqueness of the Mishkan may be attributed to its perfect sanctity. Individuals who were paragons of rectitude and piety - consummately righteous and totally committed to carrying out the will of Hashem - constructed it. These men and women, whose actions were untarnished by sin, built an edifice that was holy in every aspect, from its very inception. Thus, it was impossible for the enemy to harm it.

Sanctity, by its very definition, is intrinsically immortal. When something becomes holy, it is elevated above the mundane, so that it is not subject to the limitations that plague a physical entity. The creation and construction of the Mishkan were imbued with the loftiest elements of holiness, which rendered it eternal. Its source was the Source of all holiness, Hashem, Who is eternal.

The Batei Mikdash were certainly constructed with sacred intentions, by men of great virtue and piety; otherwise, the Shechinah would not have reposed there. Fire descended from Heaven to the Mizbayach, Altar, and miracles occurred there on a regular basis. Nonetheless, it did not achieve eternal status, despite its high level of sanctity, since, as Sforno notes, non-Jews were included in the building crew. As decent as the people were, they remained a foreign influence, thereby blemishing this near-perfect edifice, and, ultimately, leading to its destruction.

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl, comments that the Torah details the names of the individuals involved in building the Mishkan, in order to teach us that, when building our Torah institutions, it is essential to maintain the highest level of purity and holiness - every step of the way. This applies equally to the maintenance of our shuls, yeshivos, schools - any Torah establishment. We may not permit anyone whose character traits leave much to be desired - whose integrity is questionable, whose money dealings are not above scrutiny - to be involved in building a Torah establishment. Any deficiency in this area can have severe ramifications on the sanctity of the establishment.

The Talmud Bava Metzia 85b illustrates to the lengths to which Rav Chiya went to maintain the purity of the Torah he was teaching children. He planted flax from which he later made nets. These nets were used to trap deer, whose skins provided the parchment on which he wrote the Torah that he taught to the children. It seems that he really went out of his way to provide these children with the ultimate in pristine, unembellished teaching materials. The question that troubles the commentators is: Why did Rav Chiya insist on doing it himself? True, he wanted pure Torah, holy Torah, from the very beginning, but why could he not simply have instructed someone to do it for him? Why did he plant, he make the nets, he trap the deer, he prepare the parchment, he write the Torah? He could have had it prepared for him to teach - just like the master surgeon who performs the intricate surgery, after everything has already been prepared for him.

The Alter, zl, m'Novaradok, explains that R' Chiya did it himself precisely because he wanted to avoid any suspicion of theft or impropriety, which would interfere with the Divine assistance in learning. The fewer people involved, the less would be the risk that anything would go wrong. This is how important it was for him to provide pure Torah. The Alter quotes the famous words of the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna: "If a Jew learns Torah in a building whose roof has one stolen nail, that Torah study will be lacking in success."

The Rosh Yeshivah posits that this idea extends to our own mikdash me'at, miniature Bais HaMikdash, our miniature sanctuaries that must be established and maintained upon the same spiritual principles of purity and holiness which are requisites for any spiritual endeavor. The standards of morality and ethicality demanded by the Torah imbue our homes with a level of sanctity that precludes any of the ills that plague the secular household. These hallmarks of the Jewish family have enabled us to endure with resolution and fortitude throughout the millennia.

It does not come easily. The yetzer hora is no fool, and it is specifically in this area that it mounts its greatest challenge. We see it all of the time. Our goals are lofty; our aspirations for success are heartfelt. What could go wrong? We are building Torah! It is in this area, however, when people think, "I am building Torah," that the yetzer hora "convinces" them that everything is mutar, permissible - regardless of the project's questionable integrity or the possibility that it might infringe upon someone, emotionally or financially. Who has not heard, "We can bend the rules! We are building Torah!" We see from Sforno that it is especially in these areas that one must be extremely vigilant to preclude the yetzer hora from having the last laugh.

Questionable integrity plays a negative role in another area: maachalos asuros, forbidden foods. You may ask: Who would dare eat forbidden foods, and who would intentionally feed them to their children? Horav Mendel, zl, m'Rimonov tells us how this tragedy may occur unexpectedly. He says that we find Jewish children who, although endowed with charm and graciousness in their early lives, suddenly lose their charm as they mature in age. While this may be attributed to a number of factors, the Rebbe maintained that these children quite possibly had been fed maachalos asuros. This occurs when food is purchased with funds that have been obtained through dishonest measures. The individual did not outright steal; rather, he acted less than ethically in his financial dealings. Over the years, such a diet of forbidden foods has a dulling effect on a child's personality until it erases his charm completely. Scruples must be maintained upon dealing with Jews and non-Jews alike. If scruples are lacking, one's most lofty endeavor will be tainted and his food will become tainted, leaving his children as innocent victims of a father's selfishness.

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

The metals were deposited with Moshe Rabbeinu and were consequently under the supervision of Betzalel. These were individuals whose integrity was unquestionable and whose greatness was indisputable. Yet, as Chazal tell us, there were scoffers among the Jews who complained that Moshe became wealthy as a result of the Mishkan. Indeed, when Moshe gave the accounting, he came up short one thousand, seven hundred and seventy-five shekalim. Hashem "reminded" him that he had used this amount of silver for the hooks for the pillars. Despite the fact that every ounce of precious metal was accounted for, people still spread rumors. True, they were sick people, but they continued to speak. In contrast, when Aharon collected the gold for what became the Golden Calf, which was actually not a large amount, we do not find anyone demanding an accounting. It seems that it was only for the Mishkan that people were concerned about the integrity of the "management." When it involved the Golden Calf, they had no questions. People were prepared to divest themselves of their jewelry, precious metals, everything; after all, it was for an idol. When it came to building an edifice for Hashem's repose, the people suddenly became money conscious; they now needed a receipt for every penny. How are we to understand this?

Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, attempts to rationalize the Jewish People's actions, thereby removing some of the onus of guilt. He quotes the Yerushalmi that says: "The People are holy. They are asked to donate towards the building of the Mishkan, and they give freely of themselves. They are asked to contribute towards the Golden Calf, and "they give freely." What are Chazal teaching us? Horav Shapiro interprets Chazal to be asking a rhetorical question, rather than giving a narrative. "Does it make sense that the Jews gave towards the Golden Calf?" Actually, comments Rav Shapiro, they heard the statement, Eileh elohecha Yisrael, "These are your gods, Yisrael!" The Jew heard only that Aharon was collecting for some kind of godhead, a replacement for Moshe, whatever. It must be something sacred if Aharon was involved, and he was referring to it as elohecha, your gods. If it had Aharon's hechsher, seal of approval, for what more could they ask? The Jews would never have contributed towards an idol. They were not thinking. Aharon stood at the lectern with his hand out, making an appeal. It must be kosher.

Jews are generous. Regrettably, they do not always scrutinize to whom

they give or what they are supporting. If they would spend a few moments discerning the subject of their beneficence, they might think twice before they write the check. We are a compassionate people. We open our hearts and wallets to everyone with a story. If we would check the story once in a while, we might find that we have more funds left to support those who act with spiritual integrity and are thus really deserving of our contributions.

These are the accounts of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of the Testimony, which were reckoned at Moshe's bidding. (38:21)

Chazal teach that Moshe Rabbeinu's accounting was prompted by our quintessential leader's response to the rumblings of some scoffers who claimed that Moshe was becoming wealthy through the financial activity of the Mishkan. Before we address Moshe's incredible rectitude in seeing to it that everything he did was perceived by even the most obtuse, myopic individual as reflecting the height of integrity, it is appropriate that we note that this attitude is not unusual for some people. Talk is cheap, and people like to talk against anyone who is "employed" by them. A certain perverted perception prevails in the minds of some that the spiritual leader belongs to them. Therefore, they feel that they have license to scrutinize everything he does, especially when it involves the material dimension. His home, his car, his clothes and his trips are all open to scrutiny. This applies equally to his spouse and children. Moshe taught that one must always be above scrutiny, despite the fact that the individuals who are talking are contemptuous and thrive on spreading such filth. If they did it to Moshe, they would do it to anyone who has the misfortune of crossing their path.

Having said this, we address Moshe's response. The Torah writes, Va'yakam Moshe es ha'Mishkan, "Moshe erected the Mishkan," (Shemos 40:18). The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh writes that no Jew was able to erect the Mishkan. The greatest scholars and wise men, the Torah leaders of the Jewish people, the individuals who were involved in its construction: none of them had the ability to raise up the Mishkan. They tried, but it did not remain in position. Moshe was the only one upon whom the Shechinah rested. It was only for him that Hashem performed a miracle, such that the Mishkan remained standing.

The Malbim adds that the Mishkan was called Mishkan Ha'Eidus, of Testimony, since it attested to the fact that each and every activity involved in its construction was performed with spiritual integrity. Every person involved was a paragon of spiritual and moral rectitude. Otherwise, the Shechinah would not have rested on it.

All of the above notwithstanding, Moshe still found it necessary to give an accounting of every drop of metal. This was not the result of his outstanding sense of humility; rather, it was because he felt that one's reputation must be the capstone of trustworthiness. One should never rely on his personal feelings of integrity: "I know that I am acting aboveboard. I would never do anything that was not right." This may be true, but it is not enough. One must be prepared to qualify his rectitude to others, so that even the most adversarial individual will not be able to claim that something inappropriate is occurring.

Horav Eliyahu Chaim Meisel, zl, Rav of Lodz, Poland, was a distinguished talmid chacham, Torah scholar, who was well-known for his personal devotion to the support of the various charitable institutions in his community. He would not permit others to do the fundraising. He personally visited the various philanthropists of the community and solicited funds for a host of institutions and community endeavors. When it came to the disbursement of the funds, however, he relied on the judgment of the community heads. He refused to involve himself in this aspect of the philanthropic process.

When he was questioned concerning his self-exclusion from this process, he replied with the following Torah thought: "You are aware that Parashas Tetzaveh is the only parsha in the Torah from Moshe's birth until his death, excluding parts of Sefer Devarim, from which Moshe's name is excluded. This especially contrasts Parashas Terumah in which Moshe's name is mentioned numerous times. Why is this? Parashas Terumah records the many donations of precious metals for the Mishkan and for the establishment of the spiritual center of Klal Yisrael.

In these cases, Moshe was involved. His name would engender positive reaction from the people. When, in Parshas Tetzaveh, the Torah addresses the disbursements of these metals for various purposes, Moshe was scarce. He wanted no part of this, so that people would not talk.

The Torah in Bamidbar 32:22, writes, V'heyisem nekium mei Hashem u'mi Yisrael, "You shall be vindicated from Hashem and from Yisrael." The Chafetz Chaim, zl, notes that the Torah enjoins us to first be naki, vindicated, from Hashem, and then in the eyes of the people. Regrettably, there are those public figures who reverse their priorities, first attempting to find favor in the eyes of the populace and, only later, seeking Hashem's approval. Such practice will ultimately satisfy neither Hashem nor the people he is trying to impress.

The Torah is teaching us the importance of remaining above-board, of total accountability and of full disclosure. Regardless of how far-fetched the fear might be, one should never allow people to be suspicious of him. In his Gilyon HaShas, Meseches Shabbos, Horav Akiva Eiger, zl, writes that if one has two entrances to his home facing the street, he should light the Chanukah menorah at both doors. Yes, the two require two menoras, one lit at each door, because the people walking by the other door might wrongly suspect you of not lighting Chanukah candles. Regrettably, some people look for such opportunities and thrive on the way they can raise suspicion, thus impugning someone's reputation.

The following episode demonstrates to what extent people have gone to assure they remain above suspicion. Horav Shlomo Zalman Porush, zl, was an individual of exemplary character. His moral and ethical rectitude complemented his scholarship and fear of Heaven. He was in charge of disbursing the monies sent from Kollel Minsk in Russia to the poor of Eretz Yisrael. The "check" usually arrived before Pesach, so that the poor could purchase their necessities for the festival. One year, the check was late. As a result, Rav Shlomo Zalman borrowed 200 Napoleon gold coins from a distinguished layman, R' Feivel Stoller, with the promise that he would repay the entire loan after Yom Tov.

Immediately following Yom Tov, R' Shlomo Zalman delivered 110 Napoleons to R' Feivel with the promise that the remainder of the loan would follow soon. Two months later, R' Shlomo Zalman brought the 90 Napoleons in full repayment of the loan. Unfortunately, R' Feivel's memory failed him, and he did not remember receiving the first installment of 110 Napoleons.

The question was brought before the Bais Din, court, of Horav Shmuel Salant, zl. The judges decided that R' Shlomo Zalman was to take a shevuah d'oraisa, Biblically mandated oath, in order to clear his good name. R' Shlomo Zalman refused, claiming that he had never sworn in Hashem's Name and was not going to do so now. He would rather pay the 110 Napoleons. Rav Shmuel Salant would not hear of it. He felt that people might talk and claim that R' Shlomo Zalman had originally attempted to cheat R' Feivel, but when he saw it was not going his way, he relented and paid. No, he would have to support his veracity by swearing by Hashem's Name.

R' Shlomo Zalman accepted upon himself the judgment, but asked for three days to prepare for this awesome undertaking. It was no small endeavor to swear using Hashem's Name. That day he came to Bais Din accompanied by his family. Everyone was lamenting, weeping profusely at what their father was about to do. R' Shlomo Zalman came dressed in his white kittel.

After the oath was administered, R' Shlomo Zalman still refused to use the 110 Napoleons that he had "saved." He sold his home for 50 Napoleons and he borrowed another 60 Napoleons. The money was used to establish the Bais HaKenneses "Bais Yaakov" in the Bais Yisrael neighborhood of Yerushalayim. That year, as R' Feivel was cleaning his house before Pesach, he discovered the "missing" 110 Napoleons. He immediately begged R' Shlomo Zalman's forgiveness for all of the trouble he had caused him.

When we consider the ethical qualities of R' Shlomo Zalman Porush, we no longer wonder why he merited to have a grandson, who was his namesake, of the calibre of Horav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zl.

From Rabbi Yissocher Frand ryfrand@torah.org & genesis@torah.org
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Subject Rabbi Frand on Parsha

Rabbi Yissocher Frand Parshas Pekudei

We Toil And Receive Reward -- For The Toil!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I asked Rabbi Emanuel Feldman (Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Beth Jacob in Atlanta), "What is the key to your success?" Rabbi Feldman told me that the key is to try to plant seeds. That is all a Rabbi can do. He can try to nurture and water the seeds, but really all he can do is try. He never knows for sure whether his efforts will succeed.

For example, one individual who recently returned to intensive Jewish involvement and observance told Rabbi Feldman that he made his decision because of a Yom Kippur sermon that Rabbi Feldman delivered 15 years earlier. A comment in that sermon had struck home. He did not act upon it then, but 15 years later, he decided to become religious.

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

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky
The TorahWeb Foundation
Constant Focus - The Lesson of the Tzitz

The Kohen Gadol performing the avoda in the Beis Hamikdash adorned by the bigdei kehuna reaches a level of sanctity that a regular person presumably can never attain. Yet Chazal tell us that a talmid chacham has precedence over a Kohen Gadol (mishna Huriyos 3:8). The Rambam elaborates upon the distinction between a Kohen Gadol and a talmid chacham as follows: Kehuna is reserved exclusively for the descendants of Aharon, while Torah belongs to the entire Jewish People. Through Torah study anyone can be elevated spiritually and even surpass the level of the Kohen Gadol. (see Rambam Hilchos Shemitah v'Yovel 13:13).

There is one halacha concerning the Kohen Gadol that, in its broadest sense, applies to all of us and whose observance is fundamental to living a life of kedusha. The Kohen Gadol wore the tzitz, which was engraved with the words "Kodesh laHashem", on his head. Although the Torah seems to describe the Kohen Gadol as wearing the tzitz at all times - "tamid" - the Torah shebaal peh explains that "tamid" does not demand that he wear it constantly, but rather "tamid" dictates that when the Kohen Gadol wears the tzitz he must always be aware that it is on him (i.e. hesech hadaas is forbidden while wearing the tzitz.) Chazal derive from this that one who is wearing tefillin must focus on the tefillin and take care that his thoughts not stray to other matters that are inconsistent with the message of tefillin. While the tzitz has the name of Hashem engraved on it, the parshiyos of tefillin contain Hashem's name many times. As such, tefillin must be treated with even more care than the tzitz. Hesech hadass should be inconceivable when the name of Hashem is upon us.

We carry the name of Hashem with us whenever we study His Torah. The Ramban in his introduction to chumash elaborates upon how the entire Torah is the name of Hashem, i.e. Hashem's Torah is a description of Him that we can relate to in this world. Just as the Kohen Gadol cannot have hesech hadaas from the message of the tzitz and one cannot have hesech hadaas from tefillin, so too, talmud Torah cannot be accomplished with hesech hadaas. This requirement that talmud Torah be free of hesech hadaas has a substantive halachic impact on our approach to birchas HaTorah. The rishonim question why we recite birchas HaTorah before we learn in the morning yet do not repeat it later in the day when we return to learning, given that if we interrupt the fulfillment of another mitzvah we recite a new bracha when we return. The explanation is given that talmud Torah is different because we are never allowed to have hesech hadaas from Torah. Even when we are involved in other activities, the mitzva of talmud Torah requires of us to constantly focus on returning to our learning as soon as possible, since talmud Torah is incumbent upon us tamid.

There is a question at the end of Orach Chaim whether one should rejoice on Purim Katan, i.e. the 14th day of Adar Rishon. The Rama supports such rejoicing by quoting the pasuk that states, "tov lev mishte tamid - one with a good heart is constantly rejoicing". The Rama thereby ends the section of Orach Chaim with the word "tamid". The commentaries on the Rama note that the Rama began Orach Chaim by quoting the pasuk, "shivisi Hashem l'negdi tamid - I have placed Hashem in front of myself at all times." One who thinks of Hashem tamid is the one who is truly happy tamid. The Kohen Gadol focuses on the tzitz tamid, and tamid governs the wearing of tefillin. It is this sense of tamid, the concentration and focus on Hashem and His Torah that is our Orach Chaim, our way of life.

As we conclude the parshiyos of the mishkan and bigdei kehuna and as we transition from Adar Rishon to Adar Sheni, it is time to commit ourselves to a life of tamid. May we be zoche to once again see the Kohen Gadol wearing the tzitz tamid, inspiring us to live a life of

"Kodesh laHashem tamid."

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A Thought for the Week with Rabbi Jay Kelman
Parshat Shekalim - Purim and Pesach

Imagine if every few years the Gregorian calendar had two Decembers. When would people shop? We of course are faced with a similar dilemma seven out of every nineteen years as our calendar has two Adars. While we celebrate Purim in Adar II this was actually the subject of Rabbinic debate. The Talmud instinctively understood the view that we should celebrate Purim in Adar I. After all, we should never pass up an opportunity to perform a mitzvah. Furthermore is not the first Adar the real Adar with the second added to balance our lunar and solar calendars. In fact the court could wait until the 29th day of Adar (the last day of the Jewish year - it is Nisan not Tishrei that marks the beginning of the calendaric year) to decide if we should even have an extra month. Clearly one would have to read the megillah two weeks earlier in the middle of Adar I. Yet the Talmud accepts the reasoning that Purim should be celebrated in Adar II based on the desire to have "redemption next to redemption" i.e. that we should celebrate the miracle of Purim as close as possible to the miracle of Pesach.

This connection between these two seemingly unrelated holidays appears in many sources. Rashi explains the reason that "when Adar enters we increase our joy" is due to our recall of the miracles of Purim and Pesach. The first law codified in the laws of Pesach is that we should start learning them thirty days prior i.e. on Purim itself. While it is true that the essence of the Purim story took place at Pesach - the three day fast coincided with what should have been the seder - the connection between Purim and Pesach requires further elucidation. Why are we so insistent on having Purim next to Pesach? The redemption of Pesach and the redemption of Purim could not be more different. On Pesach G-d actively intervened to change the course of history. The Jewish people are almost completely passive throughout the whole process relying on the overt miracles of G-d to redeem them. The role of the Jewish people is so insignificant that at our seder - celebrating our first redemption - the name of Moshe is not even mentioned. It is as if our great leader played no part in the Exodus. Of course on Purim we find the exact opposite. There are no overt miracles, the central roles are played by Mordechai and Esther and the role of G-d is so much behind the scenes that His name is nowhere to be found in the Megillah.

Pesach celebrates the formation of the Jewish nation. A group of slaves who were far removed from G-d had to be taught that G-d is the Master of the Universe. Maimonides begins his monumental code of Jewish law declaring that "the foundation of foundations and pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a G-d" who is the source and cause of all of existence. This is the holiday of Pesach, the holiday in which we celebrate G-d's role in history. Purim in effect represents the maturation of the Jewish people. A thousand years later we are able to recognize G-d even when G-d is hidden. No miracles are needed as we understand that all that transpires is the will of G-d. Our calendar symbolically reflects this growth process. At the beginning of the year, in Nissan we are in essence little children who have difficulty understanding abstract concepts and need to see the direct power of G-d to be impressed. By the end of the year, in Adar we have grown into adults with a more sophisticated approach to our Master. Purim and Pesach can not be separated, the link between open and hidden miracles must be emphasized.

Our Sages tell us that the story of Esther marks the end of the period of miracles. Once one understands that all of existence is a miracle, that Esther was the agent of G-d in redeeming the Jewish people, no more miracles are necessary. We can now begin to understand why our Sages place such emphasis on Purim, equating it in importance to Yom

Kippurim, seeing it as a day of rededication to Torah and claiming that while books of the prophets and the writing (Neviim and Ketuvim) will be abrogated the book of Esther will never be annulled. So while we are full of joy as we recount the miracles of Pesach a higher form of joy is to be found in the miracles of Purim. MiShenichnas Adar Marbim BeSimcha . When Adar enters we increase our joy. May we merit the ultimate joy of the final redemption. Shabbat Shalom .

Rabbi Kelman, in addition to his founder and leadership roles in Torah in Motion, teaches Ethics, Talmud and Rabbinics at the Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto.

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Rav Kook List
Rav Kook on the Torah Portion
Pekudei: Always on His Mind

It is said that the brilliant Gaon of Rogachov, Rabbi Joseph Rosen (1858-1936), would write scholarly Halachic correspondence while simultaneously conversing with someone on a totally different subject. When questioned how he accomplished this feat, the Rogachover humbly replied that his talent was not so remarkable. 'What, have you never heard of a businessman who mentally plans out his day's schedule while reciting the morning prayers?'

Constant Awareness

The tzitz was one of the eight special garments worn by the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest. This was a gold plate worn across the forehead, engraved with the words kodesh le-Hashem - "Holy to God."

The Torah commands that the tzitz "will be on his forehead - always" (Ex. 28:38). The Sages understood this requirement not so much as addressing where the head-plate is worn, but rather how it is worn. It is not enough for the tzitz to be physically on his forehead. It must be always 'on his mind.' The High Priest must be constantly aware of the plate and its succinct message, "Holy to God," while serving in the holy Temple. His service requires conscious recognition of the purpose of his actions, without irrelevant thoughts and musings. He could not be like the fellow whose thoughts revolved around business dealings while he mumbled his daily prayers.

Awareness When Wearing Tefillin

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

This logic, however, appears flawed. Do the Sages really mean to say that tefillin, worn by any Jew, is a holier object than the sacred head-plate worn only by the High Priest when serving in the Temple?

Furthermore, why is it that God's name is only recorded once on the tzitz, while it appears many times in tefillin?

Connecting to Our Goals

Life may be divided into two parts: our ultimate goals, and the means by which we attain those goals. We must be careful not to confuse one for the other. It is easy to lose sight of our true goals when we are occupied with the ways of achieving them.

Even those who are careful to 'stay on track' may not have a clear understanding of the true purpose of life. The Sages taught that "All of

your deeds should be for the sake of Heaven" (Avot 2:12). Knowledge of what God wants us to do in every situation is by no means obvious. Success in discovering the highest goal, in comprehending our purpose in life, and being able to relate all of life's activities to this central goal - this depends on our wisdom and insight.

Regarding the High Priest, we expect that the individual suitable for such a high and central office will have attained the level of enlightenment where all of life's activities revolve around a single ultimate goal. For the Kohen Gadol, everything should relate to the central theme of "Holy to God." Therefore the tzitz mentions God's name just once - a single crowning value.

Most people, however, have not reached this level of enlightenment. We have numerous goals - performing acts of kindness, charity, Torah study, prayer, acquiring wisdom, and so on. These are all true spiritual values; and by relating various activities to each of these values, we succeed in elevating ourselves and recognizing the underlying central goal. For this reason, the scrolls inside tefillin contain God's name many times, reflecting the various spiritual goals that guide us.

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

Now we may understand the logic of the Talmudic argument comparing these two holy objects. Even the High Priest, despite his broad spiritual insight, needed to be constantly aware of the tzitz on his forehead and its fundamental message of kodesh le-Hashem. Certainly the average person, with an array of goals, must remain conscious of the spiritual messages of his tefillin at all times.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. III, p. 26)

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Weekly Halacha
by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Lighting Shabbos Candles * Part II

Question: In regard to Shabbos candle-lighting, whose customs should a woman follow—her husband's or her mother's?

Discussion: There is a general rule that once a woman gets married, she must follow her husband's customs—both leniencies and stringencies. Marriage signifies a wife's entrance into her husband's domain, and that entry obligates her to follow his customs.¹

It is possible, though, that there may be an exception to this rule in regard to Shabbos candle-lighting. Many women follow the example set by their mothers in matters of custom, such as the number of candles to light, the appropriate time to light candles on Yom Tov, etc. Often, their husbands do not object even though their own mothers followed a different custom. Is this contrary to the aforementioned rule?

It seems that there is a halachic source for women following their mother's custom. To prove this point, let us examine a well-known custom which is connected to the mitzvah of candle-lighting:

It is customary for many women to recite the blessing of shehecheyanu when they light candles for Yom Tov. Although this custom has no source or basis in Halachah—indeed, it may be halachically objectionable²—it has nevertheless become almost universally accepted.

Rav Yaakov Emden reports³ that he, personally, objects to this custom. Indeed, he rules that if a woman does not have the definite custom of reciting shehechyanu at candle-lighting time, she should not do so. Nevertheless, he says, his wife—who saw this custom in her parents’ home—does so, and he does not object. Since it is not halachically forbidden, he does not feel compelled to reject her minhag which she witnessed in her home.

Surely, Rav Emden was aware that upon marriage, a woman ought to change her customs to follow her husband’s. Still, he did not insist that his wife abandon her mother’s custom and adopt his own. Perhaps Rav Emden held that customs pertaining to candle-lighting are an exception to the general rule. Since, as mentioned above, our Sages made it the woman’s responsibility to light candles, it becomes “her” mitzvah, to be followed according to her customs.⁴ Apparently, it is not incumbent upon the husband to insist that his wife alter the customs which she learned from her mother. Although she may do so if she likes, she is not required to do so.⁵

Question: May a woman daven Minchah after she has lit candles on Friday night?

Discussion: L’chatchilah, all poskim agree that she should daven Minchah before lighting candles. When a woman lights candles, she automatically accepts upon herself the restrictions and obligations of the Shabbos day. This precludes her davening the previous day’s Minchah. If, however, a woman is running late and has not davened Minchah by candle-lighting time, the poskim differ as to what she should do. There are three views:

1. She should go ahead and light candles. She should then daven the Shemoneh Esrei of the Shabbos Ma’ariv twice to compensate for the lost Minchah.⁶ Even though women do not usually daven Ma’ariv, she may do so in this case in order to make up the lost Minchah.⁷

2. Before lighting, she should stipulate that she is not accepting the Shabbos until after she has davened Minchah.⁸ This should not be done on Yom Tov if she recited shehechyanu at the candle-lighting.⁹

3. Some poskim rule that she may daven Minchah after lighting candles even if she did not stipulate that she was not accepting the Shabbos.¹⁰

Note that when men light candles, they do not automatically accept the Shabbos with their candle-lighting.¹¹ They may, therefore, daven Minchah after lighting candles.

Question: How many candles should a woman light on erev Shabbos?

Discussion: This depends on family custom. While the basic halachah mandates that a minimum of one candle be lit,¹² it is universally accepted that no one lights fewer than two candles, representing the dual aspects of Shabbos—Zachor and Shamor.¹³ Some women light seven candles, others ten,¹⁴ while others light the number of candles corresponding to the number of people (parents plus children) in the family.¹⁵ All customs are halachically acceptable, and each woman should follow her custom and not vary from week to week.¹⁶ Should a woman, however, find herself away from home on Shabbos or Yom Tov, she may light just two candles even if she lights more when she is home.¹⁷

Question: Some women do not blow out the flame of the match, lighter, etc. after lighting candles on erev Shabbos; instead, they allow the flame to extinguish on its own. They do this in order to avoid transgressing a Shabbos Labor—“Extinguishing”—once they have accepted Shabbos with the kindling of the candles. Should all women observe this custom?

Discussion: No, they need not do so. It is permitted to extinguish the flame after lighting candles as long as one does so before reciting the blessing of l’hadlik ner shel Shabbos. Although Shulchan Aruch does note the custom of “some” women who are careful not to put out the flame after lighting candles,¹⁸ this custom no longer applies today when all women (who follow the Ashkenazi custom¹⁹) recite the blessing over the candles after kindling them. Since Shabbos does not begin until after the blessing is recited, there is ample time to blow out the flame

before reciting the blessing.²⁰

Question: Does the same halachah apply to Yom Tov?

Discussion: On Yom Tov when many women follow the custom of reciting the blessing before lighting candles,²¹ care should be taken not to put out the flame after lighting them. This is because once Yom Tov has begun, it is forbidden to extinguish a fire. The match, therefore, should be carefully put aside and allowed to extinguish on its own or she may hand it over to another person to extinguish it.²² [A woman who is afraid to allow a match to extinguish on its own should light her candles first, blow out the match, and then recite the blessing, as she does on a regular erev Shabbos.²³ Of course, she may do this only if she lit candles before sunset. If she is lighting after Yom Tov has begun, she may not put out the flame.]

1 Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:158; E.H. 1:59; Minchas Yitzchak 4:83; Rav S.Z. Auerbach (oral ruling quoted in Yom Tov Sheini K’hilchaso, pg. 187).

2 See Discussion on Parashas Bamidbar.

3 Teshuvos Ya’avetz 107.

4 Similarly, see Igros Moshe, E.H. 2:12 who rules that a wife need not listen to a husband who holds that a wig is not enough of a hair-covering, since this is “her” mitzvah. See also Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:32-10; 4:100-4.

5 According to Rav S.Z. Auerbach (oral ruling quoted in Yom Tov Sheini K’hilchaso, pg. 188; Halichos Shelomo 1:1-7), a husband may allow his wife to keep her former customs in all cases. For instance, she does not have to change her nusach of davening after her marriage.

6 This appears to be the view of the Mishnah Berurah 263:43; see Chut Shani, Shabbos, vol. 4, pg. 70.

7 Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K’hilchasa 43:110). But she may only do so if she davens Minchah on a regular basis; Shulchan Shelomo, addendum to vol. 1, pg. 22.

8 Eishel Avraham 263:10; Kaf ha-Chayim 263:35; Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (oral ruling quoted in Avnei Yashfe, Tefillah, pg. 201).

9 Tzitz Eliezer 10:19-5. This is because several poskim hold that one cannot recite shehechyanu, which celebrates the arrival of the Yom Tov, and at the same time stipulate that he is not accepting Yom Tov’s arrival.

10 Several poskim quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K’hilchasa 43, note 128.

11 Mishnah Berurah 263:42. It is still, however, preferable even for men to verbally stipulate that they are not mekabel Shabbos when lighting candles.

12 And, indeed, under extenuating circumstances, one may light only one candle and recite the blessing over it; Mishnah Berurah 263:9.

13 Based on Rama, O.C. 263:1.

14 Mishnah Berurah 263:6.

15 This custom, although widespread, is not mentioned in any of the classical sources.

16 Based on Beir Halachah 263:1 (s.v. she’shachechah).

17 She’arim Metzuyanin b’Halachah 75:13.

18 O.C. 263:10.

19 Most Sefaradim, however, recite the blessing before kindling; Yechaveh Da’as 2:33.

20 Aruch ha-Shulchan 263:14; Yechaveh Da’as 2:33, quoting Mateh Yehudah 263:2. [Note that Mishnah Berurah does not disagree with this; indeed, he repeatedly rules that Shabbos begins after the blessing is recited; see 263:21 and 27. See also Da’as Torah 263:5 (s.v. v’yesh).] Chayei Adam and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, too, do not mention the custom of allowing the flame to extinguish by itself. See also addendum to Shulchan Shelomo, vol. 1, pg. 19.

21 As ruled by Mishnah Berurah 263:27.

22 Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos k’Hilchasa 43, note 179).

23 Based on the ruling of the Magen Avraham (263:12) and

Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (75:4), who rule that women should light on erev Yom Tov exactly as they do on erev Shabbos: first light the candles and then recite the blessing.

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Subject TalmuDigest

TALMUDIGEST * Zevachim 114 - 120

For the week ending 5 March 2011 / 28 Adar I 5771

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by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

SPEECH AND SILENCE * Zevachim 115b

“A time to speak and a time to be silent.” (Kohelet 3:4)

Our Sages explain this profound observation of King Shlomo as a reference to the reward one can sometimes receive for speaking and sometimes for remaining silent.

The silence which earned a reward was that of Aharon who silently accepted the tragic death of his two sons. When Moshe comforted his brother that the sudden death of his son served as a sanctification of G-d's Name, Aharon responded with silent acquiescence. The midrash cited by Rashi states that his reward was that the very next command given by G-d was only to Aharon (Vayikra 10:8) and not to Moshe.

While the time to remain silent is explicitly mentioned in our gemara, we turn to Rashi in Kohelet for an explanation of when there is a time to speak. Three examples are listed there: The song of Moshe and the Children of Israel at the splitting of the sea, the song of the Prophetess Devorah after the victory over the Canaanites, and the call of the Prophet Hoshea to return to G-d and “take words with you”.

The reward for such speech is self-evident and needs no elaboration.

WHAT THE SAGES SAY

“What did Yitro hear that motivated him to join the Jewish People? The splitting of the sea.”

Rabbi Elazar ben Yaakov - Zevachim 116a

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