

Weekly Parsha VAYAKHEL 5782

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Rashi points out that the opening portion of this week's Torah reading was transmitted by Moshe to the entire Jewish people in public, when they were all gathered. These laws of the Sabbath that represent one of the core pillars of Judaism – the observance of the Sabbath day as a day of rest and spirituality – were communicated to everyone in a public venue. No one was obligated to hear it second hand, and take the word of anyone else, regarding the proper method of observance of the Sabbath day.

Everyone heard the instructions simultaneously and clearly, publicly, and definitively. The observance of the Sabbath day has, to a great extent, been counted by other cultures as faith at its essence and remains a uniquely Jewish idea and code of behavior. The idea of a day of rest from the toil of the week has certainly been adapted by most of human civilization. However, the methodology of defining and implementing such an abstract idea as a day of rest into reality remains wholly within the purview of Jewish tradition and Torah observance.

There is, perhaps, no more striking mark of absolute Jewish identity that exists in our society than that of observing, sanctifying, and enjoying the Sabbath day. It is a truism said by a Jewish 19th century popular thinker, that more than the Jews guarded and preserved the Sabbath, the Sabbath guarded and preserved the Jewish people. To emphasize this point, the Torah teaches us that the Shabbat not only preserves the sanctity and spirit of the individual Jew, but, since it was given publicly with everyone gathered to hear its message, it is also the guarantor for the preservation of all Jewish society and the people of Israel throughout the ages.

The fact that the Sabbath was so publicly explained and detailed, teaches us another important lesson regarding Jewish life in Jewish society. There are commandments in the Torah that can rightfully be described as private and personal. The Sabbath, however, has not only a private face to it, but a public one as well. The Jews are commanded to keep the Sabbath in their private homes, but there must also be a public Sabbath, so to speak. It must be apparent on the Jewish Street that the Sabbath has arrived and is present.

Public desecration of the Sabbath by individual Jews was a far more damaging sort of behavior than the violation of other precepts in the privacy of one's home. Part of the struggle here in the State of Israel is for the growth and influence of the public Sabbath to be maintained, as part of the Jewish identity for all Jews who live here in our ancient home. Denying the concept of Shabbat to maintain total freedom of each individual is like a person who drills a hole under his or her seat on a ship and claims it will not affect anyone else. It is the public Sabbath as much as the private one that guarantees the survival of Jewish society and the Jewish state as well.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Spirit of Community

VAYAKHEL • Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

What do you do when your people have just made a Golden Calf, run riot, and lost its sense of ethical and spiritual direction? How do you restore moral order – not just then in the days of Moses, but even now? The answer lies in the first word of today's parsha: Vayakhel. But to understand this, we have to retrace two journeys that were among the most fateful in the modern world.

The story begins in the year 1831 when two young men, both in their twenties – one from England, the other from France – set out on voyages of discovery that would change both of them, and eventually our collective understanding of the world. The Englishman was Charles Darwin. The Frenchman was Alexis de Tocqueville. Darwin's journey aboard the Beagle took him eventually to the Galapagos Islands where he began to think about the origin and evolution of species. Tocqueville's journey was to investigate a phenomenon that became the title of his book: Democracy in America.

Although the two men were studying completely different things, the one zoology and biology, the other politics and sociology, as we will see, they came to strikingly similar conclusions – the same conclusion God taught Moses after the episode of the Golden Calf.

Darwin, as we know, made a series of discoveries that led him to the theory known as natural selection. Species compete for scarce resources and only the best-adapted survive. The same, he believed, was true

of humans. But this left him with serious problem: If evolution is the struggle to survive, if the strong win and the weak go to the wall, then all ruthlessness should prevail. But this is not the case. All societies value altruism. People esteem those who make sacrifices for the sake of others. This, in Darwinian terms, doesn't seem to make sense at all, and he knew it.

The bravest, most sacrificial people, he wrote in *The Descent of Man* "would on average perish in larger number than other men." A noble man "would often leave no offspring to inherit his noble nature." It seems scarcely possible, he wrote, that virtue "could be increased through natural selection, that is, by survival of the fittest." [1]

It was Darwin's greatness that he saw the answer, even though it contradicted his general thesis. Natural selection operates at the level of the individual. It is as individual men and women that we pass on our genes to the next generation. But civilisation works at the level of the group.

As he put it:

A tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to give aid to each other and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes; and this would be natural selection."

How to get from the individual to the group was, he said, "at present much too difficult to be solved." [2]

The conclusion was clear even though biologists to this day still argue about the mechanisms involved. [3]

We survive as groups. One person versus one lion: lion wins. Ten people against one lion: the lion may lose. *Homo sapiens*, in terms of strength and speed, is a poor player when ranked against the outliers in the animal kingdom. But human beings have unique skills when it comes to creating and sustaining groups. We have language: we can communicate. We have culture: we can pass on our discoveries to future generations. Humans form larger and more flexible groups than any other species, while at the same time leaving room for individuality. We are not ants in a colony or bees in a hive. Humans are the community-creating animal.

Meanwhile in America, Alexis de Tocqueville, like Darwin, faced a major intellectual problem he felt driven to solve. His problem, as a Frenchman, was to

try to understand the role of religion in democratic America. He knew that the United States had voted to separate religion from power by way of the First Amendment, the separation of church and state. So religion in America had no power. He assumed that it had no influence either. What he discovered was precisely the opposite:

"There is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America." [4]

This did not make any sense to him at all, and he asked various Americans to explain it to him. They all gave him essentially the same answer. Religion in America (we are speaking of the early 1830s, remember) does not get involved in politics. He asked clergymen why not. Again they were unanimous in their answer. Politics is divisive. Therefore if religion were to become involved in politics, it too would be divisive. That is why religion stayed away from party political issues.

Tocqueville paid close attention to what religion actually did in America, and he came to some fascinating conclusions. It strengthened marriage, and he believed that strong marriages were essential to free societies. He wrote:

"As long as family feeling is kept alive, the opponent of oppression is never alone." [5]

It also led people to form communities around places of worship. It encouraged people in those communities to act together for the sake of the common good. The great danger in a democracy, said Tocqueville, is individualism. People come to care about themselves, not about others. As for the others, the danger is that people will leave their welfare to the government, a process that ends in the loss of liberty as the State takes on more and more of the responsibility for society as a whole.

What protects Americans against these twin dangers, he said, is the fact that, encouraged by their religious convictions, they form associations, charities, voluntary associations, what in Judaism we call *chevrot*. At first bewildered, and then charmed, Tocqueville noted how quickly Americans formed local groups to deal with the problems in their lives. He called this the "art of association," and said about it that it was "the apprenticeship of liberty."

All of this was the opposite of what he knew of France, where religion in the form of the Catholic

Church had much power but little influence. In France, he said:

“I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country.”[6]

So religion safeguarded the “habits of the heart” essential to maintaining democratic freedom. It sanctified marriage and the home. It guarded public morals. It led people to work together in localities to solve problems themselves rather than leave it to the government. If Darwin discovered that man is the community-creating animal, Tocqueville discovered that religion in America is the community-building institution.

It still is. Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam became famous in the 1990s for his discovery that more Americans than ever are going ten-pin bowling, but fewer are joining bowling clubs and leagues. He took this as a metaphor for a society that has become individualistic rather than community-minded. He called it Bowling Alone.[7] It was a phrase that summed up the loss of “social capital,” that is, the extent of social networks through which people help one another.

Years later, after extensive research, Putnam revised his thesis. A powerful store of social capital still exists and it is to be found in places of worship. Survey data showed that frequent church- or synagogue-goers are more likely to give money to charity, regardless of whether the charity is religious or secular. They are also more likely to do voluntary work for a charity, give money to a homeless person, spend time with someone who is feeling depressed, offer a seat to a stranger, or help someone find a job. On almost every measure, they are demonstrably more altruistic than non-worshippers.

Their altruism goes beyond this. Frequent worshippers are also significantly more active citizens. They are more likely to belong to community organisations, neighbourhood and civic groups, and professional associations. They get involved, turn up, and lead. The margin of difference between them and the more secular is large.

Tested on attitudes, religiosity as measured by church or synagogue attendance is the best predictor of altruism and empathy: better than education, age, income, gender, or race. Perhaps the most interesting

of Putnam’s findings was that these attributes were related not to people’s religious beliefs but to the frequency with which they attend a place of worship.[8]

Religion creates community, community creates altruism, and altruism turns us away from self and toward the common good. Putnam goes so far as to speculate that an atheist who went regularly to synagogue (perhaps because of a spouse) would be more likely to volunteer or give to charity than a religious believer who prays alone. There is something about the tenor of relationships within a community that makes it the best tutorial in citizenship and good neighbourliness.

What Moses had to do after the Golden Calf was Vayakhel – turn the Israelites into a kehillah, a community. He did this in the obvious sense of restoring order. When Moses came down the mountain and saw the Calf, the Torah says the people were pru’ah, meaning “wild,” “disorderly,” “chaotic,” “unruly,” “tumultuous.” He “saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies” (Ex. 32:25). They were not a community but a crowd. He did it in a more fundamental sense as we see in the rest of the parsha. He began by reminding the people of the laws of Shabbat. Then he instructed them to build the Mishkan, the Sanctuary, as a symbolic home for God.

Why these two commands rather than any others? Because Shabbat and the Mishkan are the two most powerful ways of building community. The best way of turning a diverse, disconnected group into a team is to get them to build something together.[9] Hence the Mishkan. The best way of strengthening relationships is to set aside dedicated time when we focus not on the pursuit of individual self interest but on the things we share, by praying together, studying Torah together, and celebrating together – in other words, Shabbat. Shabbat and the Mishkan were the two great community-building experiences of the Israelites in the desert.

More than this: in Judaism, community is essential to the spiritual life. Our holiest prayers require a minyan. When we celebrate or mourn we do so as a community. Even when we confess, we do so together. Maimonides rules:

One who separates himself from the community, even if he does not commit a transgression but merely holds

himself aloof from the congregation of Israel, does not fulfil the commandments together with his people, shows himself indifferent to their distress and does not observe their fast days but goes on his own way like one of the nations who does not belong to the Jewish people – such a person has no share in the world to come.[10]

That is not how religion has always been seen. Plotinus called the religious quest, “the flight of the alone to the Alone”.[11] Dean Inge said religion is what an individual does with his solitude. Jean-Paul Sartre notoriously said: hell is other people. In Judaism, it is as a community that we come before God. For us the key relationship is not I-Thou, but We-Thou.

Vayakhel is thus no ordinary episode in the history of Israel. It marks the essential insight to emerge from the crisis of the Golden Calf. We find God in community. We develop virtue, strength of character, and a commitment to the common good in community. Community is local. It is society with a human face. It is not government. It is not the people we pay to look after the welfare of others. It is the work we do ourselves, together.

Community is the antidote to individualism on the one hand and over-reliance on the state on the other. Darwin understood its importance to human flourishing. Tocqueville saw its role in protecting democratic freedom. Robert Putnam has documented its value in sustaining social capital and the common good. And it began in our parsha, when Moses turned an unruly mob into a kehillah, a community.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayakhel (Exodus 35:1-38:20)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel –“Take for yourselves an offering to the Lord. Let everyone whose heart moves him bring an offering to the Lord, gold and silver and copper... for the sanctuary and its tents and its coverings” (Exodus 35:5-11)

The last two portions of Exodus seem to repeat the two previous portions of Terumah and Tetzaveh, listing the precise dimensions, materials and furnishings of the desert sanctuary. Why is such a reiteration necessary?

Before responding, we must recall that the two portions which initially commanded the construction of the sanctuary are separated from Vayakhel and

Pekudei, which repeat those instructions, by last week’s portion of Ki Tisa, which records the tragic incident of the Golden Calf. When we realize that according to most commentaries and midrashim, the idolatrous act with the calf occurred before the command to construct the sanctuary our problem becomes compounded. Why interrupt the story about the construction of the sanctuary with the account of the calf, and why repeat the instructions?

An analogy comes to mind: Picture an excited, engaged couple who spend the period before their wedding carefully choosing their marital home and shopping for its furnishings. Then the young groom-to-be leaves on a short business trip and is unexpectedly delayed. In his absence, his fiancée has an all-night tryst with a former boyfriend. If after the accusations, confession and breast-beating subsides, the couple resumes the search for an apartment and its accoutrements with the same enthusiasm they had before, we can feel assured that all has been forgiven and they are opening a new chapter in their relationship.

This is a metaphor for the biblical account of the Golden Calf and the construction of the sanctuary; the biblical groom is the Almighty and the bride is the People of Israel.

Our analogy may well explain the repetition as well as the placing of the calf story between the two accounts of sanctuary construction. But it leaves us with a profound religious problem. The Bible itself forbids a married (or betrothed) woman who commits adultery from returning to her betrothed/husband (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Why does God take Israel back after the Golden Calf? I believe it was because of Moses. In his defense of the Jewish people before God, he initially presents three arguments: First, You [God] redeemed them paternalistically with Your great power and strong hand before they were religiously capable of dealing with independence; second, Egypt will think You only took them out to kill them in the desert, and not because You wish every human being to be free; and third, You made an irrevocable covenant with the patriarchs that their seed will live in the Land of Israel (Ex. 32:11-14).

But it is only after Moses makes another, final plea; crying out, “And now if You would only forgive their sin! But if not, erase me now from this book that You have written” (Ex. 32:32) that God actually

commands Israel to go up to the Land and conquer it – proving not only that He has forgiven them, but also that His covenant with them remains intact.

The great classical commentator Rashi interprets these words along the lines of Targum Yonatan Ben Uziel: “If You would forgive their sin, it would be good and I would not ask to be erased; but if You will not forgive them, then erase me from the entire Torah, that it not be said by future generations that I was not worthy to merit Divine compassion for them.” The Rashbam explains, “Erase me from the Book of Life” and the Ibn Ezra and Sforno have “Erase me from the Book of Eternal Life... and grant my merits to the Israelites so that they be forgiven.” The Ramban maintains, “...If You will forgive their sins out of Your compassion, it would be good; but if not, erase me instead of them from the Book of Life.”

For me, however, the interpretation truest to the plain meaning of the text comes from the Match Yosef, a disciple of the Hatam Sofer. Based on the Talmudic axiom (B.T. Shabbat 54b, 55a) that a leader must be held responsible for the transgressions of his “flock,” Moses tells the Almighty, “How is it possible that the nation could have transgressed in so egregious a manner? Clearly, I am not worthy to be their leader. Hence, whether or not You forgive their sin, You must erase me from Your book. You must remove me from leadership, because I have been proven to be ill-prepared...”

God responds that He only punishes the actual transgressors, not their “minister,” and God determines that Moses is still the best qualified to lead the nation. However, God also understands that Moses has expressed a profound truth. Perhaps Moses’ flaw was that he was too much a man of God and too little a man of the people, unable to rouse and reach the Israelites in a way that would have prevented their transgression.

Nevertheless, God forgives us, as we see from the repetition in Vayakhel and Pekudei even after our idolatry. After all, it was God Himself, apparently realizing that the highest priority for covenantal Israel was a leader who would convey His eternal Torah, who cajoled Moses into accepting the leadership of Israel in the first place.

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week’s Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Avraham Yitzchak ben Alter Lieb. “May his Neshama have an Aliya!”

Making Sense Out of Dollars

every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the Lord’s offering [...] (35:21).

The Torah uses an unusually long and verbose description of the motivations behind Bnei Yisroel’s bringing gifts for the creation of the Mishkan. The Torah could have simply said that the people brought their donations. The word donation in and of itself implies a free will desire to give. Why does the Torah use the elongated language of “whose heart stirred” and “whom his spirit made willing”?

Most people have a very complicated relationship with money. On one hand, money is something they try to acquire and hold on to, on the other hand it is something that needs to be spent on life’s essentials. Therefore, one always has to weigh the costs and benefits of spending versus saving. In addition, because money gives people the ability to have what they want, it represents an acquired sense of power – sometimes real, sometimes an illusion. Consequently, a person begins perceiving his own sense of self-worth as tied inextricably to how much money he has managed to accumulate. Inevitably, an unhealthy relationship with money leads to conflict within family, coworkers, and society at large.

A healthy relationship with money is therefore achieved by seeing money for what it really is: potential – nothing more, nothing less. When one understands this concept it becomes clear that the mindless pursuit of the collection of money is as pointless as it is useless. The only proper approach to money is to begin by deciding for what one needs money. One may then begin to anticipate how much one needs to accumulate in order to have a meaningful and fulfilling life.

Money earned is therefore not an end goal; it is only to be perceived as a product of our efforts. This is why the Gemara says that a person would prefer to have his own earned portion than to receive nine portions from his friend. A person always wants the work product of his own efforts because it represents personal achievement.

This concept also explains a very difficult Gemara. The Talmud (Chullin 91a) says that by a righteous person his money is more precious than his own body.

This seems very strange. What kind of shallow person sees his money as more precious than his body? How can a righteous person possibly feel this way? The answer is really quite simple: A righteous person is the one who understands that we are put on this earth to achieve and justify our existence. His physical body is something he was given, but his money represents the accomplishment of his work product and that represents something that he alone accomplished. His achievements are far more precious to him than what he was given.

This brings us to the most important (and enjoyable) part of having money; how we spend it. When a person has a healthy understanding of money, he begins to understand that spending money should be extremely fulfilling in that one is actualizing their efforts into something concrete. In other words, all your hard work is now transformed into a house or a car or clothes or food for your children. That is something that you alone created. Much like a work of art is precious to an artist because it is an expression of who he is, actualizing your efforts into something concrete is an expression of who you are.

The same is true about giving a gift. When one gives a gift he isn't merely giving over potential; he is actually giving his heart and soul. That is, he is actually giving all his hard work and efforts that went into acquiring that money. This is what the Torah is saying here. Bnei Yisroel weren't just giving materials to the Mishkan, they were actually giving an expression of their hearts and spirits.

A Lesson in Leadership

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

Rashi (ad loc) explains that the word (והנשאם) "heads" is written missing a letter yud because they were criticized for their approach to giving a gift to the Mishkan: The heads of the tribes announced that Bnei Yisroel should give whatever they wanted to contribute to the Mishkan and they (the heads of the tribes) would make up the difference of whatever was still needed. This is the first instance of a "capital campaign" in Jewish history and they were offering to make sure that it came to a successful completion. This is seemingly a very generous offer.

Remarkably, not only was it the shortest capital campaign in Jewish history (Chazal teach us that it only lasted two days), those who were in charge of

collecting for the Mishkan had more resources than they knew what to do with. The heads of the tribes didn't have much to contribute to so they were only able to participate in a modest way – by giving some of the stones.

Yet, Rashi says that they were punished for their approach. This is very difficult to understand. The offer to deficit fund a project is an incredibly generous offer. Making such an offer exposes a donor to the entire cost of the project. There is no fundraiser or executive director in the world who wouldn't be thrilled to receive such an offer. How can the heads of the tribes possibly be criticized for making this offer?

What the tribal heads failed to recognize was that their job as leaders wasn't merely to make sure that a community project was completed. A leader's responsibility, first and foremost, is to get everyone to do what they're supposed to do. A leader has to educate and show his followers what they're supposed to do.

By waiting around to see what people were going to contribute to the Mishkan, the tribal leaders caused a two-fold problem: firstly, they weren't exhibiting leadership in showing people how to give and secondly, and possibly much worse, they marginalized all of Bnei Yisroel's gifts. That is, if someone promises to deficit fund something, when someone else contributes to the campaign he is essentially not giving to the campaign because the money is already pledged by the person who is deficit funding. In other words, in that situation, giving to the campaign is merely saving money for the original donor who offered to deficit fund the project. Thus, this approach marginalized all the future gifts. That is why they were criticized even though they made such a seemingly generous offer.

***Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights
For the week ending 26 February 2022 / 25 Adar
Alef 5782***

***Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair -
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Parshat Vayakhel

Churchill and the Jews

"These are the things..." (35:1)

The relationship between Winston Churchill (1874–1965) arguably the greatest Englishman of the twentieth century, and the Jewish People is a subject of debate. Churchill opposed anti-Semitism (as in

1904, when he was fiercely critical of the proposed Aliens Bill severely restricting Jewish immigration from Czarist Russia). However, in "Zionism versus Bolshevism," an article written by Churchill in the Illustrated Sunday Herald in 1920, he makes a distinction between "national" Jews — who Churchill said supported Zionism — and "international" Jews — such as Karl Marx, Trotsky, Béla Kun, Rosa Luxemburg and Emma Goldman, who Churchill said supported a Bolshevik “world-wide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilization and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of arrested development, of envious malevolence, and impossible equality.” The article was criticized by the Jewish Chronicle at the time, calling it "the most reckless and scandalous campaign in which even the most discredited politicians have ever engaged." The Chronicle said Churchill had adopted "the hoary tactics of hooligan anti-Semites" in his article.

However, Sir Martin Gilbert (1936-2015), himself a Jew and Churchill's official biographer, argues in "Churchill and the Jews" that Churchill was overwhelmingly sympathetic to the Jews and Jewish causes: In that same 1920 article, Churchill writes, "We owe to the Jews... a system of ethics which, even if it were entirely separated from the supernatural, would be incomparably the most precious possession of mankind, worth in fact the fruits of all other wisdom and learning put together. On that system and by that faith there has been built out of the wreck of the Roman Empire the whole of our existing civilization."

"These are the things..." In the Torah portion called Vayakhel, the mitzvahs of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, are preceded by yet another injunction to keep Shabbat. And from the juxtaposition of the work of the Mishkan to the next two verses that deal with Shabbat, our Rabbis derive the thirty-nine categories of creative labor that are forbidden on Shabbat.

One of the messages of this juxtaposition is that the same creative labors that build the material world are precisely those that are needed to create an abode for sanctity. If "a system of ethics which, even if it were entirely separated from the supernatural, would be incomparably the most precious possession of mankind, worth in fact the fruits of all other wisdom and learning put together," how much more when that system is connected to the spiritual world is it

"incomparably the most precious possession of mankind."

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah Vayakhel: What will you be doing on the day after?

23 February 2022

Parshat Vayakhel commences (Shemot 35:1),

"Vayakhel Moshe et kol adat Bnei Yisroel." – "Moshe congregated the entire assembly of the People of Israel."

Rashi comments,

"Lemacharat Yom Hakippurim," – "This took place on the day after Yom Hakippurim."

Which yom Kippur is Rashi referring to and why is it important for us to know this? Rashi continues, "Kesheyarad min hahar," – "When Moshe came down from the mountain." Now we see that he was referring to that original Yom Kippur when we received the second tablets of the Ten Commandments.

You will recall that after initially spending 40 days and nights on Mount Sinai, Moshe received the first tablets and then, when he came down and witnessed the nation worshipping the golden calf, he smashed them. On the first of Elul, Moshe ascended the mountain again and 40 days later, on the 10th of Tishrei, he received the second set of tablets.

Timing

Why did Moshe not wait? Why was he so keen to gather the people together immediately after the receipt of the second tablets? The answer is surely that Moshe Rabbeinu recognised that on the previous day, the nation had had the most extraordinary, uplifting experience, a transformational day for one and all. And he wanted to guarantee that there would be follow-up.

He didn't want that to be a one day memory. Rather, he wanted it to genuinely change their lives for the better, and so he purposefully, proactively created an event to guarantee that the inspiration which they had received would now continue well into the future.

Follow-up

We can learn so much from Moshe Rabbeinu's lesson. For example, immediately following a Bar Mitzvah or a Bat Mitzvah, we can't just leave it up to chance that our children will remain connected to our people and our tradition. We need to proactively create

programmes of study and engagement for them to continue their commitment. Similarly, after many years of immersive Jewish education, it's important for us to create opportunities for ongoing Jewish education and commitment well into adulthood. I find all this to be of great relevance right now. The pandemic has provided us with an extraordinary, unprecedented, long opportunity for cheshbon hanefesh, introspection. During Covid we've been reassessing our lives and now we have fresh priorities. As we now emerge from the pandemic towards a more regular rhythm of life, let's learn that lesson from Moshe Rabbeinu – let's do something proactively to guarantee that all our Covid resolutions will be translated into action, to ensure that the inspiration that we have received will continue for the rest of our lives.

Shabbat shalom.

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

Drasha Parshas

Parshas Vayakhel - Going the Extra Smile

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Building a sanctuary is difficult enough. Getting people to donate has been, historically, even more difficult. That, however, was not the case concerning the Mishkan. The Torah in this week's portion tells us that everyone contributed to the cause. Men and women brought gold and silver. They brought personal items and family items. Copper mirrors were donated as well as bracelets, bangles and baubles. Those who had wool and linen came and those who had dyes donated.

Before the pledges began arriving, the Nesseim (the heads of the tribes) were so confident that the goals would not be met, that they pledged to fill the gap of any missing funds. They were shocked to learn that there was almost nothing for them to contribute! So much of every item was donated that an announcement was made, ordering the entire nation to halt their generosity. (It may have been the first and last of its kind!)

But what interests me is one other group of people that the Torah mentions as contributors. "And all those who Hashem inspired with wisdom to do the work. They took in front of Moshe the donations that the Jews brought for the work of the Mishkan, and the

brought an additional offering each morning" (Exodus 36:2-4).

Why did the Torah single out that these people brought something to the Mishkan? Didn't everybody?

The daughter of Rabbi Zusia of Anipol's was engaged. As poor as he was, Reb Zusia and his wife scraped together enough money for a seamstress to sew a beautiful gown for the bride-to-be. After a month the gown was ready, and Reb Zusia's wife went with her bundle of rubles to the home of the seamstress to get the finished gown.

She came home empty-handed. "Where is the gown?" asked both the Rebbe and his daughter, almost in unison.

"Well," said his wife, "I did a mitzvah. When I came to pick up the gown, I saw tears in the eyes of the seamstress. I asked her why she was crying and she told me that her daughter, too, was getting married. Then she looked at the beautiful gown that she had sewn for me and sighed, "if only we could afford such beautiful material for a gown."

Reb Zusia's wife continued. "At that moment I decided to let the seamstress have our gown as a gift!" Reb Zusia was delighted. The mitzvah of helping a poor bride was dear to him and he longed for the opportunity to fulfill it. But he added one question to his wife. "Did you pay her for the work she did for us?"

"Pay her?" asked the wife, "I gave her the gown!"

"I'm sorry," said the Rebbe. "You told me the gown was a gift. We still owe her for the weeks of work she spent for us." The rebbitzen agreed and, in addition to the gift of the gown she compensated the seamstress for her work.

The men and women who toiled laboriously could have said that they had done their share. After all, they crafted and wove the beautiful utensils and tapestries of the Mishkan. Yet that was not enough for them. In addition to the work they did, Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (1786-1829) explains, they contributed too! They did not stop their commitment with their work for the Mishkan. The Torah tells us that they, too, gave each morning. The efforts of individuals were crowned by their relentless generosity. In addition to their time and their skills, they gave their possessions. In a generation that looks to abdicate responsibility and commitment, it is wonderful to read about men and

women who searched for more ways to give — and found them!

Good Shabbos

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

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

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***Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayakhel
Why No Praise for the Acacia Wood Schleppers?***

Parshas Vayakhel contains a review of the process of constructing the Mishkan and its furnishings, beginning with the solicitation of donations for the various building materials necessary for this construction. Among the significant items brought was Atzei Shittim (Acacia wood). The pasuk says, "...anyone with whom there was found shittim wood for any work of the labor brought it." (Shemos 35:24). In fact, there was a significant need for Shittim wood, which was both long and heavy. The Medrash in Shir HaShirim speaks of the central beam (Beriach haTichon) that wrapped around the walls of the Mishkan being 32 cubits long.

Where did they find such long beams? They were hidden in Egypt (Mitzrayim) from the days of Yaakov Avinu. Chazal teach that Avraham Avinu originally planted the trees for the wood for the Mishkan in Be'er Sheva, and when Yaakov Avinu relocated to Mitzrayim, he took the wood from those trees and brought it with him to Mitzrayim. The people took this wood with them when they left Mitzrayim. They carried it into the Midbar and eventually they used this "wood with a pedigree" for the beams of the Mishkan. This is referenced in the above-cited pasuk.

The sefer Darash Mordechai by Rav Mordechai Druk brings a question from his own son: We know that Chazal spend a lot of time praising Moshe Rabbeinu for the fact that he spent his final hours in Mitzrayim locating and retrieving the bones of Yosef which he took with him. (Shemos 13:19) Chazal praise Moshe by noting that the rest of the Jewish people were occupying themselves with collecting "the booty of Egypt" while Moshe occupied himself with Mitzvos, quoting the pasuk "The wise in heart, will take Mitzvos..." (Mishlei 10:8) The son of the Darash Mordechai asked his father: "Why is there no praise

given to the people who made it their business to gather up the Acacia wood that Yaakov brought down to Mitzrayim and schlep it out with them?" If we consider that the central beam (Beriach ha'Tichon) was approximately 64 feet long (32 Amos) then that was certainly a cumbersome task, to say the least. There is no doubt that it was much harder to take responsibility for all that wood than to take responsibility for Yosef's bones. The wood schleppers also did a very noble act. What is the difference between Yosef's bones and Avraham and Yaakov's Acacia wood?

The Darash Mordechai suggested an answer to his son, and then his son responded with an answer of his own.

Rav Mordechai Druk answered that the praise bestowed upon Moshe was not merely for the fact that he schlepped, but rather for the fact that he did it while everyone else was busy collecting money. What does someone do when he is confronted with the following choice: On the one hand, there is a mitzvas asech from the Ribono shel Olam to collect money—go into the vault and take out gold and silver, no strings attached! Who will hesitate to fulfill a mitzvah and get rich in the process?

On the other hand, what did Moshe Rabbeinu do? Forget the money. Forget the riches. I am just going to do the mitzvah of taking Yosef's bones. The praise bestowed on Moshe is not for the weight he had to carry. If we would bestow praises based on pounds or kilograms carried, the wood carriers should be considered far greater heroes. Rather, Moshe was praised for forgoing the mitzvah with which he could acquire great wealth for himself, and instead focusing on a pure unadulterated mitzvah with no "matan sechara b'tziddah" (immediately accompanying reward).

Rav Druk's son offered another answer: Moshe saw the distinction being between a mitzvah bein Adam l'Makom (between man and G-d) and a mitzvah bein Adam l'Chaveiro (between man and his fellow-man). Work to build a shul is an attractive mitzvah. People will come to shul and see the wood that I broke my back schlepping. It is a mitzvah that will bring me praise and social accolades from my friends and neighbors. It is not hard to find people anxious to work for such a mitzvah.

However, it is not so easy to find people willing to do a private kindness for someone else. A personal

mitzvah bein Adam l'Chaveiro has neither the glory nor the publicity of a mitzvah involving public worship in a Mishkan of the Ribono shel Olam. Such a public mitzvah is actually less of a mitzvah than a private chessed to an individual. Yosef haTzadik had children and grandchildren. Really, it should have been their responsibility to take care of their grandfather's bones. Let them do it! The fact that Moshe Rabbeinu chose a Mitzvah bein Adam l'Chaveiro has value and superiority that trumps even a Mitzvah bein Adam l'Makom.

I heard an interesting incident that bears this out.

Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein has a sefer in which he brings interesting incidents related to Chodesh Nissan and to Pesach. His first story concerns the mitzvah of Birkas Ilanos (making a bracha on the first blooming fruit trees of the spring season). There is a Kabbalistic concept which emphasizes the preference of making this Bracha specifically over two trees.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt"l, was walking down the street in Chodesh Nissan and he passed a house with a fruit tree. He paused in front of that house and prepared to recite the bracha. Another Jew passed by and said to the respected sage, "If you go two blocks down the street, you will find a house with two blossoming fruit trees in front of it. Why don't you wait two blocks and fulfill the mitzvah in accordance with the Kabbalistic preference?"

Rav Shlomo Zalman pointed out to this Jew the window of the house in front of which he was now standing. "Do you see the woman in the window? She is a widow. She is standing in the window and is bursting with pride that I, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, posek of the generation, am making my Birkas Ilanos on her tree! It is better to do a chessed by bringing pleasure to a widow, even if it means making the bracha on just one tree, rather than adding the dimension of the Zohar's preference of making the Birkas Ilanos on two trees."

This is again an example that if a person can combine into his Man-God mitzvos a dimension of a Man-Man mitzvah, that is indeed preferable. Thus too, the private chessed that Moshe Rabbeinu performed with the bones of Yosef haTzadik was an even bigger mitzvah than schlepping the wood for the Mishkan.

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Rav Kook Torah

Vayakheil: Technology and the Sabbath

Rabbi Chanan Morrison

"Do not ignite fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath." (Exod. 35:3)

The Torah forbids 39 different categories of activity on the Sabbath. Yet only one — lighting fire — is explicitly prohibited in the Torah. Why?

And why does the Torah qualify the prohibition of lighting fire with the phrase, "in any of your dwellings"? Is it not forbidden to start a fire in any location?

Guidelines for Technology

The control and use of fire is unique to humanity. It is the basis for our advances in science and innovations in technology. Even now, fuel sources for burning, coal and oil, are what power modern societies. In short, fire is a metaphor for our power and control over nature, the fruit of our God-given intelligence.

What is the central message of the Sabbath? When we refrain from working on the seventh day, we acknowledge that God is the Creator of the world.

One might think that only the pristine natural world is truly the work of God. Human technology, on the other hand, is artificial and perhaps alien to the true purpose of the universe. Therefore, the Torah specifically prohibits lighting fire on the Sabbath, emphasizing that our progress in science and technology is also part of creation. Everything is included in the ultimate design of the universe. Our advances and inventions contribute towards the goal of creation in accordance with God's sublime wisdom. Along with the recognition that all of our accomplishments are in essence the work of God, we must also be aware that we have tremendous power to change and improve the world. This change will be for a blessing if we are wise enough to utilize our technology within the guidelines of integrity and holiness.

Fire in the Temple

This caveat leads to the second question we asked: why does the Torah limit the prohibition of lighting fire on the Sabbath to "your dwellings"? The Talmud (Shabbat 20a) explains that lighting fire is only forbidden in private dwellings, but in the Temple, it is permitted to burn offerings on the Sabbath.

Why should fire be permitted in the Temple?

The holy Temple was a focal point of prophecy and Divine revelation. It was the ultimate source of enlightenment, for both the individual and the nation. The fire used in the Temple is a metaphor for our mission to improve the world through advances in science and technology. We need to internalize the message that it is up to us to develop and advance the world, until the entire universe is renewed with a new heart and soul, with understanding and harmony. Permitting the technological innovation of fire in Temple on the Sabbath indicates that God wants us to utilize our intellectual gifts to innovate and improve, in a fashion similar to God's own creative acts.

We need to be constantly aware of our extraordinary potential when we follow the path that our Maker designated for us. At this spiritual level, we should not think that we are incapable of accomplishing new things. As the Talmud declares, "If they desire, the righteous can create worlds" (Sanhedrin 65b). When humanity attains ethical perfection, justice will then guide all of our actions, and scientific advances and inventions will draw their inspiration from the source of Divine morality, the holy Temple.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 164-165. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. III, p. 53)

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Vayakhel

פרשת ויקהל תשפ"ב

ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה וביום השביעי יהיה לכם קדש

On six days work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you. (35:2)

Shabbos is much more than one of the 613 *mitzvos*. It attests to Hashem as the Creator of the world. We rest in recognition of Hashem's "resting" from Creation. We tend to gloss over another element of *Shabbos*. *Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 2) relate: "The *Shabbos* came before Hashem and said, 'Everyone has a partner, but I do not.' Hashem replied, '*Knesses Yisrael* is your partner.' When *Klal Yisrael* stood at *Har Sinai*, Hashem said to them, 'Remember the *Shabbos* to keep it holy.'" Each of the six days of the work week is considered a "work day," a day of creative mundane activity. Each of these days was assigned the adjunct of a working day. It required *kedushah*, holiness, another day to complement it, a day to help it to actualize

its potential, establishing three sets of partnerships. *Shabbos*, however, was bereft of a partner. Its potential could not be realized thoroughly in order to grow in sanctity. Only *Klal Yisrael* could achieve this goal.

One does not turn his back on a partner. It is a relationship of mutual sharing in which two people (entities) enhance and complete one another. This concept should define our relationship vis-à-vis *Shabbos*. One might conjecture that laxity in *Shabbos* observance is a deficiency to be found in those who do not practice *mitzvos*. Specifically, because *Shabbos* is the soul-mate of *Klal Yisrael*, even the observant have difficulty doing justice to one aspect of *Shabbos* observance.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, relates that one *Erev Shabbos*, he noticed his neighbor walking into the apartment building carrying two heavily-laden shopping bags. He was certain that he was transporting delicacies for his *Shabbos* meal. This was confirmed (he thought) when the man smiled to him, and said, "My *Oneg Shabbos*, *Shabbos* delights." Since the man practically invited him to look in the bag, *Rav Galinsky* peeked to see what types of goodies his friend had bought. He was shocked to see that this man's idea of *Oneg Shabbos* was newspapers and magazines. While it is not *halachically* inappropriate (*Shabbos* should be a day for Torah and *tefillah*), it is a sad commentary concerning this man's perception of *Oneg Shabbos*.

In his inimitable manner, the *Maggid* presents an analogy to describe the man's obtuseness. On the day of a king's coronation, the future monarch sought to do something for the benefit of his kingdom. He met with his advisors and suggested that every citizen be allowed one wish/one request which he would fulfill. His advisors countered that would break the royal treasury. Instead, they suggested that for one hour each week on a specific day, whoever presented his wish, would see it fulfilled. Two days prior to the designated day, the lines were forming. People slept on the street. They would do anything to get in during that hour – which would allow for only so many people. Once the hour passed, regardless of the length of the line, the king's benevolence would halt.

The awaited moment had arrived, and the gates to the palace were opened as the people edged forward. Suddenly, out of nowhere, someone pushed through and went to the head of the line. How did he do it? He

was the town leper, afflicted with the contagious, dread disease, covered from head to toe with pus-filled boils emitting a noxious odor. Everyone was careful to give the intruder a wide berth. The guards were not prepared to permit this man, with his decrepit soiled clothes and foul-smelling body, to enter the palace. They scrubbed him from head to toe, gave him clean clothes and sprayed him with a powerful deodorizer. He was now as ready as he would ever be to greet the king.

“How can I help you?” the king asked. “My master, the king, I have a miserable life,” the man began. “My wounds are painful; their odor drives people away from me. The only food that I eat is derived from the scraps that I find in the garbage. I do not enjoy anything in life, except for one thing: When I scratch my skin, I have some pleasure. I wait for that moment. There is, however, a problem. I am unable to reach my back. I ask that the king arrange for me to obtain two long brushes with which I will be able to scratch my back.” The king agreed and had the royal scribe enter the leper’s order for two brushes.

When the king saw the smiles on his advisors’ faces, he asked them why they were laughing at this wretched man. They replied, “This man had a one-time opportunity, a chance of a lifetime, to ask the king to provide him with a specialist that would heal his pain and restore his body to its original healthy self. Instead, he asked for brushes. How pathetic!” The leper looked at them and raised his voice, “No one tells me what to do. I want brushes! You will not deprive me of my two brushes.”

Shabbos is Hashem’s gift to His People, a gift which provides us with the opportunity to be with Hashem through prayer and study. Instead, this man’s notion of *Oneg Shabbos* is reading a newspaper. He would rather have the brushes than the cure. ...

ראו קרא ד' בשם בצלאל בן אורי בן חור למטה יהודה

See, Hashem has called by name, Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur from the tribe of Yehudah. (35:30)

The *Midrash Tanchuma (Vayakhel 1)* teaches: “Every time a man increases his good deeds (and *mitzvos*), he adds to his good name. You find that a man is known by three names: the name which his father and mother call him; the name by which other men call him; and the name he earns for himself. Proof of this is Betzalel, who was granted the privilege of building the *Mishkan* because he had earned a good name. What is the source of this idea?

From the name He called him: ‘See, Hashem has called by name, Betzalel.’ (Which can be read as *b’tzeil Keil*, ‘in the shadow of G-d’).” An intriguing statement which begs elucidation. What is special about the name that one earns from himself? Why is it better than the name he was given at birth or the name by which his friends call him?

Horav Eliezer Kahanov, zl (Rosh Yeshivah, Torah Vodaas) explains the concept of *shem she’kanah l’atzmo*, “The name that he earns for himself,” as the name by which he is recognized, to the point that it becomes a synonym for his birth name. For example, Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah became synonymous for one who is *mekadesh shem Shomayim b’rabim*, “publicly sacrifices himself for the glory of the Almighty.” Thus, when the name of one of these three is mentioned, one immediately thinks of *Kiddush Shem Shomayim*.

Anyone who devotes himself whole-heartedly to serving Hashem becomes a symbol of the greatness that he has achieved, and he is ultimately identified with that symbol, that specific characteristic. When one mentions the *Gaon* of Vilna, we think of brilliance, unparalleled diligence and assiduousness in Torah. The *Chafetz Chaim* is the symbol of righteousness and devotion, as he was the individual who altered our *halachic* appreciation of *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* with his *Mishnah Berurah*. He also transformed how we think and speak concerning others through his *Shemiras Halashon*. These are but a few examples but the idea of a person symbolizing his unique quality applies to many. A *shem tov* is an identity; it is the name that we earn.

This is *Chazal’s* message concerning Betzalel’s good name. Betzalel – *b’tzal Keil* – in Hashem’s shadow: Betzalel’s name was the identity which he earned as a result of his devotion to Hashem. ...

ויעש בצלאל את הארון

Betzalel made the Aron. (37:1)

Rashi makes an insightful comment which gives us pause, “Because Betzalel put himself out for this task more than the others, it bears his name.” *Chazal* teach that the origins of Betzalel’s devotion, his *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, were in his character, in his DNA, transmitted from his grandfather, Chur. The acts of Betzalel and Chur appear to be token varied expressions of *mesiras nefesh*: Chur giving up his life to prevent the Golden Calf from achieving fruition; Betzalel’s punctilious devotion to the building of the

Sanctuary in which the Divine Presence would repose. These acts qualified each of them for the designation of *mesiras nefesh* designation. How are we to understand the connection between the grandfather's life sacrifice and the grandson's devotion to building the *Mishkan*?

Horav Tzvi Kushelevsky, Shlita, explains this based on a *Talmudic* passage (*Berachos* 20a): "Rav Papa asked Abaye, 'Why did the previous generations merit miracles, while we do not? It clearly was not because the previous generation achieved a greater level of scholarship, since Rav Papa's generation was proficient in all six orders of the *Mishnah*, which was greater than the previous generation.'

"Abaye replied, 'It is because the early generation exhibited *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, as in the case of Rav Ada bar Ahava, who noticed a woman dressed immodestly (calling attention to herself by her flamboyant attire). He thought that she was Jewish and immediately tore the outer garment (that was the cause of the ruckus) off of her. It turned out that he had erred, and actually the woman was a gentile.'" [As a result, he compensated her handsomely for her humiliation.]

According to *Chazal*, the barometer of *mesiras nefesh* is a function of one's intolerance of a woman's flaunting herself immodestly in public. The fact that this distinguished sage was willing to ignore public opinion and act zealously indicated his *mesiras nefesh*. Does this mean that *mesiras nefesh* is measured on the yardstick of our zealotry – even if it means that people will think negatively of us? The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that we see from here that *mesiras nefesh* means that when someone acts in an affronting manner against Hashem (or His devotees), one feels personally aggrieved. One views this as a personal issue, an attack against his person. He is troubled and expresses his displeasure with action against the perpetrator. This is why Rav Ada bar Ahava acted impulsively. To him, this was self-defense. He was being assaulted.

Such a response, however, carries a downside. At times, we become so heated that we react rashly, without weighing the situation from all vantage points. Rav Ada reacted before he confirmed the identity of the perpetrator.

Betzalel exhibited this same core quality of *mesiras nefesh*. Veritably, he did not give up his life for the *Mishkan*, but he made certain that Hashem's Name

and honor were priority number one. Indeed, Hashem's honor and Betzalel's personal wishes became one and the same. It is for this *mesiras nefesh* that the *Mishkan* is attributed to him.

Va'ani Tefillah

נפילות אפים – תחנון. *Nefillas apayim – Tachanun.*
Falling on the face – supplication.

Chazal (*Bava Metzia* 59a) teach that one who submissively places his head down in fervent prayer effects a positive response. This supplication is a heartfelt plea to Hashem that He have mercy on us. The original source for this supplication heralds back to Moshe *Rabbeinu*, Aharon *HaKohen* and Yehoshua who cast themselves down before Hashem in times of stress and tragedy.

When we recite *Shemoneh Esrai*, we stand erect before Hashem. This is an extraordinary privilege, since, when we petition His favor, we should really be cringing in total subjugation. Avraham *Avinu* stood when he prayed to Hashem. We take our "cue" from our Patriarch and act likewise. However, when we arrive at the conclusion of *Shemoneh Esrai*, we realize the enormity of what we have just done: We stood before Hashem, pleaded with Him and even argued that we should be blessed. In great humiliation, we fall on our faces and surrender to Him. *Tachanun* is, thus, a more realistic prayer, a more appropriate manner of praying to the Almighty. I heard in the name of *gadol echad* that: *Shemoneh Esrai* and *Tachanun* are two sides of the same coin. In the *Shemoneh Esrai*, we acknowledge by the way we stand and the manner in which we pray that the human being is potentially great. Thus, he is worthy of being a "partner" with Hashem in Creation. On the other hand, the *Tachanun* prayer reveals the true reality about ourselves: how dependent we are on Hashem's mercy and grace.

Sponsored by Jeffrey and Jane Belkin

On the occasion of his grandfather's *yahrzeit*

יעקב צבי בן פינחס ז"ל - February 20, 1919 - ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

כ' אדר א' תרע"ט -

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Athens Vs. Jerusalem

G-d Dwells in the Gulf Between Your Dreams and Your Reality

Rabbi YY Jacobson

The School of Athens, by Raphael (1509-10). In the center is the artist's depiction of Plato pointing upward, to the abstract and the universal.

Question: Did your life, your marriage, your career, your family, work out the way you dreamt it would?

The story is told of a famous child psychologist who spent many hours constructing a new driveway at his home. Just after he smoothed the surface of the freshly poured concrete, his small children chased a ball across the driveway, leaving deep footprints. The man yelled after them with a torrent of angry words. His shocked wife said, "You're a psychologist who's supposed to love children."

The fuming man shouted, "I love children in the abstract, not in the concrete!"

A Vision of Duality

Plato, one of the greatest philosophers of ancient Greece (428-347 B.C.E.), was driven by the search for truth. How, in this world of chance and change, can we arrive at knowledge that is beyond chance and change? His answer was that reality is not the chaotic profusion of things we see, feel and touch; the thousands of different kinds of chairs, houses, or trees. The truth of reality lies in what is common to each: the ideal form of a chair, house, or tree.

Plato argued that the substantive reality around us is only a reflection of a higher truth. Truth, he believed, is the abstraction; ideas are more real than things. Things are particular; truth is universal. The Greek philosopher developed a vision of two worlds: a world of unchanging ideas and a world of changing physical objects.

For example, a particular tree, with a branch or two missing, possibly alive, possibly dead, and with the initials of two hikers carved into its bark, is distinct from the abstract form of Tree-ness. Tree-ness is the ideal that each of us holds in our mind which allows us to identify the imperfect reflections of trees all around us. (1)

It is hard to describe how deeply this idea of Plato impacted Western thought and civilization. For one, it taught that truth can be found only in universalism, not in the particulars of reality. The more universal a culture is the closer to truth it comes. Truth is abstract, perfect, uniform.

In addition, Plato's vision embraced duality, conferring truth upon the perfect, spiritual ideal universe and corruption and falsehood upon the flawed, physical and concrete universe.

It is equally difficult to exaggerate how deeply the Chassidic tradition of Judaism dismissed this seemingly compelling idea. To be sure, Jewish mysticism discusses in great detail how each physical existence originates in the pristine world of the spirit, where it can be encountered in a far more wholesome and complete manner. In the Midrashic literature, the two realities are known as the "heavenly Jerusalem" vs. the "earthly Jerusalem"—the latter is frail, vulnerable, and destructible, while the former

is eternal. Still, the teachings of Chassidism have dismissed Plato's conclusions, in which he shunned the physical in favor of the spiritual, ignored the particular in favor of the universal, scorned at the concrete in favor of the abstract.

Our sages knew how to compress profound philosophical ideas in concise and seemingly simple phrases. "G-d promised that He would not enter into the heavenly Jerusalem until he did not enter into the earthly Jerusalem (2)." This was the Rabbis' way of dismissing the dramatic conclusion of Platonic Idealism.

In this essay, we will explore the ramifications of these two conflicting world views within the psychological arena of human existence.

Two Lives

Richard Nixon was reported to have once explained why the American people were infatuated with Kennedy and filled with animosity toward Nixon. "When they gaze at Kennedy," he reportedly said, "they see what they'd love to be; when they look at me, they see who they are."

Most of us own two lives—the life of our dreams and the life of our reality, the life we wished for, and the life we ended up with.

Many people can speak about, at least, two marriages: the marriages they dreamt of having, and the marriages they ended up with.

This is true concerning most issues in life—children, careers, relationships, psychological serenity, and physical health. As innocent children, idealistic youngsters, and newlyweds flying high, we harbor a particular vision of what life, romance, family, and success might be like.

Then we grow up and we are called to the task of translating this magical vision into a concrete reality. We are confronted with the challenge of constructing lives of wholesomeness and happiness in a world of stress, anxiety, pain, and disillusionment. Many of us grow frustrated and downtrodden by the broken and flawed realities we must confront. We yearn to escape to Plato's idealistic world, where all flawed objects are transformed into perfect ideas.

Preserving a Letter

There is something very intriguing about this week's Torah portion (Vayakhel & Pekudei). Anybody even slightly familiar with the Bible is aware of its unique conciseness. Complete sagas, rich, complex, and profound, are often depicted in a few short biblical verses. Each word in the Bible literally contains layers upon layers of interpretation.

For the sages and rabbis over the past 3,000 years, it was clear that there is nary a superfluous word or letter in the Bible, and large sections of the Talmud are based on this premise. If a verse is lyrically repetitive, if two words are used where one would suffice or a longer word is used when a shorter word would suffice, there is a message here, a new concept, another law (3).

It is thus astonishing to observe that two entire sections in the Torah are seemingly superfluous!

These are the final two sections of the book of Exodus—Vayakhel and Pekudei (4)—telling the story of how the Jewish people constructed the portable Tabernacle (Mishkan) that would accompany them during their 40-year journey in the desert.

In the previous sections of this book, Terumah, and Tetzaveh (5), the Torah gives a detailed account of G-d's instructions to Moses regarding the construction of the Sanctuary. With meticulous description, G-d lays out to Moses every detail of the Tabernacle—every piece of furniture, item, article, and vessel that should become part of the Sanctuary. Nothing is left out, from the Holy Ark, the Candelabra and the Altar to the pillars, wall panels, curtains, ropes, bars, hooks, and pegs, all specified with their exact shapes and dimensions. In these portions, G-d also presents Moses with the exact instructions of how to weave the priestly garments—down to the last tassel—worn by those who would perform the service in the Sanctuary.

Then, a few chapters later in Vayakhel and Pekudei, in the story of how the Jewish people carried out these instructions, the previous two portions are repeated almost verbatim. The Torah records, once again, every nook and cranny of the Sanctuary and tells of the actual building, carving, and weaving of every pillar, wall-panel, peg, hook, bar, tapestry, piece of furniture and vessel that comprised the Sanctuary. For a second time, we are informed of every decorative form and artistic design sculpted in each article of the Tabernacle and every single shape, design, and dimension of each and every article (6).

Now, a single sentence, something like "The Jewish people made the Sanctuary exactly as G-d had commanded Moses," would have spared the Torah more than a thousand words! Why the need for hundreds of sentences that are purely repetitive of facts that have been stated earlier?

One of the worst mistakes a speaker or writer can make is to be repetitive. "You made your point," the crowd says to itself. "Time to move on." This is true in regard to anybody who speaks or writes. How much more so, concerning the Torah, a divine document well known for its extraordinary briefness. Yet, in this instance, the Torah apparently shows not even the slightest attempt to avoid repeating itself hundreds of times!

Two Sanctuaries

The truth of the matter is that the Torah is not repeating itself at all; it is discussing two distinct sanctuaries: a heavenly model and a terrestrial edifice.

The first two portions outline the structure and composition of the Sanctuary as it was transmitted from G-d to Moses. This was a conceptual, celestial Tabernacle; it was a heavenly blueprint, a divine map for a home to be built in the future.

In His instructions to Moses on how to construct the Sanctuary, G-d says (7), "You shall erect the Tabernacle according to its laws, as you have been shown on the mountain." In other words, on the summit of Mount Sinai Moses was shown an image, a vision, of the home in which G-d desired to dwell. This image was, obviously, ethereal and sublime; it was a home created in heaven, by G-d himself and presented to one of the most spiritual men in history, Moses.

Plato would describe it as "the ideal tabernacle," the one that can be conceived only in our minds.

In contrast to this first celestial Sanctuary come the last two portions of Exodus, in which Moses descends from the glory of Sinai and presents the people of Israel with a mission of fashioning a physical home for G-d in a sandy desert. Here the Jewish people are called upon to translate a transcendental vision of a spiritual home into a physical structure comprised of mundane cedar and gold, which are, by their very definition, limited and flawed.

This second Sanctuary that the Jews built may have resembled, in every detail, the spiritual model described several chapters earlier, but in its very essence, it was a completely different Sanctuary. One was "built" by an infinite and absolute G-d; the other by mortals of flesh and blood. One consisted entirely of nebulous spirit, the other of gross matter. One was designed in heaven, the other on earth. One was perfect, the other was flawed.

In our personal lives, these two Sanctuaries reflect the two lives most of us must deal with throughout our years. Each of us owns his or her heavenly "Sanctuary," envisioned atop a summit of spiritual and psychological serenity and representing a vision and dream for a life and marriage aglow with love, passion, and endless joy. This is the ideal home, the ideal family, the ideal marriage. Then we have our earthly Sanctuary, a life often filled with trials, challenges, battles, and setbacks, and yet one in which we attempt to create a space for G-d amidst a tumultuous heart and a stressful life.

G-d's Choice

Astonishingly, at the end of this week's portion, we are told (8) that it was only in the second Sanctuary that the divine presence came to reside. He wished to express His truth and eternity within the physical abode created by mortal and fragmented human beings on barren soil, not in the spiritual Sanctuary atop Mount Sinai (9).

In which one of these two did G-d choose to dwell? In the physical Sanctuary!

If the Bible had not repeated the story of the Sanctuary, just leaving it at "The Jewish people made the Sanctuary exactly as G-d had commanded Moses," we might have entertained the notion that our Sanctuary below is valuable insofar as it resembles the Sanctuary above. The primary Sanctuary, we may have thought, is the perfect one designed by G-d in the spiritual realms and that the beauty

of the earthly abode depends on how much it is capable of mirroring the heavenly abode.

It is this notion, the Platonic notion if you will, that the Torah was attempting to banish by repeating the entire Sanctuary story a second time. G-d did not desire a duplication of the spiritual Sanctuary on earth. The value of the earthly abode was not in how much it mirrored its heavenly twin. The Bible is, in its own inimitable fashion, teaching us that G-d wished for a second, distinct Sanctuary, one that would mirror the design of the spiritual one but would remain distinct and unique in its purpose; to fashion a dwelling place for the divine in a coarse universe, to light a candle of truth in a world of lies, to search for the spark of truth in a broken heart. It is in this struggle-filled abode where G-d allows Himself to be found!

So if the Torah had not repeated the story of the Sanctuary, it would have saved itself hundreds of sentences but robbed us of perhaps its most powerful message: that man, in living his or her ordinary, flawed, and fragmented day-to-day life permeated with the morality and spirituality of the Torah and its mitzvos, can create heaven on earth.

“You Were Never As Beautiful”

A story (10):

A young Chassidic boy and girl from Krakow were engaged and deeply in love when the transports to Auschwitz began. Their entire families were decimated and they both assumed that their life's partner-to-be was also dead.

One night, close to the end of the war, the groom saw his bride standing on the women's side of the fence. When the Russians came and liberated them, they met and went for a stroll. They entered a vacant home, where they spent, for the first time in years, some moments together.

Suddenly, the young woman came upon a mirror and saw herself for the first time in years. A dazzling beauty had turned into a skeleton. She had no hair, her face was full of scars, her teeth were knocked out and she was thin as a rail. She cried out to him, "Woe, what has become of me? I look like the Angel of Death himself! Would you still marry such an ugly person?"

"You never looked more beautiful to me than right at this moment," was his response.

Two Types of Beauty

Which beauty was this young man referring to? It was not the external attractive beauty of a healthy and shapely body. It was the internal, sacred, and deep beauty emerging

from human dignity and courage, from a spirit who faced the devil himself and still chose to live and love.

Perhaps this is why G-d chose the second, and not the first, Sanctuary as His abode. On the surface, the Sanctuary in heaven is far more beautiful and perfect than the Sanctuary on earth. The truth is, however, that beauty and depth exist in our attempt to introduce a spark of idealism in a spiritual wasteland that a palace built in heaven can never duplicate. When G-d sees a physical human being, filled with struggle and anxiety, stretching out his hand to help a person in need or engaging in a mitzvah, G-d turns to the billions of angels filling the heavens, and says: "Have you ever seen anything more beautiful than that (11)?"

(This essay is based on an address delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shabbas Vayakhel-Pekudei 5718, March 15, 1958 (12)).

1) See Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, The Dignity of Difference, for a detailed explanation of this idea of Plato and its impact on Western thought.

2) Talmud Taanis 5a. Zohar Vayikra 15b.

3) The Chumash ("Five Books of Moses") contains 79,976 words and 304,805 letters. The Talmud states that Rabbi Akiva would derive "mounds upon mounds of laws from the serif of a letter" in Torah (Menachos 29b).

4) Exodus chapters 35-40.

5) Exodus chapters 25-30

6) This redundancy is reflected very clearly in the most basic and fundamental commentary to the Bible, written by Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki. From among all the 53 Torah portions, these two portions have the newest explanations of Rashi on them. Why? Rashi makes it clear in the beginning of Vayakhel: "I have already explained the contribution to the Tabernacle and its construction in the verses where their commands were presented." No need to repeat that which has been stated already.

7) Exodus 26:30. Cf. Exodus 25:40; 27:8.

8) Exodus 40:34-38.

9) "G-d desired a dwelling in the lowly realms" (Midrash Tanchuma, Nasso 16); "This is what man is all about, this is the purpose of his creation and of the creation of all worlds, supernal and ephemeral" (Tanya, chapter 36).

10) I once read this story; I do not know its original source.

11) See Midrash Rabah on the verse Hayosheves Baganim (Song of Songs).

12) Likkutei Sichot, vol. I, pp. 195-198.

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה