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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON VAYAKEHL PEKUDEI - 5786

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From: *Chaim Shulman*

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

Terumah–Ki Tisa–Vayakhel

When Was the Mishkan Commanded and What Was Its Purpose?

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

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

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

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

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

The earliest articulation of this interpretation appears in the Midrash.

Midrash Rabbah comments on the opening verse of Parashas Terumah: עד ויקחו לי תרומה — הדא הוא דכתיב אני ישנה ולבי ער

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Additional passages in the Torah appear to support this interpretation.

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

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

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

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

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

Ramban: The Mishkan as the Continuation of Sinai

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Mishkan as Revelation and Reconciliation

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

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

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

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

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

Translated & summarized primarily by chatgpt. Chaim.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Meaning of Melachah

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

The distinction is crucial for understanding Shabbat.

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat and the Festivals

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

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

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

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

Shabbat as Rectification for the Golden Calf

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

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

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

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

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

Sanctity of Time and Sanctity of Space

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

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

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

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

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

to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: Mar 12, 2026, 9:47 AM

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

Parshas Vayakhel

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

The Impact of Kedusha

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington.

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, Maryland.

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

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

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

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

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

PEKUDEI: An accounting of the precious metals and materials collected for the Mishkan • The Bigdei Kehunah are fashioned • Everything is completed as Hashem commanded • Moshe blesses the workers • Hashem commands Moshe to erect the Mishkan • On Rosh Chodesh Nissan, Moshe erects the Mishkan and anoints the Keilim • Moshe dresses Aharon and Aharon's sons in the Bigdei Kehunah and anoints them • The Ananei HaKavod rest on the Mishkan • Hashem's Glory fills the Mishkan and Moshe cannot enter • Bnei Yisrael travel based on the movement of the Ananei HaKavod • Chazak Chazak V'nis'chazeik!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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date: Mar 12, 2026, 6:01 PM

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Ram Yeshivat Har Etzion

Built Within Nature

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

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

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

NATURAL FORM AND RELIGION

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

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

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

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

WEAVING ON NATURE

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

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

TERMS THAT FRACTURE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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date: Mar 12, 2026, 7:40 PM

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

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

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

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

The Stringency of Chametz

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

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

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

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

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

Three Approaches to the Metaphor

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Biur and Bitul: Two Roots, One Obligation

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

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

The Breadcrumbs and the Mitzvah

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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date: Mar 12, 2026, 6:01 PM

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

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

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

As we have noted in previous weeks, the final section of Sefer Shemos is devoted to the building of the Mishkan, the earthly abode for the Divine Presence amongst Am Yisrael. Beginning in Parshas Terumah and continuing through Tetzaveh, Ki Tisa, Vayakhel and Pekudei, the Torah describes both the instructions for the Mishkan and its ultimate construction. Our parsha opens with Moshe gathering the entire nation together:

וַיִּקְהַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת-כָּל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֱלֹהִים הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר-צִוָּה ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת אֲתֶם - Moshe

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

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

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

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

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

Why?

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

The Mishkan required human construction. Shabbos did not.

As the Torah tells us at the conclusion of Creation:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Goldman episode differs in key ways from the controversy involving Mayor Mamdani's wife. Duwaji's likes on Instagram included posts that celebrate the Hamas attack itself and dismissed investigations into assault

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

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

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

The Torah describes the relationship between husband and wife as ezer k'negdo, a helpmate opposite one another. Our sages explain that a healthy marriage includes two roles. At times, it requires offering support and encouragement, and at other times, it requires having the courage to stand opposite, challenging a spouse in order to bring out the best in them.

The Torah's vision of marriage is not simply one plus one equals two. It is two halves becoming a whole. The pasuk (Bereishis 5:2) describes, "He created them male and female, and blessed them, and He called their name Adam." Adam and Chava were originally created as one being, fused together, before Hashem separated them. The search for a spouse and the act of kiddushin are, in a sense, an effort to recreate that original unity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the end, the question is not whether spouses are identical or independent.

Of course they are individuals. The question is whether we take seriously the covenant of becoming one. When someone we are one with celebrates evil and we say nothing, we have allowed that evil to live in our shared space, and others are justified in concluding we tolerate it.

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

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

Silence is not neutrality. Silence is complicity.

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

Drasha By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Vayakhel

Up Close and Personal

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

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

Rav Kook Torah

Psalm 9: Nations Who Forget God

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BS”D

March 13, 2026

Alan Fisher <afisherads@yahoo.com>

Potomac Torah Study Center Vol. 13 #22, March 13-14, 2026; 25 Adar 5786; Vayakhel-Pekudei 5786; Shabbat HaHodesh Mevarchim HaHodesh. Rosh Hodesh Nisan is next Thursday
Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom, Alan & Hannah

RIETS Kollel Elyon from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon
Substack <riets@substack.com>
Wed, Mar 11, 10:37 AM (2 days ago)

Lessons From the Mysterious Prohibition of Carrying on Shabbat

RIETS Kollel Elyon

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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