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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **VAYAKHEL PEKUDEI** - 5769

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from **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to
ravfrand@torah.org date Thu, Mar 19, 2009 at 8:05 PM
subject Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei

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Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 629, Sitting in Judgement on Shabbos. Good Shabbos!

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The first pasuk [verse] in Parshas Vayakhel [Shmos 35:1] refers to an assembly of the Children of Israel. The first Rashi in the parsha informs us that the assembly took place on the day after Yom Kippur, when Moshe descended for the final time from Har [Mt.] Sinai. Although Parshas Teruma and Tezaveh, which deal with the construction of the Mishkan, precede Parshas Ki Sisa, which deals with the sin of the Aigel Eigel Hazahav [Golden Calf], Rashi follows the opinion that the sin of the Eigel occurred prior to the building of the Mishkan, and that the building of the Mishkan in fact atones for that sin.

The sin of the Eigel occurred on the 17th of Tamuz. On that day, Moshe descended from Har Sinai for the first time and broke the Luchos [Tablets]. Moshe went up for a second 40-day period to plead with the Almighty that He not destroy the Jewish people because of this sin. The Almighty granted forgiveness and Moshe went up for a third 40-day period -- beginning on Rosh Chodesh Elul -- in which he received the second set of Luchos. The third descent was on Yom Kippur. On the morrow of that day the announcement went forth to build the Mishkan.

It is interesting to note another incident that occurred on that same day. In Parshas Yisro [Shmos 18:13] the pasuk says "And it was on the next day" in reference to the incident where Yisro saw Moshe Rabbeinu sitting in judgment over the people "from morning until evening." Rashi quotes the Sifrei that this event also happened "on the morrow of Yom Kippur."

It appears that according to Rashi, both the "sitting in judgment the whole day" and the announcement to collect money for the building of the Mishkan happened on the very same day. The Shemen ha'Tov points out that this is not coincidental. The two events dovetail with each other.

If Moshe wanted to ask people to donate funds to the Mishkan, the first thing he had to determine was that the money in fact belonged to them. It was only after Moshe was able to validate that everyone's money was free of any suspicion of theft or extortion that he was able to ask for donations to build the Mishkan.

This is reminiscent of the famous Maharsha in Tractate Kesubos, who decries the custom of people who donate to charity only for the honor they gain, when the money is not legitimately theirs. The Maharsha bemoans the fact that people acquire money through deceit and through theft from non-Jews, thereby desecrating the Name of G-d. They give large sums of such ill-gotten money to charitable causes and expect honor and prestige from the recipients of these funds. The Maharsha proclaims such action to be in the category of "mitzvah ha'ba b'aveirah" [a good deed coming about through sin] and warns that such money will not last.

Before a person contemplates how much money he has available to give or where he should give it, he must first contemplate if the money is legitimately his.

Medrash Links Pasuk In Pekudei With Teaching of Darkei Shalom

There is a difficult Medrash Tanchuma in Parshas Pekudei. The Torah states that the Mishkan and all of its keylim [vessels] were brought to Moshe [Shmos 39:33]. The Medrash seemingly makes a very strange comment that many things were enacted for reasons of preservation of peace (darkei Shalom) and that in this case, Moshe enacted the proscribed sequence for calling up people to read from the Torah -- Kohen, Levi, and Yisrael.

We can easily understand the concept of preventing fights by having an orderly sequence for calling up Jews for Aliyahs. However, what is the connection Moshe's enactment and the pasuk teaching that the Jews brought the Mishkan and its vessels to Moshe?

Maharal Diskin gives a beautiful interpretation. He asks why the people brought the various components of the Mishkan to Moshe. Why didn't Moshe go to the people to collect these components? The Maharal Diskin explains that Moshe hesitated to go to the people to collect because of the dilemma -- Whom would he go to first? To avoid this problem he instituted the rule: "You come to me." This was an example of Darkei Shalom [a peace-inducing method]. That is why the Medrash on this pasuk cites the wide spread practice of Chazal to implement procedures which embody

Darkei Shalom, such as the order of Kohen – Levi – Yisrael in the Torah readings.

The Shemen haTov cites a practice amongst a number of prominent Chassidic Rebbes that if one of their Chassidim wants them to be Mesader Kiddushin (officiate at their marriage) the rule is "You come to me" rather than vice versa. The Choson-Kallah must come to the Rebbe's house or the Rebbe's courtyard and he will officiate there. The Rebbe does not accept invitations to perform weddings away from his "home-base".

The Shemen haTov explains that this rule is designed to avoid machlokes [arguments; insult]. If the Rebbe had to decide which wedding invitation to accept and which to reject, which he could attend and which were too far away, then there would be fights and resentment among the Chassidim. This is the same theory as "they brought the Mishkan to Moshe" (rather than having Moshe go around collecting the pieces from each and every donor).

Great is peace. We must always look creatively for ways to enhance peace amongst Klal Yisrael.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei are provided below:

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Covenant & Conversation

**Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from
Sir Jonathan Sacks**

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British
Commonwealth

[From 3 years ago - 5765]

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Vayakhel The beauty of holiness or the holiness of beauty

Then Moses said to the Israelites, "See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and he has filled him with the spirit of G-d, with wisdom, understanding and knowledge in all kinds of crafts - to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic craftsmanship." (Ex. 35: 30-33) In last week's and this week's sedra we encounter the figure of Bezalel, a rare type in the Hebrew Bible - the artist, the craftsman, the shaper of beauty in the service of G-d, the man who, together with Oholiab, fashioned the articles associated with the Tabernacle. Judaism - in sharp contrast to ancient Greece-did not cherish the visual arts. The reason is clear. The biblical prohibition against graven images associates them with idolatry. Historically, images, fetishes, icons and statues were linked in the ancient world with pagan religious practices. The idea that one might worship "the work of men's hands" was anathema to biblical faith.

More generally, Judaism is a culture of the ear, not the eye (for a more nuanced view, however, see Kalman Bland: The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual). As a religion of the invisible G-d, it attaches sanctity to words heard, rather than objects seen. Hence there is a generally negative attitude within Judaism towards representational art.

There are some famous illustrated manuscripts (such as the 'Bird's Head Haggadah', Bavaria, circa 1300) in which human figures are given bird's heads to avoid representing the full human form. To be sure, art is not forbidden as such. There is a difference between three dimensional and two dimensional representation. As R. Meir of Rothenburg (c. 1215-1293) made clear in a responsum: 'There is no trespass [in illustrated books] against the biblical prohibition . . . [illustrations] are merely flat patches of colour lacking sufficient materiality [to constitute a graven image]'. Indeed several ancient synagogues in Israel had quite elaborate mosaics. In general, however, art was less emphasised in Judaism than in Christian cultures in which the Hellenistic influence was strong.

Positive references to art in the rabbinic literature are rare. One exception is Maimonides who, in the fifth of his 'Eight Chapters' (the introduction to his commentary to the Mishneh tractate Avot) says the following:

If one is afflicted with melancholy, he should cure it by listening to songs and various kinds of the melodies, by walking in gardens and fine buildings, by sitting before beautiful forms, and by things like this which delight the soul and make the disturbance of melancholy disappear from it. In all this he should aim at making his body healthy, the goal of his body's health being that he attain knowledge. The very terms in which Maimonides describes the aesthetic experience make it clear, however, that he sees art in strictly instrumental terms, as a way of relieving depression. There is no suggestion that it has value in its own right.

The strongest statement of which I am aware was made by Rabbi Abraham ha-Cohen Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of (pre-State) Israel, describing his his time in London during the First World War:

When I lived in London, I would visit the National Gallery, and the paintings that I loved the most were those of Rembrandt. In my opinion Rembrandt was a saint. When I first saw Rembrandt's paintings, they reminded me of the rabbinic statement about the creation of light. When G-d created the light [on the first day], it was so strong and luminous that it was possible to see from one end of the world to the other. And G-d feared that the wicked would make use of it. What did He do? He secreted it for the righteous in world to come. But from time to time there are great men whom G-d blesses with a vision of that hidden light. I believe that Rembrandt was one of them, and the light in his paintings is that light which G-d created on Genesis day. (Jewish Chronicle, 9 September 1935). Rembrandt, as is known, had a special affection for Jews (See Michael Zell, Reframing Rembrandt, and Steven Nadler, Rembrandt's Jews). He visited them in his home town of Amsterdam, and painted them, as well as many scenes from the Hebrew Bible. I suspect that what Rabbi Kook saw in his paintings, though, was Rembrandt's ability to convey the beauty of ordinary people. He makes no attempt (most notably in his self-portraits) to beautify or idealise his subjects. The light that shines from them is, simply, their humanity.

It was Samson Raphael Hirsch who distinguished ancient Greece from ancient Israel in terms of the contrast between aesthetics and ethics. In his comment on the verse "May G-d enlarge Japheth and let him dwell in the tents of Shem" (Gen. 9: 27), he comments:

The stem of Japheth reached its fullest blossoming in the Greeks; that of Shem in the Hebrews, Israel, who bore and bear the name (=Shem) of G-d through the world of nations . . . Japheth has ennobled the world aesthetically. Shem has enlightened it spiritually and morally. Yet as we see from the case of Bezalel, Judaism is not indifferent to aesthetics. The concept of hiddur mitzvah, 'beautifying the commandment', meant, for the sages, that we should strive to fulfil the commands in the most aesthetically pleasing way. The priestly garments were meant to be 'for honour and

adornment' (Ex 28:2). The very terms applied to Bezalel -- wisdom, understanding and knowledge - are applied by the Book of Proverbs to G-d Himself as creator of the universe:

The law and the Lord founded the earth by wisdom; He established the heavens by understanding; By His knowledge the depths burst apart, And the skies distilled dew. (Proverbs: 3: 19-20) The key to Bezalel lies in his name. It means, 'In the shadow of G-d'. Bezalel's gift lay in his ability to communicate, through his work, that art is the shadow cast by G-d. Religious art is never 'art for art's sake'. Unlike secular art, it points to something beyond itself. The Tabernacle itself was a kind of microcosm of the universe, with one overriding particularity: that in it you felt the presence of something beyond - what the Torah calls 'the glory of G-d' which 'filled the Tabernacle' (Ex. 40: 35).

The Greeks believed in the holiness of beauty (Keats's "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, -that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know"). Jews believed in the opposite: hadrat kodesh (Ps. 29: 2), the beauty of holiness. Art in Judaism always has a spiritual purpose: to make us aware of the universe as a work of art, testifying to the supreme Artist, G-d himself.

Pekudei The space we create for G-d

So all the work on the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, was completed. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses . . . The Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. So Moses blessed them. (Ex. 39: 32, 42-43) With these words, the long section dealing with the construction of Tabernacle reaches its culmination and conclusion. As several commentators point out, there is a precise linguistic parallel between the making of the sanctuary, and the creation of the universe:

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day, G-d had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And G-d blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. (Gen. 2: 1-3) The keywords in both passages are 'completed' [vayechulu / vatechel] and 'work' [melakhah]. Moses' blessing of the Israelites parallels G-d's blessing of the seventh day. Just as the seventh day is a moment in time which points to something beyond time, so the people Israel are a nation in history which points to something beyond history.

What blessing did Moses give the Israelites at that moment? According to tradition, Moses said: 'May it be G-d's will that the Divine presence rests in the work of your hands.' The Israelites - the same tradition says-replied:

Let the beauty of the LORD our G-d be upon us, And establish the work of our hands for us; Yes, establish the work of our hands. (Psalm 90: 17) Drawing on the parallel between the making of that Tabernacle and the creation of the universe, the Yemenite Midrash HaGadol, offers a daring suggestion:

R. Shimon b. Lakish said: the sanctuary was more precious than the creation of the universe, for the creation of the universe involved neither labour nor effort, and no creature assisted [G-d]. Instead, 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made' (Ps. 33: 6). But the sanctuary was made through the active involvement of Moses and the Israelites. Bezalel and his disciples, Oholiab and his disciples, were actively involved, as it is said, 'So all the work on the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, was completed. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses.' Beneath these various phenomena is one undisputable and radical fact: whereas the Torah describes the creation of the universe with the utmost brevity, it describes the making of the sanctuary at exhaustive length. As I have put it elsewhere: the Torah is G-d's book about humanity, not humanity's book about G-d. Its primary interest is not the home G-d makes for mankind, but the home mankind makes for G-d. Moses' blessing, despite its specific context, applies to the totality of Judaism. It is through our deeds that our work becomes a vehicle for the Divine presence.

James Kugel sees the construction of the Tabernacle as a metaphor for the whole of Judaism, for life lived in accordance with halakhah, Jewish law:

The purpose is to open up a space, a possibility, in the heart. Once the opening is made, it can be filled . . . After the people of Israel had been led out of Egypt and slavery, G-d ordered them to build for him a certain structure, called in Hebrew mishkan [tabernacle] . . . Now to us this demand might at first seem strange; after all, as Scripture says elsewhere, the heavens themselves cannot contain G-d . . . Moreover, why should they build it - could not the Creator of the universe have chosen some magnificent feature of the natural world that He had fashioned in which to, as it were, dwell, rather than relying on merely human artisans? But the point was, as I said, for them to open up a space in order to allow Him to fill it. And this is the most basic principle of our way, to open up such a space in our lives and in our hearts. Then such a space will have the capacity to radiate outward. (James Kugel, On Being a Jew, 36) It is through one of the great concepts of Jewish mysticism - R. Isaac Luria's notion of tzimtzum - that we can best understand the beauty of this idea. Luria posed a fascinating question: how, if G-d exists, can the universe exist? G-d is everywhere. Therefore, in any given place, there is both finite and infinite being. But surely infinity must crowd out finitude. There is simply no space for physical matter if every place is filled with the glory of G-d. Luria's answer was that in order to make space for the universe, G-d, as it were, imposed on Himself a process of contraction, self-effacement, tzimtzum. Only by doing so could He contain the Divine light sufficiently to allow the emergence of a physical world. The universe is the space G-d creates for mankind through an act of self-limitation.

By a dazzling parallel, the same applies in reverse. The sanctuary is the space mankind creates for G-d through an act of self-limitation. Hence the phrase repeated in our sedra: 'the Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses' (The structure is astonishingly precise. The sentence, 'Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded' appears at the centre of chapters 39-40. Before it, the phrase just as the Lord commanded Moses appears seven times; after it, it appears another seven times. The total is therefore fifteen: the number of words in the priestly blessing ['The Lord bless you and protect you . . .'], which itself appears [Num. 6: 24-26] just before the words 'When Moses finished setting up the Tabernacle' - a reference back to the moment described in our sedra).

How do we practice self-limitation? By acting 'just as the Lord commanded', suspending our will in deference to His. That is the meaning of the holy in Judaism. Holiness is the space we create for G-d by sacrificing the pursuit of self-interest and the satisfaction of desire and aligning ourselves, instead, with the totality of being. When that happens, our lives become transparent containers of the infinite light. In Moses' words, 'The Divine presence lives in the work of our hands.'

From **Rabbi Jonathan Schwartz** chaburah613
<rjpsyd@comcast.net> date Wed, Mar 18, 2009 at 10:34 PM subject
[internetchaburah] parshas VaYaKel/Pekudai/HaChodesh 5769

Prologue: It was definitely something to reflect on.

The torah tells us that the Kiyor (the sink or laver used by the Kohanim when preparing to commence service in the temple) was fashioned from the glowing mirrors. Where did these mirrors come from and why specifically for the Kiyor?

Rashi notes that these were not ordinary mirrors. These were the mirrors that the dedicated women used in Egypt to beautify themselves in order to inspire their husbands to persevere despite the slavery in Egypt. Rashi notes that the ideal use of the mirror would be for the Kiyor for it was the source of the water used in restoring and inspiring Shalom Bayis in the case of the Sotah.

Although Rashi's suggestion is inspiring, why would the contribution of the women be utilized for the kiyor? After all, the kiyor's primary use was in

preparing the Kohanim for the Avodah. What connection might one find THERE to the contributions of the women and their mirrors?

The Netziv (Ha'Amek Davar) notes that there is a second reason for the women's contribution specifically for the Kiyor. He cites the famous statement in Berachos that women earn a special reward for preparing their households for the study of Torah. The Netziv adds that this role is a social one whether in one's own house, preparing and encouraging the household members to study Torah or when entering Hashem's house where their contribution, the Kiyor, served to prepare all who engaged in Meleches HaKodesh, (the holy work of Hashem) for their special job. The women understood that preparing for a Mitzva and a spiritual event raises that event. Hence, their contribution would be used to achieve a glow -- through the process of preparation.

This week's Chaburah examines women's obligations as we prepare for a unique spiritual experience. It is called:

Women and Birkas HaChamma: A Halachic reflection

One of Judaism's unique goals is its desire to have the world be cognizant of Hashem's great Chessed to us all the time and the requirement to offer thanks to Hashem for that great Chessed. Toward that end, many opportunities rise for the recitation of many different Berachos.

Perhaps one of the most infrequent opportunities for such a Beracha (once in 28 years) will arise this year on Erev Pesach when the sun will return to the same position, at the same day, at the same time, that it did at the time of creation. At such time, we will recite the Beracha known as Birkas haChamma or the Blessing over the sun. But are women obligated to recite the blessing or, are they exempt due to the time constraint on the Mitzva? and if they are exempt, can they recite the blessing anyway?

Generally speaking, women are exempt from active, time-bound Mitzvos (Mitzvos Aseh She'HaZman Gramma -- see Kiddushin 33). truthfully, Rashi (Berachos 20b) limits their exemption to situations where the obligations are biblical in nature. However, in regard to Rabbinic Mitzvos (like Birkas HaChamma) women would share the same obligation as men. Tosafos (Berachos 20b) disagrees and exempts women from Mitzvos Aseh She'HaZman Gramma both on a biblical and rabbinic level.

Some argue that Birkas HaChama is not a Mitzvas Aseh She'HaZman Gramma in that it is fixed to an astrological phenomena (the sun's return to a particular position) and not to a specific time (every 28 years). The fact that these coordinate is a coincidence but not a reason to exempt women from the obligation (Boker yizrach, Shaarei Mizrach, 7).

This last point aside, Birkas HaChama is a mitzva whose very essence involves a Beracha. In general, Sefardim do not allow a woman to recite blessings over a Mitzvas Aseh She'HaZman Gramma as they usually utilize the phrase "V'Tzivanu" which, if exempted, would not apply to women. Hence the Rambam (Hil. Sukkah 6:13) does not permit women to recite the blessing for sitting in the Sukkah even when they are sitting there (See also Shulchan aruch 589:6). Rama disagrees and notes that the Ashkenaz practice is that women DO recite blessings on Mitzvas Aseh she'HaZman Gramma. Mogen Avraham (O.C. 296: 8) extends this idea to include Mitzvos Aseh She'HaZman Gramma whose whole Mitzva is the Beracha like Birkas HaChamma.

Some offer a different reason for a potential exemption from this beracha. The Mogen Avraham (O.C. 426) notes that women do not recite Kiddush Levana as they were responsible for the diminishing of the moon during creation through the sins of Chava. Accordingly, the same might apply here (Yabia Omer I:39-42). In truth many argue with this point, some correctly noting that women were quick to atone for their sins by contributing to the Mishkan quickly (Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer, 425 and Radal there) and are not to be blamed.

Still others (Shut Maharam Shick, OC 90) note that since women are not obligated to make the necessary calculations to know how and when to recite Birkas Hachama (as they are exempt from Talmud Torah) they cannot be obligated to recite the blessing.

Rav Yosef Shaul Nathanson (Shut Shoeil U"Meishiv, Tinyana, IV:168) offers a unique insight as to why women might not recite the Beracha noting that during the Novi Yirmiyahu's time (acc. to Redak) the women worshipped the sun. Accordingly, so as not to create a misimpression, the women did not recite the Beracha.

Still others argue that women might be exempt due to the potential for frivolity and intermingling during Birkas HaChama. To prevent this, they argued that women not recite it. This too, is not accepted fully as a reason for exemption and the Ben Ish Chai (Shana Rishona, Ekev, 19) notes that he personally recited the Beracha for an assembled group of women.

L'Halacha, the Chazon Ish (Pesach HaDvir IV:229) seemed to encourage women to recite the blessing. Moreinu HaRav Bleich Shlita (Birkas HaChamma, 1980 edition p. 89) concurred. Still, the prevailing Sefaradic position seems to be to have the women wishing to participate, hear the Beracha from another male present.

Shabbat Shalom

From **Rabbi Dovid Horwitz** <yutorah@yutorah.org>
internetparshasheet@gmail.com date Wed, Mar 18, 2009 at 12:00 PM
subject Parashat Va-Yaqhel-Parashat Pekudei: Finishing the Mishkan
Parashat Va-Yaqhel Parashat Pekudei: Finishing the Mishkan
Parashat Va-Yaqhel Parashat Pekudei: Finishing the Mishkan
This was completed all the work of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting. The Israelites did so; just as the L-RD had commanded Moses, so they did (Exodus 39:32).

R. Moses Alshikh (1508 Adrianopolis- 1600 Damascus, but spent most of his life in Tzefat, Israel) raised the following question: Shouldn't the order of the verse have been reversed? One would expect that the words "The Israelites did so" would be written first, and only subsequently "Thus was completed all the work." In other words, why first the passive voice and only subsequently the active voice?

His answer is as follows:

The following lesson is indicated: Even when the Holy One, Blessed be He assists those who execute His commands, he attributes their execution only to the person engaged in it. In the case of the construction of the Tabernacle the Israelites were not even expert in the work, which was executed miraculously on its own accord through Divine Providence. Despite this, the text attributes the execution of the work wholly to the Israelites.

But as Nechama Leibowitz (Studies in Shemot, pp. 696ff. who cites this Alshikh) notes, this principle can apply to every human performance mentioned in the Torah. Man can accomplish nothing by himself. Everything that a human being accomplishes comes from the grace of God. The verses in Deuteronomy (8:11, 17-18) are well known:

Take care lest you forget the L-RD your G-d and fail to keep His commandments, His norms and His laws, which I enjoin upon you today...And you say to yourselves, "My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me." Remember that it is the L-RD your G-d who gives you the power to get wealth, in fulfillment of the covenant that He made on oath with your fathers, as well as is still the case.

The reference in this passage is not to the construction of a Mishkan, but to the everyday tasks of the field and the vineyard. Can we find a specifically Mishkan-connected reason for the order of the verses at the end of Parashat Pekudei?

Nechama Leibowitz suggested the following: We possess a human obligation of Imitatio Dei. Just as G-d created the world and crowned him king over it, man was called upon to take all the earth's bounty and prepare a dwelling place on earth for God: the Mishkan. This particular parallel might be another reason for the sequence of verbs. The verses of the Torah as the end of the penultimate chapter of Parashat Pekudei correspond to the verses at the beginning of the 2nd chapter of Parashat Bereshit, the "Va-Yekhulu" section (Genesis 2:1-3). In both contexts, there is first an allusion to the completion of the work in the passive voice. Subsequently, there is a

reference in the active voice to the author of the work. There is one difference, however, between the Sefer Bereshit account of the world's creation and the Sefer Shemot account of the construction of the Mishkan. In Bereshit, the world is designated as God's: The earth is the L-RD's (Psalms 24:1). In Pekudei, however, as distinct from Bereshit, the human participants of the work, Moshe and the children of Israel are mentioned.

Moreover, the entire nation of Israel, the children of Israel, is mentioned. But from the previous verses, one would assume that the verbs refer to Bezalel, and not to the nation itself. How can the Torah write that all the children of Israel built the Mishkan? Don Isaac Abravanel suggests that the acts of contributing the materials and bringing offerings were included in the category of "making." R. Hayyim ibn Attar (the Talmudist and cabalist; born in Morocco, in 1696; died at Jerusalem July 31, 1743, known by the name of his work *Or Ha-Hayyim* ad loc.), writes that as Bezalel was the agent of the children of Israel, and in light of the halakhic principle of *sheluh* *shel adam ke-moto*, (a man's agent is legally considered to be equivalent of the sender himself), the Torah could indeed legitimately ascribe the construction of the Mishkan to the entire Israelite nation. But the *Or Ha-Hayyim* continues with the following observation:

The text wished to indicate the mutual, interlocking character of Torah observance, by means of which the children of Israel brought reciprocal benefits on each other. The Torah was given to be collectively observed by Israel as a whole. Each individual would contribute his best to their mutual benefit. Perhaps an allusion to this can be found in the Scriptural admonition: "And thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself," implying "who is as thyself." Your neighbor's welfare will contribute to yours and though him you complement your own perfection, so that he is not someone else, but you and like a part of you....

Nechama Leibowitz comments as follows: (Studies in Shemot, p. 700): "Our Torah is a social code designed for observance in the communal context, and not for a solitary Crusoe on his desert island. The Jewish people as a whole; all classes, great and small were entrusted with the Divine law and His covenant was made with the entire nation.... The Torah can only be realized in practice by the people as a whole. Similarly, the Tabernacle was constructed through the participation of the nation as a whole. This is why the verse emphasizes the contribution of the entire nation of Israel."

Thus, the human subject of Parashat Pekudei is not any individual, not Bezalel, not even Moshe Rabbenu. It is the community of the people of Israel.

from **Rabbi Josh Flug** <yutorah@yutorah.org>
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subject B'Mesillat HaHalacha #4 - The Significance of the Thirty Days
Prior to Pesach

The Significance of the Thirty Days Prior to Pesach

The thirty days leading up to Pesach have special significance in halachic literature. In this issue we will present the areas where the thirty day period arises and explain the common denominator between them.

The Obligation to Study the Laws of Pesach

The Gemara, Pesachim 6a, states that there is an obligation to begin the study (*sho'alin v'dorshin*) of the laws of Pesach thirty days prior to Pesach. The Gemara provides a proof to this idea from the Torah. The Rishonim (medieval scholars) ask the following question regarding this rule: The Gemara, Megillah 4a, states that Moshe Rabbeinu instituted a special obligation to study topics relating to each holiday on the holiday itself. If there is an obligation to begin studying the laws of the holidays thirty days prior to the holiday, why was it necessary to institute an obligation to study the relevant topics relating to the holiday on the holiday itself?

Rabbeinu Nissim (1320-1380), Megillah 2b, s.v. Purim, suggests that in reality, there is no inherent obligation to study the laws of the holiday prior to the holiday. The significance of the thirty day period is that a teacher

must give questions relating to that holiday higher priority. Normally, a teacher can choose to answer questions in order of relevance to the matters in which he is teaching. If he is teaching matters relating to legal issues and he is asked a question relating to a holiday, he can delay answering the question until he has responded to the questions relating to legal issues (see Tosefta, Sanhedrin 7:5 and Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 246:14). However, within thirty days of the holiday, he must give questions relating to the holiday the same priority.

R. Chizkiah DeSilva (17th century), *P'ri Chadash*, Orach Chaim no. 429, supports Rabbeinu Nissim's suggestion from a comment of the Talmud Yerushalmi, Pesachim 1:1. The Talmud Yerushalmi states that the concept of studying the laws of Pesach thirty days before Pesach only applies in the study halls. *P'ri Chadash* interprets this statement to mean that in the study halls, questions relating to Pesach are given higher priority. R. David Frankel (1707-1762), *Korban Ha'Edah* to Yerushalmi ad loc., also understands the comments of the Talmud Yerushalmi in this manner.

R. Yosef Karo (1488-1575), *Beit Yosef*, Orach Chaim no. 429, provides two more answers to the aforementioned question. First, R. Karo posits that the requirement to study thirty days before Pesach only applies to Pesach and not to the other holidays because there are many laws that one must know before preparing for Pesach. While Sukkot also has laws that one must know in advance, such as how to build a sukkah or purchase the four species, a thirty day preparation period is not required.

Second, R. Karo suggests that the thirty day requirement only applies to Pesach because of the requirements to prepare for the *Korban Pesach* sacrifice. Since each person has an obligation to participate in the sacrifice and there is a requirement to prepare the animal for sacrifice, there is an obligation to begin studying the laws thirty days before Pesach.

R. Moshe Feinstein's Analysis

R. Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986), *Dibrot Moshe*, Pesachim no. 5, provides an analysis of the various opinions on the topic. His primary query is whether the rule to study the laws of Pesach prior to Pesach is a function of an inherent obligation to know the laws of the holiday or whether it is a function of the fact that we view the thirty days prior to the holiday as part of the holiday. Within the possibility that this law is a function of considering the thirty days prior to the holiday as part of the holiday, R. Feinstein queries further whether the requirement to learn before the holiday is an outgrowth of the requirement to learn on the holiday itself or whether it is an outgrowth of the obligation to prepare for the holiday. [R. Feinstein addresses the *korban* aspect of this discussion, which we will omit for purposes of brevity.]

Rabbeinu Nissim seems to be of the opinion that the thirty days prior to the holiday are an extension of the holiday. Therefore, questions that are asked of a teacher during those days are considered relevant and not tangential. As such, the teacher must give them priority. R. Feinstein further notes that if one understands that the thirty days prior to holidays are specially designated days to prepare for the holiday, one can provide an additional insight to the comment of the Talmud Yerushalmi. The Talmud Yerushalmi never intended to limit the significance of the thirty-day period to the study hall. Rather the Talmud Yerushalmi is noting an additional application to the requirement to prepare for the holiday. Each person must prepare for the holiday in his own way. For most people, this means cleaning, cooking, and preparing Pesach products as well as learning the laws that are relevant. For the student in the study hall who is not spending his time preparing for the physical necessities of Pesach, his obligation to prepare for the holiday is fulfilled by spending extra time studying matters of the holiday.

R. Feinstein notes that one can explain R. Karo's suggestion that only Pesach is subject to the requirement to study thirty days in advance by claiming that there is an inherent obligation to study before the holiday. However, R. Feinstein notes that one can alternatively suggest that R. Karo's suggestion is based on the thirty day period as the preparation period for the holiday. According to R. Feinstein, R. Karo's suggestion does not

necessarily negate Rabbeinu Nissim's explanation. Rather, R. Karo's suggestion adds a special obligation to study the laws of Pesach as part of the preparation for the holiday. Because preparation for Pesach requires study of the laws, there is an obligation to study the laws as part of one's preparations. Prior to all other holidays it is not necessary to begin the study of the laws thirty days before and therefore, it does not become an integral part of the holiday preparations. Nevertheless, regardless of the holiday, the thirty day period is still considered a period of preparation and therefore, a student who asks a holiday related question within thirty days of any holiday is given priority.

When Does the Obligation of Bedikat Chametz Begin?

The Gemara, Pesachim 6a, discusses whether there is an obligation to check one's property for chametz if one leaves the property before the time of bedikat chametz. According to Rava, if one leaves prior to thirty days and does not plan on returning to that property until after Pesach, he has no obligation to perform bedikat chametz. If he leaves within thirty days of Pesach, he has an obligation to perform bedikat chametz even if he doesn't plan on returning until after Pesach. The Gemara states that thirty days was chosen as the cutoff point based on the obligation to begin the study of the laws of Pesach thirty days prior to Pesach. [See Mishna Berurah 436:32, regarding one who is planning on selling the chametz in his home and leaving before Pesach.]

R. Feinstein notes that the equation between the two laws can be understood based on the idea that thirty days prior to a holiday is considered an extension of the holiday. Therefore, one is specifically obligated to perform bedikat chametz on a property that one vacates during that time, even if he doesn't plan on returning before Pesach. [Alternatively, one can explain that there is an inherent obligation to study before Pesach and the significance of the thirty day period is that the thirty days prior to the holiday are an extension of the holiday. The obligation to perform bedikat chametz during this period is also based on the fact that this period is an extension of the holiday. One can also explain that the obligation to study generates a requirement to be more cautious about matters of the holiday.] B'Mesillat HaHalacha, authored by Rabbi Josh Flug, is a project of YUTorah.org, in partnership with the Center for Jewish Leadership and Learning (CJLL), a South Florida community partnership with Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future, where Rabbi Flug serves as a senior scholar. Please visit www.cjll.org to learn more. The Marcos and Adina Katz www.yutorah.org is a project of Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future.

Halacha Discussion

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

The Proper Blessing over Fruit during a Meal While the laws governing the blessings over fruit are complex, they become even more so when fruits are eaten right before a meal, or during a meal as an appetizer or a dessert. There are many details and different views to consider on the subject, but we will attempt to review these halachos in as concise and organized a manner as possible. There is one basic rule to bear in mind: The blessing of ha-Motzi, recited over bread at the beginning of the meal, includes anything in the meal which is normally eaten with bread — even though it is not actually being eaten with bread at this particular moment. Meat, fish, eggs, vegetables, cheese, and other foods eaten to satisfy one's hunger are all foods normally eaten with bread, and are therefore included in the ha-Motzi blessing. Fruit, on the other hand, is not normally eaten with bread. It is eaten as a separate food within the meal and therefore requires its own blessing. This basic principle is agreed upon by practically all the early authorities and is recorded in the Shulchan Aruch. What remains unclear and in dispute is the exact classification of certain fruits — cooked or raw — which are eaten either as an appetizer or as a dessert. These can be classified either as aiding in the digestion of the meal, which would exempt them from a blessing, or as an independent part of the meal, which would

require that a blessing be recited over them. In many cases the poskim differ and no clear consensus emerges. We must, however, establish some basic guidelines. Note: Although the ha-Motzi exempts all other foods which are normally eaten with bread, this holds true only if at least a k'zayis of bread (approximately 1 fl. oz.) is eaten within 3-4 minutes at one point during the meal. If a k'zayis is not eaten within that time span, each food eaten during the meal requires its own blessing. One must, therefore, decide at the beginning of the meal if he is going to eat a k'zayis of bread or not.¹

Fruit eaten before the meal: One who eats fruit before a meal and plans to eat fruit during the meal as well [a common occurrence on Rosh Hashanah night], should recite the proper blessing over the fruit before the meal begins, while intending to exempt the fruits which will be eaten later. No berachah acharonah is made over the fruits eaten before starting the meal — the Birkas ha-Mazon recited at the end of the meal includes them. If, however, one has no intention of eating fruit during the meal, then a berachah acharonah must be recited over the fruit eaten before the meal began, provided that a k'zayis of fruit was consumed. The Birkas ha-Mazon after the meal does not include that fruit, and a berachah acharonah will have to be recited over them even after Birkas ha-Mazon was said.²

Fruits eaten during the meal but before the main course is served: ? Grapefruit — usually eaten to whet the appetite. The Rishonim differ as to whether or not such an appetizer is an intrinsic part of the meal, since it is served as an “introduction” to the meal. The commonly accepted practice is not to recite a blessing over fruits served as appetizers.³ The same applies to olives and pickles served before the actual meal. If, however, the grapefruit, etc., is eaten for its own sake and is considered one of the courses at the meal,⁴ the blessing should be recited. ? Cantaloupe, fruit cocktail, fruit salad, honeydew and other such fruits — Contemporary poskim debate the halachah concerning these fruits. Some suggest that they are no different from grapefruits, which — according to our custom — exempts them from a blessing.⁵ But most poskim consider these fruits as full-fledged first courses. Since, as explained, fruits are not normally eaten with bread, the ha-Motzi blessing does not exempt them and a separate blessing is required.⁶ Generally, one should follow this view, unless his intention is to eat the fruit as an appetizer.⁷ Alternatively, one could follow either of the following two methods: 1) Before washing, recite the proper blessing over a small piece [less than a k'zayis⁸] of fruit, then wash for the bread, and continue eating the fruit.⁹ 2) Eat the fruit while eating bread along with each bite of fruit.¹⁰

During the meal: ? Fruit soup — no blessing is recited¹¹ ?? ? Applesauce with a potato pancake, rice cooked together with raisins or pineapple — no blessing is recited.¹² ? Cooked fruits as a side dish —? no blessing is recited.¹³ ? Fruit eaten as the main course of the meal — most poskim hold that no blessing is required. Since there is a minority opinion that requires a blessing, it is best to eat a sizable amount of bread with the fruit before partaking of the fruit alone.¹⁴ ? Fruit-filled blintzes, etc. — no blessing is recited.¹⁵ ? Fruit eaten as a snack between courses — requires a blessing ?

Dessert: ? Raw fruit (apples, grapes, etc.): The correct blessing is recited.¹⁶ ? Cooked fruit: The basic halachah follows the opinion of most poskim who hold that a blessing is recited,¹⁷ since the cooked fruit is being served as dessert and is considered a “dessert type food.” A minority opinion suggests that no blessing is recited¹⁸ since a cooked fruit, even though it is being eaten at the end of the meal, may still be considered as one of the courses of the meal. One who wants to avoid a questionable situation should eat cooked fruit only with bread¹⁹ or recite a blessing over a raw fruit before eating the cooked fruit.²⁰ ? Popcorn: The correct blessing (ha-adamah) is recited. ? Peanuts and nuts: The correct blessing is recited. ? Chocolate: The correct blessing (shehakol) is recited. General Rule: No fruits eaten during a meal, whether a blessing was recited over them or not, require a berachah acharonah. The Birkas ha-Mazon will exempt them all.²¹

Footnotes 1 Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:41. 2 With the exception of dates, which b'diavad are covered by the Birkas ha-Mazon; O.C. 208:17. 3 Mishnah Berurah 174:39; Aruch ha-Shulchan 174:12. One who would like to satisfy the other view should recite the blessing and eat a small part of the grapefruit before washing his hands for the meal. 4 Possible cases: 1) When a grapefruit is eaten on a diet. 2) When there is little other food available and the grapefruit is used as one of the courses. See Beis Boruch 43:21. 5 Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Vesain Berachah, pg. 93). More recently, however, Rav Elyashiv ruled that these fruits are generally not served as appetizers and that a blessing should be recited over them (Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 235). 6 Rav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Vesain Berachah, pg. 93); Ohr l'Tziyon 46:15; Shevet ha-Levi 6:21; Avnei Yashfei 2:12. 7 Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 235. 8 Mishnah Berurah 174:37; Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 1, pg. 81; Emes L'yaakov, O.C. 177, note 199; Yechaveh Da'as 5:19; Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 78 and Vesain Berachah, pg. 87). 18 Several sources report that the Chofetz Chaim eventually changed his ruling and exempted cooked fruits served as dessert from a blessing; see Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 1, pg. 81, and Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 78. [Others dispute that the Chofetz Chaim changed his ruling.] Reportedly, Rav A. Kotler ruled that no blessing is recited over cooked fruit. See also Sedei Chemed (Berachos 1:26), who quotes Sefer Zochreinu l'Chaim that no blessing is recited over cooked dessert, but the Sdei Chemed himself disagrees.. 19 Custom of the Brisker Rav (quoted in Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 1:177). 20 Rav A. Kotler (reported by several disciples); Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 78). 21 Mishnah Berurah 177:7.

**Peninim on the Torah
by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**

Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei Shema Yisrael Torah Network to Peninim
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PARSHAS VAYAKHEL/PEKUDEI On six days work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem. (35:2) Rashi comments that the Torah presents the admonition concerning Shabbos prior to the command of constructing the Mishkan, in order to teach that the building of the Mishkan does not override the mitzvah of Shabbos. This is enigmatic. If the entire purpose of mentioning Shabbos is to teach that it supersedes even the building of the Mishkan first, then it would have been more appropriate to first mention the mitzvah of building the Mishkan and then write that it does not repeal the laws of Shabbos. After all, the parsha focuses primarily on the Mishkan. It should take precedence.

Horav Dovid Povarsky, zl, derives a powerful lesson regarding shemiras hamitzvos, mitzvah observance, from here. We see from here that had the Torah not decreed specifically that the Mishkan does not take precedence over Shabbos, one might momentarily have thought that he could be meikil, lenient, with regard to the laws of Shabbos. Even though the Torah would later on teach that Shabbos is sacrosanct and the Mishkan does not supersede it, the "damage" would have been done. Someone might think that there is room for kula, leniency, concerning Shabbos. This is why Shabbos is written first. It is the important principle that must be set down from the very beginning: there are no kulas regarding Shabbos. It is the very foundation of our belief.

Noach HaTzadik achieved great spiritual eminence until he permitted himself a kula; he was lenient in planting a vineyard. This catalyzed his spiritual transformation from an ish tzadik, righteous man, to an ish adamah, man of the earth. The Rosh Yeshivah emphasizes that this also occurred concerning the Golden Calf. The people "allowed" themselves to be lenient and build a "replacement" for Moshe Rabbeinu. This led to full-blown idol worship.

Avraham Avinu was called Ivri, derived from the word eivar, side, denoting that the entire world was on one side, while he stood his ground on the other side. Avraham would not budge. He would not compromise his values. When it came to his belief in Hashem, he had no room for negotiation. We are a nation today because Avraham-- and others like him-- refused to be meikil; they would not budge one iota from their Torah convictions.

Count Pototsky, Rav Avraham ben Avraham, the famous ger tzedek, righteous convert, disciple of the Gaon m'Vilna, would not swerve from his commitment, would not waver from his course of belief in Hashem. His mother attempted to dissuade him, but to no avail. The Gaon was prepared to save him from death, but he refused, because he wanted to die sanctifying Hashem's Name. He was the ger tzedek who followed the other ger tzedek - Avraham Avinu.

This approach distinguished Noach from Avraham. Noach was willing to bend ever so slightly, while Avraham refused to deviate one iota. It all starts with one simple leniency, which leads to full-fledged sin. By establishing from the very onset of the parsha that it is forbidden to desecrate Shabbos, the Torah sets the strict standard for its observance and immediately conveys the message: there is no deviating from this mitzvah, no kulas, no leniencies. This is Hashem's command.

This unswerving devotion to Torah values has exemplified the lives of our gedolim Yisrael, Torah leaders. It has defined their very essences. Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, was Rav of the Washington Heights community of Khal Adas Jeshurun. A man of unimpeachable integrity, the emes of Torah was the beacon that guided every decision he made in life. His unswerving devotion to the truth of Torah would, at a number of junctures in his life, put him at odds with those whose sense of integrity was either flawed or weakened by various external pressures. His first position in America provided an opportunity for him to demonstrate his internal strength, his unstinting commitment to what the Torah deems right.

He became Rav of the German-Jewish Shearith Israel Congregation in Baltimore. Shortly after his arrival, he confronted his first crisis. According to the bylaws of the congregation, voting rights were conferred only on shomrei Shabbos. Rav Schwab insisted on upholding the bylaws. As a result, two hundred members, the majority of the shul, left to start their own synagogue. Shearith Israel was left with barely two dozen members, often without a minyan during the week. The young rav's salary was affected, but he would not compromise on his principles. He had no room for leniency. He was weaned on the tenets of Horav S.R. Hirsch: "Learn how to withstand animosity and to weather unpopularity, carrying on the struggle to uphold Hashem's ideals." Integrity was not just a character trait about which he spoke; it defined his life's calling.

Moshe said to Bnei Yisrael, "See, Hashem has proclaimed by name, Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur, to the tribe of Yehudah. He filled him with G-dly spirit. (35:30,31)

When we read the above pesukim, we recognize that they provide an almost verbatim repetition of similar pesukim in the previous parsha: "See, I have called by the name, Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur, of the tribe of Yehudah. I have filled him with a G-dly spirit." (31:2,3) One difference exists between the two sets of pesukim. In Parshas Ki Sissa, Hashem is speaking to Moshe Rabbeinu, while in our parsha, Moshe is relating what Hashem had told him. Nonetheless, is it that important to be repeated?

Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita, suggests that the significance of the repetition is based upon a statement in the Talmud Berachos 55A, in which

Chazal state that we do not appoint a parnes, leader, over the community, unless we first consult with the community. They support this with the above pasuk, saying that Hashem first consulted with Moshe, asking him, "Is Betzalel suitable for you?" Moshe replied, "Ribono Shel Olam, if he is suitable to You, is there any question concerning me?" Moshe then went and asked Klal Yisrael, "Is Betzalel suitable for you?" Their response mirrored that of Moshe, "If he is suitable before Hashem, is there any question concerning us?" Chazal imply that only after Hashem had consulted with Moshe, and had received a positive response from him, did Hashem agree, instructing Moshe to consult with Klal Yisrael.

Thus, the two sets of pesukim relate to the two consultations that took place regarding Betzalel's nomination as the Mishkan's architect. First, Hashem spoke it over with Moshe, who, in turn, did the same with Klal Yisrael.

In his commentary to Parashas Ki Sissa, the Chasam Sofer rationalizes why Hashem had instructed Moshe to consult with Klal Yisrael concerning His choice of Betzalel as the Mishkan's architect. He explains that Betzalel was only thirteen years old at the time. It was Hashem who filled Betzalel "with wisdom, understanding and knowledge," granting him the capability to understand the intricate designs and the Divine inspiration with which they were imbued. Why did Hashem do this? Why choose a young lad and infuse him with G-dly spirit? Why not choose someone older, more accomplished, who had earned his position through age, experience and virtue?

Betzalel represented something unique; in fact, he represented the reason for the Mishkan's presence. The Mishkan was all about Betzalel. Hashem instructed Klal Yisrael to erect the Mishkan, which would serve as an atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. Indeed, Hashem used the Mishkan as a symbol for the world, declaring that Klal Yisrael had been forgiven for their grave sin. This is why it is called Mishkan HaEidus, Tabernacle of Testimony, since it attests to Klal Yisrael's teshuvah, repentance, and Hashem's acceptance. Klal Yisrael had taken their gold and silver and given it for the Golden Calf. They atoned for their rebellion when they gave their gold and silver with heartfelt devotion for the Mishkan.

Betzalel merited his position because he was intricately involved in the Mishkan's mission statement. It was his grandfather, Chur, who had attempted to quell the rebellion by rebuking the sinners. They not only repudiated his advice, but they killed him for it. We now understand why Hashem instructed Moshe to consult with Klal Yisrael regarding His choice of Betzalel. Hashem was concerned that the people might feel ashamed to face Betzalel, given the fact that their sin had created the mood which catalyzed his grandfather's death. This might be a reason to be uncomfortable with Betzalel. Their reply was: on the contrary, we want Betzalel, so that our embarrassment will atone for our sin.

The Meshech Chochmah posits that Betzalel was the logical choice to build the Mishkan for two reasons: He was Chur's grandson, and, thus, the heir to a legacy of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice for the honor of Hashem. He was also the great-grandson of Yehudah, whose tribe was the first to enter the Red Sea. Both of these instances manifest extreme devotion to Hashem, a devotion predicated upon the principles and conviction of emunah peshutah, pure, simple faith in the Almighty without embellishment. This is the quality necessary to build the edifice in which Hashem's Presence will repose. It takes commitment, devotion, trust, faith - without question - without seeking glory - just pure belief in the Almighty.

This, explains the Meshech Chochmah, is the reason that, specifically regarding the construction of the Aron HaKadosh, the Torah emphasizes that Betzalel made the Aron. Why does the Aron stand out? Betzalel made all of the vessels of the Bais Hamikdash. The Aron had an added component: the Keruvim which were a form, an image. The Golden Calf was also an image. The difference was that the Keruvim were "ordered" by Hashem, while the Golden Calf was ordered by the people. A nation that had once fallen prey to the sin of making an image might have a problem preparing the Keruvim. They might not prepare with the utmost conviction

needed for such a holy endeavor. It was Betzalel who made the Keruvim, because he represented selfless devotion and true conviction. No one questioned his motives.

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

The last parshah in Sefer Shemos begins with a detailed accounting of the amounts of gold, silver and copper which were used for the construction of the Mishkan. These metals were deposited with Moshe Rabbeinu and were under the supervision of Betzalel, who was in charge of the Mishkan's construction. Yet, despite all precautions, people like to talk, and talking against gedolei Yisrael, Torah giants, the spiritual leaders of the community, is especially flagrant. Moshe was no different. He was Hashem's choice to be Klal Yisrael's leader, the one through whom Hashem wrought all of the miracles and wonders in Egypt and at the Red Sea, the one who was our first national rebbe, through whom the Torah was given. Nonetheless, the people talked. Moshe was not going to allow the disparaging words of a few low-lives besmirch his name and the Mishkan's integrity. He ordered an accounting.

What kind of person would have the audacity to open his mouth against Moshe? True, every generation has its demagogues who seek to undermine their leadership, and every community has its malcontents, but this is Moshe we are discussing. Hashem attested to his veracity when He said, "In My entire house he is the trusted one" (Bamidbar 12:7). Who were these people? Chazal refer to them as the litzanei ha'dor, scoffers/jokers of the generation. These were individuals who made it their business to be cynical about everything, to find fault in and impugn the actions of Moshe constantly. They were the generation's spiritual misfits. If so, why did Moshe feel it necessary to respond to their slander?

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, cites Horav Yosef Zundel Salant, zl, in his Be'er Yosef who responds to this question. First, however, the Maggid makes the following introduction: Every lie has a crumb of truth. Where there is smoke, there is usually some fire. In other words, while the statements against Moshe were categorically false, there is a reason why the people might have erred, thinking that something was not totally kosher. This does not excuse their contemptible behavior.

The Jewish People had no shortage of money. Between the money they "borrowed" from the Egyptians before they left Egypt, and the spoils from the Red Sea, the Jews were doing quite well. Moshe, however, was not as fortunate. While the Jews were cleaning out Egypt, he was searching for the coffin of Yosef HaTzadik. While they were filling their coffers with Egyptian gold, he was occupied in a more lofty mitzvah. When all is said and done, Moshe was far from wealthy - before he broke the Luchos. Chazal teach us that after Moshe broke the first Luchos, Hashem instructed him to prepare a second set of Luchos. Also, he was told to keep the shivrei luchos, broken shards, of the original luchos. That is how he became wealthy. The Luchos were made of the finest priceless stones.

Let us look at the dates and develop a better picture of how these leitzanim were able to find fault. Moshe descended Har Sinai on the seventeenth day of Tamuz. When he saw the outrage around the Golden Calf, he immediately proceeded to shatter the Luchos. The next day Hashem instructed him to fashion new Luchos, which Moshe did, and immediately ascended the mountain-- to return forty days later. He returned on Yom Kippur with the wonderful news that Klal Yisrael's actions had been atoned for, and he presented the nation with their new Luchos. The next day - the day after Yom Kippur - Moshe announced that he was collecting donations for the building of the Mishkan. It seems a bit strange. As far as the people were concerned, he had no money when he made the appeal for the Mishkan. Suddenly, Moshe had become wealthy. When did he strike it rich? Is it not "possible" that he had some "leftover" contributions from the Mishkan?

The above explanation gives us something to think about and-- quite frankly-- explains where these cynics found the material for their slander. If

so, why blame them? It does appear somewhat suspicious. Why are they referred to as leitzanei ha'dor? They should be called to'ei ha'dor, the mistaken ones, the erroneous ones. It almost seems as if they are viewed as evil, when, in fact, they erred. Rav Reuven makes a striking comment: To speak against a tzadik - regardless of the nature of one's words, just speaking against him-- is evil, earning the individual a place in infamy.

The lesson for us is clear. We might have excuses. We might even find justification for our comments, but if the subject of our remarks is a tzadik, then we are classified as wicked. These leitzanim made an error, a grievous error, but an error nonetheless. Yet, they earned for themselves an ignominious reputation: leitzanei ha'dor. All this is because they spoke against Moshe. In addition, who are we to decide who should bear the mantle of tzadik? Therefore, even when we think that we are justified, it is best just not to talk. By talking against others, we might just be labeling ourselves.

It was in the first month...on the first of the month that the Mishkan was erected. (40:17)

The craftsmen brought the various components of the Mishkan to Moshe. Since Moshe Rabbeinu had not had a share in the actual work, Hashem wanted him to have the honor of erecting the Mishkan. Moshe could not fathom how he could raise it, given that it was so heavy. "How can anyone erect it?" Moshe asked. Hashem told him to make the attempt, and the Mishkan would raise itself and stand on its own. This is the underlying meaning of hukam ha'Mishkan, "the Mishkan was erected," in the passive sense, implying that although Moshe had made the attempt the Mishkan stood up by itself.

There is an important lesson in avodas Hashem, serving the Almighty. Chazal tell us in Pirkei Avos 2:21, "It is not for you to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it." The Chafetz Chaim, zl would say, "It is not for you to achieve, but to act. Achievement is the province of the Almighty." Likewise, Moshe was to do, to make the attempt. The rest, the achievement, is Hashem's province.

Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, related the following story. He was Rosh Yeshivah of the Lomza Yeshivah in Petach Tikvah. There was a man who, for all appearances, looked like a hardworking farmer who would attend the daily Daf Yomi shiur in the bais ha'medrash. Every day he would enter, like clockwork, proceed to the bookcase, remove his Gemora, take a seat- and fall asleep. This was not a one-time incident. It occurred every day!

This is, regrettably, an almost daily occurrence for many people all over. They are totally exhausted after an entire day's work, and a shiur for an hour is just too much. Sleep is very tempting. Let us examine the reaction of the gadol ha'dor, pre-eminent leader of the previous generation; let us contrast how we view the sleeping man with how the great Rosh Yeshivah views him.

Rav Shach related that he was actually envious of the farmer. "Here is a man who puts in a difficult day's toil, and, yet, does everything within his ability to learn Torah! He has just enough strength to come to the shiur, open his Gemora and plop down his head! He has done all that he can do. For that, I am jealous of him! He does all that he can!"

The story is both meaningful and inspirational. It should inspire us to view all Jews in a similarly positive light.

Va'ani Tefillah Va'anachnu nevarech Kah, me'atah v'ad olam. And we shall bless Hashem, from now and until forever.

Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, explains this pasuk pragmatically. People speak about what is important to them. For some, it is business; for others, it is politics; and yet, for others, it is sports. For us, Hashem's People, His nation, our primary interest and sole desire are to occupy ourselves all of the days of our lives with paying gratitude and praise to Hashem for His countless gifts. We seek to humble ourselves, to thank Him by bending our knee, a concept derived from the word nevareich, bless, a derivative of berech, knee. We also hope to make this so much a part of our lives that we will be able to transmit this emotion to further generations, "from now and until

forever." This is not a one-time experience. Rather, it is a life's vocation. It is not merely a virtuous aspiration, but our sole desire, a desire filled with yearning, so that we may begin this praise immediately, without delay.

The words "until forever" have three connotations: 1. all of the days of our individual lives; 2. all of the days of our eternal nation; 3. all of the years of the Afterlife. This is our primary function: to be excited over Hashem - and only over Him. It is the source of excitement that has eternal meaning.

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InnerNet - "How Prayer Works"

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INNERNET MAGAZINE March 2009

"HOW PRAYER WORKS"

by Rabbi Zev Leff

* * *

The Maharal [of Prague] explains that the four-letter Name of G-d, Havayah, connotes mercy, for it describes G-d as transcending time — He was, is, and always will be. What appears to be harsh and tragic is a result of our inability to see the total picture. In an eternal perspective, all is really for the good, as the Sages say, "All that emanates from Heaven is for good" (Talmud - Berachos 60b).

In view of this foundation of belief, it is difficult to understand the function of prayer as a remedy for a tragic situation. For example, how can one pray to be healed from an illness that one sincerely believes has been ordained by G-d and is really for his eternal welfare? Is it not comparable to one who needs a painful operation to preserve his life, and foolishly begs the surgeon to spare him the pain and not perform the operation?

We can answer this seeming enigma by expanding our analogy of the surgeon and patient. Upon examining a patient, the doctor concludes that based on his present condition, a painful operation is necessary in order to preserve his life. However, if the patient will exercise and strengthen himself, the operation will not be necessary, and the same result could be achieved by taking various medicines. If the patient's condition changes, the operation is no longer needed and hence is no longer considered to be good for the patient.

Similarly, an illness may be Heaven-prescribed to produce some benefit mandated by the present spiritual condition of the person. However, if that spiritual condition changes, that same effect can be achieved without the illness. prayer, as well as Torah and mitzvot, can affect one's spiritual condition and hence change what is necessary and beneficial regarding one's ultimate welfare. Put another way, prayer does not change G-d's mind, but rather it changes man's condition. Hence the word l'hispallel, to pray, is a reflexive verb, which connotes causing an effect on oneself.

* * *

This concept, however, requires further elucidation. If the effect of prayer is dependent on the impact it has on one's own condition, how can prayers for another person be effective?

First, all Jews are interrelated components of one spiritual entity. A change in any one of the components ultimately affects all the components. When my son was six years old, he had an infected finger for which the doctor prescribed antibiotic capsules. He hated taking pills and complained about the need to take capsules by mouth. "It's not my mouth or stomach that's infected," he argued, "just my finger. So put the capsule on my finger. What is it going to help to swallow it?"

Obviously, the entire body is a single system, and a change anywhere can affect the whole system. The digestive and circulatory systems transport the antibiotic to the area where it is needed. Similarly, a change in any part of

the body of the Jewish people affects all parts of that body. Even the prayers of one person can positively affect the situation of another.

Second, G-d's justice is so complete and comprehensive that every decree is calculated to affect only those who deserve and need that effect, and to the precise degree necessary. When one person is stricken ill, the indirect effect it has on the one who prays for that individual, whether because he is troubled that a fellow Jew is ill or because of the time and bother he expends on the prayer, is precisely calculated to serve the present condition of that individual. If he changes that condition by prayer, then the adverse effect that has been generated by the other's illness is no longer necessary or prescribed. Hence, a change will have to be effected in the patient to accommodate and rectify the indirect effect on the one who is praying.

In this context, we never refer to misfortune as bad, but rather as bitter. Everything is ultimately for good, but sometimes that good is by necessity deemed by G-d to be achieved through bitter means.

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**by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller**

The month that moves us out of being enslaved to our egos.

Nissan! The name itself evokes a sense of freshness and renewal. From the very beginning of Jewish history, Nissan has been synonymous with a longing for redefinition and hope.

The Talmud tells us that Abraham observed Passover. Obviously it was not to commemorate the Exodus, which only took place centuries later. Maharal explains that the Nissan season 'spoke to him.' The more Abraham saw physical evidence of God's love and creativity, the more humble he felt. So during the Passover season, Abraham chose to eliminate everything from his life that was puffed up -- a semblance of the over inflated ego.

This included all leavened food. It was Abraham's way of holding on to his recognition of what renewal really means and where it comes from.

Flock of Sheep

The astral sign of Nissan is the lamb. Lambs graze in a flock, faithfully following the shepherd. Being a follower is sometimes a mature choice, not a passive failure. The Jewish people made the choice to follow God, and not our own inflated egos as people. In Egypt, as we seesawed between the twin forces of assimilation and oppression, we came to realize that relying on transient humans for our self-definition was national suicide. We chose to follow God.

We also came to realize that no amount of autonomous political action would bring us the spiritual freedom we craved. We finally humbled ourselves to acknowledge that the only possible way we'd ever get out of Egypt would be by God's mercy.

Something within us moved, enough for us to follow G-d into the desert, and later accept His Torah. We were like lambs that finally discovered the shepherd who cares for them. How appropriate that the liberation from Egypt took place in the month of the lamb.

Nissan is referred to in the Torah by three names, each one of which opens a door to a deeper understanding:

1) "The First Month" -- The month of redemption is considered even greater than Tishrei, the month of that the universe came into being. The world was created with a purpose, which is that we humans imbue it with purpose, in order to rectify ourselves individually and the world at large. Nissan is the month in which our people emerged with this goal as their national definition.

Nachmanides, the great 13th century sage and commentator, goes so far as to say that when assigning a number to each month, it is a mitzvah to count beginning with Nissan, to increase our awareness of the miracles that led to our liberation. From his perspective, it's better, when possible, to refer to the secular months by their names -- January, February, etc. Assigning numbers would dull our sensitivity that "month number one" is number one is reserved for that month which leads us toward national self-definition.

2) "Aviv" -- This name means spring, the time when the physical and spiritual messages of rebirth meet and blossom.

3) "Nissan" -- Although this name is technically of Babylonian origin, the Aramaic word Nissan is related to the Hebrew word, nitzan, meaning bud. In Song of Songs, King Solomon's epic poem in which he depicts the love that bonds us to God, redemption is symbolically referred to as "the time that the buds were seen in our land," which means that the inarticulate earth gave birth to a people who soon would flower.

Special Days

Besides Passover, other days in Nissan carry deep significance. The first day of Nissan marks the inauguration of the Mishkan, the portable tabernacle that accompanied the Jewish people during 40 years of wandering in the desert. The Mishkan served as a visual allegory of how the macrocosm and microcosm can both be transformed as a sanctuary for God. In the Mishkan, each vessel, material and metal was carefully selected to symbolize specific ways in which the animal vegetable and mineral worlds can be uplifted.

Years later, the first of Nissan was when the Jews of the Babylonian exile began their return to Israel. The buds had begun to blossom.

Amazingly, Nissan is the time when Jews make a special blessing over new blossoms. Upon the first sighting of the new blossoms of fruit trees at the start of spring, the following blessing is recited:

Blessed are You, God, our Lord, King of the Universe, for nothing is lacking in His universe and He created within it good creatures and trees, with which to provide pleasure to mankind.

The first of Nissan is also the time that most congregations begin their fundraising campaign for Kimcha DiPischa (literally, "flour for Passover"). No Jew can fully experience the freedom of these days while in isolation. The Exodus was the liberation of an entire nation, not of any one individual. No one is free when he knows that his fellow Jew doesn't have what he needs.

In earlier times, the rabbi of the town had the legal authority to mandate contributions. While this is no longer the case, the underlying premise hasn't changed: that true freedom comes through giving, not taking.

Shabbat HaGadol

When G-d created the world, His plan was that we choose to know Him. When we internalize His presence by choosing goodness, in a certain sense we receive the greatest gift of all: G-d Himself. The kabbalists state this idea as: "An awakening [of Divine mercy] from above, must be preceded by an awakening [of commitment] from below." For this reason, G-d didn't free

us from Egypt without challenging us to make a commitment to Him, so that we would share in the process of redemption.

The way that G-d challenged us was by requiring each family to take a sheep, an important symbol in the pantheon of pagan belief that characterized ancient Egypt. Each family tied the sheep to their bedposts for four days, and then offered it as a sacrifice to God. The day they took the sheep was Shabbat, the 10th of Nissan.

We see this day as the beginning of the redemption, for it is on this day that we followed God's instructions, to later slaughter the sheep, even at the risk of enraging our Egyptian captors. But our trust in G-d made this act possible.

On Shabbat HaGadol, it is a well-established custom to read those sections of the Haggadah that deal with the miracles of the liberation -- i.e. from "We were slaves" until "You brought us to the Temple to atone for our transgressions." It is also a custom for the rabbi of every synagogue to deliver a major sermon on this Shabbat.

#### Bedikat Chametz

The deadline for removing all leavened ("inflated") food from one's house is the evening, one day prior to the Seder. The idea of ridding our homes of chametz is that it is a tool to simultaneously rid ourselves of its spiritual counterpart, egotism. Egocentricity is the source of all evil. G-d infused these times with the spiritual power to destroy the ego's grip on our personalities.

Getting ready for this night requires quite a bit of physical and spiritual preparation. For some people, "Passover cleaning" begins at least a month before the holiday arrives. They spend days removing every trace of leavened food from the home, sometimes getting involved with general spring cleaning and possibly even a tad of redecorating or painting. It is important to realize that the religious requirements are relatively simple, and in situations where doing a great deal of cleaning is just not feasible, it is best to stick to the basics. The focus should be on doing God's will -- getting rid of leavened food and negating the ego.

Indeed, freshness and renewal most easily comes when we let go of the heaviness of self-importance and give ourselves permission to be simple. For the more we open our hearts to God's presence and love, the more ridiculous our pomposity feels.

The formal act of searching to remove chametz is called Bedikat Chametz. The examination begins at night. Every nook and cranny has to be checked. The examination must be done by direct light -- i.e. using a candle or flashlight. It is customary to hide 10 pieces of bread (remember where you put them!), which symbolize the 10 mystical Sefirot in reverse.

The kabbalists use the Sefirot to describe the ways in which G-d reveals His presence to us, for instance through his continual outpouring of goodness. Since we live in a world in which free choice is authentic, we acknowledge that if it is possible to be good, and we find it attractive, we will find doing evil equally as compelling.

Each one of the 10 Sefirot has a negative counterpart. Passover is a time that all the forces of evil can be defeated, just as they were in Egypt over 3,000 years ago.

The timing is critical. Rabbi Chaim Vital tells us that the first 13 days of Nissan hint at the first 13 years of one's life. When the 13th year is over, and the 14th year is about to begin, something crucial happens to us. The yetzer tov (positive impulses) becomes just as forceful in the battle for one's personality as the yetzer hara (negative impulses). It is then that the ability to examine and introspect begins, in the same way that when the 13th day of Nissan ends, we now can search, discover and ultimately destroy the actual chametz that is so much part of our lives.

#### Bitul Chametz

The climax of our search for chametz is our stating that "whatever chametz is in our possession, is now considered to be as ownerless as the dust of the earth."

The next day, the 10 pieces of bread, plus any residual chametz, must be destroyed.

As you sit down to the Seder, to relive the enslavement and the Exodus, you will eat the matzah and drink the wine. These are tools to help you write your own personal story of redemption, added to the millions of stories that are part of our unwritten history. May we all merit to see the buds of Nissan blossom into full and genuine redemption. And may we spend the next Seder together, in a free and rebuilt Jerusalem.

This article can also be read at:  
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With her trademark blend of wit, down-to-earth advice, and profound Torah scholarship, author and educator Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller with Sara Yoheved Rigler shows us how to confront the eight essential challenges of life - including the challenge of anger, the challenge of relationships, the challenge of parenting, even the challenge of happiness. In "Lets Face It!" we learn how to embrace life's numerous challenges and transform them all into positive opportunities for personal growth and a deeper connection to the Creator.

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The Torah of Life - How Fortunate Are We!

The Torah tells us, "וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת הַכִּיּוֹר נְחֹשֶׁת וְאֵת כַּנּוֹתָיו כְּמִירְיָתָם...". "He made the wash-basin out of copper and its base out of copper, from the mirrors..." (Shemos 38:8). Doesn't it seem strange that the wash-basin in the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) was made out of mirrors? Rashi teaches us why these mirrors were special. He explains, based on the *Midrash Tanchuma*:

The daughters of Israel possessed mirrors into which they would look when adorning themselves. Even those [mirrors] they did not withhold from bringing as a contribution to the *Mishkan*. However, Moshe found them repulsive, since their purpose was to incite the evil inclination. God said to him, "Accept [them] for *they are dearer to Me than everything else*, because through them the women raised huge multitudes in Egypt." When their husbands were exhausted from their crushing labor, they [the women] would go and bring them food and drink, and feed them. They would then take the mirrors and each one would look at herself and her husband in the mirror, and entice him with words, saying, "See, I am more beautiful than you," thereby awakening their husbands' desire and they would cohabit with them. They conceived and gave birth....

What a fascinating *Midrash*! Let us try to understand why God says that these mirrors "*are dearer to Me than everything else*."

The sanctification of the physical is one of the major doctrines of Judaism. Our Sages teach that all the physical aspects of this world should be used according to the guidelines of the Torah, and that God's commandments enable us to transform the physical into the spiritual. For instance, when one makes a blessing and thanks God for his or her food, eating is raised to a higher spiritual level. Similarly, when one rests in order to have strength to study Torah, sleeping is raised to a higher spiritual level. The Jewish women in Egypt used the mirrors to channel their sexual desire towards the service of God and perpetuate Jewish existence, despite the miserable conditions that the Jews endured as slaves in Egypt. These mirrors represent an example of utilizing the physical according to the ideals of the Torah; even mirrors can be used to enhance our spiritual well-being. God said that these mirrors "*are dearer to Me than everything else*," because they are symbolic of one of the major doctrines of Judaism, that all the physical aspects of this world should be used according to the guidelines of the Torah.

In his discussion of the significance of these mirrors, Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. (contemporary Torah scholar, psychiatrist, and author of many wonderful books, including *Living Each Week*) echoes this doctrine: "The highest degree of *kedushah* [holiness] is achieved when the mundane and physical are elevated and are transformed into the spiritual and sacred." Perhaps Rabbi Twerski based this doctrine on the writings of Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, זצ"ל, one of the most profound Jewish thinkers of the last century. Rabbi Dessler (1892-1953) was the director of the *Kollel* in Gateshead, England, and later was spiritual guide of the *Ponevezh Yeshiva* in Israel. Rabbi Dessler's writings were published posthumously in a multi-volume edition entitled *Michtav MiEliyahu*. Rabbi Dessler writes:

All of the [physical] things of this world are there to serve the ends of holiness...This is the deep and wonderful significance of the *Gemora* in *Berachos* 55a, which teaches that the table of the Torah scholar is like an altar and his eating resembles a *Korban* (sacrifice). Eating for such a person is a sanctified act, since it enables him to reinforce his powers for the fulfillment of the Torah. (Adapted from the translation of *Michtav MiEliyahu*, Vol. 1, pages 38-39, by Rabbi Aryeh Carmell.)

Rabbi Twerski points out how wonderfully different Judaism is in this regard, when compared to other religions. It seems that other religions have difficulty dealing with the physical pleasures of this world. Often their response to physical pleasure is that it is best to abstain from it. For instance, Roman Catholic priests are not allowed to marry. Judaism is quite different in this respect. According to the *Sefer HaChinuch*, which was written by an anonymous thirteenth-century Torah scholar, the first commandment in the Torah is to "...Be fruitful and multiply..." (*Bereishis* 1:28). The *Sefer HaChinuch* writes, "This is an important commandment, by virtue of which all the commandments in the world are fulfilled: For to human beings were they given, not to the ministering angels." The Roman Catholic position is that celibacy is preferred and that it is best to avoid sexual relations. The Jewish position is that the Torah was given for human beings, and that procreation, when performed according to the precepts of the Torah, is such an important commandment that it is the first of the 613 commandments. The *Halacha* (Jewish law) emphasizes the importance of this commandment. The *Halacha* is that "Every man must marry a wife in order to beget children and he who fails in this duty...diminishes the image of God and causes the Divine Presence to depart from Israel" (*Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer*, 1:1; translation by Rabbi Dr. Charles B.Chavel).

In Hebrew, the initial act of marriage is often termed *קידושין* (*Kiddushin*). The entire tractate of the *Gemora* that deals with the laws of marriage is also called *קידושין*. The term *קידושין* (*Kiddushin*) is clearly derived from the word *קדש* (holy). Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that marriage transforms the physical act of sexual relations into one of the most important holy commandments.

Both Christianity and Buddhism consider a monk, who secludes himself in a monastery to abstain from the normal activities and pleasures of this world, to be praiseworthy. The Torah tells us, "...וּבְחַרְתָּ חַיִּים..." "...And you shall choose *life*..." (*Devarim* 30:19), and King Solomon wrote, "עֵץ חַיִּים הוּא לְפָנֵינוּ...". "It is a tree of *life* to those who grasp it..." (*Mishlei* 3:18). In the *Shemoneh Esrei*, which is the most important of our prayers, the Torah is described as "תּוֹרַת חַיִּים" "the Torah of *Life*," possibly because the Torah is a manual for daily living that encourages participation in the activities and pleasures of this world, according to its principles. As Rabbi Twerski writes in his discussion of the mirrors that the Jewish women used in Egypt to arouse their husbands, "The highest degree of *kedushah* [holiness] is achieved when the mundane and physical are elevated and transformed into the spiritual and sacred."

Every day in the daily morning service (*Shacharis*), we declare: "אֲשֶׁרֵינוּ מְהֵרָה טוֹב הַלְקֵנוּ" "We are fortunate - how good is our portion, how pleasant our lot, and how beautiful our heritage!" How fortunate are we that our Torah is a "Torah of *Life*" that teaches us how to properly partake in the activities and pleasures of this world, levating our entire lives into the realm of the spiritual and sacred. (I am indebted to Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, who is the Rabbi of Efrat and Chancellor of the Ohr Torah Stone Institutions of Israel, for an inspiring essay that he wrote on this topic.)

Just Try!

The Torah portions *Vayakhel* and *Pekudei* review the details of the construction of the *Mishkan*. The *Mishkan* is the Tabernacle that God instructed the Jews to build to accompany them during their travels in the desert. God promised that He would dwell among the Jews in the *Mishkan* that they would build (*Shemos* 25:8).

The fifth sentence in the Torah portion (*Parsha*) entitled *Vayakhel* says, "וְהָיוּ יְמֵי שְׂמֵחָם..."

"...לבו... "Take from yourselves a portion for God, everyone whose heart motivates him...." The twenty-first sentence in *Parshas Vayakhel* says, "יָבִיאוּ כָּל אִישׁ אֶשֶׁר

"...לבו... "Every man whose heart inspired him came...." The Torah clearly emphasizes that the hearts of the Jewish people should motivate them to donate and construct the *Mishkan*.

Why, regarding the construction of the *Mishkan*, does the Torah place so much emphasis on the inspired hearts of the Jews? The Ramban (1195-1270, great Biblical commentator, Talmudist, Kabbalist, and physician) points out that the Jewish people had recently left Egypt, where they were slaves and primarily worked "with mortar and bricks" (*Shemos* 1:14). They were not artisans and lacked the training and skills required to build the *Mishkan* and its utensils. They did not have significant experience with most of the skills required to construct the *Mishkan*, such as embroidery, weaving, stone-cutting, wood-carving, and working with gold, silver, and copper (*Shemos* 35:32-35). The Torah emphasizes, "Every man whose heart inspired him came..." because it took great courage and faith for the Jews, who had very little education in the skills that were needed, to attempt to build the *Mishkan* and its utensils. The Ramban explains in his commentary on *Shemos* 31:2 and 35:21 that *even though the Jewish people did not have the skills required, God helped them to complete the task, since they had the courage and faith to attempt to build the Mishkan and its utensils.*

In four locations (*Yuma* 38b, *Shabbos* 104a, *Menachos* 29b, & *Avodah Zarah* 55a)

the *Gemora* teaches this concept as a general principle: "בָּא לְטַהַר מְסִייעִים אוֹתוֹ" "If someone comes to purify himself, he is given assistance [from God]." God wants us to make an effort, and, if necessary, He will help complete the task.

In all four locations this concept is attributed to the great Torah sage Reish Lakish, who lived in the third century C.E., and was an important contributor to the *Gemora*. This is especially interesting and relevant, because Reish Lakish states in the *Gemora Bava Metziah* 84a that he was the leader of a group of thieves before he repented and devoted his life to Torah study. Reish Lakish enjoyed incredible success in his Torah study, as he was able to become one of the great Torah sages of his era, despite his beginnings as a thief. Clearly, Reish Lakish was speaking from his own personal experience when he taught, "בָּא לְטַהַר מְסִייעִים אוֹתוֹ" "If someone comes to purify himself, he is given assistance [from God]."

This idea is re-emphasized just a few chapters later in the Torah portion (*Parsha*) entitled *Pekudei*. In his commentary on *Shemos* 39:33, Rashi quotes the explanation of the *Midrash Tanchuma*. The *Midrash Tanchuma*, which has been ascribed to the fourth-century *Amora* Tanchuma Bar Abba, teaches that the Jews brought the unassembled *Mishkan* to Moshe because they were unable to erect it because of the weight of the planks. Moshe asked God, "How is it possible for man to erect it [because it is too heavy]?" God answered Moshe, "עֲסוּק אַתָּה בְּיָדְךָ" "You busy yourself [in erecting the *Mishkan*] with your hand."

God wanted Moshe to make an effort to erect the *Mishkan*, even though Moshe couldn't possibly do so without assistance. Once Moshe tried to lift up the heavy planks, God helped him finish the job. This is another example of the principle quoted above: "בָּא לְטַהַר מְסִייעִים אוֹתוֹ" "If someone comes to purify himself, he is given assistance [from God]."

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin (contemporary scholar, teacher, and communal leader) points out that this idea is also taught later in the Torah in the Book of *Bamidbar*. The Torah says: "וַיִּפְקֹד אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה עַל פִּי יְהוָה..." "And Moshe counted them [the Levites] according to the word of God..." (*Bamidbar* 3:16). Rabbi Yudin writes:

Rashi [based on the *Midrash Tanchuma*] teaches that Moshe was troubled as to how he would succeed in counting the *Leviim* from the age of thirty days. Could he possibly enter each tent and count the number of suckling infants? Thereupon *Hashem* said to him, "עֲשֵׂה אַתָּה שְׂלָךְ, וְנֵאֲנִי אֶעֱשֶׂה" "You do yours and I will do Mine."

Moshe stood outside the entrance of each tent and a קוֹל בְּרַת, a heavenly voice, proclaimed the number of male children in each tent. One could ask: If the census was coming from the קוֹל בְּרַת (the heavenly voice), why did Moshe have to go from tent to tent? The answer is: he had to do his part, and only then did *Hashem* finish. (*Internet Parsha Sheet on Vayakhel-Pekudei*, 5761)

Another example of "בָּא לְטַהַר מְסִייעִים אוֹתוֹ" "If someone comes to purify himself, he is given assistance [from God]," is found earlier in the Book of *Shemos*. Rashi, in his commentary on *Shemos* 2:5, quotes a *Gemora* and a *Midrash* that Basya, the daughter of Pharaoh, reached for Moshe's basket, which had been placed among the reeds near the river, but it was beyond her reach. According to the *Gemora* and *Midrash*, her arm miraculously extended to reach the basket. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk (1787-1859, a great Chassidic Rebbe) explains, as quoted in the commentary in the *ArtScroll Stone Chumash*, "that her example teaches us that one should never assume that a task is impossible. She was far from the basket, yet she reached out for it - and God enabled her to attain her goal."

These are some examples of the general principle that the *Gemora*, as quoted above, teaches in four separate locations, that Reish Lakish said, "בָּא לְטַהַר מְסִייעִים אוֹתוֹ" "If someone comes to purify himself, he is given assistance [from God]." Our Sages have also expressed this idea in other words: "God tells the Jews, 'My children, open for Me an opening as large as the eye of a needle, and I will enlarge it as wide as the opening of a large reception room'" (similar to *Midrash Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 5:2). Similarly, the *Gemora Makkos* 10b teaches, "בְּדַרְךָ שֶׁאַתָּה רוֹצֵה לֵלֶכֶת, בֵּה מוֹלִיכִין אוֹתוֹ" "A person is led in the way that he wants to go."

The examples quoted above teach us that God says, "עֲשֵׂה אַתָּה שְׂלָךְ, וְנֵאֲנִי אֶעֱשֶׂה שְׂלָי" "You do yours and I will do Mine" and "עֲסוּק אַתָּה בְּיָדְךָ" "You busy yourself with your hand." God wants us to try to complete worthwhile tasks with desire, courage, and enthusiasm and not to be lazy or afraid of failure. Even if a task seems impossible, God wants us to try so that He might help finish the task.

In the last decade, many self-help books have been published that emphasize these fundamental principles: that you can't succeed if you don't try and if you are afraid of failing. I recently purchased one such book entitled *Yes, You Can!* As God told Moshe, "עֲשֵׂה אַתָּה שְׂלָךְ, וְנֵאֲנִי אֶעֱשֶׂה שְׂלָי" "You do yours and I will do Mine."

The examples quoted above illustrate that God wants each of us not to be lazy and to have the enthusiasm and courage to try, because, as the *Gemora* teaches, "בָּא לְטַהַר מְסִייעִים אוֹתוֹ" "If someone comes to purify himself, he is given assistance [from God]." As Rabbi Zelig Pliskin (contemporary author of many wonderful books, including *Growth Through Torah*) writes, "Have the courage to accept upon yourself to do what is needed. A person who has a strong drive to accomplish something will find that he has many [hidden] talents and abilities" that will enable him to be successful and complete the task.