

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Vayakhel Pekudei 5770

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BETWEEN SALVATION TO REDEMPTION :: Rabbi Berel Wein

With Purim safely behind us we are now entering the final phases of preparation for the great holiday of Pesach. The period of time between Purim and Pesach is usually a period of great frenzy and intense work. Even those who leave to spend Pesach at hotels or with relatives are halachically obligated to clean and prepare their houses for Pesach. But preparing for Pesach is more than a physical requirement. It also requires a certain mindset, a feeling of redemption and spiritual uplift.

Perhaps this is the change that this time brings in this period of time between Purim and Pesach. Purim is a commemoration of salvation from physical destruction and national genocide. Though it certainly has spiritual overtones and halachic ritual attached to it, it remains basically a holiday of the body, of joy unrestrained and food and drink without limit or measure.

Though Pesach also has food, drink and physical enjoyment connected to it in an integral fashion, it nevertheless demands a more spiritual reckoning from its celebrants. We thank God not only for our freedom from Egyptian bondage but for the redemption of our souls as well.

We were redeemed from paganism and from Egypt's culture of the exploitation of others for the selfish benefit of the ruling few. Physical freedom, though important, is in itself no guarantee of a productive life or of noble deeds. Many times just the opposite is true when freedom descends into licentiousness, violence and cruelty towards others. It is the redemptive quality of Pesach that reaches our souls that makes it the glorious holiday that it is.

Salvation from our enemies is an eternal requirement of the survival of the Jewish people. If we wished to, we could declare a Purim holiday many times through the year to mark the salvation of Jewish communities throughout the world and the ages. Salvation is a constant companion of the Jewish people.

Redemption is a much rarer commodity. We still await the ultimate redemption promised to us by the great prophets of Israel millennia ago. For redemption has this strong spiritual dimension, and without this advancing and nobility of spirit redemption is only further delayed and postponed. Whereas Purim prefers a somewhat befuddled brain to mark our salvation from Haman, Pesach requires clarity of thought and intensity of soul.

Redemption comes from the inside while salvation arrives always from the outside and often, if not most times, unexpectedly, unplanned and illogically. Thus salvation can occur immediately and surprisingly. Not so redemption, which requires planning, forethought, training and education.

Purim requires relatively little preparation – it almost just descends upon us. Pesach requires a month or more of preparation and readiness because our souls have to become attuned to the ideas and goals of redemption. And that is usually a matter of great effort and struggle.

It does not happen automatically or by itself. This period of time between Purim and Pesach is meant to remind us of this important lesson and to allow us to concentrate ourselves on preparing not only for salvation but rather for redemption.

The national independence of the Jewish people, as personified in the existence of the State of Israel, is alone insufficient to bring us a feeling of redemption. Since the state and the people of Israel generally are still a work in progress, we can only continue to struggle towards our ultimate goal of the final redemption of Israel and the world at large.

Every good deed, every act of social justice carries with it a message of redemption being brought nearer. No act of kindness and goodness, no matter how slight and minor we may consider it to be, escapes Heaven's notice. It marks another step on our road to ultimate redemption.

Therefore the laws of Pesach as recorded for us in Shulchan Aruch begin with the requirement to donate to the cause of the poor so that they may

also enjoy a bountiful Pesach. Every Jewish holiday requires acts of charity and goodness towards others. It highlights the redemptive qualities of our holidays and of traditional Jewish life as lived over millennia.

Purim also requires charity and its purpose there, as everywhere, is to move pure salvation to the level of redemption. One can only redeem one's self by aiding others in need of help. Salvation saves one's self. Redemption can save an entire world. Pesach, the holiday of redemption is fast upon us. Let us prepare properly for its joyous arrival.
Shabat shalom.

Weekly Parsha :: VAYAKHEL – PEKUDEI :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The book of Shemot is reaching its conclusion in this week's double parsha. The final review of all of the artifacts, construction and costs of the mishkan is detailed before us. The transparency that we all claim to long for in governmental spending and budgets is realized in the Torah's exquisite detail in accounting for all income and spending on the mishkan.

This is an example of the soul of public trust and accountability as it should be practiced. The fact that this occurs in relation to holy purposes – the construction of the mishkan and its artifacts – only intensifies the lesson that impeccable integrity is necessary in such matters. Too many times people think that for holy projects and Torah welfare somehow corners can be cut and that the responsibility for funds donated and used can be juggled.

The Torah itself clearly does not tolerate such ideas and behavior. The Torah many times over warns us of the danger of corruption, even so-called "holy" corruption. It blinds us and distorts all of our achievements and accomplishments. Even the great Moshe whose face shines with the radiance of heaven itself must be publicly held accountable.

I think that is why after so many millennia after the disappearance of the mishkan from the midst of Israel these parshiyot are still read publicly in our synagogues. The message of accountability and transparency in public monetary matters is the keystone to holiness. The holiness of the mishkan is dependent upon these principles and values.

Another idea present here is the importance of repetitiveness in these matters. The Torah recounts in detail what it has already told us earlier regarding the construction of the mishkan and its artifacts. Since reading a budget or studying a data sheet is not necessarily the most fascinating reading in the world, the Torah's insistence upon recounting these matters is at first glance most puzzling. But it is the repetition as much as the content itself that is the Torah's message to us.

Repeating the accounting of the construction of the mishkan – its expenses and labor and talent – emphasizes to us that the holy mishkan was crafted efficiently and honestly. There is no longer any question regarding its probity when the Torah lists for us the materials and work once more.

The second accounting must coincide exactly with the first description of the materials and work involved. And repetition is the soul of honesty. One must train one's self to be honest, to resist temptation and shoddiness. Goodness and truthfulness are conditioned by habitual behavior more so than by inspired sermons and learned treatises.

In Yiddish there was a folk saying that "truth is the best lie." A lie requires many other lies to cover its tracks. Truth stands pristine and strong always. Therefore it is not only the first accounting that is important in public and holy matters but the later accounting is also of equal if not even more importance. This week's double parsha certainly drives this point home.
Shabat shalom.

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by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Overview

Vayakhel

Moshe Rabbeinu exhorts Bnei Yisrael to keep Shabbat, and requests donations for the materials for making the Mishkan. He collects gold, silver, precious stones, skins and yarn, as well as incense and olive oil for the menorah and for anointing. The princes of each tribe bring the precious stones for the Kohen Gadol's breastplate and ephod. G-d appoints Bezalel and Oholiav as the master craftsmen. Bnei Yisrael contribute so much that Moshe begins to refuse donations. Special curtains with two different covers were designed for the Mishkan's roof and door. Gold-covered boards in silver bases were connected, forming the Mishkan's walls. Bezalel made the Holy Ark (which contained the Tablets) from wood covered with gold. On the Ark's cover were two figures facing each other. The menorah and the table with the showbreads were also of gold. Two altars were made: a small incense altar of wood overlaid with gold, and a larger altar for sacrifices made of wood covered with copper.

Pekudei

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

Insights

The New Israel

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

At the beginning of Megillat Esther, Achashverosh throws a party to end all parties. The party of the millennium. He was celebrating his unassailable grip on the throne of the Persian Empire. At this party, Achashverosh brought out the vessels of the Holy Temple which the Babylonians had plundered and caroused with. More than this, Achavshverosh's party attire consisted of the vestments of the High Priest. Why did he do this? Was it some elaborate spoof? Was Achavshverosh poking fun at the Jewish People and their prophecies of the demise of his all-mighty kingdom? Or was there something more sinister behind this charade?

"And the land was formless and empty and darkness on the face of the deep." (Bereishet 1:2) These words form part of the opening words of the Torah. They hint to four mighty empires that will subjugate the Jewish People. The first, Babylon, will snatch the crown of Empire from the Jewish People, and then the Persian, Greek and Roman empires will successively snatch world domination one from the other. Eventually, the last of those empires, Rome and its cultural heirs, will return the kingship to the Jewish People. When that happens "The lost ones will come from the land of Ashur..." (Yeshayahu 27:13), and the final exile will end.

The name Ashur is related to the Hebrew word "ishur." An ishur is a certification. Each nation which takes the kingship from the Jewish People seeks to "certify" itself as being the true and final recipient of the crown of the world. But they can only do this by proclaiming themselves the true heirs. They claim to be the "New Israel." They claim that the testament of faith of the Jewish People is old; that they have a new one.

That, in essence, was what Achashverosh was attempting to do at his millennial party. He was certifying himself as the New Israel. His party was a grotesque replication of the Temple service. The vessels of the Temple were there and being used. He was dressed as the kohen gadol, the high priest. He even went so far as to name his ministers after the offerings of the Holy Temple. He was trying to utilize those forces of holiness for

his own means, to set his seal on world domination using the higher spiritual forces. This was no charade.

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parshas Vayakhel - Pekudei

Vayakhel

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

Rashi teaches that mentioning Shabbos in our parsha before mentioning the Mishkan emphasizes that Shabbos takes precedence in any conflict of interest with the construction of the Mishkan. When Shabbos arrives, construction of the Mishkan halts. Kedushas Shabbos brings the work on the Mishkan to an impasse. Veritably, the Torah already presented this lesson to us in Parashas Ki Sissa 31:13, where Rashi asserts that the link between Shabbos and Mishkan teaches us that the building of the Mishkan does not supersede the strictures of Shabbos. Clearly it is an important lesson, but why does the Torah teach it twice?

The Nesivos Shalom explains that it is all in the timing. Our parsha occurs on the day after Yom Kippur, when Moshe Rabbeinu returned from the mountain with the wonderful news that Hashem had forgiven Klal Yisrael for the sin of the Golden Calf. In addition, he reiterated the two mitzvos which were to play a crucial role in the Jewish nation's process of teshuvah, repentance/return to Hashem. It was necessary that these two mitzvos be repeated specifically on the morrow after Klal Yisrael's first experience with Heavenly pardon.

The Slonimer Rebbe qualifies the above statement. Shabbos and Mishkan share a principle which is relevant to all aspects of Jewry. They both focus on all Jews, regardless from which end of the spectrum of observance they hail. Even those Jews who are at the extremes of spiritual affiliation - both right and left - are required to observe Mishkan and Shabbos. The Jew who has transcended the physical dimension - whose head is in the clouds of spirituality - and the Jew who has fallen into the abyss - into the nadir of depravity, the sewer of morality - and everyone in between: all answer to the universal message of Shabbos and Mishkan. Shabbos illuminates the world of the Jew who aspires to elevated spiritual ascendancy. It inspires and cloaks him in a mantle of kedushah, holiness, as it invigorates every fiber of his spiritual essence. Indeed, every Jew, even one who has fallen into the morally bankrupt world of idolatry, can find atonement through proper observance of Shabbos. The observance of this holy day enriches and transforms his entire life.

This concept of universal relevance is paralleled in the underlying motif of the Mishkan. Those who have achieved an elevated level of kedushah are moved by the spiritual influence emanating from the Aron and Luchos, which are the seat of the Torah. They develop a more sophisticated appreciation of the Torah and avodah, Divine service. They are internally illuminated by the light of the Menorah. The flame burning through the night on top of the Mizbayach, Altar, protected it from the darkness engendered by various mishaps. Each of the Mishkan's vessels offered some spiritual benefit which could be appreciated by the individual who is spiritually inclined.

Likewise, the Mishkan was home to all Jews. Regardless of their shortcomings, their inconsistencies and indiscretions notwithstanding, they were all welcome in its environs. Was it not the place where the sinner was to bring his sacrifice to seek atonement? Indeed, Chazal teach us that the Korban Tamid, Daily morning offering, atoned for nocturnal sins, while the Korban Tamid shel Bein HoArbayim, afternoon Tamid, compensated for sins committed during the day.

We now understand the significance behind the mutual juxtaposition of Shabbos and Mishkan. Parashas Ki Sissa addresses the Jew prior to the sin of the Golden-Calf. He is yet untainted, climbing the spiritual ladder of holiness. The Jew in Parashas Vayakhel has already been in the spiritual pit, having fallen into the abyss created by his involvement in the sin of the Golden Calf. Shabbos and Mishkan speak to both of these. Their relevance applies to both, individually and together. The "before" and "after" Jew is

confronted by the institutions of Shabbos and Mishkan: "We can help you both." To the Jew affected with "post Golden-Calf syndrome," we can offer guidance and encouragement on the road to spiritual makeover. To the Jew who has it all, who is surging forward on his spiritual quest to become closer to Hashem, we can help make the trip smoother and more meaningful.

I think that the greatest lesson of these two institutions is: No Jew should be left behind. No Jew should be written off. No Jew is exempt from responsibility. The Mishkan and Shabbos are not the sole property of the truly observant or the one who is not yet observant. Indeed, the Jew of Parashas Ki Sissa would do well to open up his "heart" and his "home" to the Jew of Parashas Vayakhel. This way both Jews will benefit from the integration of these two parshios!

Every man whose heart inspired him came; and everyone whose spirit motivated him brought the portion of Hashem. (35:21)

Ramban explains that in his address to the people, Moshe Rabbeinu called upon two types of people: the *nediv libo*, "whose heart motivated him," to contribute gifts; and the *chacham lev*, wise-hearted person, to volunteer his craftsmanship. In our *pasuk* we are told that, in response to Moshe's call, every man *asher nasao libo*, "Whose spirit inspired him," came forward to bring the portion to Hashem. The individuals who would do the actual work were the ones who possessed *nesius ha'lev*, an inspired heart; in contrast, the contributors were the ones who had *nedivus ha'lev*, a motivated heart.

In what has become a much cited commentary, Ramban explains the concept of *nesius ha'lev* with regard to craftsmanship. To answer Moshe's call required an inspired individual, since there was no one among them who was proficient in the necessary crafts. They neither had a teacher, nor had they ever been trained in the art or skill that was required to produce the Mishkan and its vessels. Rather, he perceived in his own nature that he somehow knew how to perform such skilled work, *Vayigbah libo b'darkei Hashem* (stylistic citation from *Divrei Haymim II 17:6*), "And his heart was elevated in the ways of Hashem." Without experience and with no training, these individuals declared themselves ready to do anything that was required of them.

This is an amazing statement. After all is said and done, if one does not know how to do something, how does he take it upon himself to perform the necessary task? Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, asserts that the only quality that separates intellectual knowledge, skill and expertise from craftsmanship and proficiency is *nesius ha'lev*, an inspired heart. What is *nasah libo*? The Rosh Yeshivah explains that the heart has "wings" that allow it to soar to great elevations. In addition, the heart possesses the reservoir of knowledge, as well as the required talent and expertise, to attain great achievement. The individual has to "grab hold of the heart" and soar with it. The problem is that we are so caught up in the mundane, so prone to habit, that we do not allow for "inspiration" to affect us and stimulate our forward and upward advance.

We have it all within us! School teaches us how to uncover what is already there. When we begin to realize that Hashem has imbued us with the ability to create, conceive, compose, institute, invent, to do those things that we always thought were beyond us, we will be able to do all of that! Every organ, fiber, muscle, of our body possesses the capacity for anything that we want to do. Our bodies are comprised of a symphony of millions of cells which work in perfect harmony. This is all part of the *Tzelem Elokim*, image of G-d, with which we are all imbued. If we apply ourselves, it will all come together. First, we must believe in ourselves. This conviction creates inspiration. We connect with the heart, and we soar!

Rav Ezrachi emphasizes how it is all within the nature of each individual creation. While the human being created in the image of G-d possesses greater faculties, the animal world also has innate talents and skills that are intrinsic to its nature. The panther knows exactly how to attack its prey. So does the lion. They certainly did not take a hunting course. How interesting it is that they know which animal to attack and which to avoid. They know this because they have been endowed with an innate aptitude, which is triggered by a sense of self-preservation. In order to live, they must eat,

and, in order to eat, they must hunt. It is as simple as that. Necessity is the mother of invention; in this case, it is the mother of inspiration.

The women who sewed the Curtains and Paroches for the Mishkan did not take a sewing or weaving course in Egypt. How did they do it? It was all within them. Moshe called for volunteers. They understood that their purpose was to build a Mishkan. This was their life, their sense of self-preservation. Thus, they were inspired to come forward and "somehow" found it within themselves to sew brilliantly!

If this is true with regard to the physical dimension, how much more so should it apply in the world of spiritual development. How often do we hear a student bemoan that he lacks the ability, the acumen to become another Rav Akiva Eiger or Chazon Ish? "I cannot control my mouth as the *Chafetz Chaim*" is not an uncommon rejoinder. The only quality they lack is ambition - not brains; diligence - not ability; perseverance - not intelligence. One who is a *sho'ef*, ambitious, who strives with all of his *kochos*, strengths, can grasp the wings of the heart and soar. He possesses all of the potential to become a Moshe Rabbeinu. The Rambam in *Hilchos Teshuvah 1:2* asserts this. What more does one need? There is one requirement, however: this must be his life. Becoming the next Chazon Ish must be his life's goal. It defines his sense of self-preservation. The Torah is his sustenance, without which he cannot live. With it, he can achieve his life's goal. When he achieves *nesius ha'lev*, he will suddenly discover that all he has been seeking has actually been a part of him all of the time - just like the individuals who constructed the Mishkan.

In a completely unrelated exposition, Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, once made a distinction between the terms *nedivus ha'lev*, motivated heart, and *nesius ha'ruach*, inspired spirit. Since the two terms are very close in meaning and the Rosh Yeshivah's *machshavah*, thought, is practical as well as significant, I felt it deserves mention. On the way out to the *bais ha'medrash*, a husband passes by the kitchen sink filled with dirty dishes. He knows that the dishes do not just wash themselves. So, he offers to wash them. That is *nedivus ha'lev*, sensitivity to his wife's state of affairs, not ignoring that he also lives in the house, and, surprisingly, he "also" ate from the dishes. Knowing that her husband is on his way to learn Torah and that every moment is of infinite value, the wife responds, "Thank you, but I would rather not deprive you of your learning." This is *nesius ha'ruach*. She has just elevated the mundane act of washing dishes to a lofty, spiritual conduit. Every dish is another line of Talmud, another *Tosfos*. A home built along the lines of such give and take, of a relationship of *nedivus* and *nesius*, is a veritable Mishkan, a place that will merit to be a resting place for the Divine Presence.

Parashas Pekudei

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

In the *Tur Yoreh Deah*, 257, Chazal assert that virtuous charity collectors who are in charge of communal funds need not be scrutinized. They are implicitly trusted. In order for them to be "innocent in the eyes of Hashem and Yisrael, they should provide a thorough accounting of their collections. The Bach adds that this demand is not found in the *poskim*, halachic decisors. Perhaps the *Tur* derived this from the actions of Moshe Rabbeinu concerning the funds administered for the Mishkan. He gave a full accounting of every penny that he collected, explaining where it was put to use. He wanted to be sure that no one suspected him of any wrong doing. The *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* derives from the words "which were reckoned at Moshe's bidding," that indeed it was only Moshe who made the demand for an accounting. He did not want anyone raising suspicion unnecessarily.

Dealing with communal funds is an enormous responsibility which must not be taken lightly. This goes without question, but what about an individual Jew's funds? Is that any different? Is there a distinction between *gezel ha'rabim*, public theft, and *gezel yachid*, theft from an individual? Theft is theft, and a *ganov*, thief, is a *ganov*, regardless of whom he victimizes. How careful we must be with other people's money. When Horav Avraham Karliner, zl, searched through the pockets of his garments on Erev Pesach, he would weep. He said that one must check his pockets for other people's money. Heaven forbid that one have money in his

possession that belongs to another Jew. Once, two Jews came to Horav Meir, zl, m'Premishlan, with the request that he draw up a document for them to confirm their partnership. He took out a blank piece of paper and wrote the letters aleph, bais, gimel, daled. "Rebbe, what relationship do these letters have to a partnership?" He explained, "Aleph stands for emunah, trust; bais is for berachah, blessing; gimel is for geneivah, stealing; daled is for dalus, poverty. If you act with emunah, trustworthiness, towards each other, you will be blessed; if, however, you steal from one another, you will end up poor."

On that awesome day when we are all called before the Heavenly Tribunal to give an accounting of our mortal life, the first question which we will be asked will be, Nasassa v'nosata b'emunah, "Did you conduct your business dealings in emunah?" Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, explains that the word emunah has two meanings: "Were your dealings done honestly?" and "When you were engaged in business, did you possess emunah in Hashem?" In other words, did you believe that Hashem provides for all, that Divine Providence rules? Were you cognizant of the fact that Someone is always looking over your shoulder, listening to every word that you say and think?

Based upon the above, one who resorts to cheating, trickery, fraud, or just plain "shtick," is not only dishonest - he is non-observant! He manifests a behavior that lacks emunah. Apparently, he does not believe that Hashem provides sustenance for all. He can daven a long Shemoneh Esrai, eat only the most reputable shechitah, and even be a great baal tzedakah, but if he denies Hashgachah pratis, Divine Providence, he is a blasphemer. Parnassah is a direct intervention from Hashem, granting the individual favor in the eyes of others.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, explains the pasuk concerning parnassah, Poseiach es yadecha umasbia l'chol chai ratzon, "You open Your hand and willingly satiate all living creatures" (Tehillim 145:16), in this manner. Based upon the translation, it should have, instead, read, U'masbia ratzon l'chol chai." What role does the word, ratzon, play at the end of the pasuk? He says that the word, ratzon, is similar to the phrase, yehi ratzon milfanecha, "the matter should be pleasing to You." Parnassah is derived when Hashem grants an individual favor in another person's eyes. Whether it is the poor man at the door, the teacher in school, the physician in the office, or the fundraiser - they all need ratzon to make it. This favor is Hashem's way of granting us parnassah, but we must believe that parnassah comes from Hashem. One who cheats denies Hashem's Providence.

We should be extremely careful with someone else's money. The Brisker Rav, zl, asked, "What prompted Yosef to give their money back to the brothers, and place it discreetly in their sacks? He answered, 'Because he wanted to be certain that they would return to Egypt.'" Someone who was present at the Rav's Chumash shiur, lesson, asked, "But they would have to return because of the famine. Their need for sustenance would have been a prime motivator. And besides, their brother, Shimon, was being held captive. They could not ignore him. Why did Yosef find it necessary to put money in their sacks to make sure that they would return?"

The Brisker Rav replied, "The ten brothers were Shivtei Kah, the forebears of Klal Yisrael. We have no way of grasping their level of bitachon, trust, in Hashem. Yosef conjectured that as a result of their profound bitachon, they might decide to remain at home for the duration of the famine. They trusted that Hashem would neither forsake them nor forsake Shimon. Eventually, Hashem would have him released from prison. Yosef, however, was acutely aware of one thing: If his brothers had money in their possession that was not theirs - they would immediately return. Shivtei Kah would never keep any money that was not by halachic rights theirs. That is why they would return."

We have to ask ourselves: How far have we deviated from such lofty standards?

For the Cloud of Hashem would be on the Mishkan by day, and the fire would be on it by night, before the eyes of all the Bnei Yisrael throughout their journeys. (40:38)

In his preface to Sefer Shemos, Ramban writes that the second book of the Chamishah Chumshei Torah is dedicated to the subject of the first galus, exile experienced by the Jewish People, and their geulah, redemption, from

it. He posits that the Egyptian exile did not end until the day that Klal Yisrael returned to the location and stature of their forefathers. Thus, when they left Egypt, they might have been leaving the "house of bondage," but they were still considered exiles. They were wanderers in a wilderness, travelers in a land not their own. They were not yet home. When they arrived at Har Sinai and later constructed the Mishkan, with Hashem's Presence eventually dwelling among them, they finally returned to the eminence of their forefathers. Only then were they considered geulim, liberated from their exile. This is why Sefer Shemos concludes with its completion of the subject of the Mishkan and with the glory of Hashem filling it always.

In Parashas Terumah (25:2), Ramban explains what he refers to as "the secret of the Mishkan": The glory of Hashem's Presence, which was revealed openly at Har Sinai, was always present in the Mishkan in a concealed manner. Numerous parallels exist between Har Sinai and the Mishkan, reflecting the concept of the Mishkan as an extension of Har Sinai.

We no longer have the Mishkan or the Bais Hamikdash. This means that we are in galus, since we no longer have that place which is suitable for hashroas haShechinah, an abode for the Divine Presence. While we cannot catalyze the collective, general geulah for all of Klal Yisrael, each and every individual can create within himself a veritable Mishkan. The Torah in Parashas Terumah (Shemos 25:8) says, V'asu Li Mikdash, v'shochanti b'socham, "They shall make for Me a Sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them." It should have said, b'socho, "in it." This prompts the Sages to derive an all important lesson: Hashem resides within each and every one of us. We must let Him in. We must give Him the space. How do we do that? V'asu Li Mikdash, "Make for Me a Sanctuary." When we act for Hashem, when our intentions are solely to conform with His demands; to glorify Him, then we become a Mishkan - and the galus is over! In other words, it is not where you are - it is what you have become!

The following vignette sheds light on the meaning of becoming a veritable Mishkan for Hashem. When Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, was a young child, he davened in the shul of Rav Moshe Datnover, in Baltimore, MD. He was also a playmate of Rav Moshe's children. When Horav Shimon Shkop, zl, the venerable Rosh Yeshivah of Grodno and Telshe came to America, he visited with his talmid, student, Rav Moshe Datnover. After delivering the drashah, sermon, on Shabbos, Rav Shimon bentedched, blessed Rav Moshe's children. Since the young Rav Gifter was a friend of the family, Rav Moshe asked the Rosh Yeshivah to include him. Rav Shimon placed his hands on the young boy and said, ehr zol kennen lehrnen, "He should know how to learn." Rav Gifter would later describe the powerful impact these few words emanating from such a great man had on his life. Rav Shimon's face shone like that of a Heavenly Angel. Indeed, the Rosh Yeshivah, in his extreme humility, would say that if he had any connection to the accolade, kennen lehrnen, it was attributable to Rav Shimon's brachah.

Upon hearing the Rosh Yeshivah relate the incident in the yeshivah dining room, a Kollel fellow escorted the Rosh Yeshivah and the Rebbetzin out, commenting, "Halevai, if only, I would be zoche, merit, to bring my son to the Rosh Yeshivah for a blessing, ehr zol kennen lehrnen." In his inimitable manner, the Rosh Yeshivah countered, "What is stopping you?" The Rebbetzin quickly interjected with the reply, "He does not have any children." Apparently, they had been married for some time and had not yet been blessed with a child. Rav Gifter looked at him and said, "But avada, certainly, you will have children - avada and avada!" and with those parting words, the Rosh Yeshivah went home. The Rebbetzin turned to the young man and said, "You will see. Within the year, you will be blessed with a son."

At the end of that month, the young couple was notified that, indeed, they would in the near future be blessed with a child. This young man immediately went to Rav Gifter and asked, "How did the Rosh Yeshivah know?" The Rosh Yeshivah replied, "You probably think it was a mofeis, a miraculous wonder, due to a tzaddik's blessing. Dos is nisht geven kein mofeis, "It was not a mofeis. You are someone who seeks a son for one purpose: To raise him l'Torah u'le'yirah, to study Torah and be G-d-fearing.

That is exactly what Hashem Yisborach wants. So, if you want the same thing that Hashem wants, why would He not give it to you? That is what I meant when I said avada!"

Months later, the proud young father brought his newborn son directly from the hospital to the Rosh Yeshivah's house to collect his brachah.

Aside from the characterization of Rav Gifter to which this episode alludes, it teaches us the principle of how one transforms himself into a Mishkan: he coincides his ratzon, will, with that of Hashem. It is as simple as that. I want what Hashem wants. Thus, I become one with the Almighty. This is what is meant by v'shochanti b'socham, "I will dwell within 'them.'"

Laasos nekamah ba'goyim... hadar hu l'chol chasidav.

To effect revenge against certain nations... that will be the splendor of all His devoted ones.

The progression of the pesukim imply that by taking revenge against the gentiles, it becomes a hadar, splendor, for Hashem's Chassidim. Why? The Gaon, zl, m'Vilna, explains that an individual's perfection is not achieved, and, likewise, not noticed, unless he possesses two contrasting qualities. For example, he is endowed with the attribute of compassion. Also the middah, quality, of achzarius, cruelty, is dominant in his life. Thus, one might posit that an individual who is only compassionate is not acting out of respect for Hashem's dictate, but rather, as a result of his inherent nature. He is a rachaman, compassionate person. If, however, by nature he is also a cruel-hearted person, and he goes against his grain to act compassionately, then he is truly performing Hashem's Will. He is a veritable tzaddik, righteous person. He is contending with his inborn character trait of cruelty and acting with compassion towards all of Hashem's creatures. Thus, when Chassidim, who usually act with compassion for all of Hashem's creatures go against their natural grain and exact vengeance against Hashem's enemies, this is for them a hadar, splendor, because they are acting solely to execute the will of Hashem.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand on Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei

"Please Contribute" Preceded By The Command To Observe Shabbos

Parshas Vayakhel marks the fruition of the instructions provided in Parshas Terumah and Tezaveh. On a theoretical level, the earlier parshios spell out the structure of the Mishkan [Tabernacle], its various utensils, and the uniform of those who use those utensils and serve in the Mishkan. In this week's Parsha, it is finally time to "pay up". This is the intent of the section introduced with the words:

Moshe said to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel, saying: "This is the word that Hashem commanded, saying: Take from yourselves a portion for Hashem, everyone who is generous of heart shall bring it, as the gift for Hashem: gold and silver and copper..." [Shmos 35:4-10]

Our parsha should logically begin with these words, asking for donations to the Mishkan building fund. However, our parsha begins (after an introductory pasuk [verse] stating that Moshe gathered the people to tell them the things Hashem commanded) with a two sentence section which is almost entirely off topic from the subject matter at hand:

Six days work shall be done but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem; whoever does work on it shall be put to death. You shall light no fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day. [Shmos 35:2-3]

The Shabbos laws were already mentioned in greater detail in last week's parsha [31:12-17]. The repetition this week, at the beginning of Vayakhel, seems totally redundant. Why is it necessary to begin the section dealing with donating money to the Mishkan with this brief preamble telling us about Shabbos?

Many commentaries deal with this question. Rav Naiman notes in his sefer Darkei Mussar a peculiarity in the expression "sheshes yamim tay-a-seh melacha" which literally means "six days WORK SHALL BE DONE". A more common expression (as we indeed find elsewhere in the Torah) is "shashes yamim ta-a-seh melachtecha" (six days YOU SHALL DO YOUR

WORK). It is peculiar to use the passive form of the verb for doing work. The Darkei Mussar suggests that by use of this expression, the Torah is teaching us a fundamental rule for anyone who is engaged in earning a livelihood: The amount of money a person makes is NOT commensurate with the amount of effort he puts into his job.

A person is indeed required to make an effort to earn a living and support a family. One who does not make that effort and expects "mann" from heaven will be disappointed! However it is flawed to mentally make the equation that "the more work I do the more money I will make." It does not work like that.

The Almighty decides what each of us should earn. We can exhaust ourselves in our professions and either we will not succeed in earning as much as we feel we should earn or we perhaps will earn all that money and then lose it due to unforeseen expenses or poor investments, or a variety of other "unforeseen" circumstances. On the other hand, we can exert the normal amount of effort and the Almighty may bless the actions of our hands and we may earn large sums of money, far greater than what others who work much harder than we do earn. This is a fundamental belief in our religion and it really is what Sabbath observance is all about. Common wisdom is that "Of course if one works seven days a week, he will make more money than if he works six days a week." And yet, the Torah commands us to work only six days. If the Almighty wants to bestow upon us a certain degree of financial success, he will bestow it to us whether we expend six days of effort to earn it or we expend seven days of effort to earn it.

On a macro scale, this is what the mitzvah of Shmitah (in Parshas Behar) is all about. It may not be such a big deal to take off one day a week, but it is a big deal to take off one year in every seven. What will happen to the farmer if he does not labor in the field during that seventh year? The fundamental reason behind the mitzvah to observe the Sabbatical year of the agricultural cycle is to recognize that one's livelihood (parnassah) comes from the Almighty. He gives us His Promise that He will take care of us!

This is why the Torah here states "For six days work SHALL BE DONE". The work must be done, but one should not think "you shall do work". The "you" is not what gets the job done, it is the "He" that gets the job done and allows "you" to earn a living.

This is the necessary preamble to asking the people to donate funds for the construction of the Mishkan and its associated vessels. Whenever people are approached for giving charity - whether for institutions or for individuals - it is hard for them to write the check. It is always challenging because "where is the money going to come from?"

It was in order to address this perennial question that Moshe prefaced the chapter asking the Children of Israel to contribute to the Mishkan building fund with the mitzvah to observe Shabbos and specifically with the expression: Six days work SHALL BE DONE. This expression teaches that money is earned based on what G-d wills. After establishing the principle that in six days a person can earn the same amount that he would earn in seven days (because everything he earns comes from the Almighty), Moshe can proceed to ask for donations of gold, silver, copper, and so on.

It was first necessary to remove the people's anxiety and assure them that in the final analysis their donations would not cost them anything. As the Rambam writes in Mishneh Torah, "no one becomes poor from giving charity." Only then did Moshe ask for contributions to the Mishkan.

Yes, We've Heard of Chur, But Who Was Uri?

Chapter 35 pasuk 30 contains a repetition of something taught previously: "See, Hashem has proclaimed by name, Bezalel son of Uri, son of Chur of the tribe of Yehudah." Bezalel was the general contractor of the entire project relating to the construction of the Mishkan. He oversaw all of the artistic creation and the rigorous compliance with the specifications spelled out in the portions of Terumah and Tezaveh.

The Torah emphasizes Bezalel's genealogy by tracing it back three generations. Rashi quotes the Medrash explaining the reason for including Chur, Bezalel's grandfather, in this lineage. The Medrash explains that Chur became a martyr while protesting the desire of the Jewish people to

build a Golden Calf when Moshe was apparently delayed in descending from Mt. Sinai after forty days absence. The Medrash says that the Almighty swore to Chur that he would be paid back for his devotion and promises that his descendants would be prominent leaders of the community.

It is true that Bezalel made a name for himself. Bezalel the great artisan is well known. But what about Uri? No one seems to have heard anything about Chur's son, Uri, who was Bezalel's father. What happened to G-d's promise that Chur's descendants would be special people regarding Chur's own son, Uri?

The answer is that the Almighty has a very long memory. In human terms, we expect instant gratification and we expect a Divine Promise to be fulfilled immediately. This is not necessarily how the Almighty works. The promise might not be fulfilled in a single generation. It might take two generations. It might take four generations. With the Master of the Universe's broad perspective of time, promises may be fulfilled only many years later.

To an extent, this phenomenon explains a common problem. Sometimes we see a wonderful person - an outstanding Torah personality - who comes from very unexceptional parents. We may ask ourselves, "Where did such a person come from?" There are famous families where Torah greatness seems to be almost automatically passed on from generation to generation. But there are other individuals where greatness seems to have sprung out of nowhere. "Where did he come from?" we may ask ourselves.

Our problem is that we see only one generation. We look at the person's parents and are surprised by the son's greatness. However, it is quite possible that the greatness stems not so much from the parents but from a grandparent or even a great grandparent or great great grandparent that perhaps the child may have never even known! The self-sacrifice and dedication for this great Jew of antiquity may have earned him an illustrious descendant whose time to make an appearance has only now arrived.

The lesson of Bezalel ben Uri ben Chur is that greatness itself may be a "recessive gene". Chur was a great individual, who gave his life in self-sacrifice for the Almighty. That greatness was passed down through his son Uri, but clearly manifested itself only two generations later in his grandson, Bezalel.

This idea may be an important source of inspiration to educators in Day Schools where the student population does not come from the most observant and Jewishly committed sets of parents. One may be tempted to ask, what can I expect from such students? Look who their parents are! However, one needs to look beyond the parents. All these students have or had grandparents and great grandparents, some of whom or even many of whom were very righteous and learned individuals. Perhaps, for whatever reasons, the Almighty did not reward them with children who completely followed in their footsteps. Perhaps, over the years, their children and grandchildren have deviated a great deal from the path and lifestyles of their ancestors. But maybe, just maybe, the Heavenly Payback time has come for the reward due for the dedication and self-sacrifice of those previous pious generations. Maybe given the proper education and the proper attention, these young students will grow up to embody the values and commitment of their ancestors. Maybe, just maybe, their success and achievements will be the reward that the One who is beyond time has in Mind for those pious Jews of yesteryear.

Maybe Uri was not so special, but the grandfather named Chur explains the success and achievements of the young man named Bezalel. Do not ever write off a kid because of the way he looks or the way his father looks.

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

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In the final Torah portion that details the completion of the Mishkan, an expression that describes the accomplishment is repeated over and over. In fact, the descriptive assertion is repeated no less than eighteen times!

After the Torah details the completion of each utensil, component, or vestment necessary to finish the Mishkan and begin the service, the Torah uses an expression that declares that they were made "exactly as Hashem commanded Moshe."

Again and again the Torah repeats the expression almost verbatim. First, the Torah uses the expression in a general sense when telling us how the vestments were made: "exactly as Hashem commanded Moshe." Then it is used again when detailing each garment. The Ephod and its garters, "were made exactly as Hashem commanded Moshe;" the Choshen and its stone setting were made "exactly as Hashem commanded Moshe."

The same applies to the vessels of the Mishkan. In addition to a general statement that everything was crafted "exactly as Hashem commanded Moshe," the Torah reiterates the expression of perfect conformity in regard to each of the utensils. This goes on for almost every component of the Mishkan!

Why? Would it not have been enough to begin or end the summary with one proclamation that everything was crafted "exactly as Hashem commanded Moshe"? Why restate it so often?

Rabbi Zev Wilenski, shli"ta, recited that a student of Rabbi Boruch Ber Lebowitz, z"l, had undertaken to transcribe the notes of the revered sage to prepare them for print. This work would eventually be known as the Birkas Shmuel, one of the classic exegetical works on Talmudic Law.

As the student reviewed the work, he noticed a seeming redundancy of the titles mentioned about Rabbi Yitzchok Zev Soleveitchik, the Brisker Rav who was a son of Rabbi Lebowitz's own teacher Rabbi Chaim Soleveitchik, and revered as well, by Rabbi Lebowitz.

Each time that Rabbi Lebowitz quoted him, he would preface Rabbi Soleveitchik's name with all due titles and accolades, "the true Gaon, Rebbe and Teacher of all of Israel, The Gaon of Brisk, he should live to see long and good days."

Even three or four times in one paragraph, Rabbi Lebowitz would repeat the words, each preceded with a slew of praise and reverence, "the true Gaon, Rebbe and Teacher of all of Israel, The Gaon of Brisk, he should live to see long and good days."

The next time that Rabbi Soleveitchik was quoted in the works, the student, in the interest of brevity, decided to leave out the seemingly supplementary appellations. Instead he wrote, My Rebbe, the great sage, Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soleveitchik, shlit"a.

Upon reviewing the work, Rabbi Lebowitz was visibly shaken. "Why did you leave off the introductory appellations?" "But, Rebbe," countered Rabbi Lebowitz's student, "I mentioned them the first time. Must I repeat them every single time?"

Rabbi Lebowitz was dismayed. "Why am I publishing this book?" he asked in true sincerity. "What do I have from it? Honor? Money? Of course not! I wrote this work so that a student will understand how to learn a Rashba (a medieval commentator) or to understand the Rambam."

He paused. "The same way that I want them to understand the text, I also want them to understand to appreciate the greatness of the Rebbe. I want them to see and understand that Rav Yitzchak Zev is "the true Gaon, Rebbe and Teacher of all of Israel."

Perhaps the lesson imparted by each and every action of the Mishkan warrants the Torah's declaration of perfect conformity for a generalized statement does not impact as much as reiteration.

The Torah is mindful that just as we hammer the facts of dimensions and specifications into our minds, just as we ponder the intricacies of the cups and flowers of the Menorah, the forms and staves of the Table of Showbread, the various stones of the Choshen and their placement inside their settings, so too there is one detail we must not miss. And this detail applies with a freshness for every Mishkan-related activity: each was exactly as Hashem commanded Moshe.

Matzav.com

Parsha Parables On Parshas Pekudei

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky (Matzav.com)

Moses is described as the “safra rabah, the great scribe of Israel” (Sotah 13b). Moses was surely a scribe in the technical sense; as Rambam noted in his Introduction to the Mishneh Torah, Moses wrote a Torah scroll for each of the twelve tribes and one to be placed in the Holy Ark. The reference here, however, is not to Moses’ technical skill or superior handwriting. The reference is to the art of writing God’s living word upon a sensitive, passionate heart, the art of projecting God’s fiery and flaming letters upon the blank patches and uncharted lanes of human memory, the art of impressing God’s image upon the receptive and questing human personality. Moses was called “Safra rabah de-Yisrael” because he was a scribe in the same sense in which Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu is referred to in the Sefer Yezirah, “Be-sheloshah devarim ha-olam nivra: be-sefer, be-sofer, be-sipur, the world was created by a Scribe who wrote a book with a story.”

According to the Kuzari (4:25), when the Torah repeatedly mentions “And God said,” it refers to the act of sipur, the result of which was the sefer of all of creation. It was the word of God that created the world and which is embedded in nature and continues to drive it. If the flowers bloom, the birds fly, man walks, and the heavenly bodies remain in motion, it is because this is the will of God. Moses earned the title of the great scribe in Israel because the Torah he taught was inscribed on the parchment of the hearts and souls of the people so that they might act as the scribes that would teach the next generation. Just as the original word of God continues to drive nature, so, too, the Torah that Moses taught in the desert is as alive for us today as it was thousands of years ago.

Megillat Ester refers to itself first as an iggeret, a letter (Es. 9:26, 29), and later as a sefer, a book (Es. 9:30, 32). There are significant differences between these two forms of writing. A letter is written for a temporary purpose. In contrast, a sefer refers to a text that is meant to endure, to survive and communicate to future generations. For example, the prophet Jeremiah commands that the contracts for sale of land be written in a sefer and placed in earthen vessels so that they will last a long time (Jer. 32:10–14). A sefer documents an event for present and future generations. Similarly, God commanded Moses to document the eternal conflict between God and Amalek in a sefer and transmit it to Joshua (Ex. 17:14).

The obligation of sipur Yetzi’at Mitzrayim is the obligation to view one’s child as a sefer to be written with care and not as an iggeret. A Jew must feel that he has participated in the entire collective Jewish experience, and he must inscribe this knowledge into the book that is his child—it is the child who is the sefer upon whom the parent writes the history of God’s encounter with the Jewish people.

The night of Pesach is a symbol for this intergenerational transmission process. We are all familiar with the story of the great rabbis who were assembled in Bene-Berak and were involved in sipur Yetzi’at Mitzrayim all that night until dawn. The “night” symbolizes the long, dark exile that we have endured for two thousand years; the long night of pogroms and blood libels and crusades and inquisitions and Holocaust that we have suffered. Not only were Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Tarfon, and Rabbi Joshua at that table, but the great Gedolei Yisrael throughout the ages were present as well.

Yet despite all the difficulties, Gedolei Yisrael recognized that they had a mission to serve as the scribes of their generation, not in terms of writing books, but as scribes that engrave a love of Torah in the heart of each Jew. Gedolei Yisrael carried the burden, and transmitted their Torah as an intergenerational Sefer and not as a fleeting iggeret. They seized on the method God uses, the sipur be-sefer, writing on the book of creation, to ensure the continuity of faith in God and the eternity of the Jewish people. The Torah remains alive to us today because of them. If not for their efforts, we would not be able to sit at our Seder table and discuss the Exodus on the night of Pesach. Jews are called the Am ha-Sefer, the people of the book, not because they are avid readers, but because each and every Jew is a living book that has been authored by the preceding generations.

Excerpted from An Exalted Evening: The Seder Night by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.

More information on the book can be found here: <http://www.ou.org/books>

Rabbi Mordechai Willig – Separation The TorahWeb Foundation

In Parshas HaChodesh, the emphasis on the home is remarkable. A lamb is taken for each household (Shemos 12:3). The blood is placed at the entrance of the house (12:7) and serves as a sign on the house so that Hashem will pass over it (12:13). Subsequently, Moshe commands not to leave the entrance of the house (12:22) and promises that Hashem will not permit the destroyer to enter the home (12:23).

The Be’er Yosef explains that the home represents separation. He cites the Yalkut Shimoni (Va’Eschanan 828) which compares the Exodus to a birth. Hashem took a nation from amidst (mikerev) a nation (Devarim 4:34), as one takes a newborn from the innards of its mother (see Vayikra 1:9; Rashi Bereshis 18:12). Moreover, the two nations were similar, both uncircumcised and sporting identical provocative hairstyles.

Birth is impossible unless the fetus begins to separate from its mother’s womb. As long as Am Yisroel worshiped idols and were uncircumcised, the birth, i.e. the Exodus, could not take place. Therefore Hashem commanded that they circumcise and stop worshiping idols (Rashi Shemos 12:6).

The final step in this critical separation was the Korban Pesach. The slaughter of the lamb, the Egyptian deity, would uproot any vestige of this idolatry from the hearts of Am Yisroel. No Egyptian could eat it (Shemos 12:43), and the blood near the door would deter entry into the home in which it was eaten. The prohibition to leave the home prevented any contact or conversation with the Egyptians on that night.

Eating together brings people’s hearts close to one another (Sanhedrin 103b). Our eating the lamb together with our families and neighbors helped to establish us as a nation and separate us from the Egyptians who could not eat it with us. This separation made the birth of the Exodus possible.

Our distinctiveness included maintaining our own names and language (Vayikra Rabba 32:5). The need for distinctive names and language subsequent to matan Torah, when the many mitzvos of the Torah distinguish us, is questionable (see Igros Moshe O.C. 4:66). However, adopting the customs of the nations which have immoral overtones, such as the aforementioned non-Jewish hairstyles, is prohibited (Vayikra 18:3, see Shulchan Aruch Y.D. 178:1). Theaters and stadiums which exhibit lewd or violent entertainment are likewise prohibited (Rashi).

The temptations of the street are particularly dangerous in advanced societies, such as Egypt of then and western culture today. The openness of western society and its ostensible acceptance of Jews as equals have entrapped millions of our brothers and sisters since the Enlightenment. Inter-marriage, assimilation, and wholesale abandonment of Judaism continue unabated.

Even observant Jews face new and insidious challenges. The Torah home, the fortress of our nation since Egypt, is more vulnerable and permeable than ever. The twin nemeses of post-modernism and feminism have wreaked havoc with our traditional family and communal structure. This latest zeitgeist often coexists initially with Torah observance, only to undermine religious fervor, and even basic practice, in relatively short order. This painful phenomenon is most pronounced, ironically, in the Holy Land.

These dangers have reached all segments of Orthodoxy, but are most prevalent among modernists who adopt not only the latest technology but also society’s newest mores. One can hardly raise a new generation of Torah Jews with today’s rampant nonjudgmentalism. A Jewish home whose walls have been penetrated by an ever increasing array of electronics, featuring uncensored entertainment and unlimited communication, is hardly a bastion of faith.

Today, as then, we are a nation within a nation, enmeshed and similar, as our forefathers were in Egypt. Our redemption, and indeed our survival, requires a measure of separation, now as then. The Jewish home and community must learn and internalize the eternal lesson of Parshas HaChodesh.

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Zman Cheiruseinu: An Independence Day Celebration?

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski

The TorahWeb Foundation

I learned much from working with an addicted population.

I know how you celebrate an Independence Day. Parades, picnics, hot-dogs, patriotic speeches, and fireworks—that's it. Whoever heard of an Independence Day that lasts a week, and for which you must prepare weeks in advance, cleaning the house and sterilizing the kitchen as if it were an operating room? That's a bit of an overkill for an Independence Day, isn't it?

Oh, well. Jews like to do things differently. But then, every Friday night we say in Kiddush that Shabbat is in commemoration of our deliverance from Egypt. We don't invoke July 4 every week!

But we're not finished yet. Tefillin and tzitzis are in commemoration of our deliverance from Egypt. Now it's a daily thing! In fact, many other mitzvos are in commemoration of our deliverance from Egypt. We must concede that as an Independence Day celebration, this is a bit much.

I came to the realization of what zman cheiruseinu is all about when a young man who was recovering from years of heavy drug addiction attended his father's seder. When his father began reciting the Haggadah, "Avadim hayinu," we were slaves to Pharaoh, the son interrupted him. "Abba," he said, "can you truthfully say that you yourself was a slave? I can tell you what it means to be a slave. All those years that I was on drugs, I was enslaved by drugs. I had no freedom. I did things that I never thought I was capable of doing, but I had no choice. The drugs demanded it, and I had to do it. Today I am a free person."

When the young man related this to me, Passover suddenly took on an entirely new meaning. Yes, we can be slaves to a tyrannical ruler. But we can also be slaves to drugs, to alcohol, to cigarettes, to food, to lust or to gambling. Any time we lose control of our behavior, we are slaves. If we are not in control of our anger, we are slaves to anger. People who cannot detach themselves from the office are slaves to it. A person can be a slave to making money or to pursuing acclaim. These are enslavements that are no less ruthless than being slaves to Pharaoh. We may surrender our precious freedom and allow our drives and impulses to exercise a tyrannical rule over us.

It is now clear what zman cheiruseinu is all about. It is much more than political independence, and we can see why we are reminded of this not only during the week of Passover, but every Friday night and even multiple times during each day. We are at all times at risk of surrendering our precious independence and allowing ourselves to become enslaved.

Make no mistake. A slave cannot exercise proper judgment and has no free choice. A person who wants to live and knows that cigarettes can kill him but is unable to stop smoking is a slave, and this is true of many behaviors which we may not consider addictions. Our thinking becomes distorted, as I explained in Addictive Thinking, and we rationalize our self-destructive behavior.

The young man's comment to his father's reading of the Haggadah stimulate me to write a commentary, the Haggadah From Bondage to Freedom, in which I pointed out that far from bring a narrative of an historical event, the Haggadah is a text of identifying our addictive behaviors and a guideline on how to break loose from these enslavements and be free people.

Animals are not free. They can not make a choice between right and wrong. They must do what their body desires. The uniqueness of man is that we are free to choose how to act. "Give me liberty or give me death" is

more than a patriotic declaration. To the degree that we lose our freedom to choose, to that degree an element of our humanity dies.

The teaching of Passover is to cherish freedom and not to submit to tyranny, even to the tyranny within ourselves.

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Hama'ayan (torah.org)

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The Midrash Rabbah on Sefer Shmot concludes by describing the joy that accompanied the completion of the Mishkan—in our parashah—and the Bet Hamikdash—approximately 480 years later. The midrash continues: When the Bet Hamikdash was destroyed, simchah / gladness and mesos / joy ceased (literally, "simchah was darkened and mesos was exiled"). In this world, the midrash states, joy has ceased. However, when Ha'kadosh Baruch Hu will rebuild Yerushalayim, he will return to it all of the gladness, as it is written (Yeshayah 51:3), "For Hashem shall comfort Zion, He shall comfort all her ruins, He shall make her wilderness like Eden and her wasteland like a garden of Hashem; sassion and simchah shall be found there, thanksgiving and the sound of music." [Thus concludes Midrash Shmot Rabbah.]

R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Yadler z"l (1843-1917; Yerushalayim) writes: The midrash states that Hashem will return to Yerushalayim all of the gladness that it lost during the long exile. The midrash is teaching that, at the End of Days, we will retroactively understand how everything that happened was good, and this will bring us joy. [Ed. note: One analogy that can help us understand this idea is a patient undergoing surgery. To a bystander who does not understand the reason for the procedure, the surgeon looks like a knife-wielding attacker. The patient, however, is happy that he is being cured. (Heard from R' Zev Leff shlita-16 Shevat 5770)]

R' Yadler continues: The verse cited by the midrash appears to be redundant: "For Hashem shall comfort Zion, He shall comfort all her ruins." In reality, the verse is expressing the same idea. We will be doubly-comforted, once by the fact that Yerushalayim has been rebuilt, and once by the realization that every bad that ever happened was a necessary prerequisite to the redemption. (Tiferet Zion)

"The people ceased bringing" (36:6)

The Ba'al Ha'turim z"l (14th century) notes that the word "va'yi'kalei" (meaning "ceased") appears twice in the Torah, once here and once in the verse (Bereishit 8:2), "Va'yi'kalei ha'geshem" / "The rain ceased."

What is the significance of the similar wording of these two verses? R' Yosef Pazanovski z"l (Poland; died 1930) writes: I heard in the name of R' Shimon Sofer z"l that the verse is alluding to human nature. When the "rain" ceases, i.e., when the economy takes a downturn, the people cease to bring, i.e., people give less charity. (Pardes Yosef)

R' Avraham Yaakov Pam z"l (1913-2001; rosh hayeshiva of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas in Brooklyn) elaborates: Maggidim / preachers like to say that the phenomenon referred to by the Pardes Yosef is also alluded to in the verse (Yeshayah 44:6), "I [G-d] am first, and I am last." When the economy is bad, G-d, i.e., charitable giving and Torah institutions, is the first to suffer. When the economy improves, G-d, i.e., charitable giving and Torah institutions, is the last to recover.

R' Pam continues: At first glance, it is logical for a person to think that he must cut back his charitable giving when he is suffering. [Needless to say, the following is not addressed to those who are truly in need.] The Torah, however, expects the opposite. In bad times, we must give more. Why? The Gemara (Ketubot 66b) as explained by Rashi z"l states expressly that the way to increase one's wealth is to "invest" in charity. This implies that the reason for an economic downturn is our own failure to give charity as we should.

We read (Malachi 3:9 -- in the haftarah for Shabbat Ha'gadol), "You are afflicted with a curse, yet you steal from Me." Commentaries explain that Hashem is expressing wonder, so-to-speak: "You failed to give tithes, so you were cursed, and now you are making it up from My share [i.e., charity]?"

R' Pam concludes: We are all believers, so why is it that our belief weakens in tough times? The answer must be that our emunah / faith is of the type that Rambam z"l calls, "Emunah sh'yeish ba dofi" / faith that has a blemish." Even if we have emunah, there are higher levels to strive for. Our challenge in these times is to strengthen our own faith. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Mareh Kohen p.1)

Shabbat

"You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day." (35:3)

R' Yeshayah Halevi Horowitz z"l (the Shelah Hakadosh; rabbi of Prague and Yerushalayim; died 1630) writes: This alludes to the fires of machloket / disputes and ka'as / anger. A person must always be careful not to kindle these fires, but especially on Shabbat. On Shabbat, the "fires" of gehinom do not burn, but one who gets angry on Shabbat or causes machloket causes them to be rekindled, G-d forbid. (Shnei Luchot Ha'berit: Torah Shebichtav)

R' Chaim Hakohen z"l (rabbi of Aleppo, Syria; died 1655) explains further: The verse instructs, "You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day." Man's essence is his soul, his body is his dwelling, and "fire" includes the fire of anger. [Thus, the instruction not to get angry on Shabbat is not merely a derashah; it is literally included in this verse.]

He continues: Halachah forbids lighting a fire late on Friday afternoon unless there is sufficient time for the flames to take hold of the wood before Shabbat begins. This is also a hint that one should take care not to initiate an argument on Erev Shabbat. [See further below.]

What can one do if he is already angry? From the above analogy we learn that it is permitted to maintain a well-burning fire on Shabbat. This refers to Torah study, about which we read (Yirmiyah 23:29), "Behold, My word is like fire, so says Hashem . . ." The antidote to anger is Torah study, preferably a relatively light topic that will draw the person in and not make him more excitable. (Mekor Chaim, siman 255)

Why are many people more susceptible to anger on Erev Shabbat? One explanation is that the more holy something is, the harder the yetzer hara works to oppose it. Given the holiness of Shabbat, the yetzer hara tries very hard to interrupt Shabbat preparations and upset the restfulness of the day. (Kuntreis Matanah Tovah p.51)

Pesach

R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (the Maharal of Prague; died 1609) writes: The Exodus is the foundation of our faith on which everything else rests. This refers, not to the miracles that occurred in connection with that event, but to the mere fact that there was an Exodus, as will be explained below. Anyone who believes that there was ever in Jewish history a greater miracle than the Exodus is simply unaware of the Torah's viewpoint on the matter, writes Maharal.

The midrash analogizes Hashem's role in the Exodus to a goldsmith who reaches into the fire to remove the gold and also to a shepherd who reaches into an animal's womb to birth the offspring. Why does the midrash offer two analogies? Maharal explains that the Exodus must be seen from two perspectives.

First, like a goldsmith who reaches into the fire to remove the gold, Hashem reached into the most powerful nation on earth and freed its slaves. Second, like a shepherd who reaches into an animal's womb to birth the offspring, who is connected to the mother by an umbilical cord, Hashem separated Bnei Yisrael from their attachment to Egypt and freed them.

Maharal continues: Bnei Yisrael's existence in Egypt was deficient in two respects. First, they were slaves, not a free nation. That was a physical deficiency. Second, the descendants of Avraham Avinu were subjugated to

the most debased and immoral nation on earth. That was a spiritual deficiency.

The Exodus cured both of these deficiencies.

(Why was a lofty nation--Yisrael--enslaved specifically by the lowliest nation? Maharal explains that the inherent uniqueness of the Jewish People is an all-or-nothing proposition. Either we maintain our level or we fall to the lowest possible depths.) (Gevurot Hashem, chapters 3-4)

Why does Maharal mention in the explanation above that Bnei Yisrael are descendants of Avraham, as if that fact made their oppression at the hands of the Egyptians worse?

Perhaps it is because Avraham was the pillar of chessed / kindness, whereas the Egyptians, by oppressing Bnei Yisrael, turned their backs on the kindness that a Jew (Yosef) had done for them. Had Bnei Yisrael been a people with a callous nature, not a kind people, perhaps they would have suffered less from the ingratitude of the Egyptians. In fact, however, the Jewish People have inherited the trait of chessed from their ancestor Avraham.

"This is the day Hashem has made, let us rejoice and be glad `bo'."

(Tehilim 118:24 - included in Hallel)

The midrash states: I do not know whether "bo" means "with it" [i.e., the day] or with Him [i.e., Hashem]. Therefore King Shlomo writes (Shir Ha'shirim 1:4), "let us rejoice and be glad with You."

R' David Dov Meisels z"l (1814-1875; rabbi of Lask, Poland) explains: The midrash is teaching that, when a person experiences any type of salvation, his primary joy should not be over the salvation itself. Rather, it should be because the salvation means that G-d cares enough about the one who was saved to save him. (Haggadah Shel Pesach: Rei'ach Dudaim p.94)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at Torah.org start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the Hamaayan page.

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Psalm 104: Messengers and Servants

"[God] makes His messengers [to be] spirits, and His servants - burning fire." (Ps. 104:4)

The meaning of this verse is not clear. First, we must understand: what is the difference between a malach (a messenger) and a meshareit (a servant or minister)?

Prayer and Torah

A malach is a messenger who serves the king from afar, carrying out the king's orders throughout the kingdom. A meshareit, on the other hand, is a servant who works in proximity to the king, tending to his master's needs within the palace. Rav Kook explained that the verse describes not only God's celestial servants, but also His human servants. We serve God as malachim and meshartim, as messengers and servants. How?

When we pray, we reveal the holiness of our inner ratzon, our yearnings to be close to God and aspirations for holiness. Thus, as we stand in prayer, we are like servants in the king's palace. Regarding the service of prayer it says, "Fortunate are those who dwell in Your house" (Ps. 84:5). This is serving God "in His house" - within the realm of purity and holiness.

Our second path of serving God is through Torah study. Unlike prayer which is directed upwards, toward holy aspirations, Torah knowledge flows downwards, applying God's Will to mundane matters. Rabbis and scholars who immerse themselves in Torah study in order to apply its teachings to everyday life are like messengers who promulgate the king's decrees throughout the kingdom. Regarding this service of God it says, "Fortunate are those whose way is perfect, who walk with God's Torah" (Ps. 119:1). They travel throughout the kingdom, spreading God's word.

The Ferris Wheel

But what does it mean that God "makes His messengers to be spirits" and "His servants a burning fire"?

'Spirits' (ruchot) refer to spiritual aspirations - God's will. 'Burning fire,' on the other hand, refers to the clarity and brilliance of the intellect - specifically Torah wisdom - as it says, "Is not My word like fire?" (Jer. 23:29)

The verse describes a magic circle between these two modes of serving God. Torah leads to prayer, and prayer leads to Torah. A Ferris wheel ascending in prayer and returning down in Torah wisdom. How does this work?

We pray for many things - health, sustenance, redemption, peace, and so on. But the ultimate goal of our prayers is to merit Torah knowledge. All of our requests are only so that we will be able to study Torah in peace and quiet, as Maimonides wrote in the Mishneh Torah (Laws of Kings, 12:7). Concerning those who do not aspire to greater Torah knowledge, it is written, "One who turns his ear from hearing Torah - even his prayer is despised" (Proverbs 28:9).

Isaiah similarly decried the belief that it is possible to serve God only through prayer:

"Because this people have come close - with their mouths and their lips they honor Me, but their heart was distant from Me, and their fear of Me was that of people accustomed to following the Law." (Isaiah 29:13)

To serve God by rote and habit, without Torah wisdom and enlightenment, is a hollow and empty service. This is the service of prayer that does not seek Torah wisdom.

The Goal of Torah Study

And what about Torah study? While prayer reveals our inner aspirations, the goal of Torah study is to refine and elevate those aspirations.

It is crucial that this be the goal of our Torah learning. Torah study that is only for intellectual pleasure brought about the Temple's destruction and the exile. As the Sages taught, "Why was the Land lost? Because they did not recite a blessing before studying Torah" (Nedarim 81a). Why is so important to recite this blessing before Torah study? Because it reflects our awareness that the goal of our study is to learn and assimilate God's will.

Thus we see the interplay between these two modes of service. Prayer exists in the realm of our inner will, and aspires to higher wisdom. Torah exists in the realm of higher wisdom, and aspires to grasp God's Will and accordingly elevate our inner will.

Now we may properly understand the verse. God "makes His messengers [to be] spirits." He makes His messengers - those occupied in His Torah - to be ruchot, to cleave to God's Will. And He makes His servants, those who serve Him in prayer, "a burning fire" - they seek the fire of Torah wisdom. Then their prayer is not an unthinking service of rote and habit, and their Torah is not an abstract intellectual exercise.

When both of these activities are directed as they should be, the result is, as the verse continues, a stable Divine service: "He founded the land on its foundations so that it should never fall."

(Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. II, pp. 149-151)

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Weekly Halachah

Rabbi Doniel Neustadt (dneustadt@cordetroit.com)

Yoshev Rosh - Vaad HaRabanim of Detroit

Bein Adam Lchaveiro in the Classroom

Recently the seventh grade in Yeshivas Beis Yehudah in Detroit, taught by Rabbi Yehoshua Schwartz, submitted the following questions dealing with interpersonal relationships for halachic clarification:

Question: Is one person allowed to say to another, "This pizza shop makes better pizza than the other one"?

Discussion: If the statement is being made in response to an inquiry by someone who wants to buy pizza, then it is permitted to answer: "I like the

pizza in this particular store better," or "Such and such makes a superior product." Obviously, both of them need to take into account that different people have different tastes and what one likes another may dislike. Still, one may answer as to which pizza he likes better.

The same halachah applies if one is asked about the quality of service in one store vs. another, about the standard of kashrus, or about the tzenius of the proprietors or clientele. In all of these cases it is not only permitted but required to answer truthfully, without exaggeration, as to which establishment better meets the consumer's needs.

But merely speaking ill of a store's products or services needlessly can certainly be a violation of lashon ha-ra. Such negative comments can easily cause financial harm to the owner. Thus it would be forbidden to tell someone who has already bought pizza at a certain store that he purchased an inferior product, unless one is doing so to protect him for the future.

Question: How should a student answer his rebbe or principal if he is asked to point a finger at a wrongdoer?

Discussion: Generally speaking, a child should not be asked by his rebbe, teacher, or principal to point a finger at a wrongdoer because the severity of the prohibition of lashon ha-ra is thereby compromised in the child's eyes. In addition, a child who is forced by an authoritative figure to tattle on his classmates will be branded a tattle-tale and suffer the social consequences. A child who is instructed by a teacher to speak lashon ha-ra is not required to obey. If, however, the rebbe or principal feels that the information is vital for a beneficial and constructive purpose, it is permitted – and required – for the child to divulge that information.

Question: A teacher is pairing boys up to work on a project. Is a boy allowed to inquire about a potential partner to determine if he will be able to work well with him?

Discussion: As long as the information is being asked solely for the purpose of discovering whether or not the boy will be able to work together with Ploni, it is permitted to do so. Of course, the respondent must be very precise in the information that he gives – he may not exaggerate in any way, and he may not give a bad report in revenge, out of spite or for any other ulterior motive. In addition, the respondent must assume that there is a reasonable chance that the information will be acted upon by the one who asked for it. If it is likely to be ignored, it is forbidden to relay it.

Question: Can a boy tell his friend: "Don't shop in that store: the merchandise is overpriced?"

Discussion: It depends on the specific circumstances:

If a boy is asked by another boy what store has the best price for a specific item, he must answer truthfully, even if the questioner is about to enter a particular store which charges more for the item and the truthful answer will cause that establishment to lose the sale. Of course, before one declares one store to be more expensive than the other, he must make sure that he is not exaggerating and that he is not saying so because of revenge, out of spite or for any other ulterior motive. It is also forbidden to make statements like: "That store owner is a thief"; it is merely permitted to say that one can get a better buy elsewhere.

If one's advice about prices is not being solicited, he may not advise another person not to frequent a particular Jewish-owned store even though he knows that the other person will overpay as a consequence of his ignorance. The exception to this rule is if the other person is a relative or a particularly close friend. Then it is permitted - and required - to direct him to the cheaper store. This is because the Torah obligates us to protect our relatives' or best friends' financial interests. [In a situation where the overpriced store owner is also a relative or a close friend, one should not get involved and remain silent].

There are certain situations where it is permitted to warn potential customers about an establishment even when one's advice is not being solicited. One such example is when one knows with certainty that a particular storekeeper consistently deceives his customers and cheats the public. It goes without saying that one cannot arrive at such a determination without discussing the matter with a communal rav or a beis din. One should then receive their permission to disclose the storekeeper's dishonesty.

Question: Is it a less severe prohibition to speak loshon ha-ra about a child than about an adult?

Discussion: No, it is not. It is forbidden to speak loshon ha-ra about adults as well as children. Obviously, only something that would harm a child or cause him distress or embarrassment would be considered loshon ha-ra; relating normal childish antics is permitted, since this does not have a negative impact upon the child.

In a certain sense loshon ha-ra spoken about a minor could be worse than loshon ha-ra spoken about an adult. An adult has the halachic ability to grant mechillah (forgiveness); a minor may not be able to do so. Thus it may be more difficult to do teshuvah properly for speaking loshon ha-ra about a child than about an adult.

Question: Is it permitted for boys in a class to speak about a classmate's mental limitations?

Discussion: Obviously, a conversation about another person which involves discussing his weaknesses would be considered loshon ha-ra. But as we mentioned earlier, this is true only if the conversation is taking place for no reason other than to gossip. If, however, a class is looking for ways to help a fellow classmate who is struggling with his schoolwork, or if they are searching for a method to make him more social acceptable, it would be permitted to discuss his individual situation and to find ways to help him.

Question: A person asks a halachic question to a rav. Is it permitted for him to tell the rav, "I already asked Rav Ploni and he gave me a different ruling?"

Discussion: This is not considered loshon ha-ra since everyone is well aware that there are different opinions and that rabbonim may disagree.

There are certain types of questions, however, which – if submitted to one rav – may not be re-submitted to a different rav in order to obtain a more lenient ruling. This is a topic unto itself and requires a separate Halachah Discussion.

**Ohr Somayach :: TalmuDigest :: Sanhedrin 30 - 36
by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach
For the week ending 13 March 2010 / 26 Adar 5770**

The Radiant Sage - Sanhedrin 31b

"To the one whose face shines like the son of Batya."

This is how the Sage Mar Ukva was addressed in a letter sent to him as head of a rabbinical court in Babylon, requesting his cooperation in regard to a particular lawsuit.

Rashi offers two possibilities for this unusual title. One is that it is a reference to Moshe who was raised by Batya, the daughter of Pharaoh; and another is that it is a reference to the word bayti used in the tribute paid to Moshe by G-d that "In My entire house (bayti) he is the trusted one." (Bamidbar 12:7).

The skin on Moshe's face had become radiant when he descended from Mount Sinai (Shmot 34:29) and there was a sort of radiance in the face of the Sage Mar Ukva as indicated in the words of King Solomon that "a man's wisdom lights up his face." (Kohelet 8:1)

Although this approach suggests that it was the Sage's wisdom that created the radiance, another approach is mentioned by Rashi on the basis of an unnamed source:

Mar Ukva was a ba'al teshuva who became literally lovesick towards a married woman. The woman one day came to him in desperate need of a loan but he courageously withstood temptation and as a result he recovered from his illness and was rewarded with a Heavenly bestowed light shining from his face. It was these sparks of light that endowed Mar Ukva with the name Rabbi Natan Tzutzita (sparks) attached to him in Mesechta Shabbat (55b).

What the Sages Say

"Like a hammer splitting a rock" is the Prophet Yirmiyahu's poetic description of Torah. Just as the rock is split into many parts, so can one Torah passage offer a number of interpretations.

The Yeshiva of Rabbi Yisrael (according to Rashbam) - Sanhedrin 34a
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