"V'e'asu Li mikdash, veshachanti besocham – They shall make for Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell in their midst" (Shemos 25:8). This is how Hashem introduces the commandments to build the Mishkan. Moshe was standing on Har Sinai, in the midst of the greatest experience of the Divine Presence in history. In this setting, Hashem promises Moshe Rabbeinu that building the Mishkan could allow us to experience that Presence, the Shechinah. The common root of the two words hints at this connection.

The Midrash describes the Jews leaving Mount Sinai wearing three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of Priesthood and the crown of kingship. R. Shimon enumerates the same “crowns” and he adds a fourth – “the crown of a good name rests on all three.” These three crowns are similarly related to three of the utensils of the Beis Hamikdash. Three of the utensils had a crown-like ornament, called a zeir, decorating their tops: the mizbe'ach hazahav, the golden altar used for incense; the aron, the ark; and the shulchan, the table of showbread. The Gemara writes:

R’ Yochanan said “There were three crowns: that of the altar, that of the ark, and that of the table. The one of the altar, Aaron deserved and he received. The one of the ark, David deserved and received. The one of the ark is still lying and whoever wants to take it, may come and take it. Perhaps you might think it is a small matter, therefore the text reads: ‘In me kings will rule’. Rashi explains:

Three crowns: were made on the holy vessels. [The one] of the mizbe’ach, was a symbol of the crown of kohanim; of the aron, a symbol of the crown of Torah, and of the shulchan, was the symbol of kingship, for the table represented the wealth of kings.

This is how it should be written...: For the priesthood was given to Aharon and his sons as an eternal covenant. Similarly, kingship was given to David and his descendants.

In me kings will rule: And greater is the one who is ruled than the ruler. This verse speaks of the Torah.

The Gemara spells out a parallel between the Sinai experience and the Mishkan. Each involves three crowns, the mastery of the same three basic gifts. The mizbe’ach is where sacrificial service was performed, so it represents kohanim. The shulchan, containing one loaf of bread for each sheivet (tribe), shows fellowship between one Jew and another – gemillus chassadim. By symbolizing prosperity, it shows the king as an exemplar of proper use of the physical world.

But while the first two crowns were given as an inheritance, the Torah is available to anyone who will grasp it. The crown of the aron, which held the luchos (tablets) and the original sefer Torah, was not given to any one family. Yet, the crown of Torah is greater than the others. As Shelomo writes in the verse the Gemara quotes, even the king must rule from within the boundaries set by halachah.

Why are these three crowns so central to experiencing the Shechinah?

Shimon the Righteous was of the survivors of the Great Assembly. He often said, “Upon three things the world stands: on the Torah, on avodah — service [of G-d], and on gemillus chassadim — acts of loving-kindness.”

The Maharal explains, “you must understand that all creations depend on man. For they are created for man, and if men do not live up to what they ought to be, behold all is nullified.” The universe stands on these three principles because man does.

“Therefore, the godly tanna writes that one pillar on which the
It is generally difficult for weekly reviewers of the parashah to find significance in the orders of lists. However, there is definitely meaning to be deduced from the sequence of items. The following is the inventory of materials that were necessary to receive via donation for the construction of the Mishkan. As we shall see, the order of materials listed is quite significant.

“This is the portion that you shall take from them: gold, silver, and copper; and turquoise, purple and scarlet wool; linen and goat hair… shoham stones and stones for the settings, for the Ephod and the Breastplate” (Shemos 25:3-7). The stones discussed were precious, multi-colored stones that, seemingly, should have been listed along with the gold, silver and copper rather than after a long list of cloths, spices, etc. One would think that the place for precious stones is at the beginning with the precious metals. However, the Torah did not list them at the beginning. Why not?

In Parashas Vayakhel, the actual process of people bringing materials for the construction is described in detail. “The men came with the women; everyone whose heart motivated him brought bracelets, nose-rings, body-ornaments – all sorts of gold ornaments – every man who raised up an offering of gold to G-d. Every man with whom was found turquoise, purple, and scarlet wool,… brought them. Every man who separated a portion of silver or copper brought it as a portion for G-d… Every wise-hearted woman spun with her hands; and they brought the spun yarn… The leaders (hanesi’im) brought the shoham stones and the stones for the settings for the Ephod and the Breastplate” (Shemos 35:22-27). Once again, the order is significant. The leaders are listed after all of the people. Additionally, the Hebrew word for the leaders – hanesi’im – is spelled chaseir without a yud. Rashi quotes the midrash as explaining that the leaders had seen how enthusiastic everyone was about donating to the construction of the Mishkan so they had decided to wait until everyone donated what they could and then the leaders would fill any remaining needs. To their surprise and disappointment, the leaders found that the people brought everything that was necessary for the Mishkan so the leaders could only donate precious stones for the clothing of the Kohan Gadol. Thus, they gave last so the Torah mentions

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1 The Minchas Shai suggests that Torah should have written “and the leaders – vehanesi’im” and the absence of the vav is what the midrash intended to point out.
Mesukim Midevash

We have explored the standard formula for berachos in these pages in the past. However, the opening berachah of Shemoneh Esreih diverges from that norm. Berachos require “sheim umalchus”, mentioning both the names of G-d “Hashem E-lokeinu” as well the concept that He rules the world, “Melech ha’olam”.

However, this berachah, birkas Avos, does not continue with a direct reference to malchus. Instead, we say “Hashem E-lokeinu veE-lokei avoseinu, E-lokei Avraham, E-lokei Yitzchak veE-lokei Yaakov... – Hashem our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov...” The closing of the berachah similarly omits malchus, simply reading “Baruch ata Hashem, magen Avraham – Blessed are You, Hashem, the Protector of Avraham.”

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Sefasai Tiftach

Based on this, the Or HaChaim explains the order of the items listed in Parshas Terumah. Because the leaders delayed in bringing material and, in the end, only brought the stones, these precious stones were listed at the end of the sequence even though they should have rightfully been immediately after the gold, silver and copper. The leaders had good intentions, the Or HaChaim adds. They wanted to allow other people the chance to do the mitzvah of donating for the construction of the Mishkan. However, G-d was displeased because in doing this the leaders were neglecting their own opportunity to perform a mitzvah. This was improper and caused their names to be spelled defectively and their contributions to be listed last.

The Or HaChaim’s explanation is somewhat counter-intuitive. There was no actual obligation to donate to the Mishkan. Such contributions were only expected from the generous of heart, those who sincerely desired to give. Additionally, the leaders did not refrain from donating immediately out of selfish reasons, according to the Or HaChaim, but out of concern and deference to others. Let others have an opportunity to perform this mitzvah, they thought. Despite both of these factors, G-d still considered them to be at fault for not availing themselves of the opportunity to perform a mitzvah by donating to the Mishkan. Evidently, in this case the mitzvah bein adam laMakom, between man and G-d, took precedence over the mitzvah bein adam lachaveiro. They should not have deferred to their fellows but rather should have taken the opportunity for themselves.

This is surprising, not only because it is being quoted in a column ostensibly devoted to Mussar ideas, but because it runs counter to concepts with which we are familiar and about which we are frequently exhorted. Every generation has its own difficulties and ours is no exception. Some would suggest that our generation’s smallest successes lie in our treatment of our fellows, our mitzvos bein adam lachaveiro. For this reason, we are accustomed to hearing appeals from rabbinic figures to be more careful in our treatment of others. For example, we are reminded not to run to kiss the Torah if it means knocking other people and not to recite the Shemoneh Esreih loudly if it will disturb the concentration of others. Perhaps the primary talmudic example, one that is not entirely similar but is still worthy of mention, is the inability to perform a mitzvah with a stolen object. If a lulav is stolen then one cannot fulfill one’s obligation with that stolen object. Concern for one’s fellow does, indeed, seem to take precedence over, or at least demands consideration regarding, one’s obligations to G-d. Yet, from the Or HaChaim above, we see that this is not the case. The leaders should not have put other people’s opportunity for a mitzvah before their own.

The solution to this enigma, I believe, is simply that there is no easy answer. Like many aspects of life, one’s obligations to one’s fellow and one’s obligations to G-d frequently clash and the resolution is always difficult. The very concern over the difficulties and the heartaches over the contradictions are what is most important and, ultimately, heighten one’s concern for both aspects. To easily set aside one’s obligations to G-d or, in the other direction, to automatically override one’s obligations to one’s fellow is certainly wrong. While one direction must always win, at times one and at times another, and each decision must be rendered within the confines of halacha and, frequently, after consultation with a wise sage, true personal growth will come more from the struggle than from the conclusion.

2 Rashi, Shemos 35:27; Bamidbar Rabbah 12:16.
3 Shemos 25:7
4 Kaf HaChaim, Orach Chaim 149:10
5 Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 101:2
6 Sukkah 29b-30a
the G-d of someone. First E-lokeinu, our G-d, then E-lokei Avoseinu, our fathers’ G-d, and then by naming each forefather separately. How do these three clauses differ? If it were only that E-lokei Avoseinu adds a historical component to our relationship with Hashem, then the clause naming each forefather separately would be redundant.

The name “E-lokim” is used when G-d’s actions are similar to those a person would do when acting out of strict justice. E-lokim refers to the G-d of law. But there are two types of law, natural law and moral law. Hashem is the Legislator of both. The difference is that the laws of nature are imposed regardless of the person’s will, whereas moral law is very much the subject of free will.

In what sense is G-d “E-lokeinu”? Within our own relationship with Him, we all too often ignore Hashem’s commandments; we really only sense Hashem as the author of nature. Our forefathers, however, did relate to Hashem in terms of the moral law as well. In fact, the avos are credited with being able to intuit and observe the entire Torah; such was their unity with the moral law. This is the difference between E-lokeinu and E-lokei avoseinu.

According to the Maharal, the laws that people experience are a direct product of that person spiritual level. As Rav Dessler explains, to most people the world of the senses holds the greatest attraction. It is to what we pay attention, and therefore what we perceive as the most objective and absolute. However, if someone lifts his sights and attention above the physical so that concepts such as liberty, justice and oppression take on the greater reality, then that world and its laws would dominate his experience. As we noted in these pages in the past, Rav Chaim Volozhiner defines “E-lokim” as “the master of all the forces”.

From this perspective, the distinction is between “E-lokeinu”, the Master of the forces of the world in which we live, and “E-lokei avoseinu”, who controls the laws of miracle, of that higher world that our forefathers reached. As Rav Dessler writes, each perspective is a reflection of the other. By adopting Hashem’s moral law one becomes more subject to that law; whether earning greater providence than being subject to pure nature, or even the miracles that our forefathers merited.

Each of the avos found a different center for their relationship to the A-lmighty, a different means of accepting this higher law. Avraham sought to emulate His kindness to others. To Yitzchak, the means of having a relationship to Him is to encounter Him in dialogue, “lasuach basadeh”. Yaakov, the one who “sat [in study] in tents”, sought to come close to by absorbing His Thought, His Torah.

According to Rav Chaim Volozhiner the usual structure for berachah is one of descent from the Source to us, the recipients. Baruch, You are the bereichah, the well-spring, from which everything comes. Atah Hashem, we are “up” with the Cause of existence (the tetragrammaton meaning “causes to exist”), so that we can speak to Him as “You”. In the usual berachah, we then speak of the results of that flow, the laws that emerge from Hashem, and His kingship over the universe as a whole. Rav Chaim sees the purpose of the berachah as increasing that flow by consciously retracing its path.

We can understand birkas Avos, however, as continuing the theme by speaking of our own ascent, striving back upward to G-d, as the avos did. Focusing not on the path, but on our act of retracing it. We therefore speak of the G-d of natural law, followed by the G-d of moral law and of defying nature, followed finally by the various means of reaching that level. We then describe Him, as did Moshe, as “the G-d, the Great, the Mighty and the Awe Inspiring”, praising G-d from this relatively “closer” perspective.

A melech is someone who organizes and oversees society as a whole. From these lofty heights, we cannot stop there. We do not use the form of sheim unalchus because it is insufficient from the perspective of the avos. They saw a “Melech, Ozeir, uMoshi’ah, uMagen – King, Helper, Savior and Protector.” Not just Hashem as the Organizer of civilization, but also as a personal Helper, a Savior from trouble and a Protector from even encountering such troubles. Thus we conclude, “Magen Avraham”.

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1. Yoma 28b
2. Gevuros Hashem, 2nd Introduction. See also Bernachashavah Techilah for Beshalach (http://www.aishdas.org/mesukim/5764/beshalach.pdf)
3. Michtav me’Eliyahu vol. I pg 306
4. Nefesh haChaim sec. 1, ch. 2
5. Bereishis 24:63
6. Ibid 25:27, interpolated words based on Rashi ad loc