

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

In Vayakhel we meet for the second time the man who became the symbol of the artist in Judaism, Bezalel. "Then Moses said to the Israelites, 'See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and he has filled him with the spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills-to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic crafts...'" (Ex. 35: 30-33)

It would be Bezalel, together with Ohaliab, who would make the tabernacle and its furnishings and be celebrated through the centuries as the inspired craftsman who used his skills for the greater glory of God.

The aesthetic dimension of Judaism has tended to be downplayed, at least until the modern era, for obvious reasons. The Israelites worshipped the invisible God who transcended the universe. Other than the human person, God has no image. Even when he revealed himself to the people at Sinai, "You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice" (Deut. 4: 12). Given the intense connection-until around the eighteenth century-between art and religion, image-making was seen as potentially idolatrous. Hence the second of the ten commandments: "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below" (Ex. 20: 4).

This concern continued long after the biblical era. The Greeks, who achieved unrivalled excellence in the visual arts, were, in the religious sphere, still a pagan people of myth and mystery, while the Romans had a disturbing tendency to turn Caesars into gods and erecting statues to them.

However the visual dimension was not wholly missing from Judaism. There are visible symbols, like tzitzit and tefillin. There is, according to the sages, a meta-mitzvah known as hiddur mitzvah-"beautifying the command"-to try to ensure that all objects used in the performance of a command are as beautiful as possible.

The most significant intrusion of the aesthetic dimension was the in Tabernacle itself, its framework and hangings, its furniture, the cherubim above the ark,

the menorah, and the vestments of the priests and the high priest, lekavod uletifaret, "For dignity and beauty" (Ex. 28: 2).

Maimonides in *The Guide for the Perplexed* (III:45) says that most people are influenced by aesthetic considerations, which is why the Sanctuary was designed to inspire admiration and awe; why a continual light burned there; why the priestly robes were so impressive; why there was music in the form of the Levitical choir; and why incense was burned to cover the smell of the sacrifices.

Maimonides himself, in the work known as *The Eight Chapters*-the introduction to his commentary on Mishnah Avot-speaks about the therapeutic power of beauty and its importance in counteracting depression: "Someone afflicted with melancholy may dispel it by listening to music and various kinds of song, by strolling in gardens, by experiencing beautiful buildings, by associating with beautiful pictures, and similar sorts of things that broaden the soul..." (ch.5)

Art, in short, is balm to the soul. In modern times the thinker who spoke most eloquently about aesthetics was Rav Kook. In his *Commentary to the Siddur* he wrote, "Literature, painting and sculpture give material expression to all the spiritual concepts implanted in the depths of the human soul, and as long as even one single line hidden in the depth of the soul has not been given outward expression, it is the task of art [avodat ha-umanut] to bring it out" (*Olat Re-ayah*, II, 3).

Evidently these remarks were considered controversial, so in later editions of the *Commentary* the phrase "Literature, painting and sculpture" was removed and in its place was written, "Literature, its design and tapestry."

The name Bezalel was adopted by the artist Boris Schatz for the School of Arts and Crafts he founded in Israel in 1906, and Rav Kook wrote a touching letter in support of its creation. He saw the renaissance of art in the Holy Land as a symbol of the regeneration of the Jewish people in its own land, landscape and birthplace. Judaism in the Diaspora, removed from a natural connection with its own historic environment, was inevitably cerebral and spiritual, "alienated." Only in Israel would an authentic Jewish aesthetic emerge, strengthened by and in turn strengthening Jewish spirituality.

Perhaps the most moving of all remarks Rav Kook made about art came in the course of a

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conversation he had with a Jewish sculptor: "When I lived in London I used to visit the National Gallery, and my favourite pictures were those of Rembrandt. I really think that Rembrandt was a Tzaddik. Do you know that when I first saw Rembrandt's works, they reminded me of the rabbinic statement about the creation of light? We are told that when God created light [on the first day of creation, as opposed to the natural light of the sun on the fourth day], it was so strong and pellucid, that one could see from one end of the world to the other, but God was afraid that the wicked might abuse it. What did He do? He reserved that light for the righteous in the world to come. But now and then there are great men who are blessed and privileged to see it. I think that Rembrandt was one of them, and the light in his pictures is the very light that God created on Genesis day."

I have often wondered what it was about Rembrandt's paintings that so enthralled the Rav. Rembrandt lived in the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam, knew Jews and painted them, as well as painting many biblical scenes, though the closeness or otherwise of his connection with Jews has been the subject of controversy. Rav Kook's admiration for the artist had, I suspect, nothing to do with this and everything to do with the light Rembrandt saw in the faces of ordinary people, without any attempt to beautify them. His work let us see the transcendental quality of the human, the only thing in the universe on which God set his image.

Art in Hebrew-*omanut*-has a semantic connection with *emunah*, "faith" or "faithfulness." A true artist is faithful both to his materials and to the task, teaching us: "To see a world in a grain of sand, / And a heaven in a wild flower, / Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, / And eternity in an hour."

The name Bezalel means, "in the shadow of God." Art is the shadow cast by the radiance of God that suffuses all things: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God. / It will flame out, like shining from shook foil."

And as Goethe said: "Where there is much light, the shadow is deep." When art lets us see the wonder of creation as God's work and the human person as God's image, it becomes a powerful part of the religious life, with one proviso. The Greeks believed in the holiness of beauty. Jews believe in *hadrat kodesh*, the beauty of holiness: not art for art's sake but

art as a disclosure of the ultimate artistry of the Creator. That is how *omanut* enhances *emunah*, how art adds wonder to faith. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and [torah.org](http://torah.org)

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

No less than seven portions are dedicated to the building of the Tabernacle and the sacrificial service offered there. One wonders why so much detail? This is especially troublesome when compared to the dearth of Biblical verses dealing with arguably, more relevant subjects such as Jewish ritual and Jewish ethical principles.

My dear friend, Rabbi Saul Berman suggests that one must first understand the Torah regulations of the Kohen (Jewish Priest), who ministers in the Tabernacle, in order to answer our question.

We are constantly reminded of the limits set for the Kohen. The Torah curtails their ownership rights, prohibits their contact with the dead and prescribes constant bowing to God during prayer by the highest priest, the Kohen Gadol.

The Kohen could not own land. Note that Joseph never acquires land belonging to the Egyptian Priests as he prepares for the years of famine. (Genesis 47:22) Their title to real estate was inviolate. In contrast, Jewish Priests were always to remain landless - marking boundaries over their material power.

The Kohen had no contact with the dead. Ancient Priests often took money for intervening on behalf of deceased souls. In contrast, Jewish law insists that the Kohen never be in a position to take advantage of those who are most vulnerable - the surviving relatives. Hence, the Torah declares the dead to be off limits to the Kohen. (Leviticus 21:1-9)

The Kohen Gadol (High Priest) bowed at the conclusion of every one of the Amidah's nineteen blessings. This is in contrast to everyone else who bows only four times during this silent devotion. The highest of priests, the Kohen Gadol, who could easily be caught up with his lofty spiritual position, is reminded that he is not all mighty-he must constantly give homage to the Almighty. (Berakhot 34a-b)

These kinds of limits built into the function of the Kohen help answer why the text dealing with the Tabernacle and sacrifices is so elaborate. Precise detail in these sections forces the Kohen to be accountable to the people. If the Jewish Priests deviated in any way from the norm, the common folk, basing themselves on the text explicitly spelled out in the Torah, could challenge them. The Jewish Priest could not claim to have special hidden knowledge of how to reach God. It was all laid out in the text.

Hence, Rabbi Berman concludes, Jewish law stands in stark opposition to the ancient codes and

even many contemporary forms of law, which give advantage to the powerful. Often built into these systems are distinctions between the haves and the have-nots.

The Torah declares no! All human beings are created in the image of God. All have equal access to the Divine. All are holy. ©2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**R**ashi points out that the section of the parsha that deals with the observance and holiness of Shabat was related to the Jewish people in a public manner with all of the people in attendance. Moshe gathered all of Israel to him to declare the concept of the sanctity of the Shabat.

We are taught that almost all of the other precepts, values and commandments of the Torah were taught by Moshe firstly to a select group of his relatives and then to the elders of Israel and then finally they taught the general public the understanding of Torah and the workings of the Oral Law. Apparently this method was deemed insufficient when it came to the core principle of Judaism which Shabat represents.

Shabat needed a public forum and its importance needed to be emphasized in front of the entire gathering of, similar to the granting of the Torah itself at Sinai or the final covenant with Israel at the end of Moshe's life as recorded for us in the book of Dvarim.

In my opinion, the Torah alludes in this fashion to the fact that the survival of the Jewish people is dependent not only on the private observance of the Shabat by every Jew but that Jewish society must recognize and incorporate within itself a public observance of Shabat as well. It is not only the Jewish home that must be recognizable as being special and holy on Shabat but the Jewish street must also be so recognizable and special on Shabat as well.

The private Shabat observance has made positive strides over the past few decades. The public Shabat however has regressed both in Israel and in the United States. The JCC centers in almost all major Jewish communities in the United States have abandoned the Shabat.

Many of them claim that it is because the majority of their clientele is no longer Jewish. The irony of this excuse is apparently lost on them. The reason that the Jews have abandoned JCC centers is because those Jews also previously abandoned the Shabat. Here in Israel the public Shabat many times is observed mainly in the breach of the existing Shabat laws rather than in observance and conformity with them.

Again, the irony of those who want Israel to be a Jewish state but are not at all supportive of a public

Shabat is exquisite. For it is the public Shabat more than any other public sign of Jewishness - flag, language, culture, etc. - that defines Israel as being a Jewish state.

And its continued erosion by greedy kibbutz shops, city malls, open businesses and nightclubs - and, by the way it appears that Friday night, leil Shabat, is the most violent and crime ridden night of the week - have only made our country not only less Jewish but less safe, less civilized, more emotionally unsatisfactory and less secure.

Most of the children here in Israel receive no education regarding Shabat, its history and importance in Jewish history and life. That is a sure fire recipe for diminishing our chances to have a Jewish state here in our holy land. The public Shabat should be strengthened in all ways in order to guarantee a meaningful future for Jewish generations that are yet to come. ©2011 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### **Shabbat Shalom**

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

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

Before responding, we must recall that the two portions which initially commanded the construction of the sanctuary are separated from Vayakhel and Pekudei, which repeat those instructions, by the portion of Ki Tisa, which records the tragic incident of the Golden Calf. When we realize that according to most commentaries and midrashim, the idolatrous act with the calf occurred before the command to construct the sanctuary our problem becomes compounded. Why interrupt the story about the construction of the sanctuary with the account of the calf, and why repeat the instructions?

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

and they are opening a new chapter in their relationship. This is a metaphor for the biblical account of the Golden Calf and the construction of the sanctuary; the biblical groom is the Almighty and the bride is the People of Israel.

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

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

But it is only after Moses makes another, final plea; crying out, "And now if You would only forgive their sin! But if not, erase me now from this book that You have written" (Ex. 32:32) that God actually commands Israel to go up to the Land and conquer it - proving not only that He has forgiven them, but also that His covenant with them remains intact.

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

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

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

Nevertheless, God forgives us, as we see from the repetition of Vayakhel and Pekudei even after our idolatry. After all, it was God Himself, apparently realizing that the highest priority for covenantal Israel was a leader who would convey His eternal Torah, who cajoled Moses into accepting the leadership of Israel in the first place. © 2011 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### RABBI DOV KRAMER

## Taking a Closer Look

There are numerous aspects of the construction of the Mishkan that deserve a closer look, including the positioning of the pillars of its courtyard (see <http://aishdas.org/ta/5765/vayakhel.pdf>). There were 60 pillars around the perimeter of the Mishkan complex; 20 on the 100-amah (cubit) long south side (38:10), 20 on the 100-amah long north side (38:11), 10 on the 50-amah long west side (38:12), 6 (3x2) for the 15-amah long "shoulders" on the eastern corners (38:14), and 4 supporting the 20-amah long curtain in the entranceway (38:19). Rashi (27:10 and 27:14), based on Beraisa D'Meleches HaMishkan (BdMh"M, 5:3) tells us that there were five amos (cubits) between pillars. Since there are only 19 spaces between 20 pillars, these sides would seem to be 5 amos short of their required length (19x5=95). Similarly, the west side (9x5=45), the shoulders (2x5=10) and the entranceway (3x5=15) are all five amos short. Several approaches have been suggested to deal with this issue, each having its own strengths and weaknesses.

Abarbanel suggests that the five amos between pillars do not include the thickness of the pillars themselves. If the thickness of all the pillars on the south (and north) side equaled five amos, and are added to the length of the spaces between pillars, the total length works out (95+5=100).

The main shortcoming of this approach is its lack of consistency. If there are 12 pillars on the west side, there are less than five amos (including the pillars) per space, there are five amos including the pillars on the shoulders, and five amos besides the pillars on the south and north sides. (Abarbanel doesn't discuss the distance between the pillars in the doorway; Malbim, who follows Abarbanel's approach, says that there were more than five amos, even without counting the thickness of the pillars, between each of these pillars.) According to Rabbeinu Ephraim (quoted by Riva), the thickness of the pillars aren't consistent either.

Additionally, if this is what Rashi meant, I would have expected him to point out these discrepancies. Not mentioning that the distance between pillars is not always five amos (or the same five amos) indicates that this is not how Rashi (or the BdMh"M) understood the pillars to be positioned.

Many commentators say there were really 21 pillars on the north and south sides (and therefore 20 spaces). However, since the corner pillars were utilized by both sides they were adjacent to, and they couldn't be counted twice, each corner pillar was attributed to only one side. Similarly, there were actually 11 pillars on the west side, but only 10 of them were attributed to it; only three of the four pillars on each of the shoulders were counted as "shoulder pillars," and only four of the five pillars that supported the curtain in the entranceway were considered "doorway pillars." Chochmas HaMishkan, bothered that a pillar that served two sides is only attributed to one, suggests that each "shared pillar" counted towards both, but only as half towards each. Therefore, the north and south sides each had 19 pillars plus two half pillars, for a total of 20 pillars, the west side had nine pillars plus two halves (=10), each shoulder had two pillars of its own, plus half that it shared with the entranceway and half that it shared with either the north or south side (for a total of three), and there were three pillars that were used by the entranceway exclusively, plus two halves that were each shared with a shoulder (for a total of four).

The math works out very well, as long as the entranceway is flush with the shoulders. BdMh"M says explicitly that the curtain hung in the entranceway was ten amos in front of the shoulders, negating the possibility that the shoulders could share pillars with it. Rashi does not tell us explicitly that the entranceway curtain was 10 amos in front of the courtyard. Nevertheless, he does say (27:13) that it was "opposite the 20-amah opening of the entranceway," not "in the entranceway," strongly implying that the pillars of the entranceway were not in a straight line with the pillars of the shoulders.

"[Each] kela protruded 2.5 amos from each side of the [center of the] pillar" BdMh"M (5:3). If each five-amah section of kela didn't go from pillar to pillar, but was hung on a pillar from its center, we don't need 20 spaces on the south (or north) side, only 20 five-amah sections hung on 20 pillars. (The same concept works for the west side, for the shoulders, and for the doorway.) This is the most straightforward approach to this issue, but it comes with a big logistical issue: If each kela protruded from its pillar on both sides, wouldn't the ends fall down?

This is not really an issue for most of the k'la'im, as the edges of each kela was sown to the edge of the kela next to it (Rabbi Chaim Kaniefsky, sh'lita, in his commentary on BdMh"M). Once the k'la'im were connected, there was enough support between the two pillars on each side of the edges. Since the tops of the

k'la'im were wrapped around the wooden hanging contraptions ("kundusin," BdMh"M 5:3 and Rashi on 27:10), the tops had a bit more "substance" to them, and were possibly strong enough not to collapse in the corners. However, the edges of the shoulders, by the entranceway, and the ends of the curtain hung by the entranceway, wouldn't seem to have enough support to stay up on their own.

Tosfos (Eruvin 2b) says that atop the hooks the "kundusin" hung from were poles ("klonsos") that held up the k'la'im. Rashi (Bamidbar 4:32) also mentions that there were poles, telling us that there were both "klonsos" and "kundusin." If there were "klonsos," there wouldn't seem to be a need to also have "kundusin" to keep the k'la'im up; perhaps they were there to assure that the k'la'im were evenly spaced, and didn't bunch up. It is also possible that there were only poles on the eastern side; one holding up the ends of the "shoulder claim" closest to the entranceway, and one holding up the curtain in the entranceway. The "kundusin" would then be needed to hold up the k'la'im on the other three sides.

If there were wooden poles running along the perimeter of the courtyard atop the pillars, the logistical issue is solved. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to say that this is how Rashi understood the pillars to be set up. Whereas BdMh"M compares the k'la'im to "the sail of a boat," ("kela shel s'fina") which hangs from the center of the mast and protrudes on each side, Rashi compares it to something "braided" that is used on a boat ("kalay s'fina"), such as netting or a rope ladder, which has holes. If Rashi was trying to explain things the way BdMh"M did, why would he change the meaning of the same expression ("kela shel s'fina")? Additionally, when describing the shoulders (27:14), Rashi explicitly says there were five amos from the pillar in the southeast corner-which he says was one of the 20 pillars of the south side-to the first of three pillars of the shoulder. According to BdMh"M, there was no pillar in the corner.

It is possible that Rashi meant that there were five amos of kela'im between the pillar on the south side that was easternmost (even if not in the corner) and the first of the three "shoulder pillars" (2.5 amos on the south and 2.5 amos on the east). Nevertheless, we would have expected him to be more explicit about how these five amos were measured.

Another possibility stems from a different issue discussed by the commentators on Rashi-the distance between the k'la'im and the Mishkan. Rashi says (27:18) there were 20 amos on the north, south and west sides. The Mishkan itself was 10 amos wide, accounting for the entire 50-amah width of the courtyard (20+10+20=50). However, the beams ("kerashim") of the Mishkan were an amah thick, so the kerashim on the north and south walls of the Mishkan add two more amos (for a total of 52). Mizrahi says that the pillars of the courtyard were one amah thick, and suggests that

the k'la'im were outside the pillars. The 50-amah width of the courtyard was measured from the pillars of the north to the pillars of the south, not from the northern k'la'im to the southern ones (which were 52 amos apart). The 20 amos of courtyard to the north and south of the Mishkan, however, refer to the distance from the Mishkan's coverings ("y'rios") to the k'la'im.

If the area within the k'la'im is now 102x52 rather than 100x50, there were 3.5 amos from the end pillars to the corner (not 2.5). Maaseh Choshev therefore suggests that the k'la'im could have cut the corners diagonally, with each diagonal section being (almost) five amos. (Mathematically, they would each be 4.94 amos.) If Rashi didn't mean that there was a pillar literally in each corner, but referred to the easternmost pillar on the south side as "the pillar in the southeast corner," the five amos Rashi's describes between this pillar and the first of the "shoulder pillars" could be these (almost) five diagonal amos. Again, though, if this was how Rashi understood the layout of the courtyard, we would have expected him to tell us so.

In 5771, Rabbi Yitzchok Isaac Chasan published a new approach to the issue of the "missing pillar." Similar to the "shared pillars" approach, the "21st pillar" of the south and north sides are really the first and tenth pillars of the west side. The first pillar of these sides, on the eastern corners, are shared with the "shoulder pillars," giving us four pillars and three five-amah spaces per shoulder. The curtain in the entranceway (and its four pillars) are 10 amos in front of the courtyard, but rather than the spaces between its pillars being five amos, they are  $6 \frac{2}{3}$  amos; the three spaces make up the 20 amos of the entranceway. Building on Rashi saying (27:14) that the 10 pillars on the east side correspond to the 10 pillars on the west side, Rabbi Chasan suggests that the middle four pillars on the west side line up directly opposite the four "entranceway pillars," with  $6 \frac{2}{3}$ -amah spaces between them.

The math works, and nothing Rashi wrote directly contradicts this approach. However, it is not as symmetrical as Rabbi Chasan makes it out to be. For one thing, the 10 pillars described by the Torah on the west side are literally 10 pillars; there are no other pillars on the west side. There are, however, 21 pillars on the south and north sides, despite the Torah saying there were only 20. The eastern side has a total of 12 pillars, two more than described in the Torah. (In the "shared pillars approach" every side has one more than the Torah describes, which is a lot more symmetrical than one side having two more, two sides having one more and one side having the same amount.) Additionally, the 10 pillars on the west side are not "directly opposite" the 10 pillars attributed to the east side. Two of the pillars on the west are opposite the corner pillars that are attributed to the south and north sides, and the "shoulder pillars" closest to the

entranceway are not directly opposite any pillars on the west side.

The same issues we had with the above approaches apply here as well. Why didn't Rashi specify that there were sections that were  $6 \frac{2}{3}$  amos (and not five)? Why wasn't he more explicit about the entranceway curtain being away from the shoulders? Why didn't he tell us that the west side had exactly 10 pillars while the south and north sides had 21? I am therefore not convinced that this is how Rashi understood the layout of the pillars of the courtyard.

Betzalel, the person chosen by G-d to oversee the building of the Mishkan, is described as having "wisdom, understanding and knowledge" (31:3 and 35:31). Rashi explains "wisdom" to be what a person hears and learns from someone else, "understanding" as figuring things out on his own based on what he learned from others, and "knowledge" as possessing the divine spirit. Using these three abilities, Betzalel was able to "think the appropriate calculations" to build the Mishkan and all of its vessels. If wisdom was not enough-if the ability to understand and follow directions and instructions down to the very last detail were not enough-then his role was not to just precisely follow the Master Architect's plans. Rather, the Master Architect (G-d) purposely left certain aspects of the design for its human builders to figure out. Similar to the relationship between the Written Law and the Oral Law, where G-d gave us the specific guidelines to follow, but how they are carried out-what the final halachah is from among the various possibilities-is "not in heaven" but left to the Torah sages to determine, the final choices regarding how the Mishkan was built was left up to Betzalel and those who worked with him.

This may be why BdMh"M could describe a contraction-kunusin-that are not even hinted to in the verses, and Tosfos could say there were poles even if none are mentioned; how the k'la'im were hung was up to Betzalel to figure out. When it came to the layout of the courtyard, there were specific guidelines-it was to be 100x50 amos with a total of 60 pillars supporting the k'la'im. How they were positioned exactly, though, was left for Betzalel to determine. Rashi may have purposely been ambiguous in order to leave numerous possibilities intact. If he had one specific approach in mind, he may have been able to describe things more precisely. But if he wanted to allow several of them to work within his explanation, then his impreciseness is amazing.

The only sections that he comments had five amos between pillars are the shoulders and the north and south sides, which is true for all the possibilities. Even though the five amos aren't the same according to all approaches, this impreciseness doesn't negate any of them. Telling us how many amos the entranceway curtains were set in front of the shoulders would rule out any approach that requires that they be flush; not telling us doesn't rule out any possibility. Describing the first

pillar on the southern side as being in the southeastern corner may not be precise, but it is as close to the corner as any pillar gets. And defining "kela-im" differently than BdMh"M doesn't limit which approach can be understood. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer The full version can be read at <http://rabbidmk.posterous.com/parashas-vayakhel-5771>

### **RABBI NAFTALI REICH**

## **Legacy**

**C**onjure up this scene in your imagination. The steering committee of a prestigious charitable organization convenes a meeting of its main benefactors. A new building is needed desperately, the chairman reports, and the projected cost will run high into the millions. "Ladies and gentlemen," he declares, "your generous support has enabled us to serve the community so effectively in the past, and only your continued support will help us erect this building so that we can continue to serve the community well for many years to come."

The chairman begins to call on the assembled benefactors one by one. The contributions flow. One hundred thousand dollars. Fifty thousand. One hundred and eighty thousand. And so on.

Presently, the chairman calls the name of a famous philanthropist. The room falls instantly silent as everyone strains to hear what he will say.

Slowly, he rises to his feet and clears his throat. "Mr. Chairman, I will pass right now. But I will tell you this. Let everyone give what his heart moves him to give. Total up what you have raised and calculate the shortfall. I personally pledge to cover the deficit, no matter how large it is. Before we walk out of here today, you will have your building."

What do you think the reaction would be to such a magnanimous offer? Most probably, a standing ovation. After all, what could be better than a guarantee to cover the deficit? It is an executive director's dream.

And yet, in this week's Torah reading we find an altogether opposite view. When the Tabernacle donation of the tribal princes is mentioned, the Hebrew word for princes, *nesiim*, is spelled in a truncated form, omitting the letter yod. Our Sages explain that this is an indication of the Torah's displeasure with the princes.

But what did they do wrong? Surely their offer, to cover the entire deficit, was the most magnanimous of all. They actually guaranteed that there would be no shortfall in the collection. What could be better?

The commentators explain that the error of the princes was in their skewed perspective. Covering the deficit is a wonderful offer if one is concerned about the recipient. But in the case of the Tabernacle, the recipient was the Creator of the Universe. He did not need the assistance of the princes or anyone else. The commandment to donate to the Tabernacle was a singular privilege granted to the Jewish people for their own benefit. Their gifts were meant to accomplish their

own spiritual enrichment, not the Almighty's material enrichment. Had the princes truly appreciated the essence of this commandment, they would have rushed to donate as much as they could rather than sit back and offer to cover the shortfall.

In reproof, therefore, the Torah deleted the letter yod from the word *nesiim*, princes. The mystical teachers explain that the letter yod represents Hashem's immanence in all of creation. Had the princes been truly sensitive to Hashem pervasive presence, it would never have crossed their minds that He needed them to cover His deficits.

Two neighbors came to a king with similar requests. The king granted the request of the one but rejected the request of the other.

"Your majesty, if I may be so bold as to ask," said the disappointed supplicant, "why was my request rejected while my neighbor's was not? For your birthday, I gave your majesty a beautiful jewel-encrusted one-of-a-kind coach, while my neighbor only gave you a simple quilt?"

"I will explain it to you," said the king. "When your neighbor brought me his gift, I asked him, 'Why do I need another quilt?' And he replied, 'Your majesty needs nothing from me. It is I who need to give a gift to your majesty.' You, my friend, come to me as my benefactor. He comes to me as my subject. My obligation is to him."

In our own lives, we sometimes fall into the trap of thinking that our religious observances are our gift to Hashem. We've spent so much time in the synagogue, we might tell ourselves, we've prayed, we've studied and we've performed so many different commandments. What more can Hashem want from us? Haven't we given Him enough? But the truth is that Hashem doesn't really need anything from us. After all, who gained from all these things we've done, we or Hashem? It is we who are enriched by living according to the Torah values and ideals. It is we who are the recipients of the greatest gift of all. © 2011 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

### **RABBI YISROEL CINER**

## **Parsha Insights**

**T**his week we read the parsha of Vayakhel. "Vayakhel Moshe {And Moshe gathered} the entire congregation of the children of Israel. [35:1]"

The Ramban explains that Moshe gathered them to tell them about the Mishkan {Tabernacle}. Moshe had been commanded about the Mishkan before the 'chait ha'egel' {sin of the golden calf} and the subsequent breaking of the *luchos* {tablets}. Now that the *luchos shnios* {second tablets} had been given and the relationship had been restored to the point that the *Shchinah* {Hashem's Presence} would again agree to rest amongst them, Moshe now commanded them about the details of the Mishkan.

"Aileh had'varim {These are the things} -- referring to the construction of the Mishkan, its vessels and the service performed there-that Hashem has commanded to do. Six days you shall do your work and the seventh day shall be holy for you, a Shabbos for Hashem. [35:1-2]"

Placed between the introduction to the command of the Mishkan and the command itself is the mitzvah {commandment} of Shabbos. Rashi explains that the warning to observe Shabbos was mentioned before the commandment to build the Mishkan in order to teach that one may not desecrate the Shabbos in order to build the Mishkan.

The Ramban illustrates how that same law can be derived even more clearly from the passuk {verse} itself. "These are the things-referring to the construction of the Mishkan, its vessels and the service performed there-that Hashem has commanded to do." During the "six days you shall do your work" of "these things"-the building of the Mishkan-but "the seventh day shall be holy for you, a Shabbos for Hashem." No work for the Mishkan can be performed.

The Talmud [Shabbos 70A] takes this connection between Shabbos and Mishkan much further. It derives from the above-quoted words, "aileh had'varim {these are the things}," the thirty-nine malachos {forms of constructive actions} which are forbidden on Shabbos. These parallel the thirty-nine malachos used in the construction of the Mishkan.

There is a clear parallel and association between Shabbos and the Mishkan. In order for us to truly emulate Hashem, we need to abstain on the seventh day from the 'work' that Hashem employed during the six days of creation. That is rendered impossible by the fact that it was Hashem's Will which brought the world into its state of creation and not any form of 'work' present within our realm of existence. Therefore, in order for us to emulate Hashem's rest, we must refrain from performing work that was done on something which most closely parallels creation. That is, of course, the Mishkan.

The creation is called 'yesh mai'ayin.' Something from nothing. We don't create anything. We simply form and re-shape already existing materials. 'Yesh mai'yesh.' However, there was a point when man came closest to breaking the barriers of 'yesh mai'yesh' and entered the realm of a true transformation, dealing with 'yesh mai'ayin.' That was the building of the Mishkan.

Originally the world was in a state of pure G-dliness. Nothing else existed. In order to create an arena where there would be freewill, Hashem needed to remove His obvious presence from what we would later call the world. He needed to create a void where His presence would be hidden to the degree that one could deliberate and then 'decide' if there is a G-d or not. Spirituality was transformed into physicality.

The Baal HaTanya writes that, viewed in that context, the creation could be termed 'ayin mai'yesh.' Nothing was created from something. With Hashem's presence being the ultimate reality, the ultimate 'yesh,' creating a void where that reality was no longer evident, an 'ayin,' a lack of reality, was in fact creating 'ayin mai'yesh.' Physicality, 'ayin,' from spirituality, 'yesh.'

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch zt"l writes that the building of the Mishkan was actually the process of creation in reverse. Hashem made His Presence harder to discern in order for us to use our freewill to discern that Presence. The spiritual was turned into physical only to afford us the opportunity to transform that physical back into spiritual. The Mishkan was the place for that re-transformation. The physical materials of the Mishkan became a place upon which Hashem's Presence rested in a clearly discernable way. Reality was created from a void. Spirituality from physicality. G-dliness from gold and silver. "Yesh' from 'ayin.'

The creation was a form of 'yesh' from 'ayin.' The Mishkan was a form of 'yesh' from 'ayin.'

The thirty-nine types of malacha that were used in the construction of the Mishkan mirror the creation of the world. On Shabbos, the seventh day, Hashem 'rested'-He stopped turning spirituality into physicality. We too need to rest on the seventh day, thereby emulating our Creator. The closest similarity to the 'work' of creation is the work that was done on the Mishkan. On Shabbos we refrain from performing any of those thirty-nine malachos, distancing ourselves from playing any role in the actions which mirror the transformation of the spiritual into the physical. Rather, all of our efforts are focused on sanctifying the physical and elevating it into the spiritual realm.

The Mishkan actually parallels creation in an even more basic sense. The purpose of both was to have Hashem's presence rest upon the lower realm. Through the Mishkan, Hashem's presence was meant to rest, not simply on the building but rather on each and every one of us. "Make for me a Mikdash and I will dwell amongst you [25:8]," not upon it. Shabbos is the time of perfection -- the time when Hashem's presence is revealed in the creation and upon us.

"The seventh day shall be holy, a Shabbos for Hashem." © 2011 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

