

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

A long drama had taken place. Moses had led the people from slavery to the beginning of the road to freedom. The people themselves had witnessed G-d at Mount Sinai, the only time in all history when an entire people became the recipients of revelation. Then came the disappearance of Moses for his long sojourn at the top of the mountain, an absence which led to the Israelites' greatest collective sin, the making of the Golden Calf. Moses returned to the mountain to plead for forgiveness, which was granted.

Its symbol was the second set of tablets. Now life must begin again. A shattered people must be rebuilt. How does Moses proceed? The verse with which the sedra begins contains the clue: "Moses assembled the whole Israelite community and said to them: 'These are the things G-d has commanded you to do.'" (35:1)

The verb *vayakhel* -- which gives the sedra its name -- is crucial to an understanding of the task in which Moses is engaged. At its simplest level it serves as a motiv-word, recalling a previous verse. In this case the verse is obvious: "When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they assembled around Aaron and said, 'Come, make us gods who will go before us.'" (32:1)

Moses' act is what the kabbalists called a *tikkun*: a restoration, a making-good-again, the redemption of a past misdemeanour. Just as the sin was committed by the people acting as a *kahal* or *kehillah*, so atonement was to be achieved by their again acting as a *kehillah*, this time by making a home for the Divine presence as they earlier sought to make a substitute for it. Moses orchestrates the people for good, as they had once been assembled for bad (The difference lies not only in the purpose but in the form of the verb, from passive in the case of the calf to active in the case of Moses. Passivity allows bad things to happen -- "Wherever it says 'and it came to pass' it is a sign of impending tragedy". (Megillah 10b) Proactivity is the defeat of tragedy: "Wherever is says, 'And there will be' is a sign of impending joy." (Bemidbar Rabbah 13)

At a deeper level, though, the opening verse of the sedra alerts us to the nature of community in Judaism. In classical Hebrew there are three different

words for community: *edah*, *tsibbur* and *kehillah*, and they signify different kinds of association.

Edah comes from the word *ed*, meaning "witness." The verb *ya'ad* carries the meaning of "to appoint, fix, assign, destine, set apart, designate or determine." The modern Hebrew noun *te'udah* means "certificate, document, attestation, aim, object, purpose or mission." The people who constitute an *edah* have a strong sense of collective identity. They have witnessed the same things. They are bent on the same purpose. The Jewish people become an *edah* -- a community of shared faith -- only on receiving the first command: "Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household" (Shemot 12:3).

An *edah* can be a gathering for bad as well as good. The Israelites, on hearing the report of the spies, lose heart and say they want to return to Egypt. Throughout, they are referred to as the *edah* (as in "How long will this wicked community grumble against Me?" Bemidbar 14:27). The people agitated by Korach in his rebellion against Moses and Aaron's authority is likewise called an *edah* ("If one man sins, will You be angry with the whole community? Bemidbar 16:22). Nowadays the word is generally used for an ethnic or religious subgroup. An *edah* is a community of the like-minded. The word emphasises strong identity. It is a group whose members have much in common.

By contrast the word *tsibbur* -- it belongs to Mishnaic rather than biblical Hebrew -- comes from the root *tz-b-r* meaning "to heap" or "pile up". (Bereishith 41:49) To understand the concept of *tsibbur*, think of a group of people praying at the Kotel. They may not know each other. They may never meet again. But for the moment, they happen to be ten people in the same place at the same time, and thus constitute a quorum for prayer. A *tsibbur* is a community in the minimalist sense, a mere aggregate, formed by numbers rather than any sense of identity. A *tsibbur* is a group whose members may have nothing in common except that, at a certain point, they find themselves together and thus constitute a "public" for prayer or any other command which requires a *minyan*.

A *kehillah* is different from the other two kinds of community. Its members are different from one another. In that sense it is like a *tsibbur*. But they are orchestrated together for a collective undertaking -- one that involves in making a distinctive contribution. The

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danger of a kehillah is that it can become a mass, a rabble, a crowd.

That is the meaning of the phrase in which Moses, descending the mountain, sees the people dancing around the calf: "Moses saw that the people were running wild, and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughing-stock to their enemies." (32:25)

The beauty of a kehillah, however, is that when it is driven by constructive purpose, it gathers together the distinct and separate contributions of many individuals, so that each can say, "I helped to make this." That is why, assembling the people on this occasion, Moses emphasises that each has something different to give: Take from what you have, an offering to G-d. Everyone who is willing to bring to G-d an offering of gold, silver and bronze... All you who are skilled among you are to come and make everything the Lord has commanded...

Moses was able to turn the kehillah with its diversity into an edah with its singleness of purpose, while preserving the diversity of the gifts they brought to G-d: "Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses' presence, and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to G-d for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments. All who were willing -- men and women -- came and brought gold jewellery of all kinds: brooches, ear-rings, rings and ornaments... Everyone who had blue, purple or scarlet yarn... Those presenting an offering of silver or bronze... Every skilled woman spun with her hands and brought what she had spun... The leaders brought onyx stones and other gems... All the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to G-d freewill offerings for all the work G-d, through Moses, had commanded them to do." (35:20-29)

The greatness of the Tabernacle was that it was a collective achievement -- one in which not everyone did the same thing. Each gave a different thing. Each contribution was valued -- and therefore each participant felt valued. Vayakhel -- Moses' ability to forge out of the dissolution of the people a new and genuine kehillah -- was one of his greatest achievements.

Many years later, Moses, according to the sages, returned to the theme. Knowing that his career

as a leader was drawing to an end, he prayed to G-d to appoint a successor: "May G-d, Lord of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the community." (Bemidbar 27:16) Rashi, following the sages, explains the unusual phrase "Lord of the spirits of all flesh" as follows: "He said to Him: Lord of the universe, the character of each person is revealed and known to You -- and You know that each is different. Therefore appoint for them a leader who is able to bear with each person as his or her temperament requires." (Rashi on Bemidbar 27:16)

To preserve the diversity of a tsibbur with the unity of purpose of an edah -- that is the challenge of kehillah-formation, community-building, itself the greatest task of a great leader. © 2013 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The book of Shemot that began with such high drama just a few months ago ends this week on a rather bland and apparently purely technical note. The Torah once more reviews and recounts for us the details of the construction of the Mishkan and an exact accounting of the material goods that were used in its construction.

Through the ages, the commentators have dwelt long and hard on these parshiyot in the holy Torah, where every letter and word is eternal, in an attempt to justify this seemingly superfluous repetition. I will not attempt to review all of the different approaches to explain this issue. They are all satisfactory and yet all are somehow short of the mark as well.

I certainly have no great or brilliant insight into the matter myself. But, there is an obvious teaching that all of the commentators agree with that does derive from this review and repetition regarding the construction of the Mishkan.

The Mishkan had the miraculous quality of being built exactly and unwaveringly according to its original plan. Many times in life people and institutions set out to create structures, organizations and policies that will be of great benefit to society upon completion. Rarely if ever does the finished product match exactly the plans and true intentions of those who planned and initiated the project.

All human plans and blueprints are subject to change, alterations and even to cancellation. The plans for the Mishkan, shrouded in the spirituality of G-d's commandments, were not subject to such changes. Therefore Bezalel and Ahaliav and the Jewish people were complimented for their strict adherence to the original plans given to Moshe for the construction of the Mishkan.

Every detail of the construction of the Mishkan is reviewed in the parshiyot of this week. All builders are aware of the importance of detail in their work. A missing screw or nail or hook can lead to later disaster.

This is true in the physical mundane life of people. It is doubly true regarding the spiritual and moral character of a person and a community. Only in the completion of the details is the whole person or project seen.

The measure of an artist, whether in pictures or music, is always in the nuances -- in the details. The avoidance of shortcuts that invariably lead to shabbiness is the true hallmark of the gifted performer. Moshe lovingly records for us every piece of material goods that came together as the holy Mishkan. In kabbalistic thought, every nuance of the construction of the Mishkan is truly an influence on the general world at large.

This only serves to reemphasize the importance of detail in dealing with the Mishkan. The Mishkan is no longer physically present with us but its lessons and greatness still abide within the Torah we study and in the value systems of the Jewish people. By reading the Torah's description of it and studying the underlying principles that it represents, the Mishkan gains life and influence within us individually and collectively. May we be strengthened by this eternal knowledge. © 2013 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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell in their midst.” (Exodus 25: 8) The details of the construction of the Sanctuary together with all of its furnishings and the garments of the Priest-Kohanim are painstakingly and exquisitely described when G-d issues the commandment (in the Portions of Terumah and Tetzaveh) and again when the Israelites carry out this G-d given task (in this portion of Vayakhel-Pekudei). If the construction of the Sanctuary merited such repetition, it must have been of supreme importance. Why?

Conventional wisdom would have it - and all ancient and even modern religions would concur - that if, indeed, G-d created a world in which we may dwell, the least we can do is to return the compliment and create a Sanctuary in which the Divine Presence may dwell at least here on earth. The Yom Kippur drama for forgiveness would certainly suggest that that High Priest “meets” (as it were) the Divine in the Holy of Holies once a year on the fast day which the Hassidic world calls The Day of Holiness (Yom Hakadosh) just for that purpose.

However, the Biblical passage at the conclusion of the portion of Tetzaveh would imply otherwise: “I shall set my meeting there (at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting) with the Children of Israel, and it shall be sanctified with my glory. I shall sanctify the Tent of Meeting and the Altar; and I shall sanctify Aaron and his

sons to minister to Me. I shall dwell among the children of Israel and I shall be their G-d, who took them out of the Land of Egypt in order that I may dwell in their midst; I am the Lord their G-d” (Exodus 29: 43-46).

Note that here, G-d's dwelling place is within the Jewish people - and not within the sanctuary. This is precisely what the introductory verse of the last five chapters of the Book of Exodus was telling us: “They shall make for Me a Sanctuary so that I may dwell in their midst” (Exodus 25: 8). But what does this really mean? Can G-d enter a physical human being and reside within human physicality? Does G-d “incorporealize” within the Jewish nation? Is this not dangerously close to Christianity and a notion of G-d-in-man which Judaism considers heretical?

Let us go back to the great song at the time of the miraculous splitting of the Reed Sea, the drowning of the Egyptians and the salvation of the Jews. The Hebrews then sang, “G-d had become for me salvation; this is my G-d, ‘ve’anvehu” (Exodus 15: 4)

The last word of this verse is difficult to translate. Targum renders it to mean “I shall make a house for Him” and since the Hebrew word naveh means a house, the verse means, “This is my G-d and I shall build him a Sanctuary” - presumably in which He will dwell on earth (a notion which we have already rejected). Rashi (ad loc) maintains that the root word in ve’anvehu is ‘noy’ which means beautiful: “This is my G-d and I shall beautify Him with my melodic prayers,” or - as others would rather have it - “I shall beautify Him by beautifying His commandments,” by wearing the most beautiful tallit and tefillin, by decorating His sukkah with the finest adornments.

A Talmudic sage ingeniously splits the difficult word in two, ‘ani vehu’ - He and I. “This is my G-d, and I shall do what He does,” as it were. “Just as He feeds the hungry, so shall I, and just as He clothes the naked, so shall I.” Perhaps the one who interprets this best is Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch who renders the verse, “This is my G-d and I shall become His house; I shall attempt to express His will in every word I utter and every action I perform.”

Hence, the Bible never means to teach that G-d assumes physical form, G-d forbid; the Bible is merely conveying that when a human being or a nation entire expresses the will of the Divine, it is tantamount to having the Divine presence living amongst us, to having G-d truly in our midst.

A beloved mentor and friend, Reb Aharon Landau, once told me of a hasid who purchased a magnificent kiddush cup for his rebbe. Handing over the gift, he requested from his rebbe, “Pray that Elijah the prophet reveal himself to me at my seder this year”. The hasid lived in anxious expectation, but he had no revelation of Elijah at his seder.

When the disgruntled hasid complained, his rebbe gave him the following advice; “Next year, be sure to invite poor people to your home for the seder.

Have special concentration when the door is opened for Elijah and you will surely experience him! Once again, the hasid followed the rabbi's advice, certain that at the seder he would witness the great prophet. Alas, once again, he was again doomed to disappointment. This time, he confronted angrily confronted his rebbe, the rebbe took his hand, "But of course you experienced Elijah; when you invited ten paupers you become Elijah the Prophet."

This is the point of the Biblical text. When we express G-d's will with our every act and word, we becomes G-dlike. G-d becomes manifest in the world through such individuals. © 2013 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah which we read in conjunction with Parshas Hachodesh portrays the upcoming month of Nissan in a brilliant light. It begins with an elaborate description of the special sacrifices which will introduce the Messianic era. The prophet Yechezkel focuses on the dedication of the third Bais Hamikdash and says, "On the first day of the first month(Nissan) take a perfect bullock and purify the Bais Hamikdash." (45:18)The Radak (ad loc.) notes that the Jewish nation will return to Eretz Yisroel long before this. During that time most of the construction of the Bais Hamikdash will be completed leaving only final stages for the month of Nissan. Radak suggests that the inaugural services will begin seven days prior to the month of Nissan and will conclude on Rosh Chodesh itself. He offers with this an interpretation to the classic saying of Chazal "In Nissan we were redeemed and in Nissan we are destined to be redeemed." These words, in his opinion, refer to the events of our Haftorah wherein we are informed that the service in the Bais Hamikdash will begin in the month of Nissan.

As we follow these dates closely, we discover a striking similarity between the dedication of the final Bais Hamikdash and of the Mishkan. Historically speaking, each of them revolves around the month of Nissan. In fact, as we have discovered, they are both completed on the exact same date, Rosh Chodesh Nissan. But this specific date reveals a more meaningful dimension to these dedications. The month of Nissan, as we know, has special significance to the Jewish people; it marks our redemption from Egyptian bondage. In truth, this redemption process began on the first day of Nissan. Because, as we discover in this week's Maftir reading, Hashem began preparing the Jewish people for their redemption on Rosh Chodesh Nissan. All of this indicates a direct corollary between the Jewish people's redemption and the erection of the Sanctuary and the final Bais Hamikdash. Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the date which introduced our redemption and afterwards our service in the Mishkan

will ultimately introduce the service of the final Bais Hamikdash.

In search for an understanding of this, we refer to Nachmanides' insightful overview to Sefer Shmos. In essence, the Sefer of Shmos spans the Jewish people's exile and redemption. It begins with the descent of Yaakov and his household to Egypt and concludes with the exodus of our entire nation. Yet, almost half of the sefer is devoted to the intricacies of the Sanctuary, something seemingly unrelated to redemption! Nachmanides explains that the Jewish redemption extended far beyond the physical boundaries of Egypt. Before they left the land of Israel, Yaakov and his sons enjoyed a close relationship with Hashem. The devotion of the Patriarchs had produced such an intense level of sanctity that Hashem's presence was commonplace amongst them. However with their descent to Egypt, this experience faded away and, to some degree, distance developed between themselves and Hashem. Over the hundreds of years in Egypt, this distance grew and they eventually lost all association with Him. Nachmanides explains that even after their liberation from Egyptian bondage, scars of exile remained deeply imprinted on them. Having left Egypt, they began rebuilding their relationship with Hashem and prepared for a long journey homeward to Him. Finally, with the erection of the Sanctuary, they reached their ultimate destiny and reunited with Hashem. The Sanctuary created a tangible experience of Hashem's presence amongst them, the clearest indication of His reunification with them. With this final development, the Jewish people's redemption was complete. They now returned to the status of the Patriarchs, and were totally bound to their Creator. All scars of their exile disappeared and they could now, enjoy the closest relationship with their beloved, Hashem.

This perspective is best reflected in the words of Chazal in P'sikta Rabsi. Our Chazal inform us that, in reality, all the segments of the Sanctuary were already completed in the month of Kislev. However, Hashem waited until Nissan which is called "the month of the Patriarchs", for the erection and inauguration of the Mishkan. With the insight of Nachmanides we can appreciate the message of this P'sikta. As stated, the erection of the Sanctuary represented the completion of our Jewish redemption,their reunification with Hashem. In fact, this unification was so intense that it was tantamount to the glorious relationship of the Patriarchs and Hashem. In essence this present Jewish status reflected that of the Patriarchs in whose merit this relationship had been reinstated. It was therefore only proper to wait until Nissan for the dedication of the Sanctuary. Nissan which was the month of the Patriarchs was reserved for this dedication, because it reflected the Jewish people's parallel level to the Patriarchs themselves.

In this week's Haftorah, we discover that this concept will continue into the Messianic era and the

inauguration of the final Bais Hamikdash. Our ultimate redemption, as in our previous ones, will not be considered complete until we merit the Divine Presence in our midst. Even after our return to Eretz Yisroel, which will transpire long before Nissan, we will continue to bear the scar tissue of thousands of years of exile. Only after Hashem returns to us resting His presence amongst us will we truly be redeemed. This magnificent revelation will, quite obviously, occur in the month of Nissan. Our final redemption which reflects Hashem's return to His people will join the ranks of our redemptions and be introduced on that glorious day, Rosh Chodesh Nissan.

May we learn from them to totally subjugate ourselves to our Creator, thereby meriting the final and total destruction of Amalek and his followers. © 2013 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

I came across an idea on Purim that seemed not only to capture the underlying theme of that festival, but also sheds light on the opening lines of this week's Torah portion.

We read in the Megillah how Mordechai bids Esther to appear before Achashverosh and plead with him on behalf of the Jewish people who were slated to be annihilated. Mordechai encourages her with the poignant question, "Who knows? Perhaps it was precisely and only for this critical occasion that you attained your royal position?"

Esther immediately replied, "Go assemble all the Jews in Shushan and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day; I with my attendants will fast as well. Esther then uttered a seemingly superfluous word: "U'vchen."

And thus (or consequently), I will enter the king's presence against the law of the land." What is hinted at by this extra word, "u'vchen?"

Let us consider what is the most efficacious prayer that our sages tell us is guaranteed to elicit a favorable answer from above. It is when someone sincerely entreats Hashem on behalf of his disadvantaged fellow Jew even though he too desperately needs the very thing that he requests for his friend. Such an entreaty is considered the quintessential selfless prayer, for, rather than being preoccupied with ones own travails, he has focused instead on his friend's plight.

Hashem responds first to the needs of such a caring, unselfish person for in recognition of his selflessness and total bonding with another Jew's needs, Hashem ensures that he becomes the conduit of His divine blessing, and will therefore be the first to receive His bounty and goodness.

This is what Esther was alluding to when she told Mordechai, "The Jewish people face a life-

threatening decree from Haman, just as do I when I enter unlawfully into the king's presence. We both are in mortal danger. Let the Jews fast for my welfare and I and my attendants will fast similarly for the salvation of the nation. 'U'vchen', and consequently, armed with this great merit that we are begging for Divine favor and mercy for one another, I will enter the king's presence.

We similarly mention this identical declaration 'U'vchen' numerous times in our Rosh Hashana prayers as a prelude to each major appeal for salvation. The commentaries explain that it is placed before each prayer as a reference to Queen Esther's prayer to Hashem before she interceded with the king on behalf of her people. By omitting any personal requests from our Rosh Hashana supplications and directing our pleas on behalf of the entire nation we too trust and anticipate meriting Divine assistance and deliverance.

This thought kept buzzing in my mind throughout Purim for it crystallizes the key theme of the day: by caring for one another, sending gifts and mending frayed relationships, caring for the poor and reaching out to one another in friendship, we demonstrate the inner unity that lies at the core of our people. With that demonstration of brotherhood and solidarity, we merit a unique outpouring of Divine favor and closeness.

This perhaps, is why Moshe deemed it necessary to assemble the entire people after the sin of the Golden Calf, before introducing them to the mitzvah of the building of the Mishkan. By bringing together the entire Jewish people, he paved the way for them to be reunited with the Divine, for only when we are united down here in this world, can we be connected at the most exalted Source in heaven. The building of the Mishkan fused together the entire people in the transcendent mission of its construction, and it was the unity of the people that secured Hashem's presence in this world.

May this theme of our oneness as a people and our readiness to put others first that makes Purim such a joyous and spiritual day, continue throughout the year. For only when we uncover that wonderful unity and discover the genuine caring and sharing for one another, can true joy prevail. © 2013 Rabbi N. Reich and torah.org

DAN LIFSCHITZ

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Vayakhel explains that the frame of the Tabernacle was constructed of "shittim wood, standing." The talmud offers several explanations of this phrase. The first and simplest is that it refers to the orientation of the planks used in the construction; they should be vertical rather than horizontal. Another interpretation is that "standing" means that they are standing to this very day -- the Tabernacle has been hidden away, but has not been destroyed. R' Baruch

Simon cites a number of sources who contrast this to the Temple, which was burned to the ground. Why will the Tabernacle stand forever while the Temple has been destroyed?

R' Baruch Simon explains that the Temple was largely constructed by the hired labor of Tyrean craftsmen who were working for money, not for the sake of the task itself. Their hearts weren't truly in it. However, the Tabernacle was built by Jews themselves, out of commitment and love of G-d. Our accomplishments are most likely to endure when they are done in this fashion, with dedication and for their own sake. © 2013 D. Lifschitz and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we conclude the Sefer {Book} of Shmos with Parshas Pekudai the accounting of materials used for the construction of the Mishkan {Tabernacle}.

The Ramban, at the beginning of the Sefer, described Shmos as the Sefer of Galus and Geulah Exile and Redemption. With this he explains why Shmos began with the names of Bnei Yisroel {the Children of Israel} who went down to Mitzrayim {Egypt}, even though that information had already been given at the end of Breishis. He writes that Shmos, as the Sefer of Galus and Geulah, had to begin with the very beginning of the Galus that descent to Mitzrayim.

As such, it follows that Shmos will end with the final stage of Geulah Redemption. There's often a lot of confusion over what constitutes this redemption. Many would describe Geulah as leaving Mitzrayim, but that took place in the middle of Shmos. Others would say that it was receiving the Torah on Har Sinai {Mount Sinai} but that also took place in the middle of Shmos. Still others would maintain that the stage of redemption would only be reached when we'd enter Eretz Yisroel {the Land of Israel} but that doesn't take place until long after Sefer Shmos.

If so, what was the true redemption that was reached at the end of Shmos?

The end of Pekudai tells what happened once the Mishkan had been erected and all the vessels had been positioned in their proper places: "And the cloud covered the Ohel Moed and the Honor of Hashem filled the Mishkan. [40:34]" The redemption was Hashem's presence resting amongst Bnei Yisroel. That tangible presence of Hashem that had been seen and felt so clearly on Sinai was now a constant reality, traveling with them wherever they went.

Nowadays, we too can get a bit confused over what constitutes redemption. This past week I accompanied my highschool students on an overnight trip to Boston. On the way we stopped at the Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island. One sensed the foundation of religious freedom being laid when reading

the resonating words written by George Washington in response to a letter sent to him by Moses Seixas, the warden of the congregation.

Washington wrote: The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of once class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent national gifts. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

May the children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy. G. Washington

One felt a historical perspective of the great freedoms that we as Jews have enjoyed in the United States and have enabled us to flourish. At risk of getting a little too carried away with this American spirit, we continued on to Boston, contemplated the Holocaust Memorial and visited the colonial cemetery; home to many great people and also to the author of Mother Goose. At that point I began to reflect on the visits to cemeteries I had made during my years in Israel... Praying at the grave of Rav Yosef Karo, the author of Shulchan Aruch, for a clarity in halacha {Jewish Law}. Praying at the grave of the Arizal for a deeper understanding of Torah. Praying at the grave of Rabi Akiva to have the strength and exuberance to be willing to start again, no matter what one's age might be. To be willing to see the good in even the darkest of moments. Those were the thoughts that were running through my mind as I stood at the grave site of Mother Goose...

We dare not confuse freedom with redemption. We dare not compare any place in the world to the Land of Israel. And I thank you, Mother Goose, for driving that point home in a very clear way. © 2013 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“And [Moshe] placed the Testimony into the ark" (Sh'mos 40:20). Rashi tells us that "the Testimony" refers to the Luchos, the stone tablets into which G-d had carved the text of the Ten Commandments. However, when G-d commanded

Moshe to build the ark and instructed him to put "the Testimony that I will give to you" in it (25:16), Rashi says "the Testimony" refers to "the Torah, which is a testimonial between Me and you (plural) that I commanded you the commandments that are written in it." How could Rashi explain "the Testimony" to be one thing (the Torah) when Moshe was given the commandment and another (the Luchos) when he fulfilled that same commandment?

Mizarachi asks this question, as well as how "the Testimony" could refer to the Torah if the building of the Mishkan took place in the first year after the exodus and the Torah wasn't written down until the end of the 40th year (see D'varim 31:24-26). Although Mizrachi does not suggest any answer to his questions, other commentators do.

Maharal (Gur Aryeh) says that "the Testimony" (in 25:16) cannot mean the Luchos, as Moshe was told that G-d will be (future tense) giving "the Testimony" to him; it can't refer to something that G-d had already given him. Since Rashi is of the opinion that the Mishkan wasn't commanded until long after the sin of the golden calf (see his comments on 31:18), the first set of Luchos can't be what will be put in the ark, as Moshe had shattered them upon seeing the golden calf. Besides, since the first Luchos were shattered, they couldn't be a "testimony" to anything. Moshe hewed the stones for the second Luchos and brought them to G-d (see 34:1), so it can't be said that G-d gave those Luchos to Moshe either. Therefore, "the Testimony" that G-d "will give" to Moshe must refer to the Torah, which was given to him years later; included in the instructions to build the ark for the Mishkan was the commandment to (eventually) put the Torah into it. When the Mishkan was built, however, "the Testimony" must be referring to the Luchos, as the Torah wasn't written yet.

There are several issues with Maharal's approach. First and foremost, even if it explains how logistically each "Testimony" has to refer to what Rashi says it referred to, how could the same word ("Testimony") used in the same context (building the Mishkan), in the same manner (being put in the ark) refer to two different things? The Torah uses the word "Luchos" numerous times; why use the same word that refers to "the Torah" instead of saying explicitly that it was the Luchos that were put in the ark? Additionally, Moshe providing the raw materials for the second Luchos doesn't prevent his receiving the finished product from being described as "given to him." Finally, I am not convinced that when Rashi says the commandment to build the Mishkan was given long after the sin of the golden calf he means the specifics described in 25:1-30:38 rather than the commandment to appoint Betzalel and Ahaliav and share the instructions with them (31:1-11). If so, the original instructions could have been given during the first set of 40 days that Moshe spent on Mt Sinai, and "the Testimony that I will give you" could refer to the first

Luchos. As a matter of fact, Midrash Lekach Tov, who also explains "the Testimony" Moshe was told to put in the ark as the Torah, says explicitly that the time frame for G-d giving it to him was "after 40 days." Obviously, explaining "the Testimony" to be the Torah is not based on it being given to him years later.

Midrash Lekach Tov's approach raises difficulties as well. Like Rashi, he explains "the Testimony" that Moshe was commanded to put in the ark as the Torah, which is "forever a testimony that G-d chose [the Children of] Israel and gave them His Torah," and "the Testimony" that was actually put in the ark as the Luchos. Yet, he applies the same verse (Mishlay 4:2, which explicitly refers to the Torah) to both. Why mention a verse that refers to the Torah if he really meant the Luchos, and/or why describe it as the Luchos if he really meant the Torah?

Maskil L'Dovid (25:16) says that when Rashi explains "the Testimony" as the Torah, he doesn't mean the Torah scroll that Moshe wrote at the end of the 40 years in the desert, but the Luchos, as Rashi says explicitly when explaining what Moshe actually put in the ark. However, he doesn't explain why Rashi calls it "the Torah" in one place and "the Luchos" in another. Additionally, as Maharal points out, when the Yerushalmi (Sh'kalim 6:1) discusses the dispute as to whether the Torah scroll was placed inside the ark or at its side, the commandment to put "the Testimony that I will give you" in the ark (25:16) is quoted as a proof-text, clearly indicating that this verse refers to the Torah scroll. [It should be noted, though, that Tosfos (HaShaleim 7) says that the word "es" teaches us that the Torah scroll should also be put in the ark, so this verse being used as a proof-text doesn't mean it's the main focus of the verse.]

The Talmud (Shabbos 87a) says Moshe broke the Luchos based on G-d having forbidden someone who did not maintain His covenant from participating in the Passover offering; if one commandment is off-limits for such a person, certainly the whole Torah should be. Putting aside what the logic of this argument is, some (see Torah Sh'laima 25:123) use this comparison (and other similar Midrashim) to suggest that the term "Luchos" refers to the whole Torah, and that Rashi means the same thing in both places. Besides sharing the same drawbacks as Maskil L'Dovid's approach (including why Rashi uses different terms), basing the comparison on Moshe breaking the Luchos has an additional issue. The Luchos represented the covenant that was first being entered into, so breaking it represented the covenant not being in effect; this is not the same as saying the Luchos represented the commandments that result from the covenant being in effect. Moshe was preventing the commandments from applying to those who had rejected the covenant, he wasn't nullifying the commandments themselves. It is therefore difficult to equate the Luchos with the Torah (as opposed to with the covenant necessary for the

Torah to be given) based on how the Talmud explains why Moshe broke the Luchos.

Sh'mos Rabbah (33:1) uses a parable to explain why G-d commanded us to build the Mishkan, comparing the Torah to a king's only daughter who married the king of another country. As difficult as it was to be separated from his beloved daughter, the king couldn't tell her she couldn't leave. He therefore asked his new son-in-law to build him small guest quarters, so that he can visit her anytime he wants. Similarly, G-d didn't want to part with the Torah, but wanted us to accept it, so asked us to build Him a dwelling place whereby He would still be near the Torah. Our connection with G-d comes through the Torah, which was the centerpiece of the Mishkan. The Luchos may represent our covenant with G-d ("Luchos HaB'ris"), but they also represent G-d giving us the Torah ("Luchos HaEidus"), and contained (at the very least) the Ten Commandments.

The "Testimony" ("Eidus") that was placed in the ark was put there because of it being "Torah," the essence of our relationship with G-d. It "testified" that G-d chose us because He gave to us (and only us). This is what Midrash Lekach Tov says explicitly, and what Rashi is saying as well ("that I commanded you the commandments that are written in it;" Rashi isn't saying that the Torah proves it was G-d who gave us the commandments, but that G-d gave it to us and not to anyone else). Therefore, whatever was considered "the Torah" was placed in the ark. By using the future tense ("that I will give you"), G-d included putting the Torah scroll, when it's written, into the ark. At the time of the building of the Mishkan, though, the only thing tangible that was "Torah" were the Luchos, because they had "Torah" carved into them. Therefore, when Rashi explains what was physically put in the ark that was considered "Torah" (the "Testimony"), he tells us that it was the Luchos. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The second book of the Torah concludes at the end of this week's portion. As the final words are recited, the assembled call out hazak, hazak, ve-nithazek, be strong, be strong and may we be strengthened. Indeed, we say these words when completing each of the Five Books of Moses.

Most interpret these words to speak first to the individual, and then to the collective whole. Hazak is a singular term. When uttered twice it creates a sense of community. Hence, ve-nithazek - together we will gain greater strength and prevail.

However, if we examine the end of Genesis and Exodus, the first two places where we actually utter this phrase, a deeper understanding emerges. Genesis concludes with Joseph's death. Exodus comes to a

conclusion with the cloud of glory resting upon the newly finished Tabernacle.

A common thread can be seen. Both books conclude with endeavors left unfinished-left to be concluded by the next generation. When Joseph dies, slavery is about to begin-fulfillment of the covenant with our ancestors, in the form of redemption, comes many years later. Similarly the Exodus narrative ends with the Tabernacle just constructed, but the fulfillment of the use of the Tabernacle has not yet taken place. Not only has it not been used, but it serves as a blueprint for the ultimate House of G-d, the Holy Temple built many years later.

Note that the three other places where hazak is recited fall into the same pattern. Leviticus and Numbers end with laws of tithing and inheritance. Those laws are given, although they can only fully become a reality after possessing land in Israel, which occurs later. And, of course, Deuteronomy concludes with the death of Moshe. The irony of his life is that the greatest leader of our people never realized his greatest dream, to enter the land of Israel - a mission only to be achieved by those he left behind.

An important lesson emerges. Often, in life, we think that there is nothing we cannot accomplish. The culmination of each book teaches us-no. No one leaves the world fulfilling all of their dreams, all of their hopes and expectations. In the words of Rabbi Tarfon, it is not for any of us to complete the task. (Avot 2:21)

The story is told of an elderly man who plants a carob tree. "Foolish man," a passerby proclaimed, "why do you waste your time? Surely, you will not live long enough to see the tree produce." The old man sighed and responded, "My father planted trees for me and I, in turn, must plant trees for my children."

Notwithstanding that no one can fully complete the task, Rabbi Tarfon adds that we are not free from doing our share, from embarking on our goals with our utmost energy and strength. This in fact, may be the deeper meaning of the refrain: first we proclaim hazak hazak-be strong, be strong, let us each make sure to do our share, knowing all along that we will not complete every goal.

But then, we call out together, ve-nithazek, may we be strengthened in the recognition that together, our task be concluded, even if it takes generations to make it a reality.

With this in mind, I suggest that this week, and every other occasion that we complete a book of the Torah, we take a moment of pause to recognize that as we surround the Torah, that we appreciate the gifts of the generations that proceeded us. At the same time, we should hold our children close in the prayer that they continue the mission of our people and Torah. © 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.