

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

What do you do when your people has just made a golden calf, run riot and lost its sense of ethical and spiritual direction? How do you restore moral order - not just then in the days of Moses, but even now? The answer lies in the first word of today's parsha: Vayakhel. But to understand it we have to retrace two journeys that were among the most fateful in the modern world.

The story begins in the year 1831 when two young men, both in their twenties, one from England, the other from France, set out on voyages of discovery that would change them, and eventually our understanding of the world. The Englishman was Charles Darwin. The Frenchman was Alexis de Tocqueville. Darwin's journey aboard the Beagle took him eventually to the Galapagos Islands where he began to think about the origin and evolution of species. Tocqueville's journey was to investigate a phenomenon that became the title of his book:

Democracy in America.

Although the two men were studying completely different things, the one zoology and biology, the other politics and sociology, as we will see, they came to strikingly similar conclusions – the same conclusion G-d taught Moses after the episode of the golden calf.

Darwin, as we know, made a series of discoveries that led him to the theory known as natural selection. Species compete for scarce resources and only the best adapted survive. The same, he believed, was true of humans also. But this left him with serious problem.

If evolution is the struggle to survive, if the strong win and the weak go to the wall, then everywhere ruthlessness should prevail. But it doesn't. All societies value altruism. People esteem those who make sacrifices for the sake of others. This, in Darwinian terms, doesn't seem to make sense at all, and he knew it.

The bravest, most sacrificial people, he wrote in *The Descent of Man* "would on average perish in larger number than other men." A noble man "would often leave no offspring to inherit his noble nature." It seems scarcely possible, he wrote, that virtue "could be increased through natural selection, that is, by survival of the fittest."¹

It was Darwin's greatness that he saw the answer, even though it contradicted his general thesis. Natural selection operates at the level of the individual. It is as individual men and women that we pass on our genes to the next generation. But civilization works at the level of the group.

As he put it, "a tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to give aid to each other and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes; and this would be natural selection." How to get from the individual to the group was, he said, "at present much too difficult to be solved."²

The conclusion was clear even though biologists to this day still argue about the mechanisms

¹ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, Princeton University Press, 1981, 158-84.

² *Ibid.*, 166.

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involved.³ We survive as groups. One man versus one lion: lion wins. Ten men against one lion: the lion may lose. Homo sapiens, in terms of strength and speed, is a poor player when ranked against the outliers in the animal kingdom. But human beings have unique skills when it comes to creating and sustaining groups. We have language. We can communicate. We have culture. We can pass on our discoveries to future generations. Humans form larger and more flexible groups than any other species, while at the same time leaving room for individuality. We are not ants in a colony or bees in a hive. Humans are the community-creating animal.

Meanwhile in America Alexis de Tocqueville, like Darwin, faced a major intellectual problem he felt driven to solve. His problem, as a Frenchman, was to try to understand the role of religion in democratic America. He knew that the United States had voted to separate religion from power by way of the First Amendment, the separation of church and state. So religion in America had no power. He assumed that it had no influence either. What he discovered was precisely the opposite. "There is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America."⁴

This did not make sense to him at all, and he asked Americans to explain it to him. They all gave him essentially the same answer. Religion in America (we are speaking of the early 1830s, remember) does not get involved in politics. He asked clergymen why not. Again they were unanimous in their answer. Politics is divisive. Therefore if religion were to become involved in politics, it too would be divisive. That is why religion stayed away from party political issues.

Tocqueville paid close attention to what religion actually did in America, and he came to some fascinating conclusions. It strengthened marriage, and

³ This is the argument between E. O. Wilson and Richard Dawkins. See Edward O. Wilson, *The Social Conquest of Earth*, New York: Liveright, 2012. And the review by Richard Dawkins in *Prospect Magazine*, June 2012.

⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, abridged with an introduction by Thomas Bender, New York, Modern Library, 1981, 182.

he believed that strong marriages were essential to free societies. He wrote: "As long as family feeling is kept alive, the opponent of oppression is never alone."

It also led people to form communities around places of worship. It encouraged people in those communities to act together for the sake of the common good. The great danger in a democracy, said Tocqueville, is individualism. People come to care about themselves, not about others. As for the others, the danger is that people will leave their welfare to the government, a process that ends in the loss of liberty as the State takes on more and more of the responsibility for society as a whole.

What protects Americans against these twin dangers, he said, is the fact that, encouraged by their religious convictions, they form associations, charities, voluntary associations, what in Judaism we call chevrot. At first bewildered, and then charmed, Tocqueville noted how quickly Americans formed local groups to deal with the problems in their lives. He called this the "art of association," and said about it that it was "the apprenticeship of liberty."

All of this was the opposite of what he knew of France, where religion in the form of the Catholic Church had much power but little influence. In France, he said, "I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country."⁵

So religion safeguarded the "habits of the heart" essential to maintaining democratic freedom. It sanctified marriage and the home. It guarded public morals. It led people to work together in localities to solve problems themselves rather than leave it to the government. If Darwin discovered that man is the community-creating animal, Tocqueville discovered that religion in America is the community-building institution.

It still is. Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam became famous in the 1990s for his discovery that more Americans than ever are going ten-pin bowling, but fewer are joining bowling clubs and leagues. He took this as a metaphor for a society that has become individualistic rather than community-minded. He called it *Bowling Alone*.⁶ It was a phrase that summed up the loss of "social capital," that is, the extent of social networks through which people help one another.

Years later, after extensive research, Putnam revised his thesis. A powerful store of social capital still exists and it is to be found in places of worship. Survey data showed that frequent church- or synagogue-goers are more likely to give money to charity, regardless of whether the charity is religious or secular. They are

⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁶ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

also more likely to do voluntary work for a charity, give money to a homeless person, spend time with someone who is feeling depressed, offer a seat to a stranger, or help someone find a job. On almost every measure, they are demonstrably more altruistic than non-worshippers.

Their altruism goes beyond this. Frequent worshippers are also significantly more active citizens. They are more likely to belong to community organisations, neighbourhood and civic groups and professional associations. They get involved, turn up and lead. The margin of difference between them and the more secular is large.

Tested on attitudes, religiosity as measured by church or synagogue attendance is the best predictor of altruism and empathy: better than education, age, income, gender or race. Perhaps the most interesting of Putnam's findings was that these attributes were related not to people's religious beliefs but to the frequency with which they attend a place of worship.⁷

Religion creates community, community creates altruism, and altruism turns us away from self and toward the common good. Putnam goes so far as to speculate that an atheist who went regularly to synagogue (perhaps because of a spouse) would be more likely to volunteer or give to charity than a religious believer who prays alone. There is something about the tenor of relationships within a community that makes it the best tutorial in citizenship and good neighbourliness.

What Moses had to do after the golden calf was Vayakhel: turn the Israelites into a kehillah, a community. He did this in the obvious sense of restoring order. When Moses came down the mountain and saw the calf, the Torah says the people were *peruah*, meaning "wild, disorderly, chaotic, unruly, tumultuous." He "saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies." They were not a community but a crowd.

He did it in a more fundamental sense as we see in the rest of the parsha. He began by reminding the people of the laws of Shabbat. Then he instructed them to build the mishkan, the sanctuary, as a symbolic home for G-d.

Why these two commands rather than any others? Because Shabbat and the mishkan are the two most powerful ways of building community. The best way of turning a diverse, disconnected group into a team is to get them to build something together.⁸ Hence the mishkan. The best way of strengthening relationships is to set aside dedicated time when we

⁷ Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010.

⁸ See Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together*, Continuum, 2007.

focus not on the pursuit of individual self interest but on the things we share, by praying together, studying Torah together, and celebrating together: in other words, Shabbat. Shabbat and the mishkan were the two great community-building experiences of the Israelites in the desert.

More than this: in Judaism, community is essential to the spiritual life. Our holiest prayers require a minyan. When we celebrate or mourn we do so as a community. Even when we confess, we do so together. Maimonides rules that "One who separates himself from the community, even if he does not commit a transgression but merely holds himself aloof from the congregation of Israel, does not fulfil the commandments together with his people, shows himself indifferent to their distress and does not observe their fast days but goes on his own way like one of the nations who does not belong to the Jewish people -- such a person has no share in the world to come."⁹

That is not how religion has always been seen. Plotinus called the religious quest the flight of the alone to the Alone. Dean Inge said religion is what an individual does with his solitude. Jean-Paul Sartre notoriously said: hell is other people. In Judaism, it is as a community that we come before G-d. For us the key relationship is not I-Thou, but We-Thou.

Vayakhel is thus no ordinary episode in the history of Israel. It marks the essential insight to emerge from the crisis of the golden calf. We find G-d in community. We develop virtue, strength of character, and a commitment to the common good in community. Community is local. It is society with a human face. It is not government. It is not the people we pay to look after the welfare of others. It is the work we do ourselves, together.

Community is the antidote to individualism on the one hand and over-reliance on the state on the other. Darwin understood its importance to human flourishing. Tocqueville saw its role in protecting democratic freedom. Robert Putnam has documented its value in sustaining social capital and the common good. And it began in our parsha, when Moses turned an unruly mob into a kehillah, a community. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**Y**ou shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day" (Parshat Vayakhel, Exodus 35:3) The Sages of the Talmud query the significance of this verse; after all, the Bible commands us in several places not to do "any manner of creative, physical activities on the Sabbath day" (Exodus 20:10, for example). In fact, the verse

⁹ Maimonides, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3: 11.

preceding this command not to light a fire on Shabbat says, "whoever does an act of physical creativity on [the Sabbath day] shall be put to death."

These are generic prohibitions, which include the 39 acts of physical creativity that according to our Oral Tradition are forbidden on Shabbat (Mishna Shabbat 7:2). "Kindling a fire" is one of those 39, so why is it singled out in this week's biblical portion? Philo Judaeus (c. 20 BCE-c. 50 CE), a great Alexandrian rabbi, exegete and philosopher, provides a fascinating spin on this prohibition: "Do not kindle the fire of anger in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath."

Allow me to record two anecdotes that will provide an interesting postscript to Philo's masterful interpretation.

There was a young man studying in the famed Yeshiva of Volozhin, bright and especially gifted of mind and pen, who began to go "off the derech" (lose his way religiously).

He was discovered smoking a cigarette on the holy Shabbat. The head of the yeshiva, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, asked to see the errant student, urging him to mend his ways. The young man audaciously responded that he was merely exercising his gift of free will.

The yeshiva head, who had given his life and finances to the institution - and who continued the difficult task of teaching and fundraising to maintain his yeshiva even in his later years - was overcome with anger. He slapped the "student" on the cheek.

The mortified young man left the yeshiva and made his way to America, where he became a well-known author and editor of Yiddish newspaper *The Jewish Daily Forward*. He was for many years bitterly anti-religious, and under his watch, the famous (or infamous) "Yom Kippur Eve parties" were held in the Forward's building on the Lower East Side.

In the early 1970s, my family and I would vacation in Miami Beach, Florida, where on Shabbat afternoons I would give shiurim (Torah classes) at the Caribbean Hotel. On one particular Shabbat, I was speaking about the Mussar (Ethicist) Movement and specifically about the famed Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, known as the Hafetz Haim after his book against slander. I invoked a passage in the Talmud (B.T. Arachin 16b), in which Rabbi Tarfon maintains that "no one knows how to properly rebuke in our times; if one person says to another, 'remove the flint from between your teeth,' the other will respond, 'remove the bean from between your eyes.'" However, I added, apparently the Hafetz Haim, who lived 2,000 years after Rabbi Tarfon, did know how to rebuke, and how to bring an errant Jew back to G-d. It is told that a student in the Yeshiva in Radin (the city of the Hafetz Haim) was caught smoking on Shabbat.

The Hafetz Haim spoke to him for two minutes, and the student not only repented, but even received

rabbinical ordination from the Hafetz Haim.

As I concluded my lecture, an elderly gentleman, who had been visibly agitated as I spoke, grabbed my arm and urgently whispered, "Where did you hear that story?" I told him I didn't remember, and I didn't even know if it was true. "It is true," he said. "I was that boy; I was smoking on Shabbat and I have semicha from the Hafetz Haim."

We were both overcome with emotion. We left the hotel and silently walked along the beach. Finally, I couldn't restrain myself. "What did the Hafetz Haim tell you that changed your life in two minutes?" Here is what the elderly man responded, and his words remain inscribed on my soul.

"I was standing in front of the yeshiva with my belongings, ready to leave for home. Standing in front of me was the Hafetz Haim, who took my hand in his and politely asked if I would come to his house. I felt I couldn't refuse. We walked the two blocks in silence, hand-in-hand, until we reached his home. I entered a very small, dilapidated but spotlessly clean two-room hovel, in which not one piece of furniture was whole.

The Hafetz Haim, who was quite short, looked up at me and said only one word: 'Shabbes.' "He gently squeezed my hand as an embrace, and there were tears in his eyes. He repeated again, 'Shabbes,' and if I live to be 120 I will never stop feeling the scalding heat of his tears as they fell on my hand. He then guided me to the door. At that moment, I felt in my soul that there was nothing more important than the Shabbat, and that - despite my transgression - this rabbinical giant loved me. I took an oath not to leave the yeshiva without rabbinical ordination from the Hafetz Haim." ©2015 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The main lesson of this week's Torah reading, which may possibly be obscured by the wealth of Mishkan detail that appears in these closing chapters of the book of Shemot, is the basic Jewish concept of accountability. Moshe accounts for all of the work that was done in the construction of the Mishkan/tabernacle and for every shekel that was expended in that project.

Moshe was troubled when he could not initially account for the one thousand shekels that were apparently missing and that did not allow him to balance the books fully. Only later, when he was able to recall that the missing silver was used to fashion the hooks that held the curtains of the structure, was his account complete and fully accurate.

In the last analysis of life, accountability is the main challenge and test that faces us. King Solomon in *Kohelet* informs us that all of our actions and behavior will be accounted for in G-d's system of justice. It is this concept of accountability that allows the basic axiom of

Jewish life, reward and punishment, the temporal and eternal, to function.

One of the great weaknesses of individuals and societies is that they somehow feel that they are not accountable for their errors, sins, omissions and failures. We live in a world where everyone and everything is entitled to a pass. In our Torah-only educational system, the older the student becomes and the higher the level and reputation of the institution he or she attends, the weaker the demands of accountability become.

Without a system of testing, and with no realistic goals for scholarship there is a complete lack of accountability. In the long run this is destructive to the individual and to the system itself.

In democracies, elections held periodically are meant to hold political leaders accountable. Though in practice this does not always work, the theory of accountability is at least present in the society and the political system. In a dictatorship there never is any voluntary day of reckoning or demand for accountability.

No one likes to be beholden to the judgment of others, therefore we see that in businesses, educational institutions, social agencies and religious institutions, mini-dictatorships abound. The prophets of Israel held the leaders and the people of Israel accountable to the moral teachings of the Torah and to G-d Himself, so to speak. Thus the prophets of Israel served as the necessary brake to an otherwise dictatorial, all-powerful monarchy.

The rabbis of the Talmud were acutely aware that they were accountable for their decisions and behavior. Often times that sense of accountability focused on the presence of another individual rabbi to whom one somehow felt accountable. The great Mar Shmuel mourned the death of Rav by saying that the "person that I feared and was accountable to is no longer with us." The idea of accountability stretches over generations. We are all accountable for the past and for the future. And it is in that light that we will certainly be judged, and how the accomplishments of our lifetime will be marked and assessed. ©2015 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 RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

One of this week's Parshiot, Pekudei, relates a very interesting story between Moshe and Betzalel, who built all the utensils for serving G-d in the desert. When Moshe told Betzalel to build the utensils before the actual housing (Mishkan) for them, Betzalel uncharacteristically spoke up, claiming that you couldn't

have the tools without first building the house because you'd have nowhere to put them. Moshe thought about it, agreed, and praised Betzalel for his insight. This seems very odd, being that Moshe got his orders from G-d, and there was never a valid reason to deviate until now. Why did Moshe suddenly change the way it was to be done?

As Rashi helps us understand, Betzalel's reasoning had a more global meaning: Jews can't just perform the actions (Mitzvot) that are required without first having a 'home' for them. To some that home is a real home where they can share the learning and performance of Torah with their families. To others that home lies within their hearts, as they struggle to be Jews in an environment that's not as supportive. But each of us has to perform Mitzvot and store them within our own "Mishkan" (housing). The point is not to just perform G-d's commandments and hope that one day we'll be inspired to grow from them, but to always have in mind that our goal is to realize their value. To appreciate and learn of the beauty of the Torah is to realize that we've always had a home for it in our hearts. ©2015 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

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 G-d 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 G-d. 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 G-d. All have equal access to the Divine. All are holy. ©2012 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 KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "Moses said to the Children of Israel, 'See, G-d has proclaimed by name, Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur of the tribe of Judah... to perform every craft of design.'" (Ex. 35:30-33). What were the Children of Israel supposed to see?

The Daas Zekeinim MiBaalei HaTosafos says that Moses assumed that he would be designated to fashion the Sanctuary, but G-d said to him, "It is not going to be as you assume. Rather, the grandson of Hur, who was killed by the Israelites for opposing the making of the Golden Calf, he will make the Sanctuary, which is to serve as a forgiveness for the worship of the Golden Calf."

Rabbi Henschel Lebowitz remarks that logically we might have reasoned that Bezalel was unfit for this assignment, because he might be harboring a resentment toward the Israelites for the killing of his grandfather, and he might not throw himself wholeheartedly into the work to achieve forgiveness for them. The selection of Bezalel tells us that G-d knew that Bezalel had eliminated every trace of anger and resentment toward the Israelites. It was this enormous self-mastery that made him the ideal person to build the Sanctuary to achieve forgiveness for the Israelites.

The Children of Israel were supposed to see the selection of Bezalel and to learn the lesson that it is possible for each and everyone of us to eliminate all anger and resentment and to forgive others. *From Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. ©2015 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Mirror Image

This week we read Vayakhel-Pekudei, the final portions that detail the construction of the Mishkan. Amongst the vessel discussed is the kiyor -- the laver used by the kohanim to wash.

The Torah tells us "He made the Laver of copper and its base of copper, from the mirrors of (women who reared) the legions who massed at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting" (Exodus 38:8).

Mirrors? Where did they get mirrors from? And why would women's mirrors, which clearly are a symbol of vanity, if not indulgence, become the very essence of the utensil used to prepare the kohanim for sanctity?

Rashi tells us that Moshe had those exact reservations. He too, was hesitant to accept mirrors as part of the Mishkan's makeup. How did they become an integral part of the holy Mishkan?

After my grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, had officially retired from his position as Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Torah Voda'ath and had moved to Monsey, New York, he still remained very active not only in the needs of Klal Yisrael as a whole but in discussing Torah with almost any student of Torah who would cross his threshold.

One afternoon a young scholar came to speak to my grandfather and share his novella on the Talmud with him. As he sat at the table and was about to begin sharing his self-concocted discourse, my grandmother entered the room with a freshly baked piece of cake for my grandfather and the guest.

Before my grandfather had a chance to thank the Rebbitzin, the young man, obviously steeped in his own thoughts, flippantly discarded her generous offering. "That's all right," he said, "but I already ate. I really don't need another shtikel (piece) of cake."

My grandfather remained silently shocked. He said nothing. The rebbitzin returned to the kitchen and then the young man began to speak.

"I would like to share with the Rosh Yeshiva a shtikel (piece of) Torah thought that I formulated relating to a sugya in the Gemara in Yevamos."

My grandfather was quiet and then responded. "That's all right," he said, "but I already heard Torah on that sugya. I really don't need another shtikel Torah on that sugya."

When my grandfather saw that the boy realized that Rav Yaakov was chiding him on his reckless indifference to the Rebbitzin, he went on to explain: "You see, that piece of cake was her shtikel Torah."

That was something that she prided herself in. That is how she wanted to make me and you feel comfortable. One has to appreciate that as well!"

Rashi explains in the name of the Midrash how Moshe was instructed by Hashem to use the mirrors: "The Israelite women possessed mirrors of copper into which they used to look when they adorned themselves. They not hesitate to bring these mirrors as a contribution towards the Tabernacle. Moshe wanted to reject them since they were made to pander to their vanity, but the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, 'Accept them; these are dearer to Me than all the other contributions, because through them the women reared those huge hosts in Egypt. When their husbands were tired through the crushing labor they used to bring them food and drink and induced them to eat; Then they would use the mirrors to endear themselves to their husbands and awaken their husbands' affection. They subsequently became the mothers of many children, as it is said, (Shir haShirim :8:5) 'I awakened thy love under the apple tree'; This is what it refers to when refers to when it states, Maros Hatzovst "the mirrors of the women who reared the legions."

The Ribono Shel Olam saw the greatness of those mirrors. They were used to enhance the harmony of the home and induce the love and appreciation of husbands and wives. We have the power to transform the most mundane object -- even a most vain object into an item of immense value. ©2015 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd from the blue wool and the purple wool and the red wool they made the packing cloths" (Sh'mos 39:1). Although I used Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan's translation of the words "bigday has'rad" ("packing cloths"), which is how most commentators explain them, others translate them as "knitted uniforms" (or something similar), which more closely reflects how the Talmud (Yoma 72a-72b) and other commentators explain them. The term "bigday has'rad" appears four times in Tanach, all four in relation to the Mishkan (31:10, 35:19, 39:1 and 39:41). Curiously, the first time these "garments" are mentioned is after the initial commandment to build the Mishkan was completed (25:1-30:38), as part of the summation of what B'tzalel and his co-workers were responsible for (31:1-11). Why weren't they included in the initial commandment?

Before attempting to explain their initial omission, an overview of the two basic opinions of what "bigday has'rad" are is warranted. Although Rashi, in his commentary on the Talmud (Chulin 137, Succah 51a), says that "bigday has'rad" are the priestly garments, in his commentary on the verses themselves (31:10, 35:19 and 39:1) he states his self-proclaimed

own opinion (even though there are some Midrashim, or Midrash-like commentators, with the same understanding; see Torah Sh'laimah 31:22* and 23) that they are the cloths used to cover the Mishkan's vessels during transport. He cites two strong proofs for his opinion. First of all, one verse (31:10) explicitly mentions both ("bigad has'rad" and the priestly garments), presenting them as two separate things. (The other verses also mention both, but the way they are presented could be explained as one being a clarification of the other.) Secondly, another verse (39:1) mentions the materials they were made from, which do not completely match up with the materials of the priestly garments (as the latter use two additional materials, including linen, which was in almost every priestly garment), while being an exact match with the materials the "packing cloths" were made from (see Bamidbar 4:6-12). It is likely that because of these two points, the majority of the commentators (e.g. Radak -- root word sin-reish-daleh, Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, Chizkuni, et al) also explain "bigday has'rad" to be the packing cloths.

Ramban (see also Tosfos) is a notable exception, explaining "bigday has'rad" the way the Talmud does; another term for the priestly garments. Aside from the two points raised above, another issue with this approach is why two separate terms are needed (let alone used in the same verse). Additionally, although the priestly garments were mentioned extensively in the original commandment, they weren't called "bigday has'rad" there; even if the question of why the packing cloths were initially completely omitted is a stronger question than why the priestly garments weren't initially referred to as "bigday has'rad," it is a question nonetheless. And we'd still have to explain why, if they refer to the priestly garments, there is no mention anywhere (not in the initial commandment, nor in the subsequent summaries of the commandment, when the commandment is relayed to the nation, or in the description of the fulfillment of the commandment) of the packing cloths. Their first appearance would be in the commandment delineating the procedure for packing up the Mishkan, in Bamidbar. Where would these cloths come from if there was never a commandment to make them? Why is there no mention of them until then?

Mishneh L'Melech (Hilchos K'lei HaMikdash 10:4), tries to reconcile Rashi's explanation in Chumash (that "bigday has'rad" refers to the packing cloths) with his commentary on the Talmud (where he says they were the priestly garments). Referencing Mizrahi's oft-stated refrain that Rashi's purpose in his commentary on Chumash is to give the simplest, most straightforward explanation of the verses, he says that Rashi (on Chumash) is explaining "bigday has'rad" the way it makes the most sense on a p'shat level, while following the Talmud's explication, which is on a d'rash level,

when explaining the Talmud. [Mishneh L'Melech doesn't use the word "d'rash," but this is how his suggestion is commonly understood, especially by those who give varying suggestions as to what the Talmud's "d'rasha" is based on (i.e. the word "s'rad," the word "bigday" and/or the implication of the "the" that they had been already referenced). Netziv (35:19) says both explanations are valid on a "p'shat" level, and both are included in the intent of the verses.] Ramban's objections aside (and his objections do fall away if we take the perspective that both explanations were intended whenever the term is used), it is therefore likely that the Torah uses the term "bigday has'rad" to refer to both simultaneously. It is stated separately from the "holy garments" because it refers to the packing cloths, but are called "garments" (and the other "d'rash" clues) because it teaches us things about the priestly garments as well. The question that remains is why there is no reference to the packing cloths in the original commandment. [It should be noted that Rabbeinu Bache (31:10) does find a place in the original commandment where the packing cloths are hinted to, but it is only a hint (at best), and does not fully answer the question.]

One possibility is based on one of the reasons given for using the word "s'rad" to describe the packing cloths; they were made from the leftover dyed wool from the priestly garments and the curtains/screens of the Mishkan (see Chizkuni on 31:10). If the leftover wool was supposed to be used (for whatever reason, whether it be so that those who donated the wool shouldn't be concerned that their donation wasn't needed or so that it should be prepared with the other wool, giving it a certain status, or for another reason), including the packing cloths in the original commandment would undermine this possibility. How could this wool be considered "extra" if it was needed, from the outset, for the packing cloths? Even if these cloths could be made from any material, and were "upgraded" to dyed wool because there was some left, they couldn't be included in the initial commandment, where every item was described in full detail, if the material which they would eventually be made from had to be "leftovers," or would be different than how it was originally commanded? (Besides, it would defeat the purpose of using leftover materials in order not to upset the donors if they were told that the task the material was used for didn't require this material.)

One issue with this possibility is that the first mention of "bigday has'rad" (31:10) was well before the work was started, and the second (35:19) was also before the material could be considered "leftovers." However, in these two instances, there were no details given (for any of the items mentioned), so there was no need to have to avoid saying that they should be made from leftover materials. And even though we now know (in retrospect) that they were called "bigday has'rad"

because they were made from leftover materials, since there could have been/are other reasons for them to be called that, it would not defeat the purpose of using leftovers. It was only in the initial commandment, where the details of how they should be made would have to be fully explained, that cloths made from leftover materials couldn't be included. (They could be hinted at, but not explicitly included.) But there's another possibility as well.

Previously (<http://tinyurl.com/oxcy6oj>), I discussed the nature of prophecy, specifically how the concepts being communicated by G-d to a prophet do not consist of just (or even primarily) words; even when the word "dibur" (usually translated as "speech") is used, it refers to a concept being conveyed, not the words themselves (even if the concept is expressed through words). This is especially true when it came to the Mishkan, as numerous times a vision of how the Mishkan and its vessels should look is mentioned in the commandment itself (25:9, 25:9, 26:30, 27:8). Last year (<http://tinyurl.com/or57cet>) I referenced Rabbi Yehonasan Eibeschutz (Chidushay Rabbi Yehonasan on B'rachos 55a, Tiferes Yehonasan on Sh'mos 25:9 and Y'aras D'vash 1:2), who uses this idea to explain how Moshe could have taught Betzalel things in the wrong order (first the vessels then the structure rather than first the structure then the vessels) based on the perspective Moshe had when viewing this vision. I applied this concept to explain how details not included in the words of the initial commandment could still be considered having been "commanded to Moshe," as Moshe was able to know and understand details not included in the words of the commandment by having "seen" these details in the vision. The conceptual takeaway (or at least one of them) is that the words used to describe the initial commandment are a representation of what Moshe saw when he was shown a "working model" of the Mishkani. His job was to recreate the vision he saw while atop Mt. Sinai in the center of the nation's camp below.

If Moshe was shown a "working model" of the Mishkan, the only things he could have seen in that vision (which became the basis for the words used in the initial commandment) were those needed when the Mishkan was built and fully functional. Anything needed when it was not operating, such as the wagons used to transport the beams, would not have been part of this vision. (True, the vessels had poles attached, which were used to carry them when the Mishkan was being transported, but they were part of the vessels at all times, so were included in the vision.) The packing cloths had no function while the Mishkan was up and operational, so were not part of Moshe's vision. And if they were not part of that vision, they couldn't have been included in that initial commandment, which were only a manifestation of the vision itself. ©2015 Rabbi D. Kramer