

# Toras אֵשׁ תּוֹרָה Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**P**ekudei has sometimes been called the accountant's parsha, because that is how it begins, with the audited accounts of the money and materials donated to the Sanctuary. It is the Torah's way of teaching us the need for financial transparency.

But beneath the sometimes dry surface lie two extraordinary stories, one told in last week's parsha, the other the week before, teaching us something deep about Jewish nature that is still true today.

The first has to do with the Sanctuary itself. God told Moses to ask people to make contributions. Some brought gold, some silver, some copper. Some gave wool or linen or animal-skins. Others contributed acacia wood, oil, spices or incense. Some gave precious stones for the High Priest's breastplate. What was remarkable was the willingness with which they gave: "The people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning. So all the skilled workers who were doing all the work on the Sanctuary left what they were doing and said to Moses, 'The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done.'

"So Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: 'No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the Sanctuary.' And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work." (Ex. 36:3-7)

They brought too much. Moses had to tell them to stop. That is not the Israelites as we have become accustomed to seeing them, argumentative, quarrelsome, ungrateful. This is a people that longs to give.

One parsha earlier we read a very different story. The people were anxious. Moses had been up the mountain for a long time. Was he still alive? Had some accident happened to him? If so, how would they receive the Divine word telling them what to do and where to go? Hence their demand for a calf -- essentially an oracle, an object through which Divine instruction could be heard.

Aaron, according to the most favoured explanation, realised that he could not stop the people directly by refusing their request, so he adopted a

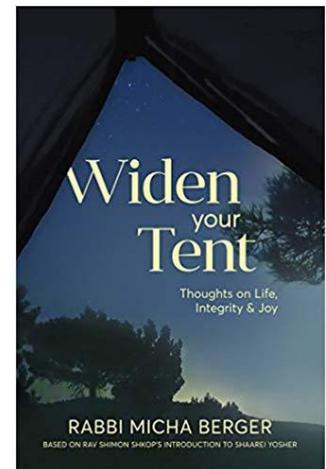
stalling manoeuvre. He did something with the intention of slowing them down, trusting that if the work could be delayed, Moses would reappear. This is what he said: "Aaron answered them, 'Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.'" (Ex. 32:2)

According to the Midrash he thought this would create arguments within families and the project would be delayed. Instead, immediately thereafter, without a pause, we read: "So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron." (Ex. 32:3)

Again the same generosity. Now, these two projects could not be less alike. One, the Tabernacle, was holy. The other, the calf, was close to being an idol. Building the Tabernacle was a supreme mitzvah; making the calf was a terrible sin. Yet their response was the same in both cases. Hence this comment of the sages: "One cannot understand the nature of this people. If they are appealed to for a calf, they give. If appealed to for the Tabernacle, they give." (Yerushalmi Shekalim 1:45)

The common factor was generosity. Jews may not always make the right choices in what they give to, but they give.

In the twelfth century, Moses



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Maimonides twice interrupts his customary calm legal prose in his law code, the Mishneh Torah, to make the same point. Speaking about tzedakah, charity, he says: "We have never seen or heard about a Jewish community which does not have a charity fund." (Laws of Gifts to the Poor 9:3)

The idea that a Jewish community could exist without a network of charitable provisions was almost inconceivable. Later in the same book, Maimonides says: "We are obligated to be more scrupulous in fulfilling the commandment of tzedakah than any other positive commandment because tzedakah is the sign of the righteous person, a descendant of Abraham our father, as it is said, 'For I know him, that he will command his children... to do tzedakah'... If someone is cruel and does not show mercy, there are sufficient grounds to suspect his lineage, since cruelty is found only among the other nations... Whoever refuses to give charity is called Belial, the same term which is applied to idol worshippers." (Ibid. 10:1-3)

Maimonides is here saying more than that Jews give charity. He is saying that a charitable disposition is written into Jewish genes, part of our inherited DNA. It is one of the signs of being a child of Abraham, so much so that if someone does not give charity there are "grounds to suspect his lineage." Whether this is nature or nurture or both, to be Jewish is to give.

There is a fascinating feature of the geography of the land of Israel. It contains two seas: the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee is full of life. The Dead Sea, as its name implies, is not. Yet they are fed by the same river, the Jordan. The difference is that the Sea of Galilee receives water and gives water. The Dead Sea receives but does not give. To receive but not to give is, in Jewish geography as well as Jewish psychology, simply not life.

So it was in the time of Moses. So it is today. In virtually every country in which Jews live, their charitable giving is out of all proportion to their numbers. In Judaism, to live is to give. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd he set the laver between the Tent of the Meeting and the altar, and put water there for washing. And Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet... " (Exodus 40:30–31) Before the priests would enter the Tent of Meeting or approach the altar, they were commanded to wash their hands and feet from the laver. Not doing so was a capital offense, as expressed in the portion of Ki Tisa: "If they are not to die they must wash with the water before entering the tent of meeting..." (Ex. 30:20)

The washing of one's hands and feet may have been the easiest of all the required rituals in the Sanctuary, but that didn't make it any less significant. On the contrary, not only was it the prerequisite for the priest's presence in the Sanctuary, but the washing of the priests has become an essential part of the halakhic life of every Jew – such as washing one's hands upon rising, or before the eating of bread.

Therefore it's interesting that the very last physical item connected to the rituals of the Sanctuary that the Torah mentions is the washstand, or laver. The portion of Pekudei closes the book of Exodus. Pekudei means "These are the accounts of..." and that's exactly what the portion does: a detailed summation of everything that God commanded and the architects constructed. After nearly half of the book of Exodus's devotion to the Sanctuary, this portion provides the closing statement. And what is the last Sanctuary "furnishing," in effect the sum-up, which is recorded in the Torah? The washstand. True, the enclosure is also mentioned, but the enclosure is not a physical item; a hatzer (as the Torah calls it), encloses space, defining an area between other spaces. It is certainly not part of Sanctuary ritual as we understand the washstand to be.

If it's true that the Torah wants us to pay particular attention to this washstand, then we must reread its description in the previous portion: "He made the copper laver and its copper base out of the mirrors of the service women [armies of women] who congregated to serve at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting." (Exodus 38:8)

It is significant that the Torah speaks of the mirrors of the women. After all, a mirror is one of those objects which is at best taken for granted as we gaze into it and check for excesses and wrinkles, and at worst causes us slight embarrassment at our vain concern with physical appearance. Is it not strange that such "vanities" are to be considered worthy of being used by the priests to sanctify their hands with water before the start of any ceremony or offering?

When the commandment was originally given in Ki Tisa, the Torah did not command the women to donate their copper mirrors. Indeed, as we have previously seen, Ibn Ezra calls the women's

contribution a victory of spiritual values over physical vanity. The daughters of Israel didn't need these mirrors anymore; they wanted to serve God by emphasizing good deeds over good looks, and their gifts of the mirrors were symbolic of this change.

Rashi, in questioning the Midrash Tanhuma, describing how the women enticed their husbands by means of the mirrors to have sexual relations with them, wants to stress that one should not be quick to reject the physical – even sexual – aspect of our existence. If anything, Judaism ennobles sex and love within marriage, which is why “kiddushin,” the Hebrew for marriage, is rooted in the word for holy, “kadosh”! When two separate people become physically united in order to become partners with God in creating another person, they are engaging in one of the holiest acts a human being can pursue. And if a mirror can help in the process, what finer material is there for the sanctification of the priest's hands before he performs the divine service?

Moreover, from this perspective, the mirrors signal to God the women's profound faith in a Jewish future. Imagine Egypt under Pharaoh's rule, a Holocaust of 210 years' duration! Knowing that his sons would be drowned in the Nile and his daughters forced to live with Egyptian slave-masters, why on earth would any Hebrew want to bring more children into the world?

But thank God for their wives, the Almighty is teaching Moses. The women remembered the divine promises made to the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs which foretold the ultimate redemption of the people and their entry into the Promised Land. The women urged their husbands not to despair, to believe in a Jewish future! In the midst of torturous persecution, slavery and infanticide, bringing more Jewish children into the world was an act of supreme faith. And the mirrors were the instruments for the expression of that faith.

I believe yet another lesson lies in the sanctity of the mirrors. The Hebrew word for mirror, *marah*, has the very same letters as *mareh*, appearance. And seeing our appearance in a mirror does not only emphasize our physical selves. We all realize that we are more than that which the mirror reflects. After all, the mirror does not show our inner selves, our memories and aspirations, our dreams and our fears. Every time the priest would sanctify his hands and look in the mirror, he would be inspired to reflect not only on his own face, but on all the faces of all the people who would be seeking atonement in the Sanctuary. Let us ponder for a moment: Who commonly came to the Sanctuary? People in search of atonement, individuals bringing guilt and sin offerings. Hence, the danger would lie in how easy it was to forget the individual behind the person who arrived with his offering. It was too easy for the priest to make his human judgments based upon the single instance when he would see the

suppliant with his sacrifice; he would tend to forget that one who commits a sin is not necessarily a sinner. A one-time lapse does not necessarily define an individual's character and personality! One of the important lessons the mirror taught is that people are not how they appear to be on the surface. Just as the priest understood that the face staring back at him in the laver is hardly the total picture – there's a lot more to us than what stares back in the glass – so too he could not possibly judge his “clients” by the reason they entered the Sanctuary.

And is this not the true message of the women's gift? After all, the women who beautified themselves for their husbands were an easy target for a cynic to ridicule their efforts as a jaded expression of inappropriate physical desire. But perhaps the message of the mirrors was the exact opposite: Don't look at me only as I appear now in the mirror; look at me also as you saw me as a bride and look at me as the mother of your future children. The present snapshot is only a small part of the story; human history, and certainly Jewish history, dare not be judged only by the picture of the moment!

Looking at people is an art, and when the prophet describes how the future Messiah will look at people, he stresses that “...he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes...” (Is. 11:3). We must learn to see within, and not only to look without.

Similarly, we find the admonition in the Ethics of the Fathers, “Judge all people favorably” (Avot 1:6). This phrase can also be taken to mean: “Judge the entire person, all of the person [*kol ha'adam*], her manifold activities as well as her inner self – and then you will come to a favorable assessment.”

Thus we see the central role of the washstand in the structure of the Sanctuary: the faith of the Jewish women despite the fact that their husbands' spirits were broken, and the importance for the priest to look deep and hard at himself as well as others to ascertain a true and full picture. In the final analysis, our reflection in a mirror is only a small part of who we really are. ©2019 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

## **Shabbat Forshpeis**

In the portion of Pekudei a reckoning of the work done in the Tabernacle is recorded. Interesting, is the Hebrew word for reckoning—*pekudei*. (Exodus 38:21) As I have often pointed out in these weekly Torah discussions, one key to understanding the meaning of a word in the Torah is by analyzing the first time it is found.

In the story of Avraham (Abraham) and Sarah we first come across the term *p-k-d*. The Torah tells us that for many years, Avraham and Sarah could not have children. Finally Sarah does give birth. In the words of the Torah, “and the Lord remembered Sarah

as He had spoken...and Sarah conceived and bore a son to Avraham." (Genesis 21:1) The word "remembered" is pakad. Somehow then pekudei is interwoven with birth as the text indicates that God had remembered Sarah.

It follows therefore, that Pekudei, the accounting of the Tabernacle, is associated with birth. Perhaps it can be suggested that just as a mother plays the crucial role in the development of the fetus and the nurturing of its well being, so too does God serve as a Mother in His protection of the Tabernacle. The Hebrew word for mercy is rachum, from the word rechem that means womb. God's love is the love of the womb. It is a mother's love that is infinite and unconditional, much like the love displayed by God in protecting the Tabernacle.

Another parallel comes to mind. By definition birth involves a sense of history. When a child is born there is recognition of historic continuity, of the infant being part of a continuum of the family's past history. So too, the Mishkan. In many ways, the building of the Tabernacle was the crescendo of Israel's past, the culmination of a dream that Israel as a nation would have a place in which to worship God.

Although the birth of a child is often the end of a time of feelings of joy and anticipation, it is also a beginning. It is the start of hopes and wishes that the child grow to full maturity and impact powerfully on the Jewish people and all humankind. This is also the case with the Mishkan. In many cases of buildings, many involved see the beauty of the actual structure to be an end in itself. But buildings are not ends, they are rather the means to reach higher, to feel more powerfully the deeper presence of God. The Mishkan is associated with birth for it reminds us that even as a tabernacle or any synagogue is dedicated, our responsibility is to go beyond the bricks and mortar to make sure that the space is infused with spirituality.

The birth of a child is a time to re-evaluate our priorities and look ahead toward the dream of years of growth. The Mishkan, and in the same way our individual structures of worship, should, in the same way, make us reflect on our values and aspire to higher spiritual levels of holiness. ©2019 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**

**O**ne of the more popular buzzwords bandied about in current society is transparency. Loosely, this means that governments and financial institutions should have no secrets and that the public be allowed to know everything that occurs and to be able to see how money is being spent and allocated. This is a

noble goal but like many goals it runs contrary to human nature and the goal is rarely if ever achieved.

In this week's Torah reading we have an example of complete transparency regarding the materials donated by the Jewish people for the construction of the Tabernacle. Additionally, it discusses the priestly vestments during the encampment of the Jewish people in the Sinai desert, after their exodus from Egyptian slavery. Moshe accounts for every piece of material that was collected for this holy and noble project.

Jewish tradition tells us that Moshe was unable to account for 1000 measures of silver that were donated but he did not remember for what they were used. Then, almost miraculously, the silver identified itself as being used for the hooks for the tapestries of the Tabernacle and Moshe's accounting was proven to be accurate to the final degree and coin. Such transparency is necessary for people are by nature suspicious of others and especially of government when it comes to handling money or other precious materials. There was always the suspicion -- many times proven to be a correct -- that somehow money was mishandled or worse, appropriated into private pockets instead of for the public good. Therefore, the accounting by Moshe to the Jewish people regarding the donations for the building of the Tabernacle is not to be viewed as an act of piety but rather one of absolute necessity.

To emphasize this point and to make clear where the Torah stands on issues of financial transparency is perhaps the reason that such space and detail is devoted in the Torah to this accounting of the funds and material used and donated in the building process of the Tabernacle. The Torah could have allowed itself to merely state that after all the donations were collected and tallied and the work of the artisans and builders of the Tabernacle was completed, then Moshe gave a full accounting of this matter to the Jewish people. But such a statement, even from Moshe, would not have sufficed to allay the suspicious nature of the public, a nature that always judges its leaders harshly and suspiciously.

The rabbis point out to us that none of the garments that the priests wore while performing their holy duties in the Temple had pockets. This was the case so no one could suspect them of taking any of the property of the Temple or any public donations. Transparency therefore is a proactive undertaking and should be performed willingly and thoroughly without being given grudgingly as an answer to public demand. The standard is a high one, but the Torah never shirks from making lofty goals. The Torah reading of this week reminds us of this constant challenge. ©2019 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

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**RABBI DAVID LEVINE**

## The Difference in Gold

**P**arashat Pekudei begins with an accounting of the gold, silver, and copper that had been donated by the people for the building of the Mishkan. Rashi explains that this accounting was both of the total amount of each metal used as well as the amount of that metal needed in the making of each individual item. Moshe wished to make clear to the people that every amount that had been donated was used for its proper purpose. No amount had been left over for either his or the Kohanim's (priests') benefit. Moshe was very precise because he did not wish anyone to question his handling of the funds.

The Kli Yakar poses a question which stems from a significant discussion among the Rabbis. Moshe lists the total amounts of silver and copper that were used and then goes into a further accounting of each of those metals in detail for each object that was made. The Kli Yakar asks why this same detailed accounting did not happen at this time for the gold that had been donated. There are a myriad of answers to this question from the practical to the philosophical. The Kli Yakar presents a rational explanation, saying that the gold was not counted for each individual usage because the usage of gold had not been completed at this time, as there was still need for gold in the clothes and special adornments of the Kohanim. The Kli Yakar then asks why there was no reckoning of the gold after the completion of the clothing and adornments. He quotes a Midrash which tells that Moshe was concerned because he could not remember one thousand seven hundred shekels that had been donated until a bat kol, a heavenly voice, reminded him that the shekels had been used for the hooks on the posts which supported the curtains. When the people saw that a heavenly voice testified on Moshe's behalf, they no longer believed that an accounting of the gold was necessary as it was clear that even the Heavens had testified that there had been no wrong-doing on Moshe's part.

The Ramban posits a different reason why the work done with the gold was not detailed. He explains that the Mishkan and the courtyard which were the responsibility of the sons of Levi (Gershon and Merari) were assigned to Itamar, but the Altar, the Holy Ark, the Table of the Showbread, the Menorah, and the Altar of the Incense under the construction by the third son of Levi (Kehat) were assigned to Elazar. Here Moshe gives an accounting of the items which were under the auspices of Itamar but does not include those items which were the responsibility of Elazar.

The Midrash which we saw earlier explained that Moshe was responsible for the initiation of the accounting. It stressed that Moshe was concerned that

the people should not suggest that he used any of the items that were donated for his personal use. The Or HaChaim presents a totally different view of this accounting. He explains that the people had sinned at the Golden Calf when they pointed to the Calf and exclaimed, "Eileh Elokecha, Yisrael, this is your Elokim, Yisrael." Hashem punished the people and told Moshe that He would no longer lead the people. Moshe pleaded with Hashem and He relented, but only because the people repented and returned to Him. Part of that repentance had to use the same process as the sin itself. This is an aspect of all repentance in Jewish tradition. The people had donated from their wealth to the making of the Golden Calf and now were repenting by donating to Hashem's dwelling place on Earth, the Mishkan. They were recognizing the true Elokim by establishing His dwelling place as He commanded them. The Or HaChaim demonstrates this concept of repentance further by showing that the word "Eileh, this", is repeated here as "Eileh pekudei HaMishkan, this is the accounting of the Mishkan." Moshe wanted to demonstrate to Hashem and the people the full extent of their repentance. For that reason, he listed not only the total amount of each metal that had been donated, but he also broke the donations down into each object built with those donations. Each donation was an indication of this repentance.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin presents us with a unique twist to this accounting and the lack of a detailed account of the gold. He explains that every Jew has it in his heart to serve Hashem but at times strays from that service. It is the nature of people to wish an exact and detailed accounting of all money that is donated for the purpose of serving Hashem, but they are not careful about the money which is spent when they stray from that purpose. HaRav Sorotzkin suggests that it is human nature to not require an accounting of the money spent in sin as one does not wish to be reminded of the extent of his actions. When instead one donates for a proper cause, he wishes to know the full extent of the good that he has accomplished and demands a proper accounting. One is not concerned that the money was misspent but wants to be reminded of the mitzvah one has accomplished.

HaRav Sorotzkin explains the lack of an exact accounting of the gold differently. He approaches the problem from the same explanation earlier that the objects that were made of the gold involved the items that were under the auspices of Kehat and Elazar. These items were placed inside the Mishkan in the Holy and the Holy of Holies. They were never directly seen by the people other than the Kohanim (in the Holy) and the Kohein Gadol (in the Holy of Holies). When it was time to travel, these items were first covered with the curtains and only then taken out of the Holy while totally

covered. Practically, there would be no point to give an accounting of the gold used in these objects as there would never be a visible proof of that accounting. Moshe only told the people something which they could verify by themselves. Here they could never verify the amount of gold that Moshe would report.

We are reminded by HaRav Sorotzkin that we, too, have goodness and the desire to do Hashem's mitzvot in our hearts. Of course there are times when we stray, but our basic desire is for good. We must strive to make our hearts and our actions as pure as the gold which was donated by our forefathers. May we then be able to request that a full accounting of our righteousness be permanently credited on our behalf.

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### **RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## **Up Close and Personal**

**T**hese final portions in the Book of Exodus summarize the amazing accomplishments of the Children of Israel in building the Mishkan -- the edifice that would house the Divine presence in this temporal world -- while in the desert. It was a mammoth feat, an act that consumed an entire nation. Men and women, young and old each had a share in this great endeavor. The Torah tells us: "Every man whose heart inspired him came; and everyone whose spirit motivated him brought the portion of Hashem for the work of the Tent of Meeting, for all its labor and for the sacred vestments. The men came with the women; everyone whose heart motivated him brought bracelets, nose-rings, rings, body ornaments -- all sorts of gold ornaments -- every man who raised up an offering of gold to Hashem." (Exodus 35:21-22)

And then there were those who did the work. "Moses summoned Bezalel, Oholiab, and every wise-hearted man whose heart Hashem endowed with wisdom, everyone whose heart inspired him, to come close to the work, to do it (Exodus 36:2). The wording needs clarification. Why use the term, "whose heart inspired him, to come close to the work, to do it"? Why not just say "whose heart inspired him, to do the work"? What is the meaning of coming close to do the work? Just do the work!

The lines outside of Rav Elozar Menachem Shach's apartment in B'nai Beraq were always long. Visitors came from across the nation and the world to speak to the eldest sage in Israel. Young and old, wealthy and poor waited in the corridor of the tiny apartment in order to gain either wisdom, advice, counsel or blessing from the revered sage.

One evening after almost everyone had left, a wealthy North American philanthropist was about to enter the study to speak to Rav Shach concerning an important matter. Before entering the study he noticed a father clutching the hand of a school-aged child no more than eleven years old.

"Please, sir," interrupted the father. "It is difficult for my child to sit still in class. Talmud seems to bore him. Please let me enter before you. I just want a quick blessing from the rabbi that my son should develop an interest in Torah learning." It seemed innocuous enough. The wealthy man had already waited quite a while and he figured that another minute or two for Rav Shach to shake the boy's hand, give him a blessing, and send him on his way could not take that long, and so, he agreed.

It was almost 45 minutes before the child left Rav Shach's apartment. The boy and his father were both beaming enthusiastically. Then they spotted the benevolent man who allowed them to go ahead. He was baffled. "What happened in there?" He asked. "Why did his blessing take so long?"

The father of the young boy began to explain. "We entered the room expecting a brocha and a handshake. But Rav Shach told us that we didn't need his blessing. He asked my son what he is learning. Then he took out that Tractate and sat down with him. He learned a Mishna with my son until he understood it. Then the Rashi. Then the Gemara. Then more Rashi. Then a Tosefos. It was not long before my son and the revered Rosh Yeshiva became entangled in excited Talmudic repertoire!

"The Rosh Yeshiva explained to us that all you need is to get close to the Gemara, draw yourself to it. Then it will grasp you and embrace you! You don't need a blessing to enjoy it. You must draw yourself close to it and then you will enjoy it!"

Building a Mishkan, like any project that entails difficult work for the sake of Heaven, can be arduous. It can become depressing at times and it is easy to become dispirited and desperate. The key to the success of the building Mishkan lies in the words of the posuk, "everyone whose heart inspired him, to come close to the work, to do it." In order to do the work, you must draw yourself close to the work. If you take small steps with love and bring a project close to your heart, then rest assured you will complete the work in joy!

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### **ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT**

## **Treasurer of Hekdesh**

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**T**he Temple Treasury, besides monies that they control, can also have ownership of Hebrew slaves. Additionally, just as a slave can free himself by buying his freedom back from his master, so also one would expect the same when dealing with those slaves that are owned and in the possession of the Temple. Ostensibly one should be able to approach the treasurer of the Temple and pay the required amount to free himself.

However the law is quite the opposite. The Treasurer of the Temple must first sell the Hebrew

slave to another and only then can the slave buy his freedom from the new owner (*Tractate Gittin 38b*). Why is it that with reference to monies we trust the Treasurer of the Temple but not when dealing with a Jewish slave?

*Rashi* states that when dealing with *Hekdesh* (sacred Temple property), the treasurer has financial ownership over the value of the slave (*kinyan damim*), but not the actual human being (*kinyan Haguf*). Since he does not own the actual human being then by definition he cannot free him. The *Meiri* offers an alternative reason and states that the reason the Treasurer cannot sell the slave is because he is not the owner of this slave. The true owner is the Almighty himself, and therefore the treasurer has no right to sell anything that is not his.

*Tosafot* explains that if we give this power of selling a slave into the hands of the Treasurer, he might find himself in situations where he might take advantage of the possessions of *Hekdesh*. However, this interpretation is quite difficult to understand for we know that the Treasurers of *Hekdesh* are reliable and honest when dealing with monies so why shouldn't we trust them with the sale of slaves?

One might explain that when dealing with monies we certainly believe the honesty and forthrightness of the Treasurer, but here we are dealing with emotional and ideological concerns (freeing a slave) and in such a case he might rationalize his feelings, in that he prefers the ideology of liberty and freedom over his loyalty to *Hekdesh*. ©2019 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

**RABBI YAAKOV HABER**

## The Boutique Shul

In order for the world to work as designed, with peace and holiness, the Presence of Hashem, the Shechinah, must be embedded into the world. To achieve this we needed a project that would bring all the tribes of Israel, in spite of their differences, together. The project was the Mishkan.

Everyone brought something to the table. Some brought their wealth, some brought their engineering ability, some brought their weaving and other forms of artistry, some brought their physical strength and others brought their organizational skills. Everyone contributed their best and worked together. This 150 foot by 75 foot concerted effort brought us from individuals to a cohesive nation. Once we were a nation, the presence of Hashem rested upon us.

They contributed so much to the Mishkan, that not only was there enough, but "vehutar", there was extra. What happened to the extra? The Zohar explains that the extra heart and soul was put away by G-d and later used in the building of the two Temples in Jerusalem, as well as every synagogue that would ever be built during the thousands of years of Galut. The

energy that constantly goes into the building and upkeep of synagogues throughout history is the spillover of energy that was donated to the Mishkan. The energy of unity, generosity and freshness of spirit was used for the Mishkan and then trickled down through the generations, right to our synagogues.

A synagogue, it seems, is more than just a minyan, more than a gathering place, and even more than a place to pray. It is more than a rabbi that can inspire with words of Torah and it is more than a beautiful chazzan. Since a synagogue is a combined community effort with sparks of the unity of the original Mishkan -- it is a home for the Shechinah.

When our people first came to Israel we prayed in bamot. Bamot were little backyard shuls, little family shuls or neighborhood shuls ("on the block"). If you were wealthy you may have had your own private bama. Wealthy cities in the Negev would boast about the two or three hundred bamot in their community. There were boutique bamot, hashkama bamot, late bamot, talking bamot and quiet bamot. Bamot were probably very comfortable and convenient. But, when the Bais HaMikdash was built in Yerushalayim bamot became outlawed. We had a new mandate -- to host the Shechinah, and in order to host the Shechina we had to work together.

When we built the Mishkan in the desert, in spite of our differences, we built it together. Because of the joint effort we merited the Shechina.

Today, more than ever, we need the Shechina. If we overlook the differences that divide us, together we can again build the Beit HaMikdash in Jerusalem, and merit true peace in Israel, and peace in the world. ©2019 Rabbi Y. Haber & *torahlab.org*

**RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON**

## Perceptions

"This is the accounting of the Mishkan -- the Tabernacle of Testimony -- as requested by Moshe of the Levites, under the guidance of Itamar, the son of Aharon the priest." (Shemos 38:21) With the final parsha of Sefer Shemos, we conclude the discussion about the construction of the Mishkan. With the beginning of Sefer Vayikra, b"H, we will be shown the Mishkan in action. "Toras Kohanim," another name for Sefer Vayikra, will introduce us to the sacrifices that were brought there as part of the service of God.

The Mishkan was a miniature universe. It was certainly far from being just another physical structure. Everything about its construction and the service of God which it made possible was Divinely-designed to educate and elevate. But, like with respect to any "map," the Mishkan, without a proper legend, is unusable.

The first question is, how many areas did the Mishkan incorporate? The most obvious answer is, three. The "Chatzer," or Courtyard, which was 50 amos

by 50 amos, the "Kodesh," the Sanctuary in which the Showbread, Menorah, and Incense Altar was located, and which was 20 amos long by 10 amos wide, and, of course, the "Kodesh Kodashim," the Holy of Holies in which the Aron was placed, and which was 10 amos by 10 amos. There was, however, ONE more area, and it was the world beyond the curtains surrounding the Mishkan. It was the world in which everyone else lived, but it was still an "area" of the Mishkan, making the total Mishkan areas FOUR.

Why is this important? Because the four levels correspond to the four letters of God's Ineffable Name, and represent the totality of Creation, physical AND spiritual. And, as such, they also represent the three-step process to spiritual growth and personal perfection, and an important insight into Purim to boot.

The "Outside World," in which we all start off, corresponds to the Final Heh of God's Name. Though part of God's Name, this Heh has the spiritual capacity to become separated from it as a result of sins. Hence, Teshuvah, spelled Tav-Shin-Vav-Bais-HEH, is really "teshuv-HEH," or, "return Heh," because repentance "returns" the Heh to the rest of God's Name.

When the Heh is distant from the other three letters, hester panim -- the hiding of God's face -- occurs. It is the reality of Amalek, who does everything he can in every generation to make it appear as if God does not exist, or at least does not involve Himself in human history. Mankind becomes "hefker," doing as he pleases with impunity. Therefore, returning the Heh, so-to-speak, reverses Godlessness. It undoes the hester panim and promotes "gilui panim" instead, the revelation of God to mankind, making man more morally responsible for his beliefs and actions. As the Torah stated at the end of Parashas Beshallah, God's Name will only be complete, once Amalek is gone from Creation once-and-for-all.

The beginning of that tikun requires a person to enter the world of the Mishkan, where the Presence of God dwelled. The first area was the Chatzer, which corresponded to the third letter of God's Name, the Vav. It's where the altar stood, and sacrifices were offered to atone for sins. And, it was 50 by 50 amos, and that says EVERYTHING.

Fifty. Now THERE'S a mystical number, specifically because it is THE number that alludes to the Nun Sha'arei Binah -- the Fifty Gates of Understanding. They are very Kabbalistic, but suffice it to say that they are the basis of ALL Torah knowledge, from the simplest to the deepest. They are what give a person access to the intellectual perspective to see the world as God does, as much as is humanly possible.

This is what it was like to enter the area of the Mishkan. It was EXPERIENTIAL Torah. A person could gain inside the Chatzer in a few moments, what could take them years to learn from seforim. God is EVERYWHERE, including the world beyond the

Chatzer. But this became EMOTIONALLY perceivable once inside the Chatzer.

This is why this area corresponds to the Vav of God's Name. It is the number six, which is a number of redemption, and therefore Yosef HaTzaddik, the first Moshiach Ben Yosef. It is through 50 Gates of Understanding that one goes to freedom.

At the other side of the Chatzer was the entrance to the Kodesh, the Sanctuary, which only kohanim could enter. That is where the Menorah was daily kindled, the showbread resided, and the incense was burned on its own gold altar. All three corresponded to "Da'as," which is Godly knowledge, and the result of the Nun Sha'arei Binah.

Hence, the Kodesh corresponded to the first Heh of God's Name, which corresponded to the sefirah of Binah, or Understanding. As such, it was the chamber in advance of the Kodesh Kodashim, the Holy of Holies, where the Aron HaKodesh resided, entered only once a year by the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur.

The Kodesh itself was 20 amos long. Therefore, the distance from the entrance to the Chatzer to the Paroches, the curtain separating the Kodesh Kodashim from the Kodesh, was 50 + 20 amos, or 70 amos altogether. Regarding this number, the Talmud says: "Anyone who becomes settled through wine has the knowledge -- da'as -- of his Creator... has the knowledge -- da'as -- of the 70 Elders; wine was given with 70 letters" (Rashi: the gematria of yai'in -- wine -- is 70), "and the mystery (of Torah) was given with 70 letters (sod -- mystery -- also equals 70). When wine goes in, secrets go out." (Eiruvin 65a)

Wine? 70? Isn't Purim a holiday about wine, celebrating a holiday that occurred in the 70th year of exile?

Last, but CERTAINLY not least, was the fourth and final area, the Kodesh Kodashim -- Holy of Holies. It corresponded to the Yud of God's holiest Name, the area itself being Yud by Yud amos -- 10 by 10 amos.

It was a place where the laws of nature broke down. According to the Talmud, the Aron HaKodesh did not take up physical space. It was there, visible, but bigger than the 10 by 10 space it occupied, and yet it still fit.

SUPERNatural. Like the miracle that took down Haman in 70 days. Like the sea that split to free Jews and drown Egyptians. Like the Ten Plagues that broke Pharaoh.

No wonder the Torah spent so many verses on the Mishkan. We may not all be architects of physical structures, but we are all architects of our lives. And like any building, such "construction" also requires a plan, and that's the Mishkan. After all, had it not been for the golden calf, each one of us would have been a Mishkan. Now we have to make ourselves that way, by following the map laid out by the actual Mishkan. ©2019 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org