

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In Ki Tissa and in Vayakhel we encounter the figure of Betzalel, a rare type in the Hebrew Bible -- the artist, the craftsman, the shaper of beauty in the service of God, the man who, together with Oholiab, fashioned the articles associated with the Tabernacle. Judaism -- in sharp contrast to ancient Greece -- did not cherish the visual arts. The reason is clear. The biblical prohibition against graven images associates them with idolatry. Historically, images, fetishes, icons and statues were linked in the ancient world with pagan religious practices. The idea that one might worship "the work of men's hands" was anathema to biblical faith.

More generally, Judaism is a culture of the ear, not the eye. As a religion of the invisible God, it attaches sanctity to words heard, rather than objects seen. Hence there is a generally negative attitude

within Judaism towards representational art.

There are some famous illustrated manuscripts (such as the Bird's Head Haggadah, Bavaria, circa 1300) in which human figures are given bird's heads to avoid representing the full human form. Art is not forbidden as such; there is a difference between three-dimensional and two-dimensional representation. As Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg (c. 1215-1293) made clear in a responsum, "There is no trespass [in illustrated books] against the biblical prohibition... [illustrations] are merely flat patches of colour lacking sufficient materiality [to constitute a graven image]." (See Tosafot, commentary to Yoma 54a-b, s.v. Keruvim; Responsa Rabbi Meir Mi'Rothenburg (Venice: 1515), 14-16.) Indeed several ancient synagogues in Israel had quite elaborate mosaics. In general, however, art was less emphasised in Judaism than in Christian cultures in which the Hellenistic influence was strong.

Positive references to art in the rabbinic literature are rare. One exception is Maimonides, who says the following: "If one is afflicted with melancholy, he should cure it by listening to songs and various kinds of melodies, by walking in gardens and fine buildings, by sitting before beautiful forms, and by things like this which delight the soul and make the disturbance of melancholy disappear from it. In all this he should aim at making his body healthy, the goal of his body's health being that he attain knowledge." (Eight Chapters on Ethics, chap. 5. 298)

The very terms in which Maimonides describes the aesthetic experience make it clear, however, that he sees art in strictly instrumental terms, as a way of relieving depression. There is no suggestion that it has value in its own right.

The strongest positive statement on art of which I am aware was made by Rabbi Abraham ha-Cohen Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of (pre-State) Israel, describing his time in London during the First World War: "When I lived in London, I would visit the National Gallery, and the paintings that I loved the most were those of Rembrandt. In my opinion Rembrandt was a saint. When I first saw Rembrandt's paintings, they reminded me of the rabbinic statement about the creation of light. When God created the light [on the first day], it was so strong and luminous that it was possible to see from one end of the world to the other. And God feared that the wicked would make use of it. What did He do? He secreted it for the righteous in

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the world to come. But from time to time there are great men whom God blesses with a vision of that hidden light. I believe that Rembrandt was one of them, and the light in his paintings is that light which God created on Genesis day." (Jewish Chronicle, September 9, 1935)

Rembrandt is known to have had a special affection for Jews. He visited them in his home town of Amsterdam, and painted them, as well as many scenes from the Hebrew Bible. I suspect that what Rabbi Kook saw in his paintings, though, was Rembrandt's ability to convey the beauty of ordinary people. He makes no attempt (most notably in his self-portraits) to beautify or idealise his subjects. The light that shines from them is, simply, their humanity.

It was Samson Raphael Hirsch who distinguished ancient Greece from ancient Israel in terms of the contrast between aesthetics and ethics. In his comment on the verse "May God enlarge Japheth and let him dwell in the tents of Shem" (Genesis 9:27), he observes: "The stem of Japheth reached its fullest blossoming in the Greeks; that of Shem in the Hebrews, Israel, who bore and bear the name (Shem) of God through the world of nations... Japheth has ennobled the world aesthetically. Shem has enlightened it spiritually and morally."

Yet as we see from the case of Betzalel, Judaism is not indifferent to aesthetics. The concept of *hiddur mitzvah*, "beautifying the commandment," meant, for the sages, that we should strive to fulfill the commands in the most aesthetically pleasing way. The priestly garments were meant to be "for honour and adornment" (Exodus 28:2). The very terms applied to Betzalel -- wisdom, understanding and knowledge -- are applied by the book of Proverbs to God Himself as creator of the universe: "The law and the Lord founded the earth by wisdom; / He established the heavens by understanding; / By His knowledge the depths burst apart, / And the skies distilled dew." (Proverbs: 3:19-20)

The key to Betzalel lies in his name. It means "In the shadow of God." Betzalel's gift lay in his ability to communicate, through his work, that art is the shadow cast by God. Religious art is never "art for art's sake." Unlike secular art, it points to something beyond itself. The Tabernacle itself was a kind of microcosm of

the universe, with one overriding particularity: that in it you felt the presence of something beyond -- what the Torah calls "the glory of God" which "filled the Tabernacle" (Exodus 40:35).

The Greeks, and many in the Western world who inherited their tradition, believed in the holiness of beauty (Keats' "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know"). Jews believed in the opposite: *hadrat kodesh*, the beauty of holiness: "Give to the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psalms 29:2). Art in Judaism always has a spiritual purpose: to make us aware of the universe as a work of art, testifying to the supreme Artist, God Himself. *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 Moses assembled [vayakhel] all of the congregation of the children of Israel and said unto them: ...Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day shall be for you, a day of complete rest for the Lord. " (Exodus 35:1-2) The portion of Vayakhel opens with the command to keep the Sabbath. This raises once again that fundamental question of the very strange order of the last five portions of the book of Exodus, Sanctuary – Sabbath – golden calf – Sabbath – Sanctuary.

Thus the Torah commands us first to create a Sanctuary, to establish a center of the sacred, which is after all the purpose and ideal of a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But the sacred can easily be profaned – as history in modern life can testify – with holy wars, Iranian Khomeini-ism and fanatical stone-throwing and book burning. Hence, in the middle of the construction of the Sanctuary (the first two portions, Teruma and Tetzaveh, are dedicated to the Sanctuary) comes the travesty of the golden calf (the portion of Ki Tisa), which serves as an eloquent warning to subsequent generations not to pervert, or idolify, the holy. It then becomes perfectly logical, or rather psychological, to now return and conclude with the positive message of the Sanctuary as the Torah does in its two concluding portions of Vayakhel and Pekudei. And the Sabbath is the beacon of light which teaches the essence of Judaism, preventing its perversion into a golden calf of idolatry.

The Sabbath is the most central pillar of our faith. It is no accident that the very first law which was given to the Israelites after the splitting of the Reed Sea – before the revelation at Sinai – was the Sabbath (Ex. 15:25; Rashi ad loc. citing Sanhedrin 56b), and the first law explained to a would-be convert (Jew by choice) is likewise the Sabbath (Yevamot 47). In all of

my experience in attempting to expose Jews who have wandered far afield from their faith to the glories of their Jewish heritage, I have found that there is no more powerful introduction to returning to Judaism than the Sabbath experience.

And how does the Sabbath accomplish this? Certainly the delightful glow of the Sabbath candles, the warmth of the Kiddush wine, the familial and congenial togetherness of delectable Sabbath meals replete with angels of peace, praises to women, blessings of children, songs of holiness and words of Torah, all contribute to the creation of a special and unique day dedicated to physical relaxation, spiritual creativity and existential well-being.

But the Sabbath is more than that. It contains the essence of the Jewish ideal, the purpose for which we were chosen by God, and the mission which has the power to unite all of us in the pursuit of a common historic goal (vayakhel). The "oasis in time" evokes the three most seminal moments in Jewish history, three moments of past and future that more than any others serve to define our Jewish present. A description of these moments are to be found in each of three main Amidot (standing prayers) which are recited by observant Jews every Sabbath. On Friday evening we evoke and re-experience the creation of the world ("And God completed the heavens and the earth and all their hosts..."), on Sabbath morning we evoke and re-experience the revelation of the law at Sinai ("Moses rejoiced with the gift of his portion...the two tablets of stone he brought down in his hands"), and on Sabbath afternoon we evoke and attempt to experience the redemption ("You are One and Your Name is One" – and the prophet Zekhariah teaches that only "... on that day [of Messianic redemption and universal peace] will God be One and will His name be One"). Creation, revelation and redemption are the three pillars which form the bedrock of the Jewish message and mission.

Creation reminds us that there is one omnipotent creator, and the entire world consists of His limited, but still exalted, creatures created in His image: This serves to unite all individuals in a bond of inescapable unity. The very fact that we share the same Parent in Heaven means that we are all of us siblings on earth: whites and blacks, Israelis and Palestinians. The corollary of God the Creator is God the Redeemer, God who will not allow any of His children to be enslaved by any of His other children. Hence the two versions of the Decalogue as well as the Kiddush prayer define the Sabbath as both a memorial to creation as well as a memorial to the Exodus from Egypt. And the Sabbath remains an eternal reminder that any expression of the sacred which does not include sensitivity to every human being and respect for the freedom and integrity of each of God's children can only lead to the perversion of the golden calf idolatry.

Revelation reminds us that there can be no

freedom without structure, no respect for self without taking into account the needs of others, no love without law. The Torah remains our God-given blueprint for the kind of meaningful and sacred lives which lead to more perfect families and societies. In this sense, Judaism is a revolutionary concept, an idea and lifestyle which will not rest until human nature is perfected and the world is redeemed. Thus the final Sabbath Amida evokes that longed-for period when the world will be redeemed as a result of the Torah, which has the power and the purpose to perfect the universe under the kingship of God, in effect to revolutionize society.

The genius of Judaism lies in its ability to maintain the future ideal as an ever-present reality of our daily lives. In this way we can never forget what we are striving to accomplish, nor can we allow ourselves to become cynically disillusioned as to the possibility of our attaining it. Hence each workaday week of frustration and sadness is climaxed by a Sabbath – a taste of the World to Come, a glimpse into the longed-for period of peace and harmony. Each Sabbath reminds us of the pure taste of the Sanctuary, and prevents us from descending into the depths of golden-calf materialism and idolatry.

Post-Script: The story is told of a Hassidic rebbe who always rejoiced mightily upon sharing the Sabbath meals with his congregant-disciples. People who were bent over with burden and toil each week, whose brows were creased with anxiety and whose eyes were clouded with worry, would become almost miraculously transformed into tall and clear-eyed princes and princesses with their new-found freedom and faith at the advent of Shabbat. But alas, the picture would change during the "third meal" late on Shabbat afternoon. As the sun would begin to set, the songs would become somber and the mundane concerns would return to haunt the faces and backs of the Jews who were forced to return to reality. And the rebbe would look heavenwards and beseech: "How long, dear Father? Can you not redeem us now!?"

But at one particular Sabbath "third meal," the rebbe's eyes became animated with a strange glow. He banged on the table, crying out: "I have it, my beloved disciples. We shall force God's hand, wage a rebellion against Heaven. We will bring about the redemption – now. The plan is breathtakingly simple. We will not recite the havdala [the prayer of "separation" which concludes the Sabbath and begins the week]. If the Sabbath never ends, redemption never ends. If there is no havdala, we will never have to return to the weekday world."

The Hassidim were entranced. They danced and sang joyous tunes long past the appearance of three stars, long past the conclusion of the Sabbath in other congregations. But then their wives began looking for them; after all, the children had to be fed and bathed, clothes had to be washed, food had to be

cooked. One by one each disciple embarrassedly returned to his family, leaving the rebbe as the lone revolutionary – until the rebbe's rebbetzin entered the scene, complaining that the week had to begin, for there was much necessary work to do. With tears coursing down his cheeks, the defeated rebbe made havdala. A voice then came down from heaven: "Redemption shall come, and the world will experience a never-ending Sabbath. But this cannot occur until all of Israel really wants to be redeemed, really works to be redeemed, and until every Jew internalizes the message of the Sabbath and reaches out to every human being, making each day a Sabbath, creating a new world order, an eternal period of peace and love."

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah reading of this week opens with a review and reiteration of the concept and laws of Shabbat.

The rabbis of the Talmud used this juxtaposition of Shabbat and the detailed description of the construction of the Tabernacle to derive and define what type of work was forbidden on Shabbat. This is certainly very noteworthy as it forms the basis of understanding the values of Shabbat as they apply to us, especially as it provides a rest from the stresses of modern life.

However, there is another insight present in this discussion of Shabbat. The first word of the Torah reading indicates that it took place in a public venue with all gathered to hear Moshe explain this concept for them and for all their generations. We are thus informed that among the many facets of the diamond of Shabbat, there is not only the private one that is observed within the home and the synagogue but also the public one that can be seen and recognized and felt even on the street and in general society itself.

For a long period of time in Jewish history, over the past two to three centuries, both facets of Shabbat were seriously challenged within the Jewish world. With the growth of the Orthodox community, especially over the last 60 years, the pride in the Shabbat has been salvaged. Even though the majority of the Jewish people are not really Sabbath observers today, there are entire sections of the Jewish people that have preserved the Shabbat in all of its beauty and allowed its holiness to invest its homes and families.

The struggle for the public Shabbat is being waged here in Israel and wherever large Jewish communities exist in the world. There are entire neighborhoods in the Diaspora where the population is overwhelmingly made up of Orthodox Jews and the public Shabbat is observed and visible. In these Jewish neighborhoods there is practically no traffic on Shabbat nor any visible public desecrations of the holy day. However, here in Israel the public Shabbat is, and has been for the past century, a strong bone of contention

between the religiously observant and secular elements of Israeli society.

In cities such as Jerusalem and even Tel Aviv there is no public transportation that operates on the Shabbat. However, there is a constant demand from secular groups for this element of the public Shabbat to be eliminated and for the Sabbath to be confined to the home and the synagogue. But it is the public Shabbat that is most necessary in Jewish society. It is the public Shabbat that defines us and reminds us of who and why we are and what our mission of service and devotion in life truly is. It is unfortunate that the public Shabbat like many other truly spiritual and apolitical values have been hijacked by politicians of all stripes and turned into contention and misunderstanding. I am confident, though, that the Shabbat will always win out, as it always has, even the public elements of Shabbat. © 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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Why is the construction of the Mishkan juxtaposed with Shabbat in the beginning of this Shabbat's reading? When God created the world he unleashed His unlimited power to create all forms of existence—inanimate, vegetable, animal and human.

God however, purposefully performed His task in an incomplete manner. The last word of the creation story is la'asot, to do (Genesis 2:3). Here, God asks that we complete creation and in partnership with Him redeem the world.

Perhaps the greatest manifestation of human creativity in the Torah is the building of the Mishkan which required human mastery over every creation. For example: gold was required to construct the Ark; vegetables were used for the dye needed to color parts of the Tabernacle; animal skin was used to cover the Tabernacle—and, of course, human interaction was essential to coordinate a building venture of this magnitude.

Nehama Leibowitz points out that the same words describing God's completion of creation (va-yekhal, vayar, ve-hinei, va-yevarekh— Genesis 1:31, 2:2-3) are also used to describe the completion of the Mishkan (va-yekhal, vayar, ve-hinei, va-yevarekh— Exodus 39:43, 40:33).

In the course of becoming so successful, however, human beings are in danger of forgetting that God is the source of our creativity. Hence the laws of Shabbat would have us refrain from activities that indicate our mastery over the world. In this way, we assert the centrality of God.

Note—the first eleven of the 39 categories of

prohibited work on Shabbat deal with the vegetable world (leading up to the baking prohibition). The next twenty three deal with animal life (leading up to sewing and writing). And the next four deal with the inanimate (building). In withdrawing from each of these endeavors we acknowledge God as the Supreme Master over nature. The final category, the prohibition against carrying, leads to the understanding that even in the social sphere (carrying is a symbol of human interaction), God is in ultimate control. (See Mishnah Shabbat 7:2)

Thus the juxtaposition of Shabbat to Mishkan — to teach that even the Mishkan could not be built on the Sabbath. A reminder that God is at the core of all existence. ©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 KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

Moses commanded the Jewish people regarding the materials for the Tabernacle: "Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring an offering of the Almighty" (Exodus 35:5). What lesson do we learn from the command being directed to those who have a "willing heart"?

Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm explains that those who brought the offerings for the Tabernacle should bring their hearts with their offering. It is not sufficient just to give a monetary donation. The Almighty wants our hearts, that is our thoughts and our emotions.

When you just give money to a charity or worthy institution, you help the cause for which you are giving. However, when you give with your heart, you are changing and elevating yourself as a person. Each donation makes you into a more giving person. Whenever you give, reflect before you give and then give with a full heart! *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2019 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

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Spinning Wool

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Spinning wool is one of the thirty nine labors that one is forbidden to do on Shabbat. It is actually one of the labors that are explicitly mentioned in the Torah. "Every wise hearted woman spun with her hands" and "All the women whose hearts inspired them with wisdom spun the goat hair" (Exodus 35:25,26) The essence of this labor is the gathering of small amounts of wool or cotton with one's finger tips or with a spindle to form thread. The derivation (toldah) of this labor according to one view is the forming of braids of dough and creating them into Challah.

The spinning in the Tabernacle was very special in that the wool was spun while it was still attached to the goat before the goat was sheared. Only the women who had such special wisdom were able to accomplish this; among ordinary people, this knowledge was not known. Thus anyone who would perform this labor on Shabbat, (as these women did) would not be transgressing since it is not the normal way of spinning wool.

Why did the women spin the wool this way? Some point out the zeal of these women to fulfill the Mitzva even before the animal was sheared while others say that they did this to prevent defilement for we know that the wool can never be defiled (Taamei) while it is attached to a living thing.

Another fascinating interpretation is advanced by Rav Yechiel Michal from Austrobiza who posits that since spinning as these women did is permitted on the Shabbat (as stated above) then the work of the Tabernacle became transformed to a Mitzva that is not bound by time, such, that women are also obligated to do. ©2018 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Letting Go

The Mishkan is completed in these portions, and the Torah recaps the stunning accomplishment. "These are the reckonings of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle of Testimony that was reckoned through Moshe's bidding. And Betzalel son of Uri, son of Chur, did everything that Hashem commanded Moshe" (Exodus 38:21-22). The Torah calls the Mishkan a Tabernacle of Testimony. To what is it testifying? Architectural ability? A fund raising phenomenon? Or perhaps something even loftier?

Rashi tells us that the Mishkan, in fact, testified that Hashem forgave the Jewish people for the sin of the Golden Calf.

It always has bothered me. Forgiveness comes with a correction of a misdeed. Obviously, each account needs direct redress. Stinginess is forgiven with acts of munificence. Sins of uncontrolled rage are forgiven when the transgressor acts with undeviating gentleness.

What connection does the building of the Mishkan have with the forming of the Golden Calf? Why is the completion of the Mishkan a testimony to absolution?

The second verse is also is disconcerting. "Betzalel did what Hashem told Moshe." Did he not do what Moshe told him? It seems that he jumped the chain of command. It should have stated that "Betzalel did what Moshe told him."

Dr. Abraham Twerski, in his book *Do Unto Others*, relates an amazing story that he personally experienced. Early in his career, Dr. Twerski would teach students by having them accompany him through

psychiatric institutions. There he would introduce the young observers to the live subjects, rarely seen outside textbooks.

In a chronic care facility, Dr. Twerski pointed out a most difficult case, a male patient whom no doctor was able to cure. The man was mute and would not communicate. He had entered the facility 52 years earlier and was suffering from strange schizophrenic-like symptoms. Immediately following breakfast he would go into the corner of the large community room, contort his arms, palms outstretched in an upward manner and stand there until lunch. After lunch, he would resume his position until bedtime. No treatment nor medication, shock therapy, or cajoling was able to get the man off his feet. His condition was so severe that due to standing all day he developed excessive accumulation of serous fluid in tissue spaces in his feet.

On one visit, a student asked if he could talk to the patient. Dr. Twerski agreed, while wondering what the young doctor could offer that had not been explored by the experts.

After a brief conversation the man stared blankly at the young doctor. But then the student assumed the man's exact contorted position and said to him, "I'll stand here like this. You can go sit down." The patient smiled, proceeded to a couch, and for the first time in 52 years he actually sat down!

Dr. Twerski surmised that the patient felt he was holding up the world. Without him, it would collapse. (He had no explanation for the meal or bedtime gaps.) The moment the patient was convinced that someone could carry the mission as well, he relaxed.

Commentaries explain that the sin of the Golden Calf began when Moshe did not return from Sinai on time. The minute that 40 days elapsed and Moshe was missing the nation panicked. No one, they felt, could lead them but Moshe, so they created a false deity. And they prayed and danced to a new-found god. The Mishkan, however, was an antidote. Moshe charged Betzalel with the tremendous task, and he accomplished it. In fact, our sages explain that he even challenged Moshe in certain directives, and Hashem concurred with him! Betzalel did what Hashem wanted exactly the way it was told to Moshe. He had the ability to perform as if he received the directive himself! That is the goal of mesorah. Tradition has the next generation holding the torch though passed from previous leaders as if it were passed from the Almighty Himself. The nation saw that it is possible to continue despite the former leader holding up the world every step of the way. There is room for young leadership to carry on the directives of the elder generation. That is the way the Torah carries on. And that is the way we hold up the world. ©2019 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

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The construction of the Mishkan is the culmination of Sefer Shemos. As the Ramban notes in his introduction to Shemos, this is the Book of Redemption. Once the presence of Hashem rests upon the Jewish People through the vehicle of the Mishkan, the redemptive process of yetzias Mitzrayim is complete. The role of the Mishkan was already mentioned as the miracles associated with yetzias Mitzrayim came to an end. Following krias Yam Suf, the song composed by Moshe and the Jewish people ends with the words, "You Hashem will establish your sanctuary." As fundamental to yetzias Mitzraim as the Mishkan is, there is another institution in Jewish life that is also integral to yetzias Mitzrayim and even has greater significance than the Mishkan. Parshas Vayakhel begins with the commandment to observe Shabbos. By introducing the actual construction of the Mishkan with a reference to Shabbos, we are taught that the Mishkan cannot be built on Shabbos. Shabbos is a *zecher* L'yetzias Mitzrayim and the Mishkan culminates yetzias Mitzraim, yet Shabbos takes precedence over Mishkan. How do we understand the relationship between these two pillars of Jewish life?

The Mishkan is not only mentioned at the end of the Az Yashir, but it is also referenced in the beginning. "Zeh Keli V'anvehu" opens the song celebrating the miracle of krias Yam Suf. There are several interpretations of the ambiguous word, "V'anvehu." Chazal in Meseches Shabbos interpreted it as referring to *hiddur mitzvah*, the beautifying of the objects used for mitzvah observance. The Targum interprets the word as relating to constructing the Mishkan. These interpretations complement one another. *Hiddur mitzvah* of the highest order was practiced in the construction of the Mishkan. The elaborate details that encompass the parshios that deal with the Mishkan help create *Hiddur Mitzvah* of the highest order was practiced in the construction of the Mishkan. The elaborate details that encompass the parshios that deal with the Mishkan help to create a beautiful structure. The Mishkan and later the Beis Hamikdash were stunning works of art, a true expression of *hiddur mitzvah*. Why is *hiddur Mitzvah* so important? Why can't we simply perform mitzvos in a way that satisfies all halachik requirements, but not necessarily in a beautiful fashion? *Hiddur mitzvah* is an expression of *ahavas Hashem*. A gift that is presented to someone who one loves is done so with special care and attention to detail that expresses that love. When we don't want to do something, we do it in a way to simply get by. *Hiddur mitzvah* is one way we show our love for Hashem and the mitzvos He has given us.

There is a third interpretation of the word "v'anvehu" that encompasses the feelings that the

Jewish people had for Hashem at the time of krias Yam Suf. Chazal in meseches Shabbos suggest that "V'anvehu" is related to the words, "Ani V'hu", "I and him." The Jewish people praised Hashem by saying that they wanted to emulate him. By following in Hashem's ways, we express our complete love and devotion towards Him. We imitate those whom we admire. There are many ways we emulate Hashem, such as being kind, patient, and forgiving. There is one mitzvah that the very essence of which is to follow in Hashem's ways. We observe Shabbos just as Hashem observed the first Shabbos, following yetzias Mitzrayim, as we became His Nation. What greater way to express our following in His ways than to observe His Shabbos. As we construct a beautiful Mishkan for Hashem's Presence to dwell in, our ultimate goal is to express our love for Him. What greater way to declare this love than by observing His Shabbos? A Mishkan that would be built on Shabbos would be nothing more than a fancy man-made structure that did not demonstrate our love for Hashem. As we build an exquisite Mishkan to fulfill "V'anvehu," we reach the culmination of yetzias Mitzrayim. We do so by first observing Shabbos as we follow the model of our Beloved who rested on Shabbos. By doing so, our beautiful Mishkan is truly our expression of Ahavas Hashem. ©2019 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky & TorahWeb.org

RABBI YAAKOV BERNSTEIN

Haaros

Leaders usually claim that they act for the betterment of the populace. Often, however, self-interest clouds their perspective. How many are really looking for attention and power? The following is a brief introduction to this subject.

The Gemara (Sotah 21b) gives a case of a "chasisd shoteh" -- a pious fool: A woman is drowning, and he is in a position to save her. However, he will have to look at her unclothed, and is concerned about forbidden thoughts; meanwhile, he loses the chance to save her. This, the Gemara concludes, is a "chasisd shoteh" -- a pious fool.

The later commentaries ask many questions. Why is he referred to as a pious fool? If he allowed her to die, this should be construed as wickedness. There is certainly no piety here!

First, we surmise that there are others to help, and there will not be any loss of life. So he is not considered wicked. But why is he pious, if his actions are foolish?

Generally, saving a life takes precedence over all mitzvos. However, there are three areas in which a person must give up his life rather than transgress: Murder, Forbidden Relations, and Idolatry. If so, regarding these three areas, life does not necessarily take precedence!

If he has deliberate intention to have pleasure

while saving her, it may very well be that he is not allowed to save her if others are present -- hers is a forbidden relationship. This, then, is the reason our friend was referred to as a "pious fool": he was concerned that he's acting in order to derive pleasure from the forbidden relationship. Perhaps this is a form of piety (i.e. his extra concern), but in regard to life and death, such piety may be folly. (See Mincha Chareiva, Sota 21b)

Rav Moshe Feinstein concludes that the question of forbidden relationships should not play a role in halacha here, assuming the intended purpose is solely to save a life. (Igras Moshe, Even Ha'ezer 1:56)

Rav Yerucham Levovitz writes:

"Although it is difficult to refrain from forbidden thoughts, he has no choice but to act to save a life. Though he will be judged for those thoughts, he must do his part. However, this is where her life is dependent upon him. If there are others, though (for example, trained lifeguards ready to perform), he must weigh his motivation; if he cannot act with pure intent -- the others should go. (Note: We are assuming that no time is lost, and the woman will not be endangered by having the others save her.)"

With this, explains Rav Levovitz, we get a small impression of Moshe Rebbenu's thinking. At the Sneh (the Burning Bush), Moshe was asked to redeem the Jewish People from Egypt. Again and again, he refused; finally he said, "Send whomever You will send!" Why the refusal? Moshe Rebbenu desired mitzvos greatly, what could be greater than redeeming all of Klal Yisrael from captivity?

He was afraid that there might be a small appearance of impropriety, a trace amount of self-interest which could distort the mission. Even a tiny inclination for power or honor would taint everything. Since Moshe felt that Aharon was fit for the task, Moshe's suspicions regarding his own motivation made Aharon a better choice. (See Da'as Chochma Umusar, Part 2, Ma'amar 22) ©2019 Rabbi Y. Bernstein & torah.org

RABBI DAVID LEVINE

The Non-Daily Message

Parashat Vayakhel, when not combined with parashat Pekudei, deals with the fulfillment of the building of the Mishkan and its objects, keilim, while Pekudei, when read separately, deals with the making of the various garments worn by the Kohanim. These actions were commanded to Moshe in parashat Terumah and parashat Tetzaveh which was read earlier. We will discuss only one of those special objects of the Mishkan, the shulchan of the lechem hapanim, the table of the Show breads. Both the table and the breads are important to our discussion.

The shulchan of the lechem hapanim is not like any of the other keilim in the Mishkan. The other keilim were used daily in the service of Hashem. The

menorah gave off light and was rekindled each night. The mizbei'ach, the altar, was used for the daily morning and afternoon sacrifices and was also used for an individual's sin offerings and other types of offerings as well. The mizbei'ach also allowed for the sprinkling of the blood (which brought forgiveness) and the burning of the parts of the sacrifices that were not for our consumption. This enabled us to eat those parts which were meant for us and to know that our offering was accepted and we had fulfilled our obligations. The mizbei'ach hazahav, the golden altar, was used daily for the incense. The kiyor, or laver, was used every day by the Kohanim in preparation for their service in the Temple. Even though the shulchan and the lechem hapanim were visible every day, no action was taken on them except once a week when the lechen hapanim were changed. The old loaves were then given to the Kohanim to eat and the new loaves were placed on the shulchan.

We are told that a miracle happened each week and the lechem hapanim were as fresh at the end of the week as when they were placed on the shulchan. In part this was accomplished by the way in which these loaves were situated on the table. The table consisted of two towers in which six loaves each were placed. These loaves sat one on top of the other, yet three rods were placed between each of the loaves to allow air to circulate. That in itself might account for a degree of freshness, but another explanation in the Gemara makes this somewhat less of a possibility. We find that the breads were not only fresh at the end of the week but that they still gave off steam that we associate only with bread coming directly from the oven.

There is an argument in the Talmud (M'nachot 94b) concerning the shape of the breads. According to R' Chaninah, the lechem hapanim had a flat bottom and two walls. Each side wall was two and a half tefachim (hand breadths) high. According to R' Yochanan the breads were in the shape of a fast boat, tapered at the bottom and coming to a point in the front and the back. The rods mentioned earlier supported and separated the loaves by only a small amount leaving just enough space for air to circulate. Yet these rods were not sufficient support for the loaves and the loaves rested on each other for this additional support. There were also two spoons of frankincense that were placed on the loaves. According to R' Chaninah, whose loaves were flat, the frankincense rested on the flat bottom of the upper loaf in each column. This would prove to be a problem for R' Yochanan whose boat-shaped bread could not have the frankincense placed on it without spilling. But there is an opinion that the Torah does not require that the frankincense be placed on the bread and that one could place it between the two stacks of bread. In this way both opinions can be reconciled with the words of the Torah.

If the lechem hapanim did not serve a daily purpose, we must ask what the lechem hapanim must represent. It is highly unlikely that the breads are merely "show" breads as is often the translation. To discover its deeper message we must first understand the table upon which the breads rested. The table is not a work table but instead a table of nourishment. According to HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch the table is symbolically used for food, material abundance, well-being, wealth, and comfort. The table was made of wood which represents growth and development. The gold that covered the table did not diminish its existence as wood. A rim like a crown of gold was placed around the table top. Since the table represented material wealth, this rim acted as a border, a limit, to the basis by which we acquire this material wealth. This is similar to a "fence around the Torah." This gold band is like a band of pure sanctifying consecration. Hirsch explains that nowhere else in the objects of the Mishkan do we find such an emphasis on purity. We see several different terms used here when describing the table: tahor, pure, zahav tahor, pure gold, l'vonah zacha, pure frankincense. In fact, the entire table is referred to as hashulchan hatahor, the pure table. Our material life must be limited by our striving for purity.

The breads were baked in metal molds and then kept in golden forms until they could be placed in the towers of the shulchan. The upturned sides or walls of each loaf were designed to support the loaves that were placed on top of it. This support indicated a lack of selfishness, an emphasis on the needs of our brother as a condition demanded of our material wealth. Each man's wealth was preconditioned by his willingness to support his brother. Each loaf clearly supported the loaves above it. This demonstrated the need for each person to be concerned with the needs for his fellowman. The loaves were baked only in groups of two together and were then placed on the shulchan in pairs. In every aspect the loaves were baked and arranged to emphasize the need for one brother to be concerned with the needs of the other.

And now we can begin to understand the reason why the shulchan and the lechem hapanim were not moved each day or arranged each day as we saw with the other items of furniture that were in the Mishkan. The message of the shulchan and the lechem hapanim is a message of consistency without change. Our need to be concerned with our fellowman must be constant so much so that we should not notice any change taking place. Our focus must be on the fact that this relationship of concern never changes. May the message of the shulchan and the lechem hapanim affect our lives and our care and concern for our fellowman. ©2019
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