

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

If leaders are to bring out the best in those they lead, they must give them the chance to show they are capable of great things, and then they must celebrate their achievements. That is what happens at a key moment toward the end of our parsha, one that brings the book of Exodus to a sublime conclusion after all the strife that has gone before.

The Israelites have finally completed the work of building the Tabernacle. We then read: "So all the work on the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, was completed. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses... Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. So Moses blessed them." (Ex. 39:32, 43)

The passage sounds simple enough, but to the practised ear it recalls another biblical text, from the end of the Creation narrative in Genesis: "The heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. On the seventh day God finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done." (Gen. 2:1-3)

Three key words appear in both passages: "work," "completed" and "blessed." These verbal echoes are not accidental. They are how the Torah signals intertextuality, hinting that one law or story is to be read in the context of another. In this case, the Torah is emphasising that Exodus ends as Genesis began, with a work of creation. Note the difference as well as the similarity. Genesis began with an act of Divine creation. Exodus ends with an act of human creation.

The closer we examine the two texts, the more we see how intricately the parallel has been constructed. The creation account in Genesis is tightly organised around a series of sevens. There are seven days of Creation. The word "good" appears seven times, the word "God" thirty-five times, and the word

"earth" twenty-one times. The opening verse of Genesis contains seven words, the second fourteen, and the three concluding verses 35 words. All multiples of seven. The complete text is 469 (7x67) words.

The account of the construction of the Tabernacle in Vayakhel-Pekudei is similarly built around the number seven. The word "heart" appears seven times in Exodus 35:5-29, as Moses specifies the materials to be used in the construction, and seven times again in 35:34-36:8, the description of how the craftsmen Bezalel and Oholiav will carry out the work. The word *terumah*, "contribution" appears seven times in this section. In chapter 39, describing the making of the priestly vestments, the phrase "as God commanded Moses" occurs seven times. It occurs again seven times in chapter 40.

A remarkable parallel is being drawn between God's creation of the universe and the Israelites' creation of the Sanctuary. We now understand what the Sanctuary represented. It was a micro-cosmos, a universe in miniature, constructed with the same precision and "wisdom" as the universe itself, a place of order against the formlessness of the wilderness and the ever-threatening chaos of the human heart. The Sanctuary was a visible reminder of God's Presence within the camp, itself a metaphor for God's Presence within the Universe as a whole.

A large and fateful idea is taking shape. The Israelites -- who have been portrayed throughout much of Exodus as ungrateful and half-hearted -- have now been given the opportunity, after the sin of the Golden Calf, to show that they are not irredeemable, and they have embraced that opportunity. They are proven capable of great things. They have shown they can be creative. They have used their generosity and skill to build a mini-universe. By this symbolic act they have shown they are capable of becoming, in the potent rabbinic phrase, "God's partners in the work of creation."

This was fundamental to their re-moralisation and to their self-image as the people of God's covenant. Judaism does not take a low view of human possibility. We do not believe we are tainted by original sin. We are not incapable of moral grandeur. To the contrary, the very fact that we are in the image of the Creator means that we humans -- uniquely among life forms -- have the ability to be creative. As Israel's first creative achievement reached its culmination Moses

blessed them, saying, according to the Sages, "May it be God's will that His Presence rests in the work of your hands." (Sifrei, Bamidbar, Pinchas, 143) Our potential greatness is that we can create structures, relationships and lives that become homes for the Divine Presence.

Blessing them and celebrating their achievement, Moses showed them what they could be. That is potentially a life-changing experience. Here is a contemporary example: In 2001, shortly after September 11th, I received a letter from a woman in London whose name I did not immediately recognise. She wrote that on the morning of the attack on the World Trade Centre, I had been giving a lecture on ways of raising the status of the teaching profession, and she had seen a report about it in the press. This prompted her to write and remind me of a meeting we had had eight years earlier.

She was then, in 1993, the Head Teacher of a school that was floundering. She had heard some of my broadcasts, felt a kinship with what I had to say, and thought that I might have a solution to her problem. I invited her, together with two of her deputies, to our house. The story she told me was this: morale within the school, among teachers, pupils and parents alike, was at an all-time low. Parents had been withdrawing their children. The student roll had fallen from 1000 children to 500. Examination results were bad: only 8 per cent of students achieved high grades. It was clear that unless something changed dramatically, the school would be forced to close.

We talked for an hour or so on general themes: the school as community, how to create an ethos, and so on. Suddenly, I realised that we were thinking along the wrong lines. The problem she faced was practical, not philosophical. I said: "I want you to live one word: celebrate." She turned to me with a sigh: "You don't understand -- we have nothing to celebrate. Everything in the school is going wrong." "In that case," I replied, "find something to celebrate. If a single student has done better this week than last week, celebrate. If someone has a birthday, celebrate. If it's Tuesday, celebrate." She seemed unconvinced, but promised to give the idea a try.

Now, eight years later, she was writing to tell me what had happened since then. Examination results at high grades had risen from 8 per cent to 65 per cent. The enrolment of pupils had risen from 500 to 1000. Saving the best news to last, she added that she had just been made a Dame of the British Empire -- one of the highest honours the Queen can bestow -- for her contribution to education. She ended by saying that she just wanted me to know how a single word had changed the school, and her life.

She was a wonderful teacher, and certainly did not need my advice. She would have discovered the answer on her own anyway. But I was never in any doubt that the strategy would succeed, for we all grow

to fill other people's expectations of us. If they are low, we remain small. If they are high, we walk tall.

The idea that each of us has a fixed quantum of intelligence, virtue, academic ability, motivation and drive is absurd. Not all of us can paint like Monet or compose like Mozart. But we each have gifts, capacities, that can lie dormant throughout life until someone awakes them. We can achieve heights of which we never thought ourselves capable. All it takes is for us to meet someone who believes in us, challenges us, and then, when we have responded to the challenge, blesses and celebrates our achievements. That is what Moses did for the Israelites after the sin of the Golden Calf. First he got them to create, and then he blessed them and their creation with one of the simplest and most moving of all blessings, that the Shechinah should dwell in the work of their hands.

Celebration is an essential part of motivating. It turned a school around. In an earlier age and in a more sacred context it turned the Israelites around. So celebrate.

When we celebrate the achievements of others, we change lives. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* © 2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd he erected the courtyard around the sanctuary and the altar, set up the screen gate of the courtyard; and Moses completed the work." (Exodus 40:33) Why repeat all the details of the construction of the Mishkan after we have already heard them when they were initially commanded? Would it not have been simpler to deal with the entire execution of external building, furnishings and priestly garb with the single verse: "And the People of Israel built the Mishkan exactly as God commanded"?

In order to understand the significance of the repetition, it is important to remember that the Almighty desires an intimate relationship between Himself and the People of Israel. That is why they are commanded to build a Mishkan in the first place: "that I may dwell among them" [29:46].

However, worshiping the golden calf was a betrayal of the ideals given at Sinai. In effect, the Israelites committed adultery, scarring the love and intimacy God had just bestowed upon them. Were God only a God of justice, this would have been the demise of the Jewish people, their sin mandating a punishment that would have meant the end of the Abrahamic mission.

But since God is also a God of compassion, He forgives. However, can we legitimately expect forgiveness for as heinous a crime as idolatry? Will the

Almighty take Israel back even after they have committed adultery?

Herein lies the true significance of the repetition of each and every painstaking instruction regarding the Mishkan. God places his nuptial “home” with Israel before they sin with the golden calf, and God accepts their construction of the nuptial home after they have sinned with the golden calf. The repetition is a confirmation that the intimacy between God and Israel has been restored, that the relationship between God and His bride, Israel, has returned to its original state of mutual commitment and faith. The repetition of the exact details is essentially God’s gift of forgiveness.

It is interesting to note that on the weeks when we read the concluding portions of Exodus, the calendar is usually host to another sequence of special readings, wherein a second Torah scroll is removed from the ark for an additional reading as well as a special haftorah reading from the prophets.

The first special reading is Shekalim, which speaks of the obligation of every Jew to give a half-shekel to the Mishkan. This represents an act of commitment: a pledge of a four thousand year-strong covenantal relationship between God and Israel, demonstrated in our daily lives by the giving of our “half-shekels” to build our sanctuaries – yeshivas and synagogues, day schools and outreach centers – thus bringing God within our midst. Financial commitment is also the traditional halakhic form of betrothal (symbolized in the wedding ring).

The second special Sabbath – immediately preceding Purim – is Shabbat Zakhor: “Remember” to destroy the evil Amalek. Shabbat Zakhor always precedes Purim because in Shushan there were two threats: externally, from Haman, the descendant of Amalek; while internally, the Jews themselves, who, deep in the amnesia of assimilation, were seduced by the invitations to the parties at the palace of Ahashverosh, with all the non-kosher wine and shrimp one could enjoy.

Israel, betrothed by the shekel to God, had succumbed to the temptation of Amalek, substituting the temptations of gold and licentiousness for their God-groom.

The third special Sabbath, Parah, symbolizes the process of purification. The People of Israel, having defiled themselves, are reminded by God that even when our impurity stems from death, the highest degree of impurity, He has provided the red heifer to spiritually cleanse us.

Finally, the namesake for this Sabbath’s special reading, HaHodesh, brings us towards a new beginning. “Hodesh,” the Hebrew word for month, is also bound up with “hadash” [new] and “hidush” [renewal]. In effect, the moon is the messenger of change and renewal, the ability to emerge from total darkness to a state of fullness and perfection.

Thus the special portions of Shekalim, Zakhor, Parah and HaHodesh parallel the portions of Terumah, Tetzaveh, Ki Tissa and Vayakhel-Pekudei. The journey begins with commitment and love, stumbles through failure and sin, and concludes with the possibility of purification and renewal. These stages mark the path of individual and national freedom, culminating in the festival of freedom, Passover. ©2021 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The book of Shemot concludes with the detailed accounting of the materials collected and used in the building of the Tabernacle. Even though this accounting may appear to us to be superfluous and even overly detailed, the words and letters that appear in this week’s Torah reading are as holy and important as any others that appear in our holy Scriptures.

There is an important overriding lesson -- a moral imperative -- that is being imparted to us in the words of the reading of this week. That lesson can be summed up in that we are responsible for each of our actions and behaviors during the year, and during our lifetime. It is as if each of us signs our name at the bottom of the pages that record each of our activities in life with one word: accountability.

Judaism holds its adherents to strict standards of accountability. Accountability in speech, in deeds and action, regarding financial income and expenses, and in all other matters of human interaction and relationships. We are informed by the prayer services of the High Holy days that each of us has pages in God’s ledger book, so to speak, and that each of us signs with our own signature at the bottom of those pages to attest to the accuracy of that accounting.

The basis of all responsible human behavior is accountability. Without that, having good intentions and high hopes by human beings to accomplish good things are mostly doomed to failure and disappointment. It is only the concept of accountability that is the driving force that creates efficiency, and the feeling of spiritual advancement and accomplishment within us. Educational institutions that never administer exams or do not make demands upon its students are really cheating them out of the benefits that an education can bring to a person.

The Torah is exacting and meticulous in recording for us all the activities, donations, and actual results regarding the enormous task of constructing the Tabernacle in the middle of a wasteland, by a people just recently freed from physical and mental bondage. One could be fooled to say that in such circumstances any demand for accountability should be lenient, if not even muted. However, we see that the Torah makes no allowance for the inherent difficulties and stress that must have been involved in building the Tabernacle in

the desert. In general, we can say that Judaism rarely, if ever, accepts excuses for poor performance or lack of effort, no matter how seemingly valid they might be. No excuse, no matter how good and valid it may be, ever equals accomplishing the task that was set out before the person to realize and fulfill.

The Torah wishes to impress upon us that accountability requires exactitude, paying of attention to what otherwise may seem to be small and unimportant, and an understanding that in the great picture of life there really are no small events or minor incidents that can be glossed over as though they never occurred. That is not our method of accountability. The Torah is never sloppy in dealing with human events. ©2021 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

In the portion of Vayakhel, the construction of the Mishkan is juxtaposed with Shabbat. (Exodus 35:1-3)

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 all realms of existence. For example: gold, which of course is inanimate, was required to construct the Ark and many vessels; vegetables were used for the dye needed to color the Tabernacle curtains; animal skin was used to cover the Tabernacle—and human interaction was essential to coordinate a building venture of this magnitude.

Nechama Leibowitz points out that the same words describing God's completion of creation (*va yechal, va-yar, ve hinei, va yevarech*) are also used to describe the completion of the Mishkan (*va yechal, va-yar, ve hinei, va yevarech*). (Genesis 1:31, 2:2,3; 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. (Mishna Shabbat 7:2)

Thus the juxtaposition of Shabbat to Mishkan teaches that even the Mishkan could not be built on the Sabbath. As creative as humans can be, it is God who is the source of all creation. ©2021 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

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The Temple Treasurer

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

During Temple times, the Temple's treasury (*Hekdesh*) was allowed to own Canaanite slaves, just as a private individual could. Therefore, we would have expected that just as a slave owned by a private individual could buy his freedom from his master, so too a slave owned by the Temple treasury could pay the treasurer (*gizbar*) and buy his freedom.

However, this is not the case. The treasurer of the Temple may not grant a slave release. Rather, he must sell the slave to a private individual. The slave can then buy his freedom from the new owner (*Gittin* 38b). Why is the treasurer of the Temple empowered to deal with all monetary matters, but not empowered to free a slave?

Rashi explains that the relationship of the Temple to a slave is different from that of a private individual to a slave. The Temple treasury does not actually acquire the body of the slave (*kinyan ha-guf*), but only his monetary value (*kinyan damim*). Since the treasury does not own the slave's body, it cannot free him. The Meiri offers a different explanation. The reason the treasurer cannot free the slave is because only the slave's owner can free him, and he is not the slave's owner. The true owner of *Hekdesh* is the Almighty Himself, while the treasurer is just a functionary.

Tosafot explains that if we give the treasurer the power to sell a slave, some might suspect him of not being sufficiently careful with *Hekdesh* assets. However, this interpretation is a bit surprising, as there is a principle that we trust the treasurers of *Hekdesh* to be acting faithfully. If we trust them with all other monetary matters, why should freeing slaves be any different? The reason may be as follows. We trust the treasurers implicitly as far as straight monetary matters are concerned. However, when it comes to freeing a slave – granting liberty to a human being – there are

emotional and ideological concerns that may come into play. People might suspect that the treasurer's altruistic wish to free a slave would lead him to do something disadvantageous to *Hekdesh*, for example accepting a lower price than he should for the slave. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"At his side, Ohaliav, son of Achisamach of the Tribe of Dan, carver and designer..." (Exodus 32:2) One of the two men named by Hashem to build the Mishkan, Ohaliav was inspired with Divine wisdom to understand how to make the various vessels and structures necessary. Along with Betzalel son of Uri, son of Chur, of the Tribe of Yehuda, he oversaw the construction of the dwelling place of Hashem in the wilderness.

Rabbeinu Bachya, in *Vayikra* (23:11), comments that a wicked person brings disgrace to their family, as the mother of the man who blasphemed was mentioned as belonging to the Tribe of Dan, and contrasts it to this verse which teaches us that a righteous person brings honor to his family, as Ohaliav was also linked to the Tribe of Dan.

The question is, how do we know Ohaliav was a tzaddik? Certainly he was chosen by Hashem to build the Mishkan and dedicated himself to holy work, but by what virtue do we know he was righteous, and not merely an inspired craftsman?

Ohaliav was called by the name "of the Tribe of Dan" twice previously, in *Ki Sisa* (31:6) and *Vayakhel* (35:34.) Why did Rabbeinu Bachya not choose either of those times to use as the contrasting *posuk* to show that a tzaddik brings honor to his family?

Perhaps it is because in those verses, Hashem is talking about the wisdom He instilled in the builders of the Mishkan. Simply being chosen by Hashem is not a reflection of one's own character. Indeed, we had several *Shoftim* whose character was questionable, yet they were chosen to lead the Jewish People.

This *posuk* is different, though. Here, Ohaliav is described as an adjunct to Betzalel. Betzalel was the primary master builder and Ohaliav was second fiddle. In truth, Ohaliav knew nearly everything that Betzalel did. The *Haamek Davar* here points out that Ohaliav only fell short of Betzalel in one aspect of imagining a design, but that he understood what was necessary to create the item.

We do not find anywhere that Ohaliav clamored to get top billing or asked to be anything other than helpful to Betzalel. He was happy to have a share in the work with no share in the honor. This can only be the mark of a tzaddik, content to serve Hashem and not vying for position or admiration from anyone. Such a person brings distinction to his family.

A man once visited R' Aharon Karliner and the

Gabbai brought in a bowl of apples. R' Aharon recited the bracha with great concentration and then took a bite. The visitor, too, made a bracha and began eating. R' Aharon looked at him and said knowingly, "You believe we are the same. You say to yourself: 'The Rebbe eats an apple, and I also eat an apple, what is the difference?'"

"There is indeed a great difference," said the sage. "When I arise in the morning and see the Ribono shel Olam's Creation, I am inspired. I see the trees with fruit and reflect on the processes involved when the seed grows into a tree, and then provides fruit. I think of the wonders of Nature and then of the wonders of my own body. I am filled with a longing to praise the Creator and I don't know how to express myself other than to bless Him. But I cannot recite a bracha unless I have the fruit to eat.

You, on the other hand, arise and see the fruit, which looks good to eat. You grasp the shiny apple in your hand and just as you are about to bite into it, you think from whence it came, and you remember to make a bracha so you can eat it. Though we may appear the same, and we say the same words and do the same thing, you make the bracha to eat the apple, while I eat the apple to make the bracha." ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

Don't Judge a Sink By Its Cover

In downtown Jerusalem there is a famous landmark named after a small, yet important, mortar used in past Israeli wars. The stone monument to the "Davidka", at Davidka Square, is much more impressive than the small black piece of metal it stands to honor. Several decisive battles became victories due to this modest piece of machinery, developed at the Mikveh Israel agricultural school in 1947. Seemingly a rudimentary mortar launcher, it has won a special place in the hearts of an already sentimental nation.

The Davidka, however, is not the first piece of metal that is embedded in the tapestry of Jewish history.

This week's Parsha describes the creation of the כִּיּוֹר, the special washing vessel used in the Mishkan.

The כִּיּוֹר was fashioned out of copper donated with love by the women of the nation. This copper came from the mirrors which they selflessly sacrificed in order to participate in this holy endeavor.

Moshe, however, was hesitant to accept this copper. He felt that something used as a "tool of the yetzer hara" for vanity, was not fit to fashion the vessel that would purify the Kohanim for service in the Mishkan.

Boy was he mistaken.

HaShem taught Moshe a lesson in looking beyond the surface. He valued these mirrors far above some of the other donations. The women brought the mirrors because they understood their pure intention buried within. These were the beauty mirrors used by the righteous women of Egypt. They created harmony between husband and wife. Rather than being a “tool” of materialism and vanity, they were a catalyst for the continuation of the Jewish people. They might look like plain old mirrors but their history contains something much more holy and deep.

For HaShem, there could be no greater ingredient for purification of the Kohanim than these seemingly “tainted” pieces of copper. HaShem told Moshe that he must look deeper than his knee-jerk impression to understand the true background of this pre-owned copper.

These mirrors hold that same lesson for us.

Too often, we fail to look beyond what “meets the eye” about people, objects and even situations. Our first impression or pre-conceived notion forms our attitudes.

Everyone and everything has potential. There is so much more than face value.

In the 4th Chapter of Pirkei Avot, Ben Zoma says: “שָׂאִין לְךָ אָדָם שְׂאִין לוֹ שְׂעָה וְאִין לְךָ דָּבָר שְׂאִין לוֹ מְקוֹם” – That there is no person who does not have his hour and no thing that does not have its place.

Every person and object has the potential to contribute or to make a difference. There are also people, places and things that have a rich history of accomplishment and purpose that we may not be aware of.

The older person slowly crossing the street might have raised a wonderful family, fought for their country or practiced countless acts of kindness. That old dining room chair might be faded and worn but who can tell how many guests sat upon it.

How often do we lose our patience with someone or casually toss something aside without contemplation of whom they really are, and/or what purpose that item served.

The Davidka sits in a place of honor in Jerusalem, not for its beauty or grandeur but rather because of the generations who owe their existence to it.

The copper mirrors of our parsha give us the impetus to reflect on the wondrous past and limitless potential in everyone and everything.

We just have to look beyond the surface.

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RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Power of the Temple

Many of our Rabbis argue about the reasons for the commandment to build a Mishkan. The order

of the last five parshiot in Sefer Sh'mot presents us with a chronological problem as to whether the command to build the Mishkan occurred prior to the sin of the Golden Calf, or after. In either case it is clear that the actual building of the Mishkan served a therapeutic purpose in redeeming the people. The sin of the Golden Calf was a sin of such importance that its punishment was added to all communal punishments that followed. The B'nei Yisrael heard directly from Hashem that they were to have only one Supreme Being and that they should not make graven images nor worship them. When Moshe appeared to have delayed descending the Mountain, the people became convinced of his death and sought someone or something to replace Moshe whom they could follow. It was not the intention of most to replace Hashem, but only to replace Moshe. Once the image had been made of the Golden Calf, only then did a small number of the Jews and others worship it as a replacement of Hashem. The vast majority of Jews did not worship the Calf, but they had contributed their gold for its production and they ate in celebration.

When a person or a group sins, it is as if milk accidentally spills into a meat pot that is used to cook a meat soup. If the amount that spills into this pot is significant enough to add the taste of milk to that soup, the soup and the pot are no longer kosher. The soup is discarded and the pot must undergo a form of redemption in order for it to be used again. After a day, the pot can be filled to overflowing with water which is then brought to a running boil and a heated rock is placed in the pot which causes the boiling water inside to splatter and spill over onto the outside of the pot, koshering the inside and the outside at the same time. The concept here which enables this koshering of the pot and the removal of the inappropriate taste is known as k'bol'o kach polto, as it swallows so shall it spit out. The sin of a person is no different: the same way in which the sin enters our bodies is the way that it must be purged from them. The sin of the Golden Calf was that the people believed that they could make an image as a leader, not a god, and they would not worship it. They attempted to interpret the Law without the proper skills to do so. The building of the Mishkan enabled the people to “spit out” that sin by precisely following the commands from Hashem.

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains the significance of the pasuk, “and Moshe saw all the work, and behold they had done it as Hashem had commanded, so they had done, and Moshe blessed them.” Moshe saw two separate aspects of the work that the B'nei Yisrael performed: (1) they made it. The people worked together as a unit with devotion and voluntary enthusiasm to make every part of the Mishkan and its vessels, and (2) the people were careful to make everything exactly according to the commandment of Hashem. “Each and every workman

accepted as his highest aim the careful and precise carrying out, not of his own ideas, but the ideas and thoughts which were embodied in the commands of Hashem." In so doing they could now rejoice with Moshe in the power of accomplishment. "This free joyful obedience, this freedom in obedience and obedience in freedom, which fills one with the happy consciousness of one's own powers just by sinking one's own personality in complete subordination to Hashem's Will is what forms the most essential sign that characterizes a human being as a servant of Hashem, the highest moral perfection that can be attained."

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that the order of one of our p'sukim appears to be reversed. "all the work of the Mishkan, the Tent of Meeting, was completed, and the B'nei Yisrael did like all that Hashem had commanded to Moshe, so did they." One would expect that the Torah would first say that the B'nei Yisrael did all that Hashem had commanded and then tell us that they had completed their work as the work would not be complete if there was still work to do. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that this apparent discrepancy can be answered by examining the experience of the B'nei Yisrael prior to the building of the Mishkan. Our Rabbis tell us that "the performance of one commandment leads to the performance of other commandments whereas the performance of a sin leads to the performance of other sins." Man was created with an equal pull between the desire to do what is right and the inclination to do what is wrong. When one does a mitzvah, he must consciously decide to "do the right thing." Once that inclination has been tapped, the balance in his mind and his entire Will has been shifted toward good. The B'nei Yisrael were prepared to accept the Word of Hashem. Their inclination had been shifted to the highest level of righteousness. They had all but abandoned the evil inclination. But this high level was short-lived as the people began to worry that their original fears of their own demise upon seeing Hashem might actually have occurred to Moshe. These doubts quickly rekindled their fear of being leaderless. They made the Golden Calf only as a symbol, but the Golden Calf reminded them of their idolatrous experiences in Egypt, with which the people had previously sinned. This changed the balance of their nature and opened them up to more sins. Hashem commanded the building of the Mishkan where sacrifices could be brought and that balance restored. Thus, the building of the Mishkan was a therapeutic process for the people which restored that balance but it had an additional effect. The people were exact in every detail of that building precisely as Hashem had commanded Moshe. This action brought them back into balance and even tipped the scale toward the performance of mitzvot. Therefore, the order of our pasuk is correct and the

words, "like all that Hashem commanded" refers to all of the mitzvot of the Torah and not only those which were concerning the Mishkan.

Our lives and our equilibrium are constantly challenged in this world. We always have the ability to start our path towards an overbalance on the side of righteousness instead of on the side of evil. All one needs to do is start doing some mitzvot and realizing that we are doing them to become closer to Hashem. Too often, though, when we sin we begin to think of ourselves as evil and unable to change. This is never the case as we have seen from the Golden Calf. No sin was greater, yet that evil could be turned around by performing the mitzvah of building the Mishkan. We are never in a rut from which we cannot rise. We have it within our own power to raise ourselves to levels we never thought possible if we just take the first step. May we each understand our own power to direct our lives along the right path. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

In this week's double Parashah, the construction of the Mishkan is completed. Parashat Pekudei opens: "These are the accountings of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of Testimony, which were reckoned at Moshe's bidding." The Sages say that the accounting was actually taken from Moshe! Why, asks R' Moshe Gruenwald z"l (died 1853-1911; rabbi of Khust, Hungary), was an accounting required from Moshe?

R' Gruenwald explains: The purpose of the accounting was to teach us a lesson. Many commentaries explain how the various parts of the Mishkan and its furnishing allude to different parts of the human body and to different human traits. Thus, the accounting that Moshe gave regarding the Mishkan teaches us to take an accounting of ourselves--of our body parts and character traits. Are we using our physical organs and our abilities as intended?

In a similar vein, R' Gruenwald asks: Why do we reckon according to a lunar calendar (as commanded in the extra reading this week known as "Parashat Ha'chodesh")? After all, the sun is more distinguished! He answers: Because we can learn a lesson in proper behavior from the moon. Every month, the moon waxes and wanes. So, too, we must undergo cycles of growth and contraction. Periodically, preferably every day, man must humble himself and reflect on what he has accomplished. Then he must grow some more and begin the cycle anew. (Arugat Ha'bosem)



"On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem." (35:2)

The Gemara states that when Shabbat arrives, a person should not feel as if Shabbat is interrupting his work; rather, he should feel as if all of his work is done, even if it is not. How does one achieve this level?

R' Avraham Zvi Kluger shlita (Chassidic Mashpia in Bet Shemesh, Israel) explains, based on a number of 18th and 19th century Chassidic works: When the Talmud speaks of the Melachot / labors that are prohibited on Shabbat, it never says that there are 39 Melachot. Rather, it always speaks of the "40 Melachot missing one." This is teaching us that the feeling that one needs to work always comes from the sense that one is missing something. If, when Shabbat arrives, he felt like he was a guest in the palace of the King (i.e., Hashem), he would not feel that he is lacking anything, and he would not feel like he is neglecting his work.

This requires explanation, for one can see with his own eyes that his work is not done just because Shabbat has arrived! R' Kluger writes: It is human nature that parents worry about and care for their children until they are certain that the children are mature enough and have the tools to begin to care for themselves. The more that the child makes efforts to care for himself, the more readily parents will let go and allow the child to become self-sufficient. In contrast, when the child was an infant and incapable of caring for himself, his parents took care of all of his needs while he needed to do nothing.

We are Hashem's children. During the six days of the work week, we are like those older children who do their best to find their own way. Just as with our parents, the more we attempt to cut the ties between ourselves and Hashem, the more He will leave us to our own devices. On Shabbat, however, even though we know intellectually that there is work to be done, we must concentrate on the knowledge that, as compared to Hashem's ability to provide, we are like infants in the crib whose every need is provided by our loving parents. (In reality, R' Kluger notes, one who works on the trait of Bitachon could feel this every day.) (Nezer Yisrael, Vol. I p.285)



"On the day of the first new moon, on the first of the month, you shall erect the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting." (40:2)

Midrash Yalkut Shimoni (Melachim, "Remez" 184) records: The Mishkan was completed on the 25th of Kislev, but it remained folded away until the first of Nissan. Bnei Yisrael were dejected, and they asked Moshe, "Why wasn't the Mishkan assembled immediately?" For His part, Hashem wanted to combine the joy of the assembly of the Mishkan with the month in which Yitzchak was born. Thereafter, Hashem repaid the 25th of Kislev with the

holiday of Chanukah. [Until here from the Midrash]

Many ask: What does the birth of Yitzchak have to do with the assembly of the Mishkan?

R' Nosson Yehuda Leib Mintzberg z"l (1943-2018; rabbi and Rosh Yeshiva in Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel) explains: The Torah--in the portion we read this Shabbat as "Parashat Ha'chodesh"--identifies the month in which Pesach falls (Nissan) as the "first month." Why? Because it is fitting for the Jewish People to count their months from when they left slavery and became a nation. Indeed, all of the significant events that led to the formation of the Jewish People occurred in Nissan, among them: The Brit Bein Ha'betarim, when Hashem told Avraham that his descendants would be enslaved; Yitzchak's birth; and Yitzchak's blessing Yaakov. (R' Mintzberg notes that the Torah was not given in Nissan; however, that event was really the culmination of the Exodus, which was in Nissan.)

The assembly and dedication of the Mishkan was, likewise, a seminal event in Jewish history--the day when G-d rested his Shechinah among the Jewish People. If not for the sin of the Golden Calf, writes R' Mintzberg, perhaps this would have followed immediately after the Giving of the Torah. After Bnei Yisrael's grave sin, however, a new beginning was required, and that required waiting for a new year. (R' Mintzberg compares this to the law of "He'erev Shemesh," i.e., that a person who was Tamei and immersed in a Mikvah may not enter the Bet Hamikdash until a new day has begun.) For the Jewish People, the new year begins on the first of Nissan--the month of the nation's birth. (Ben Melech: Chag Ha'matzot p.25)

R' Chaim Friedlander z"l (1923-1986; Mashgiach Ruchani of the Ponovezh Yeshiva) writes: The Mishkan was built as the place where Hashem could reveal His Shechinah among the Jewish People. However, whether Hashem actually reveals Himself depends on the actions of the Jewish People. Therefore, the Mishkan was erected in Nissan, the month when Hashem first taught the Mitzvah of sanctifying the moon and declaring the new month--a Mitzvah that teaches that our actions have an impact. (Siftei Chaim: Mo'adim II p.263) ©2021 S. Katz & torah.org

