

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

Pekudei 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 bringing [Moses] additional gifts every 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 the work God has commanded us to do.'

"Moses ordered an announcement to be made throughout the camp: "Let no man or woman make anything more as an offering for the Sanctuary.'

"And so the people brought no more, because what they already had was more than enough to for all the work that was to be done." (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 Aaron said: "Take off the gold rings from the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." (Ex. 32:2)

According to the Midrash, he thought this would create arguments within families, there would be resistance to the requests for jewellery, and the project would be delayed. Instead, immediately thereafter without a pause, we read: "So all the people took the gold rings from their ears 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 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." (Laws of Gifts to the poor, 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 -- and this is key -- 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 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l © 2024 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Torah Lights

“**A**nd Moses erected the sanctuary, and he fastened its sockets, and he placed its boards, and he inserted its bars, and he installed its pillars.” (Exodus 40:18) We have often queried the significance of the five Torah portions which conclude the book of Exodus, and especially the repetitions which we find in the detailed descriptions of the accoutrements of the Sanctuary. Even if we concede the very profound theological message of Ki Tisa and the unique prescription of the priestly garments in Tetzave, we are still left with the initial delineation of the furnishings of the Sanctuary in Teruma and the seeming repetitions thereof in Vayakhel and Pekudei. Why not a general statement to the effect that “And Moses did as he was instructed in the construction of the Sanctuary”!?

Rabbi Elhanan Samet, in his groundbreaking study of the portions of the Bible from a structural-narrative perspective, explains as follows: The commandment to make the various furnishings of the Sanctuary is given by God in the Torah portion of Teruma. The precise performance of the Israelites of every detail of the divine command is detailed in the Torah portion of Vayakhel; this is perhaps to emphasize the fact that we must serve the Almighty in precisely the manner which He commands, no more and no less, in order to protect Judaism from religious fanaticism and zealotry. The actual completion, the final hammer blow of the construction of each sacred object, is presented in the Torah portion of Pekudei.

From an Israeli perspective, I might explain the importance of emphasizing the finish in a separate Torah portion by bringing to your attention a typical phenomenon of Israeli construction: Ninety percent of the work generally gets done efficiently and even almost miraculously, but the last ten percent requires cajoling, entreating and sometimes (even usually) never gets

done at all. And it goes without saying that the last ten percent is quite critical, especially during a rainy winter season!

But in a more serious vein, let us investigate the construction of the sanctuary table (shulhan) in order to understand the true reason for the order of description. The divine command to make a sanctuary table is presented in the portion of Teruma in eight verses (Ex. 25:23–30), beginning with “You shall make a Table of acacia wood, two hand-breadths long, a hand-breadth wide, and a hand-breadth and one-half in height,” and the description of the actual execution or making of the Table is detailed in the portion of Vayakhel almost precisely paralleling the command in Teruma, in only seven verses (Ex. 37:10–16).

What is missing in the execution? In the portion of Teruma, the last verse of the commandment regarding the construction of the Table tells us: “And you shall place upon the Table the shewbread before Me always” (Ex. 25:30); and then, towards the end of the portion of Teruma, we find: “And you shall situate the Table outside the curtain on the northern side of the Sanctuary” (Ex. 26:35). These two features, the function of the Table (for the shewbread), and the placement of the Table, while commanded in Teruma, are not included in the actual construction of the Table in the portion of Vayakhel; but these two features are specifically mentioned in the portion of Pekudei: “And he [Moses] placed the Table in the Tent of Meeting on the side of the Sanctuary northwards just outside the curtain, and he arranged the arrangement of the bread before the Lord as the Lord had commanded Moses” (Ex. 40:22, 23).

Why do we need the separate portion of Pekudei to tell us that the function and placement of the sacred Table of the Sanctuary were carried out? One might suggest a logical, technical reason: The specific placement of the Table as well as its function as repository of the shew-bread could only be effectuated once the entire Sanctuary had been completed. Placement is a matter of relative space, each sacred object placed in relationship to the other sacred objects, and the various Sanctuary placement and functions could not take place unless the Sanctuary had reached its final stage of construction. This final completion occurs only in Pekudei, and therefore it is only in this Torah portion that we find the phrase “just as the Lord commanded Moses” (Ex. 40:17–32) appearing, not only once but actually seven times.

I would like to suggest another reason for the significance of Pekudei as the portion of the “finish,” the portion which emphasizes the placement and function of the sacred object.

Each of us must see ourselves as sacred vessels, placed upon this world-Sanctuary in order to fulfill a specific task which is crucial if human society is to be perfected under the kingship of the divine. Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, ushers in the

introspective period known as the Ten Days of Repentance. It also is called the Day of Remembrance. One of the most stirring prayers on this Day of Remembrance begins: "You [God] remember the deeds of the historic world, and are po-ked all the creatures from the earliest time." The Hebrew word "po-ked" is usually translated as "taking notice of," a synonym for remembering. However, the late Rabbi Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, zt"l, Dean of Yeshiva Torah Vadaas maintained that the verb comes from the noun "tafkid," or function, and therefore the phrase ought to be translated, "You give a specific function to every creature from the earliest time."

The most proper and penetrating question of repentance that an individual ought to ask him or herself is, "Am I in the right country, doing the right thing? In the one chance at life which God grants me, am I pursuing the proper path in the proper locality?"

The Hebrew word "pekudei" can also be translated as the plural "functions," for each vessel – whether a sacred physical object or a sacred human subject – completes its reason for being only when its unique function is actually performed. Only then can a vessel be considered as fully formed, can a life be assessed as having been truly lived. We can only pray that we are utilizing the unique gifts which the Almighty has imbued within us to perform the right function in the proper place; only then will the divine orchestra play its completed symphony, and only then will the perfected world-Sanctuary provide a home for God to dwell in our midst. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. ©2024 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The end of the book of Shemot describes the culmination of the events of the exodus from Egypt, the revelation at Sinai and the construction of the Mishkan/Tabernacle. All of these events are certainly on the positive side of the historical ledger. On the other side that the book of Shemot represents there is the sin of the Golden Calf and the constant carping and complaining of the Jewish people against Moshe and against the God of Israel.

In effect, this sets the template for all further Jewish history. There are always ups and downs, plus and minuses in the national behavior of the Jewish people. The book of Shemot ends on a triumphant note – the spirit of God, so to speak, invests and dwells within the Jewish people, and the Mishkan/Tabernacle that they so lovingly built – promising an eternal relationship.

Jewish tradition teaches us that this is the ultimate result of the long story of our existence. It will end triumphantly but there will be many serious bumps

on the road before we arrive at our ultimate destination. It seems especially appropriate that at the conclusion of this holy book, the entire congregation rises to proclaim that we will be strengthened in our lives and experiences. We will attempt to strengthen the positive side of our ledger and minimize the entries on the other side. The Torah expended much detail and space to the construction of the Mishkan/Tabernacle. Part of the reason for the need to adhere to the laws in this regard is that the devil lies in the details. All of history instructs us that seemingly unimportant details shape great events, with unexpected results.

The ineptness of Archduke Ferdinand's chauffeur, who drove the car back into the teeth of the assassins' ambush after first escaping from it, helped bring about the cataclysmic events that are called World War I. The Jewish people questioned why Moshe was late on returning from his ascent on Mount Sinai and thus the conditions for the construction of the Golden Calf somehow presented themselves. All of Jewish law and halachi decisions are built upon recognizing and analyzing the details of the issues involved. It is the small detail that builds the general rule, not the other way around. We are all aware how in architecture, manufacturing and construction for example, it is the smallest detail that is the difference between success and failure, achievement or disaster.

This is in line with the details regarding the Mishkan/Tabernacle, which in turn reflect the Torah itself, which represents all human life. Today's parsha teaches us the requirement of accountability in all aspects of our lives. All of these ideas are taught to us to help us form a proper ledger book on the basis of whose entries we will be eventually judged. This book of Shemot stands as the book of human judgment and understanding. ©2024 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

No fewer than seven portions are dedicated to the building of the Tabernacle and the sacrificial service offered there. One wonders why the text includes so much detail. This emphasis is especially troublesome when compared to the dearth of biblical verses dealing with arguably more relevant subjects such as Jewish ritual and Jewish ethical principles.

Perhaps the key is to first understand more generally the Torah regulations of the Kohen (Jewish priest) who ministers in the Tabernacle wearing majestic garments, offering the sacrificial service. A common denominator emerges, speaking to the limits set for the Kohen. Specifically:

- The Kohen could not own land. Note that

Joseph never acquires land belonging to the Egyptian priests, as he prepares for the years of famine (Genesis 47:22). Their title to real estate was inviolate. In contrast, Jewish priests were always to remain landless – making boundaries over their material wealth.

- Nor can the Kohen marry a divorcee or a convert (Leviticus 21:7). As a religious leader, the Kohen in times past may have counseled women who were married or seeking to convert. Perhaps it can be suggested that the prohibition against marrying these women helped keep the interaction pure, never leading to a personal relationship.

- During tefillah, the Kohen Gadol (high priest) bowed at the conclusion of each of the Amidah prayer's nineteen blessings. This is in contrast to everyone else, who bows only four times during this silent devotion. The highest of priests, the Kohen Gadol, who could easily be imperious in his lofty spiritual position, is reminded that he is not almighty. He, too, has limitations and must constantly give homage to the Almighty (Berachot 34a–b).

Clearly, too, the Kohen and Kohen Gadol were also limited, as they did not have exclusive knowledge of the inner workings of the Temple, the sacrificial service, or even the garments they wore. These were not their domain alone; they belonged to the people.

Thus, Rabbi Saul Berman argues, the details of the Tabernacle and sacrifices are so elaborate. Precise detail in these sections forces the Kohen to be accountable to the people. If the Jewish priests deviated in any way from the norm, the common folk, employing the text explicitly spelled out in the Torah, could challenge them.

Unlike the ancient codes and even contemporary forms of law which give advantage to the powerful, our system makes no such distinction. The Jewish priest could not claim to have special hidden knowledge of how to reach God. It was all outlined meticulously in the text. All have access to the Divine. ©2024 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

"And they brought the Mishkan to Moshe..." (Shmos 39:33) When the Jews finished all their individual labors in building the parts of the Mishkan, they brought them to Moshe. Rashi says they were unable to put the pieces together and erect the Mishkan, as the pillars were too large for them to put up. Therefore, they came to Moshe. Since he had not physically partaken in the building, Hashem arranged that this job be saved for him.

For his part, Moshe was unsure how he would lift them and stand everything up, but Hashem told him to go through the motions of doing so, and then the pillars would stand by themselves, but it would seem that Moshe had erected the structure.

If the Jews had tried to put up the Mishkan and failed, why did they bring the parts to Moshe? Why didn't they summon Moshe, and ask him to come to the job site to direct them? And, if he wasn't actually erecting the Mishkan, why make it look as if he had?

The Targum Yonason ben Uziel goes into great detail here about where "to Moshe" was. He explained that Moshe was in the Bais Midrash, the study hall, with

Aharon and his sons, as well as the elders. There, he was reviewing the laws of the Kohanim and their Avoda. Why is it significant to the situation that we know where Moshe was and what he was doing?

Perhaps, it was precisely because Moshe was sitting and learning and had not physically taken part in the construction of the Mishkan. While he had brought the instructions from Hashem, Moshe then delegated authority to Betzalel and Ohaliav, and was not present during the construction process.

There may have been some detractors who felt Moshe should have been personally involved, and that by sitting in the study hall, he was not participating in the project of the nation. Indeed, there are many who don't realize the benefit to the world of those who devote themselves to learning Torah full time. They don't recognize that these people are also contributing to society's progress because through their merit Hashem blesses the world and enables it to continue.

Therefore, when the pieces were complete, the Torah stresses that they brought them to Moshe, because this was very much still HIS project. Hashem wanted Moshe to "appear" to put up the pillars because this was a close approximation of the rest of Creation, where the merit of the righteous is what makes the rain fall and the crops grow. It's what makes businesses run and breathes life into others.

Despite all their wisdom and hard work, without Moshe and his Torah, the Jews could not complete the Mishkan. This situation and its resolution, teaches us how integral Torah study is at all levels of society - and makes us all, that much wiser.

When R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv z"l, the great sage and posek, recovered from one of his last surgeries, well into his 90's, he commented to a rabbi that he felt a tremendous debt of gratitude to the entire Jewish People.

"I know it is because of their prayers that I merited a successful operation, and I need to repay them somehow. But how can I repay everyone?" The Rav nodded sympathetically.

"What I CAN do, though," continued the gadol, with determination in his voice, "is get up earlier to learn Torah, for when one learns Torah, that helps everyone!"
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RABBI DAVID LEVIN

A Special Accounting

One of the many rules for understanding the messages of the Torah is that the Torah is always concise and exact. Words and information are not repeated without there being an additional message which one must seek to comprehend. Sometimes the message is derived from reversing the order of a phrase, the addition of an extra word or set of words, a slight change in spelling, or a different emphasis placed on a word with a change in vowelization or cantillation. Often

an important word in a sentence carries several meanings, all of which can add to our understanding and perspective. Sometimes the words in one section can be related to words in another section of the Torah (gezeira shaveh). We know of this special connection only through Moshe. The beginning of this week's parasha contains such messages.

The Torah states, "These are the accountings of the Mishkan (pekudei haMishkan), the Mishkan of the Testimony, which were counted at the word of Moshe, the work of the Leviim in the hand of Itamar, son of Aharon the Kohein. Betzalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, did all that Hashem commanded Moshe. With him was Oholiav, son of Achisamach, of the tribe of Dan, a carver and artist, and an embroiderer with the turquoise wool, and with the purple wool, and with the scarlet wool, and with the linen."

The term "pekudei haMishkan" has many different meanings and applications. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that pekudei haMishkan referred to "the computation of gifts received, and the citation of the uses to which they were put." Hirsch points out that the problem with this approach alone is that this accounting is inadequate and incomplete. "Only the total of the gold and the copper given are recorded. Of silver, only the total of that received from the half-shekels of the census is given, but not of that which ... came in as free-willed gifts. Of the amounts of the other materials, no mention at all is made, and of gold, only the amount that came in is given, but no account of the uses to which it was allotted." Hirsch explains that the word "pakad" is not usually found as a final reckoning, but instead as the counting of people, which corresponds to another meaning of the word which is "to think." Thus, "pekudei haEidah are all those who are thought of under the conception of Eidah, ... all those who belong to the community." Thus, pekudei haMishkan would be all objects that constitute the "essential meaning and importance" of the purpose of the Mishkan.

Rashi's understanding of the words "pekudei haMishkan" is based on another meaning of mishkan, namely mashkon, which is "collateral". This would explain the double use of the word mishkan as it appears in the text, "Eileh pekudei hamishkan, Mishkan haEidut. The first mishkan refers to the weighing of the collateral, while the second refers to the structure of the Mishkan, the Temple. The term "Eidut" is testimony and refers to the two tablets of "testimony" that contained the direct word of Hashem, the Ten Commandments. One can understand from Rashi that he views the phrase "Mishkan haEidut" to mean the Temple in which is the Aron Kodesh, the Ark which contained the Testament of Hashem. HaAmek Davar explains that the Mishkan HaEidut was the actual Ark that Moshe made to contain the Ten Commandments and various additional objects like a sample of the manna and the broken tablets of the first set which Moshe shattered upon seeing the Golden

Calf.

A different interpretation of the repeated word, "mishkan," comes from a Midrash. The Midrash explains that this is a reference to the First and Second Temples. Both Temples were eventually destroyed because of our sins. The Kli Yakar says that the two words Mishkan reference the Beit HaMikdash shel matah, the Temple on Earth (below), and the Beit HaMikdash shel ma'alah (above), the parallel Temple in the Heavens. Others point to the use of gold in the Mishkan as a clue to its importance. This opinion describes the Mishkan in the desert as an atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. Gold, as an atonement, is a prominent feature of the Mishkan and was used only for the items that were in the Kodesh, the Holy, or the Kodesh Kedashim, the Holy of Holies.

The Or HaChaim reminds us that the word in our first sentence, "eileh, these," is limiting: these are counted but not something else. That indicates that this count is different than other counts made in the Torah. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin also discusses the word "eileh." A Midrash compares the words here, "Eileh pekudei HaMishkan, these are the accountings of the Mishkan" with the phrase uttered about the Golden Calf, "Eileh Elokecha, this (these) is your Elokim." HaRav Sorotzkin asks how one can learn a special connection between words (gezeira shaveh), from words of the Torah to words of Idol Worship. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that we believe in a hidden Hashem, that Man cannot view the complexity of Hashem or he will die. Hashem created the world but does not dwell in it. Hashem is infinite and Man is incapable of seeing His vastness which is Ein Sof, without end. When Man sinned with the Golden Calf, he created a finite god, a rebellion against the concept of Ein Sof, One that has no end. Man replaced the infinite with a god that he could point to and understand. Before that time, it was Hashem's desire to dwell in the lower world of Man. Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden caused Hashem to leave the world and dwell in the lower regions of the Heavens. When Moshe received the Torah on Har Sinai, this was Hashem's invitation to dwell in the lower world as He had before Adam's sin. Man would then live together with Hashem and serve Him as the Kohanim would do in the Mishkan. But Man sinned again at the Golden Calf, shrinking "Hashem" to the size of a small calf. This caused Hashem to withdraw once again from the physical world, and only through Moshe's prayers, did Hashem decide to dwell among the people. This time, however, Hashem decided to punish the B'nei Yisrael in the same way that they had sinned. They had chosen to "shrink" Hashem's presence in this world, so Hashem decided to shrink His presence in this world into a building which was thirty amot by ten amot. Yet, even then, Hashem enabled Man to associate the vastness of Hashem with the Mishkan. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that every aspect of the Mishkan was like the Creation.

As an example, the yerirot, the panels that covered the Mishkan, were like the Heavens, the menorah was like the lights of the Heaven (sun and moon), and the kerashim, hooks of the panels, were like the stars.

The Mishkan, like our Beit Knesset, was a source of life for the B'nei Yisrael. It unified the people and centralized our focus on Hashem. Its accounting by Moshe was never required by Hashem or the people, but Moshe wanted everything done with an open accountability. Our lives also demand an accounting. May ours be open and demonstrate our focus on Hashem. © 2024 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

Transcribed by David Twersky

Edited by Dovid Hoffman

The following thought on Parshas Pekudei comes from the sefer Nachalas Eliezer, written by Rav Eliezer Cohen, who was a Mashgiach in the Gateshead Yeshiva in England.

The Medrash says as follows on the words "Eileh pekudei haMishkan" (These are the reckonings of the Tabernacle) (Shemos 38:21). "At the time you made the Golden Calf and danced around it, you angered Me with the words "Eileh Elokecha Yisrael (This is your god O Israel) that brought you up from the Land of Egypt" (Shemos 32:4). Now that you made the Mishkan with the word eleh, my anger has been appeased, as this eleh atones for the earlier eleh."

This is a Medrash that obviously requires some kind of an explanation. First of all, was the aveira (sin) of the Eigel HaZahav (Golden Calf) based on the fact that they used the word "Eleh"? The aveira was the fact that they made an Eigel HaZahav altogether, a pseudo avodah zarah. The expression "I was angered with the word eleh" seems a bit imprecise, to say the least. Also, what kind of atonement is it that they used the same word when building the Mishkan? Is this some type of gezeirah shavah? eleh-eleh?

The truth of the matter is that the Peirush Marzu on the bottom of the Medrash interprets this Medrash: The word eleh has a certain connotation. It has the connotation of "I am proud of this!" How do we know that? The Marzu writes that another Medrash says: Rav Yitzchak said, at the time of Creation, it is written "Eileh toldos hashamayim v'ha'aretz (These are the products of the heaven and the earth) when they were created on the day that Hashem, G-d made earth and heaven." (Bereshis 2:4). The Creator praises them. He says, as it were, "Look! Look at My world. Look at what I have created." The Creator praises the work of His Hands. This is the connotation of using the word eleh -- Look at my accomplishment!

Now we can begin to understand the above-cited Medrash. Of course, it is horrible that they built an Eigel HaZahav. But it added insult to injury when they

proclaimed "Eleh Elokecha Yisrael asher he'e'lucha m'Eretz Mitzrayim" as if they were proud of what they did. The Gemara (Berochos 19a) says "If someone sees a Torah scholar commit an aveira at night, don't suspect him the next day -- for he has certainly already done teshuva for his aveira of the previous night."

We all slip up. If someone sees a talmid chochom who did an aveira at night, he clearly feels bad about it. Without a doubt, by the next morning, he has already done teshuva. A talmid chochom may have been momentarily grasped by his Yetzer HaRah, but he immediately makes amends and goes on with his life. On the other hand, the pasuk says "(Why do You stand aloof) when the wicked man glories in his personal desire and the robber praises himself that he has blasphemed Hashem?" (Tehillim 10:3). The rasha is proud of what he did. He regrets it not, but rather he brags about his wicked deeds.

This is the difference. Of course, the Egel haZahav was wrong, but dancing around the Egel and proudly saying "Eleh Elokecha Yisrael" really angered the Ribono shel Olam.

They were desperate. They thought they lost their leader and they did not know who would lead them. Fine. They made an Egel haZahav. Very Bad. But at least there would have been some extenuating circumstances to find some justification for their succumbing to their sense of desperation. But when they danced around it and pointed to it (eleh) with glee -- that showed that there was no regret whatsoever. That is what angered the Almighty.

Eleh pekudei haMishkan shows that they were proud of having built the Mishkan. The money contributed, and the effort put into all the work of construction was something about which they felt very good, and they wanted to brag about it. That was the atonement for the aveira of the Egel. ©2022 Rabbi Y. Frand and torah.org

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

The parallel in wordings between the Torah's account of the universe's creation and of the building of the Mishkan has been noted by commentaries. I won't cite examples here but they abound.

The late British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks well phrased the upshot of that parallel, writing that "Genesis begins with G-d creating the universe as a home for humankind. Exodus ends with human beings, the Israelites, creating the Sanctuary as a home for G-d."

A little-known Midrash, I believe, also adds to the parallel. The Midrash Hagadol, on the parsha's final pasuk (Shemos 40:38) -- which states that "For the cloud of Hashem was upon the Mishkan by day, and there was fire within it at night, before the eyes of the entire house of Israel..." -- recounts the following: "When the Jews saw the cloud resting on the Mishkan, they rejoiced...

[but] when night came and fire surrounded the Mishkan, they were anguished and cried 'All our work was for naught!' When they awoke the next morning and saw the cloud enveloping the Mishkan again, they rejoiced an even greater rejoicing..."

That account is strongly reminiscent of the Gemara (Avodah Zara 8a) that tells of how: "On the day that Adam Harishon was created, when the sun set upon him, he said: 'Woe is me, as because I sinned, the world is becoming dark around me, and the world will return to the primordial state of chaos and disorder. And this is the death that was sentenced upon me from Heaven.' He spent all night fasting and crying, with Chava crying opposite him. Once dawn broke, though, he said: 'Evidently, the sun sets and night arrives, and this is the order of the world.' He arose and offered a sacrifice..."

Both accounts illustrate that, even when it seems that all is lost, that the world is bearing down and no hope is in sight, reason to rejoice may lie around the corner.

Living as we are in precarious times and headed toward Purim, when we will read of how a seemingly dire, threatening situation was turned on its head, it is a timely and trenchant message. ©2024 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.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.

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