

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

As soon as we read the opening lines of Terumah we begin the massive shift from the intense drama of the exodus with its signs and wonders and epic events, to the long, detailed narrative of how the Israelites constructed the Tabernacle, the portable sanctuary that they carried with them through the desert.

By any standards it is a part of the Torah that cries out for explanation. The first thing that strikes us is the sheer length of the account: one third of the book of Shemot, five parshiyot - Terumah, Tetsaveh, half of Ki Tissa, Vayakhel and Pekudei, interrupted only by the story of the golden calf.

This becomes even more perplexing when we compare it with another act of creation, namely God's creation of the universe. That story is told with the utmost brevity: a mere thirty four verses. Why take some fifteen times as long to tell the story of the Sanctuary?

The question becomes harder still when we recall that the mishkan was not a permanent feature of the spiritual life of the children of Israel. It was specifically designed to be carried on their journey through the wilderness. Later, in the days of Solomon, it would be replaced by the Temple in Jerusalem. What enduring message are we supposed to learn from a construction that was not designed to endure?

Even more puzzling is that fact that the story is part of the book of Shemot. Shemot is about the birth of a nation. Hence Egypt, slavery, Pharaoh, the plagues, the exodus, the journey through the sea and the covenant at Mount Sinai. All these things would become part of the people's collective memory. But the Sanctuary, where sacrifices were offered, surely belongs to Vayikra, otherwise known as Torat Kohanim, Leviticus, the book of priestly things. It seems to have no connection with Exodus whatsoever.

The answer, I believe, is profound. The transition from Bereishit to Shemot, Genesis to Exodus, is about the change from family to nation. When the Israelites entered Egypt they were a single extended family. By the time they left they had become a sizeable people, divided into twelve tribes plus an amorphous collection of fellow travellers known as the *erev rav*, the "mixed multitude."

What united them was a fate. They were the people whom the Egyptians distrusted and enslaved.

The Israelites had a common enemy. Beyond that they had a memory of the patriarchs and their God. They shared a past. What was to prove difficult, almost impossible, was to get them to share responsibility for the future.

Everything we read in Shemot tells us that, as is so often the case among people long deprived of freedom, they were passive and they were easily moved to complain. The two often go together. They expected someone else, Moses or God himself, to provide them with food and water, lead them to safety, and take them to the promised land.

At every setback, they complained. They complained when Moses' first intervention failed: "May the Lord look on you and judge you! You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us." (Ex. 5: 21)

At the Red Sea they complained again: They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" (Ex. 14: 11-12)

After the division of the Red Sea, the Torah says: "When the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and believed in him and in Moses his servant" (Ex. 14: 31). But after a mere three days they were complaining again. There was no water. Then there was water but it was bitter. Then there was no food.

The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." (Ex. 16: 3)

Soon Moses himself is saying: "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." (Ex. 17: 4)

By now God has performed signs and wonders on the people's behalf, taken them out of Egypt, divided the sea for them, given them water from a rock and manna from heaven, and still they do not cohere as a nation. They are a group of individuals, unwilling or unable to take responsibility, to act collectively rather than complain.

And now God does the single greatest act in history. He appears in a revelation at Mount Sinai, the

only time in history that God has appeared to an entire people, and the people tremble. There never was anything like it before; there never will be again.

How long does this last? A mere forty days. Then the people make a golden calf.

If miracles, the division of the sea and the revelation at Mount Sinai fail to transform the Israelites, what will? There are no greater miracles than these.

That is when God does the single most unexpected thing. He says to Moses: speak to the people and tell them to contribute, to give something of their own, be it gold or silver or bronze, be it wool or animal skin, be it oil or incense, or their skill or their time, and get them to build something together - a symbolic home for my presence, a Tabernacle. It doesn't need to be large or grand or permanent. Get them to make something, to become builders. Get them to give.

Moses does. And the people respond. They respond so generously that Moses is told, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done" (Ex. 36: 5), and Moses has to say, Stop.

During the whole time the Tabernacle was being constructed, there were no complaints, no rebellions, no dissension. What all the signs and wonders failed to do, the construction of the Tabernacle succeeded in doing. It transformed the people. It turned them into a cohesive group. It gave them a sense of responsibility and identity.

Seen in this context, the story of the Tabernacle was the essential element in the birth of a nation. No wonder it is told at length; no surprise that it belongs to the book of Exodus; and there is nothing ephemeral about it. The Tabernacle did not last forever, but the lesson it taught did.

It is not what God does for us that transforms us, but what we do for God. A free society is best symbolized by the Tabernacle. It is the home we build together. It is only by becoming builders that we turn from subjects to citizens. We have to earn our freedom by what we give. It cannot be given to us as an unearned gift. It is what we do, not what is done to us, that makes us free. That is a lesson as true today as it was then. *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 let them make Me a Sanctuary that I may dwell among them.” [Exodus 25:8] What does it mean for God to dwell among the people?

Does this not sound anthropomorphic, as if God were in human form dwelling on our street? And would the concept of a dwelling place for the divine not have been more appropriately expressed with a verse saying: “And let them make Me a Sanctuary that I may dwell in it”?

Moreover, what is the strange textual link between the Sanctuary and Shabbat? This portion and the following one, Tetzaveh, deal with the Sanctuary. The third portion of the sequence, Ki Tisa, suddenly features a ringing declaration to keep Shabbat (Ex. 31:14), apropos of nothing.

What is the relationship between the Sanctuary and Shabbat?

According to the Talmud [see Shabbat 49b], the aspect of Shabbat that is intimately linked to the construction of the Sanctuary is the fundamental definition of precisely which activities are prohibited on Shabbat. Similarly, in the portion of Ki Tisa, in the midst of God saying the following to Moses about Bezalel the great architect of the Sanctuary: “...whom I have filled with the spirit of God in wisdom and in understanding and in knowledge and in all manner of workmanship.” [Exodus 31:3]

The Torah suddenly moves from the Sanctuary to Shabbat: “But verily you shall keep My Sabbath, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you...” [Exodus 31:14]

Aside from the general declaration forbidding creative activity (melakha) on Shabbat [Exodus 20:10], the Written Torah is virtually silent on specifically what is included under the rubric of creative activity. By virtue of the fact that an additional Shabbat injunction appears precisely within the context of constructing the Sanctuary, the sages derived the definition of creative activity or “work” from the different categories of labor involved in the construction of the Sanctuary. They taught that what- ever was involved in the construction of the Sanctuary is forbidden on Shabbat.

From a traditional perspective, one might therefore explain the linkage by saying that the Sanctuary expresses sanctity of space and Shabbat expresses sanctity of time. Sanctity of time is on a higher level than sanctity of space, so the Sanctuary cannot be built on Shabbat and all the activities necessary for the building of the Sanctuary became the paradigm for prohibited Shabbat activity.

But let us look more deeply into the activities forbidden on Shabbat and I believe we shall discover an even more profound linkage between the Sanctuary and Shabbat. The Mishna [Shabbat 7:2] lists thirty-nine forbidden creative activities, beginning with seeding and plowing – basic agricultural activities. On the surface, there seems to be little relationship between these activities and the building of the Sanctuary. Rashi suggests that the initial group is related to the planting of herbs whose dyes were used for the Sanctuary curtains. However, if this is the case, then the eleventh listed category, baking, poses a difficult problem. According to Rashi's interpretation, it is cooking rather than baking that should have been included; after all, extracting the different ingredients needed to dye the linens required

the cooking or the boiling of the herbs – not baking.

The Talmud [see Shabbat 74b] explains that baking replaced cooking because the author of the Mishna, R . Yehuda HaNasi, wanted to list the processes involved in the manufacture of bread; hence the Mishna lists baking rather than cooking. This Talmudic response may very well be used to shed a fascinating light on all of the thirty-nine activities. If the first group of forbidden activities in the Mishna is to be looked upon from the perspective of bread manufacture, then the next grouping of prohibited activities centers around clothing manufacture, the third around leather manufacture and the fourth around building construction.

From this perspective, R . Yehuda HaNasi, the compiler of the Mishna, is adding another dimension to the prohibited Sabbath activities: Not only are they the activities involved in constructing the Sanctuary, but they are also the activities involved in producing food, clothing and shelter. He is informing us that although the human pursuit of food (bread, the “staff of life”), clothing and shelter (leather may be used for garments, shoes and tents) is legitimate and even mandatory for physical survival and certainly appropriate for the weekdays. Even animals require food and some form of protective clothing from the elements and shelter! The Shabbat, however, is to be dedicated to God. The Shabbat is to be sanctified for the soul and the mind. The Shabbat is the means to the end for which God created human beings above animals: to catapult us into more exalted and spiritual realms of involvement. Shabbat is the key to essence and not mere existence!

The story is told that the famed Hassidic Rebbe Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev once saw a Jew running very quickly. “I am running to make my living,” explained the harried businessman. “But perhaps in the process you are losing your life,” remonstrated the rebbe.

Indeed, the biblical explanation of the divine gift of desert manna teaches us that “...not by bread alone does the human being live but by that which comes forth from God’s mouth does the human being live.” [Deuteronomy 8:3]

Targum Onkelos (in the more precise readings of the text) translates the passage thus: “Not by bread alone is the human being meant to exist (kayam), but by that which comes forth from God’s mouth is the human being meant to live (hayei)”. [Onkelos on Deuteronomy 8:3]

“Existence” (kiyum) refers to the physical necessities of food, clothing and shelter, while “life” (hayim) is the purpose of human creation, the fellowship with God which teaches us to emulate His traits of compassion, graciousness, tolerance and truth, the hallmarks of His essence. The Sabbath is given as a day in which we can free ourselves from the “rat-race” pursuit of a living, and dedicate ourselves to the more human pursuit of a life in the context of sacred time, “time off ” which is really “time in,” time dedicated to family, to

Torah, and to God.

The building of the Sanctuary is the preparation, the means, just as the six days of the week are days of preparation, the means. The Sanctuary and the Sabbath are the goal, the purpose. To slightly change the apt phrase of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, the Sabbath is our Sanctuary in time, and the Sanctuary is our Sabbath in space. The days of the week are not yet holy time, whereas the Sabbath is a foretaste of the world to come. The world is not yet perfect, and we must transform it into a Sanctuary in which God and humanity can dwell together.

Once we understand that the Sanctuary and the Sabbath are parallel, we can readily see the similarity in language between the two. The Hebrew root khl (vayekhulu, vatekhel, to complete) and the Hebrew noun melakha (labor) appear almost exclusively in the two contexts of the Sabbath and the Sanctuary. Also, there are key verses in each context that are almost identical (for example, Genesis 1:31, Exodus 39:43). The biblical goal is for all space to become Sanctuary, all time to become Sabbath. *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 initial and most successful building campaign in Jewish history is recorded for us in this week’s Torah reading. The Torah, in recounting the event, teaches us that Moshe was to accept offerings of gold, silver, copper, precious stones, weaving materials, acacia wood, artistic talent and everything else that would be necessary for the construction of the great tabernacle/Mishkan in the desert.

The Torah, though, places a caveat on the donations of goods and services, wealth and talent that Moshe was to receive from the people of Israel. The Torah states that he was to accept all donations but only from those whose hearts and will motivated their generosity. We are all aware that it is much easier to write a check than to really feel good, excited and sincere about the donation.

The nature of human beings is to be less than forthcoming in their generosity and even if they are willing to part with some of their material possessions, the spirit and true intent of that generosity is often missing. Here the Torah is teaching us an important lesson. A building or any institution whose purpose is service of God and the spiritual enhancement of human beings cannot be built of human material generosity alone.

As the Talmud so succinctly phrases it, “God demands our heart.” Professional fundraisers employ all means and tactics to raise money for their goals and

projects. However, after many decades of observing fundraising techniques, I know that it is very difficult to penetrate the heart of the donor. Without such a penetration, the fund-raising exercise becomes devoid of spiritual meaning and soulful uplift.

I think that the giving feeling that the Torah emphasizes here is achievable only when one feels that the cause or object of one's generosity is really worth more than the wealth that one is parting with. The example I use in teaching is that if one feels that giving charity is the equivalent of paying one's taxes then that donation is completely devoid of any spiritual content. We all have to pay our taxes as a national duty and a practical necessity. Yet people do not feel any sort of spiritual achievement in paying their taxes. We may sign the check but our hearts are not in it.

This attitude, which after all is still acceptable when paying our material taxes is concerned (since no government is really interested in the spiritual effects of its taxes on the status of your soul), is not the attitude that will suffice when it comes to building a tabernacle/Mishkan. In this latter case we are asked not only to give of our material wealth and personal talents but truly to give of ourselves as well.

The demand of the Torah is not only to give from our heart but to give our heart itself to the exalted cause and spiritual greatness of the tabernacle/Mishkan. It is not a donation that the Torah asks of us, rather it is a commitment of self that is demanded. The tabernacle/Mishkan has long ago disappeared from our physical view but its lessons remain relevant and important to us today as when they were taught millennia ago. ©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

A centerpiece of the Tabernacle is the Menorah, made of seven branches, three on the right and three on the left, rising to the same height as the central shaft (Exodus 25:31–40). Insight into its symbolic meaning may emerge when analyzing the Menorah's relationship to three major themes of Judaism: creation, revelation, and redemption.

Creation. The Menorah recalls the creation story, where the first creation was light (Genesis 1:3). And it also recalls Eden, where light was far more intense than the sun (Baba Batra 58a).

In the center of the Garden of Eden were the tree of knowledge and the tree of life. The Menorah resembles a tree, adorned with flowers, knobs, and cups. The flowers represent the buds that give forth fruit, the knobs are shaped like round fruits, and the cups symbolize vessels into which nectar is poured

(Menachot 28a). Together, they represent a soft jardinière from which the Menorah wicks emanate Edenic light.

Hence, the Menorah inspires “remembrances of things past,” offering a glimpse of the serenity of the light of creation.

Revelation. The Menorah resonates with the image of Sinai as well, recalling the moment when the Torah was given, where lightning was abundant (Exodus 19:16).

The three branches on each side can symbolize disciplines outside of Torah. Yet the wicks in each of these branches turn toward the inner shaft, representing Torah. Each impacts the other. On the one hand, chemistry can enhance our understanding of kashrut and astronomy our ability to calculate the lunar calendar. On the other, Torah study can give new meaning, new direction, and new purpose to worldly knowledge, sanctifying it. The sciences, language, medicine, the arts, and all disciplines are potentially aspects of Torah.

Thus, the lighting of the Tabernacle Menorah helped focus spiritual energy on the light of Torah, the light of revelation.

Redemption. The Menorah may also allude to the Messianic hope, reminding us of our mission to be a light to the nations of the world (Isaiah 42:6).

The wick of the central shaft as well as the flames of all the branches point heavenward, beckoning us to reach higher and higher, doing our best to repair the world.

From this perspective, the Menorah catapults us into the future, when Am Yisrael and the world will experience the light of redemption.

All three of these areas speak to us today. Entering a synagogue and seeing a menorah, or an eternal light representing the Menorah, echoes the themes of Edenic inner peace, love of Torah, and a striving toward a more ideal world: creation, revelation, and redemption. ©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

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

The Holy Ark

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

When people nowadays refer to the *aron kodesh* (the holy ark), they are generally speaking about the ark in the front of the *shul*, which houses the Torah scrolls. This ark is considered a *tashmish kedusha*, something that serves a holy object and thus is holy itself. Therefore, other items should not be stored in the ark. Additionally, even if an old ark is replaced by a newer one, the old one retains its holiness and should be treated accordingly.

The question arises: May we use the ark to store *Chumashim*, *Siddurim*, *Haftarah* scrolls (written on

parchment), or Torah scrolls that have become unusable? It would seem that since all of these are of less holiness than a Torah scroll, such storage should be forbidden, as it would detract from the holiness of the ark.

However, a number of reasons have been adduced to permit this:

1. Since the Torah scroll is resting in the ark as well, the holiness of the ark is not diminished by these additional items. (If this explanation is correct, there is a problem when we remove all the Torah scrolls from the ark, as we do on Simchat Torah and (in some places) Hoshana Rabbah.)

2. The people who originally built the ark had in mind that it would be used for storing other holy objects besides Torah scrolls.

3. Since we customarily cover Torah scrolls with ornamental mantles, the ark is further removed from the scrolls' holiness. It is now a *tashmish de-tashmish*, something that serves an item that itself serves a holy object. Therefore, placing other holy items in the ark does not detract from its holiness.

Notwithstanding the above three reasons, there are still those who insist that Torah scrolls alone, and nothing else, may be stored in the *aron kodesh*. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

The aron habris, the ark of the covenant that held the *luchos*, the tablets of the law, consisted of three nested boxes, the middle one of wood, the outer and inner ones of *zahav tahor* -- "pure gold." Its *kapores*, or cover, was made entirely of "pure gold."

Not so the poles that are placed in rings on the sides of the aron -- and that are to remain there permanently. Like the aron itself, they are wooden but covered with gold. But only "gold," not "pure gold" like the aron's inner and outer boxes.

In his *sefer Nachalas Tzvi*, Rav Meshullam Gross notes that difference and sees in it the fact that those whose lives are dedicated to Torah-study, symbolized by the aron, must be pure-hearted and not motivated by ulterior motives. Those who support them, however, who are symbolized by the poles with which the aron was carried, may condition their support on other things.

Ulterior motives do not cancel the merit of Torah-support or other meritorious giving. As the Talmud (*Pesachim 8a*) teaches: "One who says: I am contributing this coin to charity so that my son will live... is a completely righteous person."

A common ulterior motive in philanthropy is honor. That is why donors' names on plaques in shuls, Jewish outreach centers and yeshivos, or on the edifices themselves are perfectly proper.

In fact, such displays can constitute great merits in their own rights.

One of the most generous donors to Torah causes was Joe Tanenbaum, whose name, along with his wife Faye's, graces wonderful institutions not only in his adopted city Toronto but across the globe. As a child, he hadn't received a thorough Jewish education and he wanted others to have every opportunity to Jewishly educate themselves.

He was, though, by all accounts, a most modest man. A story that made the rounds many years ago is that he was once asked why he wanted his and his wife's names to be prominent on the facades of the countless Torah-promoting buildings.

His reply was that, in the event that one of his future descendants should for some reason not receive a Jewish education or fall away from the Jewish path, he hopefully imagined the young person seeing the name Tanenbaum on an edifice and, carrying the same surname or knowing it was in his or her genealogy, becoming sufficiently intrigued to enter its doors. ©2024 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

Bais Hamussar

When Adam was created, he entered a spiritually pure world. In a sin-free setting, Hashem's presence is palpable and it is quite comprehensible that one living in such an environment would be able to converse with the Creator Himself as was the case with Adam. Unfortunately, this utopia lasted only a number of hours. He sinned by eating from the *eitz hada'as* and thereby plunged the world into a spiritual darkness.

This darkness culminated with the destruction of most of mankind during the flood.

Avraham Avinu began building a new world of spirituality. Seven generations later his offspring stood by Har Sinai and declared *na'aseh v'nishma* and thereby restored the world to its original state of spiritual purity. Once again those present at that time merited hearing words emanating from Hashem Himself. However, shortly thereafter the original course of events recurred: a sin was committed and it hurled the world downward into a spiritual abyss.

According to the *Seforno*, the building of the *Mishkan* was meant to rectify this situation and create an edifice which would act as a substitute for the former world of purity. The *Mishkan* was in effect a microcosm of the universe. When Moshe Rabbeinu entered this abode which was untainted by sin, he immediately heard the voice of Hashem. Indeed, anyone who entered encountered numerous miracles that proclaimed Hashem's presence.

Chazal tell us (*Shemos Rabba 34:1*) that when Hashem instructed Moshe to build the *Mishkan*, Moshe wondered aloud: "His presence fills the entire universe and He is asking me to build an abode for Him?" Hashem responded, "I did not intend it to be as big as you think it

should be. Erect twenty beams on the northern side, twenty beams on the southern side and eight beams on the western side. Moreover, I will descend and rest My Shechina within a space of a cubit by a cubit." Rav Wolbe (Daas Shlomo) quotes Rav Yeruchom Levovitz's explanation of Moshe's surprise. Moshe did not assume that Hashem intended to maintain His presence in the world and merely occupy an additional personal abode. Had this been the case then there would be no place for his question since such an endeavor would not necessitate a huge building.

Rather, Moshe understood that Hashem was planning on removing His presence from the entire universe and dwelling solely in the Mishkan! Hashem responded with the concept of tzimtzum Ha'Shechina -- He would condense His presence and limit it to a single square cubit!

Alas, the Mishkan and Beis Hamikdosh have been destroyed and Hashem's presence on earth is no longer felt. Do we have any hope of regaining His presence in a fashion similar to what was felt in the previous generations? Chazal (Brachos 8a) enlighten us and assert, "From the time that the Beis Hamikdosh was destroyed Hashem has no place in this world aside from the four cubits of halacha." We are left without a Mishkan and without any of its vessels, but Hashem still finds a way to condense and concentrate His presence i.e. on a person who delves into the Torah l'halacha.

Reb Naftoli Amsterdam once lamented to his Rebbe Reb Yisroel Salanter that he feels inadequate to properly serve Hashem. "If only I had the brilliant mind of the Shaagas Aryeh, the passionate heart of the Yesod V'Shoreish Ha'Avodah and your sterling middos, then I would be able to properly serve Hashem!" Reb Yisroel Salanter replied, "Naftoli, with your mind, with your heart and with your middos you have the ability to be a true oved Hashem!" Rav Yeruchom Levovitz comments that Reb Yisroel Salanter was informing his disciple of just how far this idea of tzimtzum Ha'Shechina goes. Hashem will even condense His Shechina and rest it upon a person with limited intellectual abilities, a small heart and unpolished middos, as long as he serves Hashem with seriousness and wholesomeness. We have the ability to build a Mishkan. We do not even have to travel to Yerushalayim since the building is to take place in our own backyard. The most lucrative investment is the investment of time one spends in building himself into an abode for the Shechina! ©2016 Rabbi S. Wolbe zt"l & AishDas Society

RABBI YITZCHAK ZWEIG

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

Over the past few weeks I have had the opportunity to spend time with a cousin of mine from Israel who was on break from his reserve duties in the Israeli army. My cousin is a sharpshooter in his army unit. His reserve unit came under heavy attack in Gaza and

thirteen soldiers sustained critical injuries. In fact, his "spotter" was grievously injured -- and for a time they despaired for his life. Knowing the severity of his injuries my cousin refers to his partner's slow recovery as "nothing short of miraculous."

Like almost every reservist, my cousin also has a career outside of the army. He worked in high tech for a few years before discovering his interest and talent for wine discernment. He chose to pursue this path and studied in London's WSET (Wine and Spirit Education Trust) and became certified as a wine expert at level 3. When not serving in the army he runs wine tasting events and advises others as a sommelier.

Over the last 25-30 years the worldwide kosher wine market has exploded -- going from a paltry handful of quality kosher wines to several thousand kosher wines, many of which are ranked among the top wines in the world. There is therefore a burgeoning market of kosher wine consumers, with specialty kosher wine stores opening in many cities. Today there isn't any excuse not to be using kosher wines for all your wine needs. For those of you living in cities with a nonexistent or poor kosher wine selection, please <https://bit.ly/3HXxydt>. It is another EXCELLENT way of supporting Israel by supporting the vineyards, wineries, and winemakers who may be short staffed and struggling due to reserve service.

Anyway, during this hiatus from the army, my cousin has been touring the USA as a featured speaker with the appellation, "Sharpshooter by Day, Sommelier at Night." (He also runs unique winery tours in Israel; you can contact me for more information on either.)

Like many reservists, he will be returning to army service after his break. Reserve duty is referred to in Hebrew as "milluim -- fulfillment" and reservists are affectionately known as "milluimnikim." The standing army of Israel, known as the IDF (Israel Defense Forces), is primarily made up of 18-21 year old men and women who are participating in national compulsory service. Their bravery and heroic acts during this vicious fighting in Gaza -- these young members of the Israeli "Tik-Tok generation" -- have inspired and galvanized the Israeli populace.

After the tragic events of Oct 7th, the army called in their reservists to report for duty. Everyone answered the call -- even those who had been outside of the country for many years. Israeli reservists across the world dropped everything they were doing and immediately booked their flights back to Israel. There was a historically high turnout of approximately 150% of that which was projected, to the point where there actually wasn't enough equipment in storage to help properly equip all the responding reservists.

For two millennia, the Jewish people have been murdered, expelled, and otherwise subjected to crushing antisemitism in just about every country in which they have ever resided. There is subconscious trauma to the

collective "soul" of the Jewish nation. But today we are living in a different paradigm; for the first time in two millennia -- and for the last 75 years of the State of Israel -- the Jewish nation has a military to call upon and Jews everywhere are answering the call, some to fight and others in support of those fighting.

By contrast, two years ago when Russia invaded Ukraine (which also claimed to be fighting an existential war), hundreds of thousands of eligible soldiers immediately fled the country. The astonishing disorganization of the Russian army, coupled with the fact that many citizens did not see the righteousness of the war caused a massive abandonment of personal responsibility. Their once vaunted army has suffered devastating losses -- to the point that they have emptied their jails and conscripted hardened criminals into service.

The fact is that the Russian people gave Putin their freedoms in exchange for promises of a "Greater Russia" filled with prosperity and security. Now they are left without freedom, prosperity, or security.

Thankfully, the situation in Israel is vastly different. Reservists come from all walks of life -- religious, anti-religious, and somewhat religious. They are lawyers, doctors, educators, engineers, plumbers, winemakers, field hands, etc. They are Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Tamani, Bukharian and yes, Christian, Muslim, Druze, and Bedouin too. Most tellingly, they are also fathers and mothers, and their service underscores their family's commitment. Remarkably, they have come together in unity; a shared vision and mission of protecting their country and their people. They are fighting -- and dying -- side by side. They are focused on what unifies them; totally disinterested in their comrades-in-arms life outlooks, which, in other circumstances, might make them exceedingly different. Of course, taking 350,000 people out of regular everyday life has had a profound impact on every aspect of the Israeli society. There are reports from those working in Israel's highly regarded tech industry that some 50% of their workforce is in the army at present. These milluimnikim are doing exceedingly well - - many have prior battle experience and/or have been in Gaza in the past. Thus, their age and experience have proven to be valuable assets in the military.

But this war has taken a heavy toll; aside from the tragic loss of life and widespread number of wounded, Israeli society is suffering the effects of reservists being called up to serve for the last four months. Some have businesses that have begun to collapse, nearly all have families with children who are struggling to cope with a parent that is absent for months.

Many of the milluimnikim are now being decommissioned and sent home, with some being told they will be recalled later. In our Miami elementary school, we filmed the emotional reunion of one of our reservist parents who returned home, surprising his

children. You can view it here. Seeing the sudden joy (and emotional relief) of his children will touch your heart.

I am focusing on the milluimnikim because they are related to this week's Torah portion. As mentioned, the army reserve duty is known as milluim. The etymology of the word comes from the Hebrew verb *l'maleh*, meaning to fill -- in this case with the knowledge to fulfill a role. The first place that the word milluim appears is in this week's Torah portion.

This week's Torah reading contains the list of materials the Almighty asked Moses to collect to be used to construct the Tabernacle (*Mishkan* in Hebrew) and all of its utensils and service garments. The Tabernacle was the epicenter of ritual service to the Almighty when the Jews were in the desert and for about 400 years after they entered Israel (until King Solomon built the Holy Temple in Jerusalem).

This week's reading begins with the Almighty asking Moses to collect fifteen different materials to be used in the construction of the Tabernacle, its utensils, and priestly garments. These materials included gold and other precious metals, acacia wood, oils, certain spices, different colored wools, and a wide assortment of precious stones (the individual names of which are identified in next week's Torah portion).

"And this is the offering which you shall take from them; gold, and silver, and copper. Blue, purple, and scarlet wools, fine linen, and goats' hair. Rams' skins dyed red, and goats' skins, and acacia wood, oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for incense. Onyx stones, and filler stones to be set on the ephod, and on the breastplate. They shall make me a sanctuary and will dwell among them" (Exodus 25:3-8).

Exodus 25:7 speaks of "avnei milluim" and according to the great Biblical commentator known as Rashi these "filler stones" were called such because of their function, they were to be inset to fill a particular place. Here they were being embedded into the breastplate that was worn by the High Priest during his sacred service.

Yet this designation as merely "filler stones" is particularly odd. In next week's Torah reading we find the actual names of the different types of stones, and they include exceedingly precious and valuable stones, including diamonds, rubies, emeralds, carbuncles, etc. The Torah referring to them as "avneimilluim" belies their tremendous innate worth.

The Talmud notes a well-known story that took place toward the end of the Second Temple Era in which one of the stones of the priestly breastplate went missing. The Talmud relates how the rabbis of the time entrusted to replace the missing stone were prepared to spend vast sums of money for this unique stone.

Some years ago, one of these precious stones was said to have turned up -- and its provenance may have even been believable (there was a family history that included escaping from the Holy Land in the times

of the crusades and a family legend about the Knight Templars). At the time the stone was examined it was determined that -- if genuine -- it was estimated to be worth in the many hundreds of millions of dollars.

So why are these precious stones merely referred to as "filler stones"? The answer, of course, must be that the innate value of the stone is indeed extremely precious, however its true value is only fulfilled as one of the priceless stones on the breastplate. Being part of the collective whole is what creates its sublime innate value -- and by comparison it's individual value is really that of just a filler stone.

I find it striking that the founders of the IDF chose this very same word -- milluim -- as the descriptive name for reserve duty. In the same manner, these precious souls of infinite value see themselves only complete when they participate as part of a greater whole -- after all, there's no "I" in team. These brave and individually priceless men and women only actualize their true innate value as part of the greater IDF fighting for their people and their land.

May the Almighty protect all who toil on behalf of the Jewish people and safely return all the soldiers and hostages to their families. Amen. ©2024 Rabbi Y. Zweig and shabbatshalom.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Ark of Inclusion

In this week's portion, Hashem commands the Jewish nation to build the Mishkan. Each one of the utensils is specified as to how it should be constructed, its width, its length, and its height. The type of material whether it was gold, silver, or copper, is enumerated and the details of its ornaments are provided.

The procedure for the construction of each vessel is preceded by a command stated in the singular form: "And you shall make" "And you shall make a show bread table." "And you shall make a Menorah." "And you shall make an Altar."

The command is directed toward Moshe to delegate the construction. The Aron Kodesh, the Holy Ark is different. Its command is not stated in the singular form, rather in the plural. The Torah does not say and you shall make a Holy Ark, it states, "And they shall make a Holy Ark." The commentaries ask, why was the command to build the Ark the only one that was given to a group?

In a small shul in Yerushalayim, a daily Daf HaYomi shiur (Talmudic folio class) was held each morning before Shacharis. An elderly Russian immigrant attended the shiur. Quiet as he was, his behavior in the shiur intrigued the lecturer. He would never ask a thing. Often he would nod off. Sometimes, when the Rabbi quoted a particular Talmudic sage, the old man's face would light up -- especially when the Rabbi mentioned an opinion from a obscure Talmudic personality.

This behavior continued throughout the

summer. Always quiet, the man would sometimes nod off, and at other times he would perk up. Then winter came. The group of men would gather around the table in the frigid mornings huddled close as they would warm to the strains of the Talmud and the straining heater in the old synagogue. The old man never missed a class.

One morning a rare snow blanketed Jerusalem. No one showed up to the shiur except the Rabbi and the elderly Russian Jew. Instead of giving his usual lecture, the Rabbi decided he would ask the old Jew a little bit about himself.

"Tell me," he inquired, "I watch you as I say my shiur. Sometimes you look intrigued but at other times you seem totally disinterested. The trouble is I would like to make the shiur more interesting for you during its entirety, but I can't seem to make out what perks you up and makes you doze?"

The old man smiled. "I never had a Jewish education. I can barely read Hebrew. I do not come to the shiur for the same reasons that the other men come." He paused as his eyes pondered his past. "You see, I was a soldier in the Red Army during World War II. Every day our commander would herd us into a room and put a gun to our heads. He commanded us to recite the names of every member of the Politburo. And we did. We learned those names backwards and forward. I come to this class to hear the names of every rabbi in the Talmud. If I cannot learn at least I will know the names of all the great sages! "That," he smiled "is my Daf HaYomi!"

Although the show bread table, the Menorah, and the Altar can be constructed by individuals -- the Ark that holds the Torah is different. One man cannot make it alone. It must be a communal effort. Just as the Torah cannot be learned by one man alone, its Ark cannot be built by an individual either.

The Torah is given for everyone to learn and to experience -- each one according to his or her own level and ability. Lighting a Menorah is a clear-cut ritual delegated to the Kohain. The Altar is used for the sacrifices brought by the kohanim. The Torah is for everybody. And each individual has his own Shas and Daf HaYomi. Each person has his share in Toras Yisrael. Everyone extracts something holy from the Torah. To some it may be extrapolative halachic theory, while for others it may be the refinement of character. And still for others it may be the names of Abayai and Rava. ©2014

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