

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

With this week's double parsha, with its long account of the construction of the sanctuary – one of the longest narratives in the Torah, taking a full 13 chapters – comes to a magnificent climax: Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Sanctuary. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the Glory of the Lord filled the Sanctuary. (Ex. 40:34-35)

That is what the building of the sanctuary was about: how to bring God, as it were, from heaven to earth, or at least from the top of the mountain to down in the valley, from the remote God of awe-inspiring power to the Shekhinah, the indwelling Presence, God as shakhen, a neighbour, intimate, close, within the camp, in the midst of the people.

Yet for all this, we wonder why the Torah has to go on at such length in its details of the Mishkan, taking up the whole of Terumah and Tetzaveh, half of Ki Tissa, and then again Vayakhel and Pekudei. After all, the Mishkan was at best a temporary dwelling for the Shekhinah, suited to the years of wandering and wilderness. In Israel, it was superseded by the Temple. For two thousand years in the absence of a Temple its place was taken by the synagogue. Why, if the Torah is timeless, does it devote such space to what was essentially a time-bound structure?

The answer is deep and life-transforming, but to reach it we have to note some salient facts. First, the language the Torah uses in Pekudei is highly reminiscent of the language used in the narrative of the creation of the universe:

And God saw all that He had made and behold it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)

Moses saw all the skilled work and behold they had done it; as God had commanded it they had done it. (Exodus 39:43)

The heavens and earth and all their array were completed. (Genesis 2:1)

All the work of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting was completed. (Exodus 39:32)

And God completed all the work that He had done. (Genesis 2:2)

And Moses completed the work. (Exodus 40:33)

And God blessed... (Genesis 2:3)

And Moses blessed... (Exodus 39:43)

And sanctified it. (Genesis 2:3)

And you shall sanctify it and all its vessels. (Exodus 40:9)

Clearly the Torah wants us to connect birth of the universe with the building of the Mishkan, but how and why?

The numerical structure of the two passages heightens the connection. We know that the key number of the creation narrative is seven. There are seven days, and the word "good" appears seven times. The first verse of the Torah contains seven Hebrew words, and the second, 14. The word *eretz*, "earth," appears 21 times, the word *Elokim*, "God," 35 times, and so on.

So too in Pekudei, the phrase "as the Lord commanded Moses" appears seven times in the account of the making of the priestly garments (Ex. 39:1-31), and another seven times in the description of Moses setting up the Sanctuary (Ex. 40:17-33).

Note also one tiny detail, the apparently odd and superfluous "And" at the very beginning of the book of Exodus: "And these are the names ..." The presence of this connective suggests that the Torah is telling us to see Genesis and Exodus as inherently connected. They are part of the same extended narrative.

The final relevant fact is that one of the Torah's most significant stylistic devices is the chiasmus, or "mirror-image symmetry" – a pattern of the form ABCC1B1A1, as in "(A) He who sheds (B) the blood (C) of man, (C1) by man (B1) shall his blood (A1) be shed" (Gen. 9:6). This form can be the shape of a single sentence, as here, or a paragraph, but it can also exist at larger levels of magnitude.

What it means is that a narrative reaches a certain kind of closure when the end takes us back to the beginning – which is precisely what happens at the end of Exodus. It reminds us, quite precisely, of the beginning of all beginnings, when God created heaven and earth. The difference is that this time human beings have done the creating: the Israelites, with their gifts, the labour and their skills.

To put it simply: Genesis begins with God creating the universe as a home for humankind. Exodus ends with human beings, the Israelites, creating the Sanctuary as a home for God.

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But the parallel goes far deeper than this – telling us about the very nature of the difference between kodesh and chol, sacred and secular, the holy and the mundane.

We owe to the great mystic, R. Isaac Luria, the concept of tzimtzum, “self-effacement” or “self-limitation.” Luria was perplexed by the question: If God exists, how can the universe exist? At every point in time and space, the Infinite should crowd out the finite. The very existence of God should act as does a Black Hole to everything in its vicinity. Nothing, not even light waves, can escape a Black Hole, so overwhelming is its gravitational pull. Likewise, nothing physical or material should be able to survive for even a moment in the presence of the pure, absolute Being of God.

Luria’s answer was that, in order for the universe to exist, God had to hide Himself, screen His presence, limit His Being. That is tzimtzum.

Now let us come back to the key words kodesh and chol. One of the root meanings of chol, and the related root ch-l-l, is “empty.” Chol is the space vacated by God through the process of self-limitation so that a physical universe can exist. It is, as it were, “emptied” of the pure Divine light.

Kodesh is the result of a parallel process in the opposite direction. It is the space vacated by us so that God’s presence can be felt in our midst. It is the result of our own tzimtzum. We engage in self-limitation every time we set aside our devices and desires in order to act on the basis of God’s will, not our own.

That is why the details of the Sanctuary are described at such length: to show that every feature of its design was not humanly invented but God-given. That is why the human equivalent of the word “good” in the Genesis creation account is “as the Lord commanded Moses.” When we nullify our will to do God’s will, we create something that is holy.

To put it simply: chol is the space God makes for humankind. Kodesh is the space humankind makes for God. And both spaces are created the same way: by an act of tzimtzum, self-effacement.

So the making of the Sanctuary that takes up the last third of the book of Exodus is not just about a specific construction, the portable shrine that the Israelites took with them on journey through the

wilderness. It is about an absolutely fundamental feature of the religious life, namely the relationship between the sacred and the secular, kodesh and chol. Chol is the space God makes for us. Kodesh is the space we make for God.

So, for six days a week – the days that are chol – God makes space for us to be creative. On the seventh day, the day that is Kadosh, we make space for God by acknowledging that we are His creations. And what applies in time applies also in space. There are secular places where we pursue our own purposes. And there are holy places where we open ourselves, fully and without reserve, to God’s purposes.

If this is so, we have before us an idea with life-transforming implications. The highest achievement is not self-expression but self-limitation: making space for something other and different from us. The happiest marriages are those in which each spouse makes space for the other to be his or her-self. Great parents make space for their children. Great leaders make space for their followers. Great teachers make space for their pupils. They are there when needed, but they don’t crush or inhibit or try to dominate. They practice tzimtzum, self-limitation, so that others have the space to grow. That is how God created the universe, and it is how we allow others to fill our lives with their glory. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z”l ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"He made the copper washbasin and its copper base out of the mirrors of the service women who congregated to serve at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting” [Ex. 38:8]. The Sanctuary and all of its furnishings are described in exquisite detail in this week’s Torah portion, Vayak’hel-Pekudei, with one exception: the Ki’ur, the large wash basin in which the priests sanctified themselves by washing their hands and feet prior to each Divine service. Whereas virtually all the other items in the Sanctuary are given exact measurements, here the Torah speaks only in general terms. What makes the wash basin unique? What message is the Torah conveying in highlighting its uniqueness?

For an answer, we turn to the verse that states that the basin was made of the “mirrors of the service women” [Ex. 38:8]. According to Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch (19th century Germany), the phrase “ba-marot ha-tzovot” (mirrors of the service women) suggests that the copper mirrors were not melted down at all, but that the wash basin was “...fitted together almost without any alteration at all, so that it would be recognizable that the basin consisted of mirrors”.

This explanation raises additional questions. Of

all contributions to the Sanctuary, why should the mirrors retain their unique identity? Does it not seem curious that the very symbol of vanity would find a new incarnation as a central piece inside the Sanctuary? Indeed, without first stopping at the basin to wash their hands and feet, the priests could not begin the Temple service. How could such “vanities” become such a significant aspect of our Sanctuary?

According to Rashi, the inclusion of the women’s mirrors inside the Sanctuary is really the story of a religious metamorphosis; not the rejection of the physical, but rather the sanctification of the physical. And herein, it seems to me, lies the true message of the Sanctuary.

In his commentary to Ex. 38:8, Rashi cites our Sages, who taught that when the Israelite women brought a gift offering of the actual mirrors, they were initially rejected by Moses because they were made for the evil instinct. But God said to Moses: “Accept them; these are more beloved to me than anything else. Through these mirrors, the women established many legions in Egypt.” (A play on the word “tzovot”, translated as “service women”, but which literally means “legions”, and is a reference to the multitudes of children whom the women conceived and birthed.)

Rashi continues: “When the husbands would come home exhausted from backbreaking work, their wives would bring them food and drink. And they would take the mirrors, and would appear together with their husbands in the reflection of the mirror. Thus they would entice their husbands (in order to) become pregnant” [Midrash Tanchuma].

The mirrors thus represent the women’s unswerving faith in their people’s future, which is all the more impressive given that at that time, the Israelites were being enslaved and their male babies thrown into the Nile during the Egyptian subjugation. Logic certainly dictated not having any children. After all, how could one bring innocent babies into a life of suffering and likely death?!

But the women were sustained by the tradition of the Covenant of the Pieces [Gen. 15], God’s promise of redemption. Consider what would have happened had the Israelite women not found a way to entice their husbands. Jewish history would have ended almost before it began, in the very first exile of Egypt, devoid of a next generation of Jewish continuity.

In effect, the transformation of these mirrors of desire into the basin of purification is the Torah’s way of rewarding the women for their devotion and explaining to future generations the Torah’s ideal of the sanctification of the physical and the uplifting of the material. They looked into the mirrors and saw not only themselves and their husbands, but the multitudes of a Jewish future.

A Talmudic teaching brings home this point to a striking degree: “Rav Katina said: When the Jewish

people would go up to Jerusalem during the festivals, the keepers of the Sanctuary would roll back the curtain covering the holy ark, and would reveal to the Jews who came up to Jerusalem, the cherubs, which were in the form of a male and female embracing each other. And they would say, ‘See the love that God has for you, like the love of a male and female’” [BT, Yoma 54a].

Love for another, expressed in the highest form by love for one’s beloved, is the greatest manifestation of sanctity, and it is precisely this attraction that has the power to secure our Jewish eternity. Thus, the Sanctuary is sanctified by the mirrors of the women in Egypt, who taught, by their example, how to turn the most physical human drive into the highest act of Divine service. ©2018 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The commentators over the ages who have studied every word of the Torah carefully and meticulously particularly note that the review and accounting for the construction of the Mishkan/Tabernacle was preceded by convening all of the Jewish people before Moshe and once again reviewing the laws and importance of Shabbat.

The main and obvious lesson to be derived from this juxtaposition of subject matter is that Shabbat is supreme even over the construction of the holy house of God itself. Though the construction of the Mishkan/Tabernacle was not allowed on Shabbat, nevertheless once the structure was erected and operating the services in that very edifice continued even on Shabbat with the special Shabbat offerings as prescribed in the Torah.

There is a very subtle but meaningful message hidden in this seeming contradiction as to the actual practical supremacy of Shabbat over the Mishkan/Tabernacle. After all, if the Jewish people were prohibited from building and constructing the Mishkan/Tabernacle on Shabbat then why were they allowed and in fact commanded to operate and conduct the sacrificial service in that building on Shabbat? There seems to be a disparity of ideas regarding this matter.

Much has been written on the subject but there always is room for new ideas and different insights. This is what makes the Torah eternal and refreshes it in every generation and under all circumstances. It speaks to all times and provides guidance to all the differing ages and histories of humankind. So, I have an idea that I wish to share with you regarding this issue.

The overriding prohibition of work on Shabbat is that of doing creative work. That is the core of the laws of Shabbat as they pertain to work on the holy day. Over the centuries, Jewish tradition has overlaid layers of prohibitions to safeguard the Shabbat but in essence global prohibition for work on Shabbat remains

a prohibition to do creative work.

This is an example of our attempt to imitate the Creator who, so to speak, finished all creative work in establishing our universe and therefore no creative work was performed any longer on the seventh day of creation. This is the template for our understanding of Shabbat. The Lord rested, so to speak, on the seventh day, however we will understand this and interpret it, from the creative nature of establishing our universe.

It is therefore understandable that our observance of Shabbat should be concentrated on creative work and that we emulate our Creator, so to speak, by refraining from any further creative work. However just as nature proceeds to operate on the seventh day as it does on all other days of the week, the idea of nature being a creative piece of work diminishes. Building the Mishkan/Tabernacle in the desert was a triumph of creativity and ingenuity, of Godly inspiration and human talent. It therefore follows that the final Torah reading of the Book occurs on the Sabbath since that day represents the cessation of Godly creativity as far as our universe is concerned.

Once the Mishkan/Tabernacle was in place and built however then it resembled nature in its continuity and flow of activity. Thus even on Shabbat the normal flow of Temple services continued. ©2018 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 this week's portion, Moshe (Moses) renders an accounting of monies donated to the building of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). One wonders why this is necessary. After all, the Torah tells us that Moshe was the most "trusted in all My (God's) house." (Numbers 12:7) Why then the need for such an accounting?

The Midrash suggests that even Moshe was not above scrutiny. His detractors questioned his integrity.

Commenting on the sentence that when Moshe went out "All the people looked at Moshe," (Exodus 33:8) the Midrash proclaims that when the people saw Moshe they said: "What a neck, what legs. Obviously, he eats and drinks what is ours."

"What do you expect?" responded another. "Being in charge of the Mishkan funds, he no doubt pockets much of the money contributed."

When Moshe heard this, he said – "By your lives, as soon as the Mishkan is finished I will render an accounting." Hence the opening sentence of Pikudei – "and these are the accounts." (Exodus 38:21). Moshe wanted to be beyond reproach in his work with the Mishkan.

An important message: Leaders, especially those who are involved in major financial and communal decisions, must be above board. Precisely because money is so enticing and can corrupt the most pious, the Torah insists that those in leadership must be careful to leave no impression of impropriety.

Nehama Leibowitz helps us in presenting various examples in the Talmud proving the need for public servants to always be accountable and avoid any hints of impropriety: "The House of Garmu were expert in the making of showbread, but never was fine bread found in the hands of their children." (Yoma 38a)

"The House of Avitnas were expert in preparing the incense, but never did a bride of theirs go forward perfumed." (Yoma 38a)

"He that went up to take an offering from the Shekel chamber did not wear a sleeved cloak." This was done so as not to have a pocket which could open up suspicion of robbery. (Shekalim 3:2)

We live in a world where there is constant scrutiny of the behavior and activity of public figures. While we must be vigilant in protecting the right to privacy of our leaders, we must also acknowledge that accountability and disclosure serves to preserve the most important ingredient of leadership— public trust. ©2018 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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Spinning Wool

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

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

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

Why did the women spin the wool this way? Some point out the zeal of these women to fulfill the Mitzva even before the animal was sheared while others say that they did this to prevent defilement for

we know that the wool can never be defiled (Taamei) while it is attached to a living thing.

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

RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

What is Special About 18?

The Torah is a very concise document. Hashem was very careful about every line of the Torah to the extent that if it appears that a letter is missing or a word is added, there will be an intense discussion among the Rabbis as to the purpose of that added word or missing letter. Often there are laws or limitations to laws which are founded precisely on the appearance of a word which might appear to be unnecessary to the meaning of a sentence or phrase. This indicates that each word that is included in the Torah testifies to its inclusion. With that concept in mind it is difficult to understand one aspect of the parshiot this week, Vayakheil and Pekudei. The parshiot deal with the commands in Vayakheil to build the Mishkan and in Pekudei to prepare the special clothes for the Kohanim. We will deal this week primarily with the sections in Pekudei.

After each garment or part of a garment was made, the Torah reports that the B'nei Yisrael finished the part "ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe, like Hashem commanded Moshe." Since we have already concluded that every word of the Torah is necessary, we must ask why this phrase is repeated constantly as that would seem superfluous. It would have been much simpler to discuss each of the garments and their completion and then say that the B'nei Yisrael did everything according to the instructions that Hashem had commanded to Moshe. By repeating this comment so frequently in this parasha, the Torah indicates that the phrase is not repetitive but instead is necessary each time it is used.

The Talmud Yerushalmi in Masechet B'rachot (Perek 4: Halacha 5) explains that the phrase "ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe" is stated eighteen times in this parasha. This is specifically done because of the eighteen b'rachot, blessings, in the Sh'mona Esrei, the major section of what is called t'filla or prayer. (The nineteenth b'racha was added later and therefore does not factor into this equation). In Sefer B'sheim Amru the Midrash continues this comparison to the eighteen chulyot, discs, in the spine, the eighteen songs that are in the beginning of Psalms, and the eighteen sentences of the Shirat Hayam, the song that was sung by Moshe and the B'nei Yisrael after watching the Egyptians drown in the Red Sea. But what does each of these

compilations of eighteen have to do with the completion of the clothes of the Kohanim?

Let us first look at the comparison to the Sh'monah Esrei. The Sh'monah Esrei is the key component of t'filla. The Talmud in B'rachot discusses the times for the t'filla as based on the times when the daily korbanot were brought. The Ma'ariv service corresponds to the time that the eivarim (those parts of the animals that were burned on the altar) were placed on the altar and were left until the morning. Since the Kohanim who brought these korbanot were required to wear the special clothes of the Kohen while performing their duties, the comparison of the clothes and the Sh'monah Esrei is easy.

The second compilation of eighteen, the chulyot, the discs of the spine, are the part of the body which enables man to be homo erectus, upright man. Erect man is able to stand proud and strong. We think of this man as pure and worthy, able to stand up straight without being burdened by sin which would weigh him down. This purity we associate with the color white, clean of any dirt that can dull its appearance. The clothes of the Kohen Hediot (regular priest) are often called the Bigdei Lavan, the white clothes. Thus the chulyot which remind us of erect man, reminds us of white and can be compared to the clothes of the Kohanim.

Our third comparison is to the eighteen "songs" at the beginning of the book of Psalms. These first eighteen psalms speak of the need for man to overcome the forces of evil which can control him and prevent him from attaining purity and closeness to Hashem. David explains that Hashem is always there to aid us and forgive our sins against Him and against our fellowman. The concluding psalm of this section is often called Shirat David, the Song of David. King David was said to carry this psalm with him at all times and recited it on every occasion of salvation. The Vilna Gaon assigned this psalm as the Daily Psalm for the Seventh Day of Passover, the day of Redemption at the Red Sea. We find at the Covenant between the Parts, that Hashem told Avraham that his children would be forgiven for their sins through the korbanot. Thus we see the comparison of the clothes of the Kohanim to these psalms. The fourth comparison of the clothes of the Kohanim to the eighteen sentences of the Shirat Hayam, song of Moshe at the Splitting of the Red Sea, has also now been answered by the Vilna Gaon's choice of that psalm for our prayers on the day of that Redemption.

HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the words, "ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe," only occur at the completion of each of the pieces of clothing of the Kohanim yet they do not occur at the completion of each of the sacred objects that were part of the Mishkan. This phrase is only said after all of the parts of the Mishkan are erected. Hirsch explains that each

of the articles of clothing was sanctified the moment it was completed but that the Mishkan was not "completed" until it was erected. The parts of the Mishkan were not important by themselves but only as a part of the whole. No part of the Mishkan could be used in a context that did not include each of the other parts of the Mishkan.

The Aznayim L'Torah explains that the structure of the two parshiot, Terumah and T'tzaveh, involve the command (in Terumah) to construct each of the sacred objects of the Mishkan and the command (in T'tzaveh) to make the clothes of the Kohanim. These two parshiot are paralleled by the last two parshiot, Vayakheil and Pekudei, in which the commands are fulfilled. In T'tzaveh, Moshe's name was not mentioned even once when describing the commands to make the clothes of the Kohanim and per his request. Here in Pekudei at the fulfillment of the commands, we are reminded of Moshe's connection to these commands. Even though Hashem was "forced" to fulfill the words of the Tzadik Moshe in T'tzaveh, Hashem sought a tikun, a remedy for this erasure. By mentioning Moshe's name here so frequently and after each item was completed, Hashem was able to accomplish that tikun.

The clothes of the Kohanim represent the tikun for all mankind. They remind us of the forgiveness that we receive from Hashem when we do teshuva and seek His closeness again. The clothes are a tikun for us just as they were a tikun for Moshe. May we soon in our lifetime be able to fulfill the commandments to make the clothes of the Kohanim and the sacred items of the Bet HaMikdash "ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe." ©2018 Rabbi D.S. Levin

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

These are the accounts of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of testimony..." (Shemos 38:21) "Rebi Akiva and his colleagues were once walking within eyeshot of the Temple Mount when they saw a fox emerge from the place of the Kodesh Kodashim, the Holy of Holies. The colleagues cried. Rebi Akiva laughed, so they asked him: "Why do you laugh?"

"He asked them, 'Why do you cry?'"

"They answered him, 'A place about which it says, 'And the stranger that comes close shall be put to death' (Bamidbar 1:51), has now become the place of foxes and we shouldn't cry?'"

"He answered them, 'That is why I laugh! It is written, 'And I will call to testify for Myself trustworthy witnesses, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Yeverchayahu' (Yeshayahu 8:2). What relevance does Uriah the priest have to Zechariah? Uriah lived during the First Temple while Zechariah lived during the Second Temple! Rather, the verse makes the prophecy of Zechariah dependent upon the prophecy of Uriah. Uriah's prophecy says, 'Therefore Tzion, for your sake

will be plowed as a field, etc.' (Michah 3:12), but Zechariah's says, 'So said the Lord of Hosts: Old men and women shall yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of old age' (Zechariah 8:4). As long as Uriah's prophecy had yet to be fulfilled, I feared that Zechariah's prophecy might not be fulfilled. But now that Uriah's prophecy has been fulfilled, I am certain that Zechariah's prophecy will also be fulfilled.'" (Makkos 24b)

What Rebi Akiva told his colleagues was that the "bad" sign which disturbed them -- a fox leaving the Kodesh Kodashim -- was really a "good" sign -- that the Temple will one day be rebuilt -- which lifted his spirits. They accepted his interpretation, and it changed their perspective: "They told him, 'Akiva, you have comforted us! Akiva, you have comforted us!'"

The question is, how? Uriah's prophecy about the fox leaving the Kodesh Kodashim predicted the aftermath of the destruction of the FIRST Temple. Zechariah's prophecy spoke of its reconstruction, that is, of the SECOND Temple. The only problem is that while Rebi Akiva comforted his friends, they stood by the RUINS of the very temple of Zechariah's prophecy! Yes, Zechariah's prophecy HAD been fulfilled, but it had also been undone by the Romans, who destroyed the Second Temple in 70 CE! What comfort was there in THAT?

The answer is not obvious, but definitely insightful. To understand it, one has to go back in time, to just after the destruction of the First Temple.

The destructions of the First and Second Temples do not faze us because, living long after and since witnessing the survival and rebuilding of the Jewish people, we have hope for a third and final temple. We've even witnessed a Holocaust, and how the Jewish people could survive such devastating destruction and go on to return to their homeland and rebuild a presence. Destruction and recovery have become part of the national consciousness.

This had not been the case after the destruction of the First Temple. Until that time, the Jewish people had not yet experienced recovery from catastrophic destruction. They had not come to know how God could turn His back on them so totally, and yet they could still remain His people: "So says God: 'Where is your mother's bill of divorce, with which I have put her away? Or to which of My creditors have I sold you?'" (Yeshayahu 50:1)

The prophet said this because the Jewish people had become confused. They had thought that the destruction of the House of God, which should have been impossible, and their subsequent exile to Babylonia meant that God had divorced His people. If the covenant had ended and the situation was hopeless, they thought that they were no longer obligated in mitzvos. They had pushed God TOO far, past the point of no return.

Yeshayahu was sent to set them straight. Yes, the House of God had been destroyed. Yes, they had been exiled to a foreign land to live under a harsh ruler. Yes, it would be some time before they would see their beloved land once again. BUT, it was not divorce, just separation. The covenant had not ended, and the situation was NOT hopeless.

It would take getting used to at first, but in 52 years, once Koresh became the king of Persia, they would witness the stirrings of redemption. In 370 CE, they would be allowed to return to Eretz Yisroel and commence rebuilding the destroyed First Temple. It would not be finished until Herod's time, hundreds of years later, but it was a taste of redemption nonetheless. There is life for the Jewish people after devastating destruction and long and difficult exile.

This was the comfort Rebi Akiva gave to his mourning colleagues. He had told them that just as Zechariah's prophecy about the Second Temple came true after the destruction of the first one, likewise would the Second Temple be rebuilt as the Third and Final Temple.

The hopeless situation of Babylonian Jewry, Rebi Akiva reminded them, was turned over, beginning with Koresh and ending with Mordechai and Esther. Our situation likewise will go from hopelessness to hopefulness. That is the pattern. We only have to maintain our emunah and wait, and take comfort in that fact of Jewish history.

In truth, the Talmud tells us, it is a historical fact because God ALWAYS creates the "medicine" before the "illness." Destruction of ANYTHING Jewish cannot occur until the recovery has been set in motion. It may not be clear at the time, and usually is not, but it is an immutable rule in Jewish history.

This, ultimately, was Rebi Akiva's comfort for those witnessing ANY Jewish destruction, personal or national. He was teaching us how to look at the destruction and see the seeds of redemption, just as God told Moshe Rabbeinu to do when he complained about the increased slavery of the Jewish people in Egypt. It is what people mean when they say that the State of Israel was founded on the ashes of the Holocaust.

In fact, the GR"A says, when the Jewish people are unworthy of a miraculous redemption, it will always come through suffering at first. And, the suffering will be the worst just prior to the redemption, just as the night is the darkest before the dawn. It was this way in Egypt in 1312 BCE, as well as in the time of the Holocaust in 1942.

Therefore, when the Torah says: "These are the accounts of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of testimony..." (Shemos 38:21) and Rashi explains: "The word 'Mishkan' is mentioned here twice in allusion to the Temple that was taken as a pledge -- mashkon -- being destroyed twice because of the sins of the Jewish

people." (Midrash Tanchuma, Pekuday 5)

A Jew has to know and realize that, even when the Temples have yet to be built, and their destruction is being prophesied, there is hope, REDEMPTION hope. In fact, the predicted destruction IS the hope, created long before the "illness" has even had a chance to do its damage. The Torah is telling us that by being given the opportunity to build a Temple, we ourselves will have helped to create our future "cure" to our future "sickness." Something will exist in the world that will counterbalance the Jewish people, and will be destroyed instead because of their sins. This way the Jewish nation will be able to continue even if their temples do not.

"Akiva, you have comforted us! Akiva, you have comforted us!" © 2018 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

RABBI BENJAMIN YUDIN

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Koheles (7:29) notes "indeed Hashem created man yashar -- perfectly upright, but they sought many intrigues." The Chasid Yaavitz, in his commentary on Avos (5:7) which lists the 10 miracles that occurred in the Beis Hamikdash, asks why did Hashem need to display open miracles? He suggests a most intriguing answer, namely to demonstrate that ideally there is a perfect harmony between Torah, man and nature.

In Chapter 2 of Breishis we read of the Garden of Eden that Hashem planted in this world. The Medrash presents a utopian existence in that environment, whereby man's spiritual existence is primary and his physical necessities are cared for from On High. Lest one doubt the feasibility and reality of such an existence, the supernatural miracles present in the Beis Hamikdash on a constant basis was a clear reminder of that perfect harmony between Torah and nature. When the Torah commands (Vayikra 6:6) that "the fires on the Altar shall remain aflame, it shall not be extinguished," nature responds in kind, and a heavy downfall of rain does not extinguish the fires on the mizbeyach.

After Cain kills Hevel, Cain is afraid for his life and exclaims, "whomever meets me will kill me" (Breishis 4:14.) Who, you might ask, is Cain afraid of? After all, the only humans alive are his family, and while his parents might have "wanted to kill him," they would not literally do so. The Ramban answers that Cain was afraid of the animals, who were so upset at Cain for having disturbed the perfect harmony between Torah and nature. The Torah prohibits murder, and by man committing murder he polluted the environment and thus Hashem had to place a sign on his forehead, warning the animals not to kill Cain. Ideally, there is a perfect balance.

With this background I believe we can understand and appreciate the insight of the Be'er Yosef who cites the Medrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 19:6)

that Hashem revealed the reason for the enigma of the Parah Adumah -- red heifer exclusively to Moshe. The wise King Solomon said, "I thought I could become wise, but it is beyond me" (Koheles 7:23.) The Medrash understands this verse as an expression of the frustration of the wisest of all men. If, as the Medrash continues, in the future, in Messianic times, the reason for this mitzvah will be public knowledge, why did Hashem conceal its rationale from us? The above enigma, simply stated, is that the ashes of the red heifer mixed with water are sprinkled on an individual who is impure as a result of contact with a dead body, or under the same roof as a deceased. The sprinkling of the ashes by a Kohen on the tamei individual on the third and seventh days of his purification process was essential in removing his tum'ah and his becoming tahor, while the Kohen who expedited this transformation became tamei.

The Be'er Yosef suggests that participating and engaging in a mitzvah that is beyond our comprehension but clearly Divinely legislated can help us respond to and accept circumstances and happenings that are equally difficult to comprehend. In Parshas Ki Sisa (33:13) Moshe asked, "to see Hashem." This is understood by the Talmud (Brachos 7a) that Moshe was requesting to understand Hashem, specifically why righteous individuals suffer and not-yet good individuals prosper? One utilized the ashes of the parah regularly. Every time one went to a funeral, sat shemira, or participated in the chevra kadisha they became tameh -- impure. The frequent utilization of these ashes, "helped the medicine go down." Just as one cannot understand the mitzvah of the parah adumah so too, one often cannot understand the circumstances and timeliness of the cause for this mitzvah. Just as we accept the chok -- statute of the parah knowing its Divine origin, so too do we accept circumstances and situations knowing they too are Divinely ordained. Thus, in the imperfect world that we now live in we need the eifer parah as a kind of catharsis to aid our spiritually challenging wounds.

The Be'er Yosef z"tl continues in this vein and discusses the two giants of their times, Moshe Rabbeinu and Rabbi Akiva. The Talmud (Menachos 29b) relates that when Moshe ascended Har Sinai he found Hashem adorning seven letters in the Torah with crowns. When Moshe asked why, he was told that there would be a great scholar Akiva ben Yosef who would reveal multitudes of laws from these crowns. Moshe was so intrigued that he asked to see him in action. Hashem played the projector of the future and Moshe sat in the eighth row of Rabbi Akiva's shiur and was most frustrated as he did not understand the presentation until he heard one of the students ask for a particular source and Rabbi Akiva responded that it is a halacha l'Moshe miSinai -- a law given to Moshe without our understanding. This assuaged Moshe's

feelings. Thus, even Rabbi Akiva, who revealed so many secrets of Torah, even he, needed to know that there are areas we just don't know and can't understand.

The Gemara continues that Moshe asked to see what the end of Rabbi Akiva's life was like, and was shown his being tortured to death, with Shema Yisrael on his lips (Berachos 61b.) Moshe immediately burst forth with "is this the reward for Torah?" Hashem responded that he be silent this is that which emanated from His Divine thought beyond man's comprehension. Thus, just as Rabbi Akiva accepted halacha l'Moshe miSinai, so too, it was easier for Moshe to accept the Divine plan. Just as in the Torah there are laws beyond our comprehension so too in the Divine governing of the world, there are happenings we cannot fathom or comprehend.

What emerges ultimately from the parah adumah is the bolstering of our emunah. While we cannot understand all, we submit to His higher authority. This is most crucial all year long, but especially as we approach the holiday of Pesach. The parah adumah humbles us, which helps us put Him at the center of our universe, and not ourselves. Thus I pray that our reading and studying of Parshas Parah will not only be a fulfillment of "unishalma parim sefaseinu -- let our lips substitute for bulls" (Hoshea 14:3), i.e. that it be looked upon and considered as if we actually brought the parah adumah, but may it inspire us to greater bitachon to know that we don't know, but He does! ©2018 Rabbi B. Yudin and TorahWeb.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

In Parshat Vayakhel, it describes that the frame of the Tabernacle was constructed of "shittim wood, standing." The talmud offers several explanations of this phrase. The first and simplest is that it refers to the orientation of the planks used in the construction; they should be vertical rather than horizontal. Another interpretation is that "standing" means that they are standing to this very day -- the Tabernacle has been hidden away, but has not been destroyed. R' Baruch Simon cites a number of sources who contrast this to the Temple, which was burned to the ground. Why will the Tabernacle stand forever while the Temple has been destroyed?

He explains that the Temple was largely constructed by the hired labor of Tyrean craftsmen who were working for money, not for the sake of the task itself. Their hearts weren't truly in it. However, the Tabernacle was built by Jews themselves, out of commitment and love of G-d. Our accomplishments are most likely to endure when they are done in this fashion, with dedication and for their own sake. ©2018 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.