

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l**

### Covenant & Conversation

**A** long drama had taken place. Moses had led the people from slavery to the beginning of the road to freedom. The people themselves had witnessed God at Mount Sinai, the only time in all history when an entire people became the recipients of revelation. Then came the disappearance of Moses for his long sojourn at the top of the mountain, an absence which led to the Israelites' greatest collective sin, the making of the Golden Calf. Moses returned to the mountain to plead for forgiveness, which was granted.

Its symbol was the second set of tablets. Now life must begin again. A shattered people must be rebuilt. How does Moses proceed? The verse with which the sedra begins contains the clue: "Moses assembled the whole Israelite community and said to them: 'These are the things God has commanded you to do.'" (35:1)

The verb vayakhel -- which gives the sedra its name -- is crucial to an understanding of the task in which Moses is engaged. At its simplest level it serves as a motiv-word, recalling a previous verse. In this case the verse is obvious: "When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they assembled around Aaron and said, 'Come, make us gods who will go before us.'" (32:1)

Moses' act is what the kabbalists called a *tikkun*: a restoration, a making-good-again, the redemption of a past misdemeanour. Just as the sin was committed by the people acting as a *kahal* or *kehillah*, so atonement was to be achieved by their again acting as a *kehillah*, this time by making a home for the Divine presence as they earlier sought to make a substitute for it. Moses orchestrates the people for good, as they had once been assembled for bad (The difference lies not only in the purpose but in the form of the verb, from passive in the case of the calf to active in the case of Moses. Passivity allows bad things to happen -- "Wherever it says 'and it came to pass' it is a sign of impending tragedy". (Megillah 10b) Proactivity is the defeat of tragedy: "Wherever is says, 'And there will be' is a sign of impending joy." (Bemidbar Rabbah 13)

At a deeper level, though, the opening verse of the sedra alerts us to the nature of community in Judaism. In classical Hebrew there are three different words for community: *edah*, *tsibbur* and *kehillah*, and they signify different kinds of association.

*Edah* comes from the word *ed*, meaning "witness." The verb *ya'ad* carries the meaning of "to appoint, fix, assign, destine, set apart, designate or determine." The modern Hebrew noun *te'udah* means "certificate, document, attestation, aim, object, purpose or mission." The people who constitute an *edah* have a strong sense of collective identity. They have witnessed the same things. They are bent on the same purpose. The Jewish people become an *edah* -- a community of shared faith -- only on receiving the first command: "Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household" (Shemot 12:3).

An *edah* can be a gathering for bad as well as good. The Israelites, on hearing the report of the spies, lose heart and say they want to return to Egypt. Throughout, they are referred to as the *edah* (as in "How long will this wicked community grumble against Me?" Bemidbar 14:27). The people agitated by Korach in his rebellion against Moses and Aaron's authority is likewise called an *edah* ("If one man sins, will You be angry with the whole community? Bemidbar 16:22). Nowadays the word is generally used for an ethnic or religious subgroup. An *edah* is a community of the like-minded. The word emphasises strong identity. It is a group whose members have much in common.

By contrast the word *tsibbur* -- it belongs to Mishnaic rather than biblical Hebrew -- comes from the root *tz-b-r* meaning "to heap" or "pile up". (Bereishith 41:49) To understand the concept of *tsibbur*, think of a group of people praying at the Kotel. They may not know each other. They may never meet again. But for the moment, they happen to be ten people in the same place at the same time, and thus constitute a quorum for prayer. A *tsibbur* is a community in the minimalist sense, a mere aggregate, formed by numbers rather than any sense of identity. A *tsibbur* is a group whose members may have nothing in common except that, at a certain point, they find themselves together and thus constitute a "public" for prayer or any other command which requires a *minyan*.

A *kehillah* is different from the other two kinds of community. Its members are different from one another. In that sense it is like a *tsibbur*. But they are orchestrated together for a collective undertaking -- one that involves in making a distinctive contribution. The danger of a *kehillah* is that it can become a mass, a rabble, a crowd.

That is the meaning of the phrase in which Moses, descending the mountain, sees the people dancing around the calf: "Moses saw that the people were running wild, and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughing-stock to their enemies." (32:25)

The beauty of a kehillah, however, is that when it is driven by constructive purpose, it gathers together the distinct and separate contributions of many individuals, so that each can say, "I helped to make this." That is why, assembling the people on this occasion, Moses emphasises that each has something different to give: Take from what you have, an offering to God. Everyone who is willing to bring to God an offering of gold, silver and bronze... All you who are skilled among you are to come and make everything the Lord has commanded...

Moses was able to turn the kehillah with its diversity into an edah with its singleness of purpose, while preserving the diversity of the gifts they brought to God: "Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses' presence, and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to God for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments. All who were willing -- men and women -- came and brought gold jewellery of all kinds: brooches, ear-rings, rings and ornaments... Everyone who had blue, purple or scarlet yarn... Those presenting an offering of silver or bronze... Every skilled woman spun with her hands and brought what she had spun... The leaders brought onyx stones and other gems... All the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to God freewill offerings for all the work God, through Moses, had commanded them to do." (35:20-29)

The greatness of the Tabernacle was that it was a collective achievement -- one in which not everyone did the same thing. Each gave a different thing. Each contribution was valued -- and therefore each participant felt valued. Vayakhel -- Moses' ability to forge out of the dissolution of the people a new and genuine kehillah -- was one of his greatest achievements.

Many years later, Moses, according to the sages, returned to the theme. Knowing that his career as a leader was drawing to an end, he prayed to God to appoint a successor: "May God, Lord of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the community." (Bemidbar 27:16) Rashi, following the sages, explains the unusual phrase "Lord of the spirits of all flesh" as follows: "He said to Him: Lord of the universe, the character of each person is revealed and known to You -- and You know that each is different. Therefore appoint for them a leader who is able to bear with each person as his or her temperament requires." (Rashi on Bemidbar 27:16)

To preserve the diversity of a tsibbur with the unity of purpose of an edah -- that is the challenge of kehillah-formation, community-building, itself the

greatest task of a great leader. *Covenant and Conversation* is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l © 2026 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust [rabbisacks.org](http://rabbisacks.org)

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd he set up the courtyard around the sanctuary and the altar, and he placed the screen gate of the courtyard, and Moses completed the work." (Exodus 40:33) Why repeat all the details of the construction of the Sanctuary after we have already heard them when they were initially commanded? For example, with regard to one of the priestly garments, the Bible commands: "And they shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, and purple, scarlet and fine twined linen, the work of the skillful workman." (Exodus 28:6)

And then, telling us of the command of the execution, the same words are repeated, practically word for word: "And he made the ephod of gold, blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen. And they beat the gold into thin plates..." (Exodus 39:2)

If there is a difference, it's that the first time around the Israelites are given the command, and the second time the Torah records that the command was indeed performed. Would it not have been simpler to deal with the entire execution of external building, furnishings and priestly garb with the single verse: "And the Israelites built the Sanctuary exactly as God commanded"?

In order to understand the significance of the repetition, it is important to remember that the Almighty desires an intimate relationship between Himself and the people of Israel. That is why they are commanded to build a Sanctuary in the first place: "in order that He may dwell among us." However, worshiping the golden calf -- whoring after strange gods -- was a betrayal of the ideals given at Sinai. In effect, the Israelites committed adultery, scarring the love and intimacy God had just bestowed upon them. Were God only a God of justice, this would be the end of the Jewish people, their sin mandating a punishment which would have meant the end of Jewish history before it really began.

But since God is also a God of compassion, He forgives. But can we legitimately expect forgiveness for as heinous a crime as idolatry? Will the Almighty take Israel back even after they have committed adultery? Herein lies the true significance of the repetition of each and every painstaking instruction regarding the Sanctuary. God places his nuptial "home" with Israel before they sin with the golden calf, and God accepts their construction of the nuptial home after they have sinned with the golden calf. The repetition is a confirmation that the intimacy between God and Israel has been restored, that the relationship between God and His bride, Israel, has returned to its original state of

mutual commitment and faith. The repetition of the exact details is essentially God's gift of repentance.

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

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

The second special Sabbath – right before Purim – is Shabbat Zakhor. Zakhor means "remember": Remember to destroy the evil Amalek. Amalek is not only the power that would destroy us from without, but is also the force threatening to destroy us from within. Amalek may also be seen as the winds of assimilation and self-destruction! When the Torah at the end of the portion of Ki Tetzeh (Deut. 25) records how Amalek attacked the tired and the weak straggling from Egypt, those who did not fear God, this does not refer only to those who were physically weak, but also to the spiritually weak, those whose link to the chain of Israel had become inadequate and indifferent. Amalek enters when Israel ceases to fear God! This Sabbath always precedes Purim because back in Shushan there were two threats, Haman/Amalek from without and a nation deep in the amnesia of assimilation from within, seduced by the (hardly kosher) invitations to the palace of Ahashverosh, with all the non-kosher wine and shrimp one could enjoy. Israel, betrothed by the shekel to God, had now succumbed to the temptation of Amalek, substituting the temptations of gold and licentiousness for their God-groom.

Israel having been defiled by the lure of assimilation, Para, the next special Sabbath portion, encapsulates the process of purification. We should know that even if our impurity stems from death, the highest degree of impurity, we have the red heifer to cleanse us.

Finally, the Sabbath of HaChodesh brings us towards a new beginning. "Chodesh," the Hebrew word for month, is also bound up with "Chadash," new, and "Chidush," renewal. In effect, the moon is the messenger of change and renewal, the ability to emerge from total darkness to a state of fullness, totality, and the perfection that awaits us on the fourteenth of Nisan when Passover begins.

Thus Shekalim, Zakhor, Para and HaChodesh parallel the portions of Terumah, Tetzaveh, Ki Tissa and

Vayakhel-Pekudei. The journey begins with commitment and love, stumbles through failure and sin, but finally ends with the possibility of purification and renewal, individual and national freedom as symbolized in the festival of freedom, Passover, which always falls two weeks after the Sabbath of HaChodesh. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Shemot: Defining a Nation, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid and available for purchase at [bit.ly/RiskinShemot](http://bit.ly/RiskinShemot). © 2026 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

### RABBI BEREL WEIN ZT"l

## Wein Online

The Torah reading of the book of Shemot concludes this week with the reading of the total portion of Vayakhel and Pekudei. These two portions are a fitting conclusion to the long narrative describing the construction of the Tabernacle/Mishkan. Every great project, whether physical or spiritual, is yet incomplete without an accounting being given as to the investment, effort and cost relating to the project.

One of the great principles of the Torah and of Jewish life generally is accountability – for behavior, speech, actions and even thoughts. The Talmud phrased it succinctly: "Human beings are always accountable and liable for their actions." We have a concept in the Talmud that one can be found not to be liable for actions caused by human negligence or mistakes by an earthly court but still be liable in the heavenly court, which judges all of our behavior.

As human beings we hold ourselves to a far less stringent standard of behavior and liability. But Heavenly judgment, which knows our true capabilities and potential, holds us to its lofty standard of accountability. And we are witness to that in the accounting that Moshe submits to us in this week's Torah reading, of the wealth accumulated and spent in this great construction project of the Tabernacle/Mishkan.

The project was enormous in scope and in cost. Yet Moshe was aware that one thousand measures of silver were not accounted for. He could not rest until he traced the missing silver - which was actually used for the hooks that held the curtains that constituted the hanging tapestries of the structure.

One of the great demands of current politics that now engulfs us is the issue of transparency. We wish for transparency in government affairs, financial dealings and even in personal relationships. All governments are currently besieged by the leaking of sensitive documents and information and all of this is justified by the idea that the public has a right to know everything about everybody at all times.

In theory, transparency is a good and necessary component of a democratic republic. But the question arises as to whether there are any limits to this right to transparency. From the Torah itself it seems that in

monetary matters and in accounting for the use of public funds, especially charity funds, there is no limit to the necessity for transparency and accountability.

However, in matters of personal behavior and past actions of human beings, the Torah does impose limits on the need for revelation. The laws of evil speech and slander apply even when one speaks the truth about others. Then, the so-called right to know is severely curtailed. Such distinctions do not exist in the culture that currently surrounds us. Private information about people's lives, which at one time was considered sacrosanct, is today visible to all on social media and through the hackers and leakers that abound in our world. Even transparency has to have its limits of decency and restraint. © 2017 Rabbi B. Wein zt"l - 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI DAVID LEVIN**

## **An Interruption**

**E**very few years, the two parshiot, Vayakhel and Pekudei, are combined as the reading for one week. This occurs when there is no leap year, a year in which there would have been two months of Adar (Adar Rishon and Adar Sheni) in order to have the holiday of Pesach fall in the Spring. Pesach is referred to as Chag HaAviv, the Spring Holiday. The Jewish calendar is based on a lunar cycle of three hundred fifty-four days, eleven days short of the solar year. The holidays would then continue to move up on the solar calendar year, making Pesach fall earlier and earlier, and eventually move into the Winter season. When the Rabbis of the Sanhedrin saw that this was happening, they inserted another month of Adar, prior to the month of Nisan and the holiday of Pesach.

At the beginning of this double parasha, the Torah states: "And Moshe assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them, 'These are the things that Hashem commanded, to do them: "For a period of six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem; whoever does work on it shall be put to death. You shall not light fire in any of your dwellings on the Shabbat day.'"" As we have explained earlier, the type of work that is forbidden is based on the work done to produce the Temple and its holy objects. Also, the fire that is forbidden is only fire that begins on Shabbat, not a fire that was lit prior to Shabbat and remains on.

While the commandments to build the Temple and prepare the clothing of the Kohanim, Priests, were given earlier, the interruption of Parashat Ki Tisa between the laws given to Moshe and the laws being passed on from Moshe to the B'nei Yisrael was significant. Last week we learned of the sin of the Golden Calf, which placed into doubt whether Hashem

would continue with His plan to dwell among the people. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains, "The people and the priests had learned to know themselves in their state of complete weakness, to realize the necessity for incessant work on themselves, and how great was their necessity for elevation and atonement. They had also learned to know Hashem in the whole weight of His justice and the infinite depth of His grace." The people now understood that forgiveness from Hashem, which now allowed them to build the first Temple (in the desert), was accomplished without either a Temple or an offering. One must then wonder what the purpose of the Temple and the offerings was. According to Hirsch, its purpose was to "show the way to gain the grace of Hashem."

The Ramban suggests that Moshe gathered the people "on the day following his descent from the mountain, and he told all of them the subject of the Tabernacle (Mishkan) which he had been previously commanded, before the breaking of the Tablets." It is possible to be confused by this explanation. Many of the commentators explain that the Mishkan was an atonement for the Golden Calf, yet the Ramban concludes that Hashem commanded Moshe concerning the Mishkan before he broke the Tablets, and now Moshe taught the commands of building the Mishkan to the elders and then to all the nation. Part of the problem is the concept of chronological order. Many commentators say that there is no chronological order to the Torah; thus, the command to Moshe in Terumah occurred after the Golden Calf in Ki Tisa. In that way, the command to Moshe and his command to the people concerning the Mishkan occurred after the Golden Calf. The Ramban tries to explain the Torah as adhering to chronological order. That forces him to say that Hashem commanded Moshe prior to the Golden Calf, but Moshe only had the opportunity to command the people after he had already broken the Tablets. The Ramban can still claim that the Temple was commanded even before the Golden Calf, yet it is still an atonement for that sin because Hashem could have cancelled the commandment and insisted that one may no longer build a House for Hashem on earth. Hashem did not abandon the B'nei Yisrael after Moshe had successfully pleaded with Hashem to retract that decision.

Once the question of chronological order has been satisfied, there is still the difficulty of this passage concerning Shabbat observance prior to the instructions of building the Mishkan and the preparation of the clothes of the Kohanim, which we have already determined to be the message of this double parasha. The standard explanation for this passage is found in Rashi. "Moshe first told them the prohibition of working on the Shabbat before the commandment of the construction of the Mishkan, to say that [the work of the Mishkan] does not override the Shabbat." HaAmek Davar explains that this interpretation is not so simple.

He states that any work that was begun prior to Shabbat and would complete its task by itself (without human intervention) is not forbidden in the Torah, as explained earlier concerning a fire which was kindled before Shabbat and remained lit on Shabbat without our intervention. Though this “work” was permitted by the Bet Din (courts), this was not true for the building of the Mishkan. All work had to have been completed before the Shabbat. Once the Mishkan was built and dedicated, the permitted “work” by the Bet Din would apply to the Kohanim in the Mishkan also.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin presents a different approach to the insertion of Shabbat before the Mishkan. He deals with the phrase, “For a period of six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem; whoever does work on it shall be put to death.” HaRav Sorotzkin explains that the most important aspect of Shabbat is rest; not the rest of sleeping or relaxing, but of ceasing to do the work necessary for building the Temple. You may not do work, but you must include even your slaves and the non-Jew who has accepted upon himself to live with you and be bound by the laws of the Torah. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that it is the responsibility of every Jew to encourage and enforce Shabbat observance. He states that the Torah does not say “you will work” but “work shall be done,” because it is not a command to an individual, but to the entire community; every community member must assist others to observe the Shabbat.

There is a general principle that says, “kal Yisrael areivim zeh lazeh, every Jew is responsible for his fellow Jew.” This is often quoted when discussing charity or helping someone to find work. But it is also relevant to Torah observance. We should not judge others, but we should enable them to see the beauty of Shabbat observance. May we help all to understand the Torah and its Laws. © 2026 Rabbi D. Levin

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## Spinning Wool

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**S**pinning 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. © 2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

#### RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

## Migdal Ohr

**T**he menorah of lighting and its vessels and lamps, and oil for lighting.” (Shemos 35:14) In Parshas Vayakhel, Moshe told the Jews what Hashem wanted them to prepare for the Mishkan. It required generosity of spirit and divine inspiration. The people crafting these items needed to be wise of heart, meaning that they had an inclination to become wise and followed it to fruition. Then, Hashem gave them more wisdom and they were able to make the vessels appropriately.

This posuk refers to the menorah and the oil, and both of them receive the adjective, “hamaor,” which literally means, “that gives light,” but is understood to explain the purpose of the two, that they provide illumination.

The Ibn Ezra says the “oil of lighting” was mentioned, because that is the purpose for which the “menorah of lighting” was made. So, we might ask ourselves, which item “gave light”? Was it the menorah, the great golden candelabra, or was it the oil? Technically, the menorah itself did not produce light. It was the burning oil which cast its glow in the Mishkan. But, without the menorah, the oil could not have been lit, and its light would never have shone. Therefore, the menorah also deserves the “hamaor” appellation.

By assigning this word to both of them, the Torah underscores their interrelated nature, and highlights the fact that they must coexist and work together for the light to shine forth. This is not merely a reference to the physical vessel and oil.

In Parshas Bamidbar, the Torah discusses the job of the Levi'im and how they covered the vessels for travel. There, the verse tells us that the menorah, its vessels, and lamps, all were covered by the blue techeiles cloth for travel. The Haamek Davar learns from this that a teacher and his students must be kept together in one vicinity. In this way, the students will see their masters, learn from them, and serve them.

In other words, the masters are like the menorah which holds the lamps and gives them the chance to be ignited and glow. The students are like the lamps who have potential, but need the support of their teachers in order to excel.

The Torah gives both the menorah and the oil the title of "hamaor" because without either of them, the other would serve no purpose and would not achieve its potential greatness. Just as this applies to teachers and students, it can apply to supporters of Torah who may not cast light themselves, but by enabling others to learn, teach, and shine, they earn the prestigious title themselves, and ultimately, in the World to Come, they, too, will be enlightened and know the brilliance of Torah like the people they support.

When we help others achieve greatness, then we have achieved greatness ourselves, and this principle should illuminate and inform all our actions and interactions in life.

*The Bluzhover Rebbe z"l retold the miraculous story of a terrible game the Nazis w"MY enjoyed. They forced the Jewish concentration camp inmates to dig a pit twenty feet across. They then had to jump to the other side. If any of them made it, they could live for another day. The ones that fell into the pit were shot and buried there.*

*Many took running jumps; a futile effort. The Bluzhover Rebbe walked up to the edge of the pit with a few of his Chasidim, closed his eyes and proclaimed, "We are jumping!" When he opened his eyes, he found himself on the other side of the pit. Next to him, he saw one of his closest Chasidim. Amazed, the Rebbe said to him, "I know how I made it across. I was holding onto the kapoteh (cloak) of my saintly father and grandfathers. Their holy merit carried me. But how did you make it across?" The disciple replied with simple faith – "Rebbe, I held on to YOUR kapoteh!" © 2026 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr*

## YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

### Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA SICHOT OF HARAV YAAKOV MEDAN

Summarized by Yonatan Oster

Edited by Yair Lichtman

In the section for Parashat ha-Chodesh which we will read this Shabbat, the Torah describes the prohibition of eating chametz and the commandment to eat matza: "And this day shall be to you for a memorial, and you shall keep it a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever. Seven days shall you eat unleavened bread; but the first day you shall put away leaven out of your houses; for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel... And you shall observe the [feast of] unleavened bread; for on this very day have I brought your hosts out

of the land of Egypt; therefore shall you observe this day throughout your generations by an ordinance forever. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses; for whoever eats that which is leavened, that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a sojourner, or one that is born in the land." (Shemot 12:14-15, 17-19)

At first glance, the prohibition of eating chametz and the commandment to eat matza appear to be two sides of the same coin, within the framework of Chag Ha-Matzot (the Festival of Unleavened Bread). However, a closer examination of the verses in their original context reveals that the Torah is describing here two different holidays, even though they are mostly overlapping -- Chag Ha-Pesach and Chag Ha-Matzot. During Chag Ha-Matzot, unleavened bread is eaten, but the prohibition of leaven is primarily associated with Chag Ha-Pesach.

This distinction is more explicitly stated in the section on the festivals in Parashat Emor: "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at dusk, is the Lord's Pesach. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread to the Lord; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread." (Vayikra 23:5-6)

The time of Chag Ha-Pesach is the fourteenth of Nissan, while Chag Ha-Matzot begins on the fifteenth of Nissan. The prohibition of eating chametz, which begins at midday on the fourteenth, does not come as a preparation for Chag Ha-Matzot which begins that evening, but rather because of Chag Ha-Pesach, which begins already at midday on the fourteenth of Nissan.

Thus, we see that the matzot of Chag Ha-Pesach and the matzot of Chag Ha-Matzot are derived from two different commandments. The matzot of Chag Ha-Pesach are associated with the eating of the sacrifice -- "And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; with bitter herbs they shall eat it" (Shemot 12:8); whereas the matzot of Chag Ha-Matzot are connected to the remembrance of the exodus from Egypt -- "And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual" (Shemot 12:39).

Chag Ha-Pesach begins on the fourteenth of Nissan in the afternoon (bein ha-arbayim) and continues until the midnight of the fifteenth of Nissan, during which time the Pesach sacrifice is offered and the deliverance of the people of Israel on the night of the plague of the firstborn is celebrated. (According to Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya; Rabbi Akiva maintains that the festival continues until the morning (for an expanded discussion, see Pesachim 120b.)

The emphasis on the redemption is also

expressed in the rescue of Lot from the city of Sodom, for from the fact that Lot served the angels unleavened bread, Chazal inferred that he too was saved on Pesach (see Rashi, Bereishit 19:3, s.v. u-matzot afa). Since the Pesach sacrifice is bound up with salvation, Chag Ha-Pesach constitutes our *raison d'être*, and it expresses the covenant between the people of Israel and God who saved them from Egypt.

In contrast, Chag Ha-Matzot lasts seven days. It begins on the fifteenth of Nissan and continues until the twenty-first of the month. The focus of this festival is the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt. When the people fled Egypt in haste, they baked matza, and therefore matza is associated with the exodus from Egypt. With the exodus from Egypt, the Jews ceased to serve the Egyptians and became servants of God, so Chag Ha-Matzot expresses the commitment of the Jews to serve God.

The great question, however, is the relationship between these two festivals, Chag Ha-Pesach and Chag Ha-Matzot: Is the deliverance necessarily linked to the exodus? Is the covenant of salvation from slavery necessarily linked to the commitment to serve God?

An examination of the end of Parashat Vayakhel-Pekudei, which we will also read this Shabbat, reveals that the completion of the building of the Mishkan was very similar to the revelation at Mount Sinai. At first, Moshe could not enter the Mishkan because of the cloud, and Chazal tell us the same about the revelation at Mount Sinai (Yoma 3b). The revelation at Sinai and the giving of the Torah express the covenant between Israel and God, as does the revelation in the Mishkan. And again the question arises: What is the relationship between the covenant and commitment? Is it possible for the nation of Israel to be delivered -- without this being accompanied by a commitment on Israel's part to the service of God and the performance of the commandments?

This question was already raised in the past in the discussion between Mordechai and Esther. Not long ago we read Esther's command to Mordechai: "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day" (Esther 4:16).

In Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer (49), it is explained that the three days in question are the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan. In response to Esther's demand, Mordechai replies in astonishment: "Isn't the third day the first day of Pesach?" (ibid.), and she answers him that "if there are no Jews to celebrate Pesach, for whom is Pesach?" (ibid.). Esther is willing to forego Pesach in order to fast for the sake of the salvation of her people. We see a similar decision later, when at the feast she declares: "But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my peace" (Esther 7:4). That is, Esther would have been willing to sell the people to be slaves of the Persian kingdom rather than to be the

exclusive servants of God, and all in order that they not be destroyed.

The argument between her and Mordechai is a fundamental one -- does the covenant, the preservation of the people and their salvation, have any meaning without the freedom to serve God? Mordechai believes that the two are inextricably linked, and that one cannot forego the commitment to serve God for the sake of saving the people, whereas Esther believes that in the absence of an alternative, the people must be saved even at the cost of compromising their freedom to serve God.

A similar disagreement emerges in Midrash ha-Gadol on the plague of frogs (Shemot 7:28), which presents a question raised by Daniel, Chananya, Mishael, and Azarya to the prophet Yechezkel: how should one act when they are required to worship idols? Yechezkel tells them to worship idols and be saved, as it is written: "And you shall live by them" (Vayikra 18:5); but in the end they do not listen to him, and are willing to sacrifice their lives rather than worship idols (and are ultimately saved by a miracle).

The question of the relationship between the two matters -- the preservation of the continued existence of the people of Israel, and the demand placed upon us to be servants of God -- is a great question. A question of even greater weight is not only what the relationship is between the two, but whether one can exist without the other. This is a momentous question that was already raised in the past and dealt with by the leading authorities of the generations. This grave question does not have an unequivocal answer, and as we have seen, at different times it was decided to act differently. But even if there is no unequivocal answer, the importance of these two principles cannot be ignored. *[This sicha was delivered by Harav Yaakov Medan on Shabbat Parashat Vayakhel-Pekudei, Shabbat Parashat Ha-Chodesh 5781.]*

#### **RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON**

## **Perceptions**

**H**ow many times when learning about the Mishkan did you say to yourself, "This is exactly what the war with Iran is about?" If even once, I'd love to hear why.

Why would we? Because everything is Hashgachah Pratis and meant to teach us something, or at least impact us on some level. Things do not coincide in life for no reason, even if that reason remains hidden from us. And even though we change the order of Torah readings for the chagim, it's not to say that there isn't something hashgachadik about the scheduled one, only that we want to focus on the sacrifices instead.

The Purim story is interesting for a number of reasons, one of which is the involvement of Amalek. If we say that Haman was not a born Amaleki, as the Yerushalmi says, then it's not such a question. A person

who was not born an Amaleki can "become" one just by exhibiting Amaleki traits. But if Haman was actually Amaleki, he and his people were a long way from home.

Amalek was a nomadic tribe that lived in the Negev. They were not one of the seven Canaanite nations the Jewish People had to eliminate, which made their attack even more despicable. They traveled hundreds of miles just to attack the Jewish People in Rephidim on their way to receive Torah for no apparent reason other than a deep-rooted hatred of all things Godly. But Persia? What were they doing all the way over there?

Making a difference. Achashveros may not have liked the Jewish People he controlled, but he was not bent on their genocide either. That took an intense hatred of the Jewish People that only an Amaleki could have, one so intense that Haman could not enjoy any of his success as long as Mordechai sat at the gates of the palace.

When the Ayatollah was still in exile before the uprising in 1979, he was asked what he thinks about everyday. He answered with complete conviction: "The elimination of Israel." Decades later, nothing has changed, and such hatred has not only overshadowed all the assets the Iranians have to be a hugely prosperous and happy people, but it has led to their own self-destruction.

All the Palestinians and Iranians have to do is forget about Israel. The Jewish People represent no physical or spiritual threat to their peoples and, if anything at all, could help them succeed as we once did under the Shah. Then both countries could instead develop their national assets with full support of the rest of the world and become major tourist resorts with a high quality of living, as Dubai and other similar countries have done. Such is the power of baseless hatred.

But if learned anything at all from the story of Kamza and Bar Kamza (Gittin 55a), it is how destructive baseless hatred can be. It led to the Roman takeover of the Jewish People and the eventual destruction of the Second Temple, and everything that has happened to us over the millennia since. Hatred breeds more hatred, and in a world run by Hashgochah Pratis, what goes around comes around.

The Mishkan represented the complete opposite of *k'ish echad b'leiv echad*, the state of unity the Jewish People reached before receiving Torah, and after Haman forced Jews to unify against him. As the GR"A explains, the physical structure acted like a national archive of Jewish hearts, built from *nedavos haleiv* -- heart offerings. The materials they donated were just the means to express that love in physical terms.

The word "Mishkan" is actually comprised of two parts, "Shechem" and the letter Nun, which always alludes to the Nun Sha'arei Binah, the Fifty Gates of Understanding. As the Pri Tzaddik explains,



Haman, whose name is Hem-Nun -- they are fifty -- built his gallows fifty amos high to block an imminent emanation of the Nun Sha'arei Binah necessary at that time to accept the Oral Law with love.

Nehafoch can also be read "Nun hafuch," or "upside-down Nun," like the ones in Parashas BeHa'alosecha to "separate between punishment and punishment." Sin is the result of a distortion of truth (Sotah 3a), of an upside-down Nun. Purim came to rectify it.

Shechem, of course, is where the brother sold Yosef and Dinah was taken from her family. The Gemora calls it "a place set aside for punishment," a term used for Haman and Amalek. It represents schism, of hatred in the worst way possible, even though it is a part of Eretz Yisroel. But so was Sdom.

But add the Nun Sha'arei Binah to the name and it becomes Mishkan, just the opposite. It not only ceases to be divisive, it becomes adhesive. That's why Yosef HaTzaddik, associated with Da'as and Nun Sha'arei Binah, insisted on being buried there.

So, yes, there is a major connection between the events of the parsha and the events of today, and we have only scratched the surface. But it's a deep enough scratch for now to help understand what we need to work on internally to limit what's happening to us externally, if not on a national level, at least on a personal and communal level. © 2026 P. Winston and torah.org

### **RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ Z"l**

## **Shabbat Shalom Weekly**

**T**he Torah states with regard to Betzalel, the artisan in charge of creating the Mishkan (Portable Sanctuary), that the Almighty filled him with wisdom, insight and knowledge: "...and to think thoughts to make with gold and with silver and with brass" (Exodus 35:32).

What can this verse teach us about our own lives? There are two types of skillful artisans. The first type of craftsman is one who is able to picture new designs in his mind. His fertile imagination enables him to create original works of art. This, wrote Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, is what the present verse is expressing. "And to think thoughts," that is, Betzalel had the ability to visualize entirely new artistic creations.

The second type is an expert in making fancy vessels with intricate designs though he may not be creative or original. After he sees what someone else has done, he learns to make similar things -- perhaps even better than the original designer.

Our lesson: One does not need to be a Betzalel to serve the Almighty. Whatever abilities the Almighty has blessed you with can be utilized for the honor of the Almighty. Whatever your talents, use them to help and teach others. You will live an honored life! *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin*  
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