



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

## Vayakhel 5774

### A Part or Apart?

Rabbi Dr. Jacob J Schacter

**T**o be a part of or apart from? This is the central challenge that confronts human beings throughout life. It applies to us as members of a family or a community (when need we part of the larger group and when need we assert our own individuality?), it applies to Orthodox Jews within the larger Jewish community (where can we join forces and where do we need to assert our unique identity), it applies to countries or governments (when need we be part of the community of nations and when need we assert our own parochial interests?), and it applies to the Jewish people as a whole in a non-Jewish world.

The central theme of the Torah readings these last few weeks has been the mishkan – exactly how it was to be constructed and exactly what sort of vessels it was to contain. After the entire description had been presented and everything discussed in great detail, the Torah states: “And Moshe was not able to come to the Tent of Meeting for the cloud rested upon it” (Exodus 40:35). Moshe was not permitted to enter this carefully constructed tabernacle because God’s anan was present there. The impression given here is that anan and Moshe are mutually exclusive; one could not be in the same place as the other. It would seem that the anan was so special and holy that no human being, even the great Moshe, was allowed in its presence.

The Talmud (Yoma 4b) records that R. Zerika (or was it R. Elazar?) pointed to a contradiction between this verse and an earlier one in Parshat Mishpatim (Exodus 24:28). There the Torah writes that, “Moshe came in the midst of the cloud.” Apparently, not only was the anan off limits to Moshe, he actually penetrated its very depths. In answer, the Talmud cites a comment of the School of R. Yishmael:

It is stated here “In the midst (bi-toch)” and it is stated there (in the context of the splitting of the sea) “And the

children of Israel came into the midst (bi-toch) of the sea.” Just as there (it means that) a path (was made for them through the water) . . . so too here (it means that) a path (was made for Moshe through the cloud).

In fact, then, the anan is indeed too holy for any human being to stand in close proximity to it but the only reason Moshe was able to do so in the previous case was because there, similar to the experience of the Jews in crossing the sea, he was surrounded by some kind of a special protective force which made a path for him. In effect, then, when the Jews crossed the Red Sea they were both bi-toch the sea and separate from it; Moshe was both bi-toch the cloud and separate from it; a part of and apart from, and both at the same time.

This dialectic concept serves as a paradigm for individuals within families, the Orthodox community within the larger Jewish people, countries within the world, and the Jewish people in contemporary society. Surely we are very much a part of the world around us. We function regularly in that world and participate actively in that world, in the cultural, social, political, intellectual, academic and economic life of the societies in whose midst we live. We pray for the welfare of our respective governments and in ancient times we reflected our concern for the world at large by sacrificing animals on Sukkot on their behalf. We live very much bi-toch the world – and, at the same time, are also removed from it. We follow our own religion, with our own laws, customs and practices, and we are different from all the other nations. Our history has consistently borne out the contention of Bil’am that “It is a nation that will dwell alone” (Numbers 23:9).

This dialectic is particularly reflected in the motto of our beloved yeshiva, Torah u-Madda. As a yeshiva, we have always stressed that which makes us unique as Jews, our

commitment to our mesorah as has been taught to us by our illustrious rashei yeshiva over the past many decades. And we have also appreciated what we have in common with other Jews and with the world at large.

## Mirrors of Love

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

**T**he Torah in Parshat Vayakhel, which describes the making of the Mishkan, goes out of its way to emphasize the role women played in it:

*The men accompanied the women, and those who wanted to make a donation brought bracelets, earrings, finger rings, and body ornaments, all made of gold. (35: 22)*

Every skilled woman put her hand to spinning, and they [all] brought the spun yarn of sky-blue wool, dark red wool, crimson wool and fine linen. Highly skilled women volunteers also spun the goats' wool. (35: 25-26).

Every man and woman among the Israelites who felt an urge to give something for all the work that God had ordered through Moses, brought a donation for God. (35: 29)

Indeed the emphasis is even greater than it seems in translation, because of the unusual locution in verse 22, Vayavo-u ha-anashim al hanashim, which implies that the women came to make their donations first, and the men merely followed their lead (Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Rabbenu Bachye).

This is all the more striking since the Torah implies that the women refused to contribute to the making of the Golden Calf (see the commentaries to Ex. 32: 2). The women had a sense of judgment in the religious life – what is true worship, and what false – that the men lacked.

Kli Yakar (R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, 1550–1619) makes the further point that since the Tabernacle was an atonement for the Golden Calf, the women had no need to contribute at all, since it was the men not the women who needed atonement. None the less, women gave, and did so before the men.

Most moving, though, by far is the cryptic verse:

*He [Betzalel] made the copper washstand and its copper base out of the mirrors of the dedicated women [ha-tzove'ot] who congregated at the entrance of the Communion Tent. [Ex. 38: 8]*

The sages (in Midrash Tanhuma) told a story about this. This is how Rashi tells it:

*Israelite women owned mirrors, which they would look into*

Are we a part of the world or are we apart from it? The answer is that we are both, like Moshe in the cloud and the Jewish people in the sea, and we are both at the very same time.

*when they adorned themselves. Even these [mirrors] they did not hold back from bringing as a contribution toward the Mishkan, but Moses rejected them because they were made for temptation [i.e., to inspire lustful thoughts]. The Holy One, blessed is He, said to him, "Accept [them], for these are more precious to Me than anything because through them the women set up many legions [i.e., through the children they gave birth to] in Egypt." When their husbands were weary from back-breaking labour, they [the women] would go and bring them food and drink and give them to eat. Then they [the women] would take the mirrors and each one would see herself with her husband in the mirror, and she would seduce him with words, saying, "I am more beautiful than you." And in this way they aroused their husbands' desire and would be intimate with them, conceiving and giving birth there, as it is said: "Under the apple tree I aroused you" (Song 8:5). This is [the meaning of] what is *בְּמִרְאֵת הַצְּבָאוֹת* [lit., the mirrors of those who set up legions]. From these [the mirrors], the washstand was made.*

The story is this. The Egyptians sought not merely to enslave, but also to put an end to, the people of Israel. One way of doing so was to kill all male children. Another was simply to interrupt normal family life. The people, both men and women, were labouring all day. At night, says the Midrash, they were forbidden to return home. They slept where they worked. The intention was to destroy both privacy and sexual desire, so that the Israelites would have no more children.

The women realised this, and decided to frustrate Pharaoh's plan. They used mirrors to make themselves attractive to their husbands. The result was that intimate relations resumed. The women conceived and had children (the "legions" referred to in the wordtzove'ot). Only because of this was there a new generation of Jewish children. The women, by their faith, courage and ingenuity, secured Jewish survival.

The Midrash continues that when Moses commanded the Israelites to bring offerings to make the tabernacle, some brought gold, some silver, some bronze, some jewels. But many of the women had nothing of value to contribute except the mirrors they had brought with them from Egypt. These

they brought to Moses, who recoiled in disgust. What, he thought, have these cheap objects, used by women to make themselves look attractive, to do with the sanctuary and the sacred? God rebuked Moses for daring to think this way, and ordered him to accept them.

The story is powerful in itself. It tells us, as do so many other midrashim, that without the faith of women, Jews and Judaism would never have survived. But it also tells us something absolutely fundamental to the Jewish understanding of love in the religious life.

In his impressive recent book *Love: A History* (2011) the philosopher Simon May writes: “If love in the Western world has a founding text, that text is Hebrew.” Judaism sees love as supremely physical and spiritual. That is the meaning of “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might” (Deut. 6: 5). This is not the language of meditation or contemplation, philosophical or mystical. It is the language of passion.

Even the normally cerebral Maimonides writes this about the love of God:

*What is the love of God that is befitting? It is to love God with a great and exceeding love, so strong that one's soul shall be knit up with the love of God, such that it is continually enraptured by it, like a lovesick individual whose mind is never free from passion for a particular woman and is enraptured by her at all times ... Even intenser should be the love of God in the hearts of those who love Him. They should be enraptured by this love at all times. (Laws of Repentance, 10:5)*

This is the love we find in passages like Psalm 63: 2, “My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” Only because the sages thought about love this way, did they take it for granted that *The Song of Songs* – an extremely sensual series of love poems – was about the love between God and Israel. Rabbi Akiva called it “the holy of holies” of religious poetry.

It was Christianity, under the influence of classical Greece, that drew a distinction between eros (love as intense physical

desire) and agape (a calm, detached love of humanity-in-general and things-in-general) and declared the second, not the first, to be religious. It was this self-same Greek influence that led Christianity to read the story of Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit as a story of sinful sexual desire – an interpretation that should have no place whatsoever in Judaism.

Simon May speaks about the love of God in Judaism as being characterised by “intense devotion; absolute trust; fear of his power and presence; and rapturous, if often questioning, absorption in his will ... Its moods are a combination of the piety of a vassal, the intimacy of friends, the fidelity of spouses, the dependence of a child, the passion of lovers ...” He later adds, “The widespread belief that the Hebrew Bible is all about vengeance and ‘an eye for an eye,’ while the Gospels supposedly invent love as an unconditional and universal value, must therefore count as one of the most extraordinary misunderstandings in all of Western history.”

The Midrash dramatises this contrast between eros and agape as an argument between God and Moses. Moses believes that closeness to God is about celibacy and purity. God teaches him otherwise, that passionate love, when offered as a gift to God, is the most precious love of all. This is the love we read about in *Shir ha-Shirim*. It is the love we hear in *Yedid Nefesh*,<sup>[1]</sup> the daring song we sing at the beginning and toward the end of Shabbat. When the women offered God the mirrors through which they aroused their husbands’ love in the dark days of Egypt, God told Moses, “These are more precious to Me than anything else.” The women understood, better than the men, what it means to love God “with all your heart and all your soul and all your might.”

[1] *Yedid Nefesh* is usually attributed to Rabbi Elazar ben Moshe Azikri (1533-1600). However Stefan Reif (*The Hebrew Manuscripts at Cambridge University Libraries*, 1997, p. 93) refers to an earlier appearance of the song in a manuscript by Samuel ben David ben Solomon, dated circa 1438.

## Finishing the Mishkan

*Rabbi David Horwitz*

**T**hus was completed all the work of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting. The Israelites did so; just as the L-RD had commanded Moses, so they did (*Exodus* 39:32).

R. Moses Alshikh (1508 Adrianopolis- 1600 Damascus, but spent most of his life in Tzefat, Israel) raised the following question: Shouldn't the order of the verse have been reversed? One would expect that the words

“The Israelites did so” would be written first, and only subsequently “Thus was completed all the work.” In other words, why first the passive voice and only subsequently the active voice?

His answer is as follows:

*The following lesson is indicated: Even when the Holy One, Blessed be He assists those who execute His commands, he attributes their execution only to the person engaged in it. In the case of the construction of the Tabernacle the Israelites were not even expert in the work, which was executed miraculously on its own accord through Divine Providence. Despite this, the text attributes the execution of the work wholly to the Israelites.*

But as Nechama Leibowitz (Studies in Shemot, pp. 696ff. who cites this Alshikh ) notes, this principle can apply to every human performance mentioned in the Torah. Man can accomplish nothing by himself. Everything that a human being accomplishes comes from the grace of God. The verses in Deuteronomy (8:11, 17-18) are well known:

*Take care lest you forget the L-RD your God and fail to keep His commandments, His norms and His laws, which I enjoin upon you today... And you say to yourselves, “My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me.” Remember that it is the L-RD your God who gives you the power to get wealth, in fulfillment of the covenant that He made on oath with your fathers, as well as is still the case.*

The reference in this passage is not to the construction of a Mishkan, but to the everyday tasks of the field and the vineyard. Can we find a specifically Mishkan-connected reason for the order of the verses at the end of Parashat Pekudei?

Nechama Leibowitz suggested the following: We possess a human obligation of *Imitatio Dei*. Just as God created the world and crowned him king over it, man was called upon to take all the earth’s bounty and prepare a dwelling place on earth for God: the Mishkan. This particular parallel might be another reason for the sequence of verbs. The verses of the Torah at the end of the penultimate chapter of Parashat Pekudei correspond to the verses at the beginning of the 2nd chapter of Parashat Bereshit, the “Va-Yekhulu” section (Genesis 2:1-3). In both contexts, there is first an allusion to the completion of the work in the passive voice. Subsequently, there is a reference in the active voice to the author of the work. There is one difference, however, between the Sefer Bereshit account of the world’s creation and the Sefer Shemot account of the construction of the Mishkan. In Bereshit, the world

is designated as God’s: The earth is the L-RD’s (Psalms 24:1). In Pekudei, however, as distinct from Bereshit, the human participants of the work, Moshe and the children of Israel are mentioned.

Moreover, the entire nation of Israel, the children of Israel, is mentioned. But from the previous verses, one would assume that the verbs refer to Bezalel, and not to the nation itself. How can the Torah write that all the children of Israel built the Mishkan? Don Isaac Abravanel suggests that the acts of contributing the materials and bringing offerings were included in the category of “making.” R. Hayyim ibn Attar (the Talmudist and cabalist; born in Morocco, in 1696; died at Jerusalem July 31, 1743, known by the name of his work *Or Ha-Hayyim ad loc.*), writes that as Bezalel was the agent of the children of Israel, and in light of the halakhic principle of *sheluh shel adam kemoto*, (a man’s agent is legally considered to be equivalent of the sender himself), the Torah could indeed legitimately ascribe the construction of the Mishkan to the entire Israelite nation. But the *Or Ha-Hayyim* continues with the following observation:

*The text wished to indicate the mutual, interlocking character of Torah observance, by means of which the children of Israel brought reciprocal benefits on each other. The Torah was given to be collectively observed by Israel as a whole. Each individual would contribute his best to their mutual benefit. Perhaps an allusion to this can be found in the Scriptural admonition: “And thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself,” implying “who is as thyself.” Your neighbor’s welfare will contribute to yours and though him you complement your own perfection, so that he is not someone else, but you and like a part of you... .*

Nechama Leibowitz comments as follows: (Studies in Shemot, p. 700): “Our Torah is a social code designed for observance in the communal context, and not for a solitary Crusoe on his desert island. The Jewish people as a whole; all classes, great and small were entrusted with the Divine law and His covenant was made with the entire nation... . The Torah can only be realized in practice by the people as a whole. Similarly, the Tabernacle was constructed through the participation of the nation as a whole. This is why the verse emphasizes the contribution of the entire nation of Israel.”

Thus, the human subject of Parashat Pekudei is not any individual, not Bezalel, not even Moshe Rabbenu. It is the community of the people of Israel.

# Understanding Shabbat

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin

**A**s the curtain rises on Parshat Vayakhel, Moshe assembles the nation in order to convey God's commandments concerning the construction of the Mishkan.

Suddenly, however, he opens his remarks with the following directives concerning Shabbat:

*"Six days work may be done and the seventh day shall be holy for you, a Shabbat, a day of complete rest for God; whoever does work (melacha) on that day shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire in any of your dwellings on the Shabbat day."*

## Questions

As is evident from the body of Parshat Vayakhel, Moshe's clear purpose in assembling the nation at the beginning of the parsha is to launch the construction of the Mishkan.

Why, then, does Moshe abruptly insert the subject of Shabbat?

While Shabbat is certainly a hugely important topic, why must it be mentioned, apparently out of context, specifically at this historic moment?

## Approaches

**A.** The abrupt, seemingly arbitrary pairing of Shabbat and the Mishkan at the beginning of Parshat Vayakhel is not an isolated phenomenon. Earlier, in Parshat Ki Tissa, on the summit of Mount Sinai, God follows His commandments to Moshe concerning the construction of the Sanctuary with the immediate warning "However, you must observe my Sabbaths..." This admonition introduces a series of further directives concerning Shabbat. In the book of Vayikra, Shabbat and the Sanctuary are again connected without explanation in the passage "My Sabbaths you shall observe and my Sanctuary you shall revere – I am the Lord.

This repeated pairing of themes, clearly intentional, serves as the source for a series of foundational halachic observations on the part of the rabbis. Based upon the repeated juxtaposition of the themes of Shabbat and the Sanctuary in the text, the rabbis learn, not only that the tasks associated with the Sanctuary must cease on Shabbat, but that the very definition of the activities prohibited on Shabbat is determined by the tasks that were connected

to the construction (and, some say, the operation) of the Mishkan.

Specifically, the rabbis delineate thirty-nine avot melacha – major categories of creative labor – associated with the construction of the Sanctuary, which are, consequently, prohibited on Shabbat. These thirty-nine general categories of melacha and their derivatives serve as the basis for the laws of Shabbat.

The encounter between Shabbat and the Sanctuary, orchestrated by Moshe at the beginning of Parshat Vayakhel, is far from arbitrary. Emerging from the intersection of these two foundational phenomena are the laws which define the observance of Shabbat itself.

**B.** On a philosophical plane, the message which emerges from the encounter between Shabbat and the Mishkan is significant, as well.

Shabbat and the Sanctuary represent two different realms of potential sanctification within Jewish tradition: the sanctification of time (e.g., Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh and the festivals) and the sanctification of space (e.g., the Mishkan, the Temple, the Land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem). Through the observance of God's laws, man is challenged with the investiture of holiness into each of these central domains.

And yet, while both of these realms are clearly significant, when a choice between them must be made, the sanctification of time reigns supreme. That is why the observance of Shabbat supersedes the construction of the Sanctuary.

The primacy of time sanctification is indicated in other ways in the Torah, as well.

Not by chance, the phenomenon of kedusha (sanctity) is first mentioned in the Torah in conjunction with Shabbat, an example of the sanctification of time.

As we have also seen, the first mitzva granted to the Jewish nation is Kiddush Hachodesh (the sanctification of the new moon), an example of the sanctification of time.

While the clear transcendence of time sanctification over space sanctification remains unexplained in the text, a rationale may be offered from our own experience: the single most precious and tenuous commodity we possess in life is time. Our moments are limited; each moment

exists ... and before we know it, that moment is gone.

There could, therefore, be no greater expression of our belief in and our loyalty to God than the dedication of some of our limited moments specifically to His service. The sanctification of time – the dedication of time solely to our relationship with God – is one of the highest religious acts possible, transcending other acts of sanctification.

When Moshe, therefore, underscores the laws of Shabbat immediately before the launching of the construction of the Mishkan, he reminds the people to remember their priorities. As monumentally historic as the launching of the Mishkan may be; as overwhelmingly important as the Mishkan and all of its symbolism will be across the face of history; even more precious to God is the dedication of our own moments of time to His service.

C. Another message of prioritization may well be included in Moshe's words, as well.

By specifically stating, "You shall kindle no fire in any of your dwellings on the Shabbat day," Moshe underscores

the primacy of that fundamental unit – the centrality of which is underscored, over and over again, at critical points in Jewish history – the Jewish home.

Even as the nation congregates for the stated purpose of launching the central concept of the Sanctuary within Jewish tradition, Moshe cautions:

As central as the Sanctuary and Temple will be in your experience, their role will pale in comparison to that of your homes and your families. Within your homes, new generations will learn of their affiliation to our people and its traditions; observance will be taught through example; children will be raised, deeply connected to their proud past and prepared for their challenging futures.

The Sanctuary is meant to inspire and to teach, but the lessons it teaches will reach their fulfillment only within your homes ...

Never believe the Mishkan to be more important than your personal observance of a single commandment: "You shall kindle no fire in any of your dwellings on the Shabbat day."

## Prerequisites for Building the Mishkan

*Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb*

**T**he time for building the Mishkan has finally arrived. After receiving detailed instruction from Hashem about all of the components of the Mishkan, Moshe is ready to communicate those instructions to the Jewish people.

"Va'yakhel Moshe es kol adas Benei Yisroel va'yomer aleihem," Moshe gathered the entire assembly of Israel and he said to them, "eleh ha-devarim asher tzivah Hashem la'asos osam," these are the things that God has said to do (Shemos 35:1). Upon reflection, however, it is curious that Moshe gathered the entire nation to deliver this message considering that really only the artisans and skilled laborers needed to be taught the building plans. Furthermore, this gathering is particularly surprising when we consider that over the 40 year sojourn in the desert Moshe only assembled the entire nation a handful of times, each for a critical and overarching message. But in this gathering Moshe primarily speaks about the specifications of the various components of the Mishkan and, important as those details may be, this does not seem to need an

audience of "kol adas Benei Yisroel?"

In response to these difficulties a number of different explanations are offered. Some meforshim (see Itturei Torah, v. 3 p. 273) suggest that this gathering was intended to highlight the importance of national unity. The message of achdus and ahavas Yisroel is important generally and at all times but it was especially critical before they started building the Mishkan. If we want to maintain a home for Avinu She'ba-shamayim, "our Father in heaven," a necessary prerequisite is that we – His children – are unified and at peace with one another. The fact that it was our disunity which tragically caused the destruction of the Second Temple only underscores the importance of this message as they began to build the Mishkan.

The Ramban offers an alternate explanation which focuses on the closeness that must exist – especially at this important time – between Hashem and the Jewish people. Namely, the Ramban explains that, in the aftermath of the Chet Ha-egel and the breaking of the luchos, the nation needed to renew their covenant with Hashem.

These events, given their seriousness, had the potential to create a permanent and devastating distance between God and His people. Therefore, explains the Ramban, in order to get past their betrayal of the relationship the people gathered for a “beris chadashah,” a new covenant, which stressed that, “chazar le’kadmasam u-le’ahavas kelulosam,” the relationship with Hashem had now returned to its original state – prior to the sin – and they had restored “the love of their nuptials.” Thus understood, this truly was an important gathering which demanded the presence of the entire nation.

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein (vbm-torah.org) offers an additional explanation which also focuses on rectifying a relationship, although not between the nation and Hashem, but rather, between the people and Moshe.

Going back to the time that Benei Yisroel left Egypt, the people had no doubt of Moshe’s love for them and they reciprocated that love. Moshe’s dedication was without limit and, as a result, he sat to judge the nation “from dawn to dusk” (Shemos 18:13). Despite the intuitive wisdom of Yisro’s suggestion to delegate some of the judicial responsibilities, Moshe initially resisted because, as the Ramban (v. 15) explains, he was reluctant to relax his connection to the people. The nation undoubtedly appreciated their unfettered access to Moshe and the ability they had to approach him directly with any question.

Everything changed, however, once Moshe went up to receive the Torah. When Moshe delayed – as mistakenly calculated by the people – coming down from the mountain the motivation to create the Egel Ha-zahav was because the nation felt abandoned and didn’t know if Moshe would ever return. When they approach Aharon they refer to Moshe as the man “asher he’elanu me’eret Mitzrayim,” who took us out of Egypt (Shemos 32:1), and R. Lichtenstein explains that they meant this as a derogatory reference; namely, how could Moshe, the man who took us out of the secure life we had in Egypt, forsake us now that we are in the desert? And then, when Moshe finally returns, he is not the loving leader they remembered, but a “fiery zealot” who orders the death of three thousand people. Instead of the “old Moshe” who dwelled amongst the people, Moshe is now a distant leader whose tent is pitched “far from the camp” (33:7). Beyond physical proximity, this new location reflected the emotional distance that the people now felt between them

and their leader.

R. Lichtenstein perceptively notes, however, that this distance existed solely from the perspective of the people. But we, readers of the Torah, know that the truth was very different because we are aware of an incredible conversation that Benei Yisroel knew nothing about (32:11-13). We know of the selfless and heroic efforts that Moshe made to save the Jewish people from God’s wrath after the Sin of the Golden Calf. God wanted to annihilate the entire nation and restart the Jewish people with just the descendants of Moshe. But Moshe rejects this offer, declaring instead that if the people would not survive, “mechaeini na me’sifrecha,” then he too would perish (32:32).

From our perspective, therefore, we know of Moshe’s incredible love of the people and his abiding commitment to their survival. But the people themselves, who didn’t know about this conversation and Moshe’s self-sacrifice, “experience only deep anger, distance, and dissociation.”

Moshe was aware of the gap that had developed between him and the people and therefore, suggests R. Lichtenstein, this is why he gathers the entire nation together. The purpose of “va’yakhel” was for Moshe to reconnect with his beloved nation and to rebuild their trust in him. To accomplish this goal, obviously, it would not have been sufficient to meet with just with leaders and elders, or even the artisans, but rather he called for, “a general gathering of the people – in order to pursue his goal of reinstating the relationship between himself and each and every member of the nation.”

The common denominator of all three explanations is that the gathering of the nation before the building of the Mishkan was dedicated to achdus and strengthening connections. The cumulative picture that emerges from these suggestions describes the ideal state of Benei Yisroel: Unity between Jews, loving commitment to Hashem, and a relationship of mutual trust and loyalty between the people and their leader. The presence of these factors enabled the unprecedented accomplishment of creating a home for Hashem in this world. To the extent that we can recreate this ideal then we too can accomplish great things even in our day.

# Building the Mishkan before the Keilim

Rabbi Meir Goldwicht

Parashat VaYakhel opens with the mitzvah of Shabbat and continues with the vessels of the Mishkan and the bigdei kehunah. Parashat Ki Tisa, on the other hand, is the opposite; it discusses the vessels of the Mishkan and bigdei kehunah first, followed afterwards by the mitzvah of Shabbat. Why did the Torah see fit to change the order in VaYakhel from the order of Ki Tisa?

This Shabbat we read Parashat HaChodesh, the fourth of the arba parshiot leading up to Pesach. We actually encounter this mitzvah, the mitzvah of kiddush hachodesh, for the first time much earlier, in the first Rashi on the Torah. Rashi there asks why the Torah begins with Bereishit rather than the mitzvah of “hachodesh hazeh lachem,” the first mitzvah in the Torah. Rashi explains that this was done in order to show that HaKadosh Baruch Hu owns the entire world and has the authority to give the land to whomever He chooses and take it away from whomever He chooses. The difficulty with this is that it doesn't entirely explain why the Torah opened with all of Sefer Bereishit. If the Torah was only coming to teach us that HaKadosh Baruch Hu has mastery over the Universe and then to teach us the mitzvot, it would have been enough to teach ma'aseh bereishit and to then skip straight to the mitzvah of kiddush hachodesh. Rashi's question is unanswered as of yet.

The answer to these two questions is as follows: The gemara in Chagigah 12a teaches that the light HaKadosh Baruch Hu created on the first day of Creation was so bright that one could see “from one end of the world to the other.” Looking ahead to the dor hapalagah and the dor hamabul, HaKadosh Baruch Hu hid it away so the wicked could not abuse it, saving it for the righteous in the future. Although He hid the light, He nevertheless left us a hint as to how to arrive at this light. This is through the creation of the luminaries on the fourth day. The average person, asked the purpose of the sun and the moon, would explain that they illuminate the world. The Torah, however, says something totally different. The primary purpose of the luminaries is to serve “for signs and for seasons and for days and for years.” Illuminating the world is secondary. In other words, the primary purpose of the luminaries is to teach us that we have jurisdiction over time. We decide when Rosh Chodesh is and when the chagim will occur. This jurisdiction over time gives us the ability to sanctify it as well, kedushat hazman. Kedushat hazman is dependent,

however, on kedushat hamakom, the holiness of the location. Kiddush hachodesh and adding an extra month to the year cannot be done outside Eretz Yisrael.

If so, the words of Rashi gain new significance. Why did the Torah open with the entire Sefer Bereishit instead of skipping straight to the mitzvot after ma'aseh bereishit? Kiddush hachodesh deals with kedushat hazman, which cannot exist independently of kedushat hamakom. The Torah had to tell us not only about the Creation of the Universe, but also about the avot and imahot who walked in the way of Hashem, through which they were able to sanctify the land. Once we have affirmed the kedushat hamakom, we can now move to a discussion of kedushat hazman.

Kedushat hamakom is based in kedushat ha'adam. When a person sanctifies himself, he can then transfer this kedushah to the land and to the zman. When a person lives in this way, he can return to the light HaKadosh Baruch Hu hid for the future. This power to sanctify one's body and one's land flows from performance of Hashem's will, and it is this power that Moshe Rabbeinu revealed was deficient in Am Yisrael. When Am Yisrael contributed to the Mishkan, Moshe was sure that they were giving because of the mitzvah and would stop when he told them to. Therefore in Ki Tisa, the mishkan precedes Shabbat, which represents ceasing. When Moshe Rabbeinu later realized, after the cheit ha'eigel, that their contributions were not for Hashem, but to satisfy their own need for a physical representation – a mishkan, luchot, Moshe – through which to connect to Hashem, he wanted to fix this. He therefore changed the order of our parasha, teaching them the lesson of Shabbat – putting what you must do before what you want to do – and only then teaching of the contributions for the mishkan and bigdei kehunah, now that it could be done in its proper form. This may also be the reason why after every parasha in VaYakhel-Pekudei we find the phrase “as Hashem commanded.”

As we stand at the end of Sefer Shemot, the book of Galut and Geulah, it behooves us to remember that the key to every redemption – both of the yachid and the tzibbur – is to put the commandments of Hashem before our own feelings and desires. What I must do – the will of Hashem – takes precedence over what I want to do.